

"You cannot have a positive life and a negative mind."

— Joyce Meyer

The Shillong Times

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When Teachers Need Schooling

The news report that the teacher of a missionary school in Dagar, East Khasi Hills subjected a student of Class 6 to the most humiliating experience of putting a garland of shoes around the student's neck because that student couldn't speak English is outrageous. The question that arises is whether these are trained teachers and if trained then which institute trained them to adopt such derogatory practices? It would be good to know the Institute from which they graduated and whether such methods are still being taught to shame students who can't speak a foreign language. That the Institution where this ghastly incident happened is named Mary Immaculate LP and UP School is ironic because missionary schools are supposed to be empathetic towards students and to try and understand the reasons why they cannot follow or understand a particular subject and speak a foreign language. In the first place the teaching skills of the teacher himself/herself is called in question here. The two staff who assisted in garlanding the poor student with shoes are of course simply following orders.

What is education if not to help the students learn life skills and to find the strength to overcome weakness? Are the school teaches children to read, write, speak and express themselves because those are the basic skills. Children should also be taught communication skills and articulation in a language they are most comfortable in. The problem with teaching English to rural students is that they have no one at school or at home with whom they can converse in the language. Most schools have students of only one ethnic community and there is a hesitance to speak English with someone from the same tribal background. Children can learn English as they grow up and interact with others who don't speak the vernacular language and such schools are mostly located in the urban areas or the suburbs. These are difficulties that teachers need to understand and therefore to find the right pedagogy to teach English.

Schooling is more than just learning to speak English. Children learn social skills and learn to interact with each other. They learn active listening and also to accept differences and to help their classmates when needed. These are interpersonal skills that schools inculcate in their students from an early age. It teaches them to live life beyond the classroom. Above all, teachers should empower children to think critically and not agree to everything but to ask questions when they are in doubt. Children must be so empowered that they would not fear making mistakes. That's real education. But is that happening in our schools? Evidently not because teachers themselves are not educated enough. And that is the most tragedy here. A child is ridiculed merely for not speaking English and the punishment has scarred him/her forever. The child may not want to enter another classroom ever! Isn't that a murder of the child's hopes and aspirations? Is this what teachers are schooled to do?

Letters to the Editor

A Sham Interview

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I would like to highlight a very distressing and traumatising article that we as aspiring teachers who are already in the teaching profession but would like to get a sanctioned post which is a dream of all teachers, are facing.

As aspiring candidates who want to gain experience in the teaching field we were happy to see an advertisement for a sanctioned post in Tiroi Singh Memorial College, Mairang which even appeared in The Shillong Times on November 1, 2021 for various posts of Assistant Professors. As has been the case now, there is an official notification on the age bar fixed at 37 as the upper limit by the Government of Meghalaya, so the same has been clearly mentioned in the advertisement. "Age as per Govt Rules" But what is surprising is that the interview happened this past month a candidate from the Political Science department who is above 42 years is allowed to appear for the interview and might even secure a job in his favour. Against the candidates I am agnostic of this blatant flouting of rules which they themselves claim

to comply with by declaring in the advertisement. ... If this is the case then the DITE, which is the nodal authority here must come clean with an official statement whether the age bar limit is in place or done away with. If the age bar is upheld then this entire process has lost its purpose and fresh advertisement is needed as there are many candidates who did not apply because of the age bar mentioned in the advertisement and hence have missed the opportunity. Secondly, the college has to give an explanation as to why it acted contrary to its own advertisement clearly mentioning that the age bar is applicable and at whose behest is it bending the rules to suit one individual.

Therefore request the authorities concerned to clarify on this matter so that the life and careers of many hard working people who have toiled day and night does not go to waste. Moreover, this sort of favouritism lowers the morale of the teaching community since people who can pull the strings can do whatever they want. I also request the Honourable High Court to take cognizance of this issue in the interests of all who want to be in the profession through hard work and dedication.

Yours etc.,
Han Lyngdoh,
Via email

A Re-look at the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023

By Rekha M Shangpliang

"Trees are sanctuaries. Whose lives have to speak to them, whose lives have to listen to them, can learn the truth"

...Hermann Hesse
The much debated Forest Conservation Amendment Bill 2023 recently passed by the Lok Sabha has drawn much media attention and has evoked negative response amongst environmental enthusiasts, forest and climate action groups and activists all over the country voicing their concerns about the potential setbacks of the proposed amendment to the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980. They have been holding peaceful demonstrations in Delhi, and more than 16 states over the last couple of days. Many pan India action citizen groups like Climate Front India, Let India Breathe, Youth for Himalaya, Warrior Moms/Friends of Earth(India) to name a few also joined hands in nationwide ecosystem along with many conservationists, Ecologists and rural and urban citizens. ... So what is the crux of the problem? What is the main demand of the campaign? Why has the proposed Bill raised concern and resistance? And the most important question-What impact will the bill have on the tribes and forest dwellers of the North-East? To probe deeper into all these questions we need to understand the historical process whereby the traditionally-held rights of the forest communities have been progressively curtailed through different government policies, management and legislations. This would give us an idea on how the post-colonial state has not changed much in terms of state monopoly over rights and exclusion of indigenous forest communities.

Colonial Forestry in India
Till the first 90 years of their rule, the British never felt the need to interfere into the forest lands which were mostly designated as community lands or at the most 'royal forests' which belonged to kings and nobles. In fact it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, that the Raj witnessed a 'fierce onslaught' on India's forests. They were attracted by the vast natural wealth that could generate commercial value through timber which was in high demand in England for ship building. This led to the first concerted effort of the British Government to introduce the Forest

Act 1865 which was the first Formal Act that introduced the two categories of forests- Reserved and Unclassified Protected Forests. This was a landmark legislation which put a blanket ban on illegal felling of trees. This was also the first ever comprehensive piece of legislation that gave East India Company the right over forests in India thus intervening on the traditional rights of the forest dwellers. The Forest Act of 1865 was then replaced 13 years later by the Indian Forest Act of 1878 which introduced a centralized system of control even till post-Independence period. Dietrich Brandis was appointed as the first Inspector General of Forests who is today remembered as the 'Father of Indian Forestry' for his intensive policy of survey and mapping of every nook and corner of forest in India. However the Act of 1878 brought much discontent amongst the forest communities because it was found that the 3 categories of land- Reserved, Protected and Village forests were mostly state controlled that served imperial interests. It was under such circumstances that this period witnessed a series of forest conflicts and struggles one of which is from our very own state of Meghalaya when the 'tribal and subtribes' Gaps under the leadership of Sonam Sangma and over 1 lakh Garos addressed a memorandum to Lord Minto, the Viceroy and Governor General of India and fought for decriminalisation of forests as early as 1879. A new phase of forest management began with the introduction of the railway network in response to colonial interest of augmenting trade leading to wanton destruction of forests.

It is against this backdrop that the British rule marks an important historical impact on what we see today which is nothing but an 'imprint' of the colonial past. The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023 seems to be another bolt from the blue from the past. Amidst doubts and fears as to whether this Bill if passed may dilute tribal cus-

tomary rights over land and forests several questions are being raised which require serious thoughts.

The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023 and its impact on the North East

The Bill which seeks to redefine some of the restrictions of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 has raised concern and resistance for a number of reasons among which the following may leave the forest communities and tribals of North East vulnerable and dilute their customary rights over land and forests.

1. Firstly, the Bill seeks to re-define the classification of forests. To my understanding, the Amendment may contradict Supreme Court orders because it brings drastic changes to the definition of forest, its governance and development issues. This aspect may also contradict the traditional customary categorization of forests especially among the tribals of the North-East since they have a very elaborate and systematic classification of forests on the basis of ownership. Like the tribals have 'Law Adomng', 'Law Nyamang', 'Law Ri-sunam', 'Law strong' etc which are specifically designated for different purposes. Environmentalists say that around 39,063 hectares of forests fall under 'sacred groves' across India - protected and managed by local communities yet they are not notified as forests and are therefore under threat.

2. Secondly, the Bill seeks to focus on 'unrecorded' forest areas for developmental projects. The forest cover of the country accounts for only 65% of total geographical cover and most of it is 'unrecorded' which means that no provision of unrecorded land will have no legal protection if the Bill goes through. The forests of North east abound in rich flora and fauna which is most at risk under the jurisdiction of autonomous bodies like the District Council. Whether this Bill if passed will overstep the powers of these bodies which are the protectors of customary laws that govern forests? That's not all, it is also not clear whether the Bill supersedes the Forest Rights Act which gives cultivation rights to forest dwelling tribes.

3. The Bill seeks to exempt 'unrecorded' forest

land within 100 kms of International borders, for projects of national importance and concerning national security. This would leave a large part of the North-East vulnerable considering the fact that the region shares an international border of 5,182 kilometers (about 99 percent of its total geographical boundary) with several neighbouring countries.

4. The Bill also allows establishing checkpoints, fences, bridges, running zoos, safaris, eco-tourism activities without any prior approval of the Central Government. But these terms are very vague and in the name of development any kind of projects, private or governmental may get their way to exploit the forest tracts which will now become an open ground. Therefore there is the possibility of 'misuse' of the clause.

Has the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change first taken this initiative to propose the policy with prior consultation with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs being fully in agreement? It appears that MOTA has not even formulated its independent opinion with regard to this very serious and critical question that would affect previously the rights of Scheduled Tribes and other Forest dwellers. Whatever the case maybe the bigger issue before us is that we need our forests and our forests need us. There are people who are led by a belief that destroying natural eco-systems equals development. That very thought has to be eliminated from the mindset of policy makers and planners of our country. Yes, national security is an integral part of development but our ecological security is equally important to protect our boundaries from eroding the forest and land rights. Forests are the 'Green gold of nature'. They have been a home, a game sanctuary, a food lender, a source of livelihood and an abode of worship to humans since time immemorial. The rich forest culture or 'Jharanya Sanskrit' that has been nurtured by our country should be revered.

The words of the famous environmentalist (L. Aril Agarwal) rings loud and clear "Development should be up to a certain limit- beyond that it will be like the foolish man who was sitting on the very branch that he was cutting".
(The writer teaches in NEHU)

Anti-BJP alliance India raises stakes for Modi-led NDA

BJP plans to upstage Stalin in Tamil Nadu for Lok Sabha seats

By S. Sethuraman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems increasingly obsessed with the need for numbers in Lok Sabha for him to make sure of his third term in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls with the emergence of an apparently effective opposition alliance, INDIA.

The kind of rhetoric the BJP head of Government indulges in, running down the new 26-party Alliance for 2024, as a "conclave of diehard corrupt groups", which would promote "democracy/fair rule", not the nation's good, expresses BJP's real concern over a radically changing political scene.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has gained international stature by his visits abroad and embracing heads of government and current chairmanship of G-20, has also to safeguard his own reputation. And this at a time events happening at home, like Manipur, and

dismissing the rest of political India as "corrupt". BJP knows the risks for winning and has put itself on a high gear, first to win over the three states, MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, where Assembly elections are due before the end of 2023. While it is relatively confident of retaining MP led by Mr Shivraj Singh, it has come up against a more formidable fight in Congress-held Rajasthan, where the party is yet to overcome its internal rift.

BJP is offering "collective leadership". Not acceptable to its former CM, Mrs. Vasudhara Raje who insists on her face to take the field. BJP President J P Nadda attempts to find an acceptable solution, maybe like "Modi Face" for Lok Sabha seats. Chhattisgarh, however, looks strong for the Congress at present.

It is in the South that BJP wants to make up for losing numbers in the North and



inroads into citizens' rights in an acclaimed Democracy in Karnataka. The Tamil Nadu with its 13 seats in Lok Sabha has gained greater importance than ever before and BJP has been plotting to dislodge the DMK from its stronghold. In 2019, the DMK (not in power then)

West (other than UP and Gujarat), after its defeat in Karnataka. The Tamil Nadu with its 13 seats in Lok Sabha has gained greater importance than ever before and BJP has been plotting to dislodge the DMK from its stronghold. In 2019, the DMK (not in power then)

"A drastic change in the scenario is no doubt subject to how far the newly minted 26-party alliance - the Congress and strong regional parties declaring themselves INDIA - Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance - would produce a more promising economic and political programme."

led by M K Stalin (now the CM) sagged 25 seats. Home Minister Amit Shah is looking after Tamil Nadu to ensure that DMK tally is drastically reduced. A strong anti-DMK campaign was launched by Mr Amit Shah, charging the Stalin Government with corruption, as he flagged off at Rameswaram a 'palayam' of Mr Annamalai, a former police officer now heading TN BJP. This is the first time that the Modi Government through its Home Minister Amit Shah brands a non-BJP State raising as "corrupt" State governing men, tensions One of the DMK Ministers hit out against the Home Minister's charge "without any basis".

All this is part of a determined BJP, both at party and Modi Government levels, to get rid of the "Dravidian" Government in Tamil Nadu as early as it can, despite its electoral majority. The Modi Government in various ways. The BJP has made some lapses by antagonising its ally AIADMK through some remarks of its leaders but the party is making all efforts to get more allies in its bid to challenge the INDIA.

It is Narendra Modi vs. M K Stalin in Tamil Nadu in 2024 Lok Sabha elections. (I/S Service)

Teachers should not murder the talents of children

Editor,
While education is meant to "nourish and nurture" young minds, recent events in Dagar, East Khasi Hills, have exposed the most despicable reality that threatens to "murder the talents" of tender children. Yes, the incident of corporal punishment at the Mary Immaculate LP and UP School under SSA has literally sent chills down the spine of the readers. The incident, which took place on July 21, involved a student of Class 6 being subjected to a degrading punishment for not being able to speak English. The head teacher and two staff members allegedly coaxed the student into wearing a garland made of shoes and slippers, an act exclusively meant to shame and humiliate the tender child. This cruel punishment is not only an assault on the child's dignity but also kills his inner calling.

Moreover, it is outrageous that the student was further forced into cleaning of shoes and slippers, an act allegedly spiced after chewing betel nuts. Such demeaning treatment of a child should

be condemned. Well, this wouldn't have been a wake up call for our society and education system. Education is not merely about academic excellence but also about fostering a sense of 'self-worth, confidence, and empathy'. When students are subjected to humiliation, their talents and potential are stifled, and they are left scarred emotionally and mentally, some even might think of self-harm such as suicide.

Here I earnestly urge the government to take "exemplary action" against all those involved. The government must not only punish the offenders but also put stringent measures in place to stop similar incidents from happening again. Of course, education should always aim to bring out the "best" in each child, irrespective of their linguistic abilities or academic prowess. The focus should be empowering students, encouraging their strengths, and providing support where they need it most. The aim should be to build a generation of confident, compassionate individuals who can contribute positively to society. What if Albert Einstein, who was very slow in learning and speaking at an early age, was subjected to this kind of repeated humiliation? We would not have had epoch-making MC2 and the THEORY OF RELATIVITY!

Poor delivery service from DTDC

Editor,
I had a consignment from Mumbai and due to my absence it was returned back yesterday. I could not attend the calls from the delivery man since I was travelling. As soon as I traced the calls, I started calling back the same number, but there was no response. Then I received an auto-generated message and I clicked the link to file the form. It auto responded.

I browsed the DTDC contact numbers on Shillong and could find a few numbers, including an office number and kept on trying all the numbers, but no one responded. I really don't understand why they have the contact numbers?

The full address details are there for the delivery. Recipient's mobile may not be used for any reason, and we definitely expect that the courier service should deliver our items at our mentioned addresses. Finding no solutions to the problem on Saturday, I met the DTDC officials in their Quanton Road office and explained the problem to be there, but I was told that my article was sent BACK to Mumbai (the origin of the place of booking). They did not bother to hold the packet even for a day if they had verified my two calls to the delivery persons the day before.

Yes, I need to mention that only one person from DTDC messaged me after my message to him that I should go to their office in Quanton road. This was on Saturday morning but my visit to that office that same day proved futile. Do postal services call us before delivery of any item? No. They just drop the parcel/letter at our addresses and sometimes at home over the items.

Henceforth, should DTDC need only MOBILE, NUBMIBRS, and SOT-ADRESSES while booking articles? In my case my delivery address proved meaningless to them. I have the full call details with me.

Yours etc.,
Anjan Kumar,
Shillong-6

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"The pursuit of perfection often impedes improvement."

— George Will

The Shillong Times

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Priority for peace

SERIOUSLY disturbing incidents with communal overtones are taking place one after another -- and in different regions. After the most-condemnable incidents in Manipur, the scene of violence has now shifted to Haryana at a place close to the national capital -- Delhi. This threatens to raise the communal temperature. At least four persons were killed in clashes in Nuh on Monday, followed by the imposition of curfew and the killing of a deputy imam of a mosque in Sector 57 of the bustling commercial city of Gurugram on Tuesday. The problems seemed to star, over the issue of holding Friday prayers in mosques, and these were apparently complicated by politically powerful elements linked to the government. The spirit of tolerance was obviously missing. While it is premature to pass comments on what went wrong or to fix the blame on one or the other side, what must be noted prima facie is that the state's police establishment failed to remain alert. The blame must be put more emphatically on the political establishment led by chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar because the police on its own cannot take decisions in such sensitive matters. Whatever be the provocation, some elements close to the ruling establishment took law into their hands, which should not have happened at all.

Admittedly, the nine years of the Modi-led government of the nation from its apex in Delhi have been marked mostly by a spirit of tolerance in religious matters other than for occasional flare-ups here and there. Overall, after the Gujarat riots of 2002, Modi had learnt bitter lessons and acted with caution. That saved the nation and helped Modi and the BJP retain power for a second term at the Centre. With an efficient home minister in Amit Shah, or Rajnath Singh previously, things were generally under control.

But, with Maniup erupting and the violence continuing for the third month with shameful incidents of sexual violence and now Haryana following suit in another condemnable manner, questions are bound to be raised about the efficacy of the Modi establishment in carrying India forward. For any government, maintaining communal equilibrium means 'half the job done.' With only a few months left for the parliament polls, it is all the more important that the central government is alert and that it avoids complicating situations with a sectarian agenda. That holds true for Khattar too, a colourless leader who had lost his right to be the CM in the last assembly polls there but retained power with help of a new party. In Manipur too, independent analysts appear to put the state CM in the dock for all that went wrong there. What's common between them is that both are of the BJP stock.

Letters to the Editor

Ethnocentrism undesirable

Kudos to Albert Thyrning for his article, 'The Manipur in us' (ST July 27, 2023). Yes, the tug of war between the VPP and ACHIC as the Reservation Policy has indeed widened and caused serious mental friction between the Eastern and Western sector communities of Meghalaya. Even the demand for Tura Winter Capital has created an irritant in the minds of the people of the eastern sectors of Meghalaya. These issues have the potential of culminating into the 'Manipur way' of rhetoric is not controlled and if the MDA allows the spread of uncontrolled passions of ethnocentrism.

On the demand for a Winter Capital in Tura and the retrospective moratorium on employment, the talks between Conrad Sangma and the ACHIC activists at Tura were going smoothly along the lines desired by them. After all, the CM cannot displace people in his own backyard and there was no reason at all to cause trouble thereafter. What irked the people was the allegation by the IXP that those who perpetrated the violence outside the CM's residence had planned to burn the CM. This was far-fetched and a figment of his imagination to cover up the failure of

police intelligence. Then followed the indiscriminate arrests which was also to divert the attention of the public and to cover up police failure. This is unacceptable! Police's intelligence cannot be underestimated.

Then on the 'Manipur' sentiment incursions, Albert Thyrning was 100 per cent correct when he pointed out that in Shillong Diocese only a Khastri Bishop is acceptable, so also in other dioceses where only a Pnar can be appointed bishop and in Tura Diocese only a Garm. In this connection I wish to mention what happened in 2014 when (Emeritus) Archbishop Thomas Moramparampil, SDB, DD of Guwahati Arch-Diocese was appointed as Apostolic Administrator of Jowai Diocese but this was fiercely opposed by a group of 13 Archdiocesan Fraternities (Priests) of Jowai Diocese led by a senior-most priest-vice their strong worded letter Ref: DF-JD 02-2014 dated 21/2/2014 because he was from the Salesian religious congregation, not a diocesan. Besides that he was not a Pnar or a Jaintia. But true to his religious vows he humbly joined his office disregarding the opposition of the 13 clergyman who signed their letter of opposition. Contrary to their opposition the laity of Jowai Diocese readily accepted Arch-Bishop (Emeritus) Thomas Moramparampil as their pastor when he was

Deducing Shillong Traffic & Urban Primacy

By Maiphang Syiem

Let us begin with a question in general. What is it that has always annoyed and bothered us every moment we step into a private or public vehicle? If one would cogitate, there would be many striking thoughts like, how clean is the windshield, how shiny is the body etc., but undeniably for a daily commuter in Shillong City whosever it is, the first thing is to avoid the persisting unrelenting hassle which is none other than the Shillong Traffic Snag. Many have elucidated the problem and also offered their suggestions, yet the "Shillong Traffic" management team, some blame the road carrying capacity and some are against the controlling authorities, but even after analysing all of that, amazingly the problem persists and has become a stumbling block. It's understood that everyone concerned is working hard to "have a high-tech moment" and "leave no stone unturned" but the situation demands, "Working Smartly." When we say "Working Smartly" it means many things which perhaps cannot be adequately elucidated here. Rather, it is important to revisit history to understand how cities are formed and eventually grow thereafter.

Going back to the era of the British Raj, they colonised areas which had commercial and administrative benefits back then and eventually those areas were transformed into towns, cities etc. This pattern is seen all over India with some of the legacies still till date. These areas have become commercial hubs, central business districts etc. If one dives deeper, somewhere the colonists have carried with them the concept of town formation with their exceptional knowledge of planning. Hence it is logical to say that the kind of town or city formation in India was not natural; it was more of a forced execution and if one observes the areas under

the colonists they appear very well planned. Some have said, the city formation for the western World was organic, which means it was natural in them perhaps because of factors such as the Industrial Revolution and the knowledge which came from the Renaissance period, but it was not the case with the Eastern World. To reiterate my point, cities here were conceptualised by the colonisers. However, the setback was that the developmental activities of the colonists were concentrated only on those areas where their vested interests lay and not on other regions.



This has created a kind of hurdle which can be termed as Urban Primacy where all activities are concentrated in only one area or where some city towns is larger than the other.

Anyone who wishes to probe more on Urban Primacy can use the term 'TAD' (Traffic and Development) as a side and connecting the dots with our scenario here in our Shillong City and with the kind of day-to-day activities concentrated at some urban hubs one should ask the question are we facing the issue of Urban Primacy? Is this the factor contributing to the 'Traffic Congestion'? Of course, there are days when such unavoidable impediments pop up such as rallies, public meetings, processions etc. and traffic snarls worsen in the affected pockets but in general the entire city is daily and continuously facing traffic snarls which affects our purses directly and takes away our time. If one were to do an audit of the time spent in traffic jams we have lost much valuable

time and money too. Time must be utilised effectively and the connotation 'Time is Money' is indeed very true with Shillong Traffic. On a daily basis we are losing both time and money and during emergencies who knows it might cost lives too. This is a matter of grave concern for every Shillongite.

Now coming to the nitty-gritty and reiterating the aforementioned statement, "Working Smartly," whosever is putting together the brains to solve this grave issue must have an extensive understanding of Shillong City, and that understanding mustn't be stereotyped

but should have a comprehensive insights taking in all angles and if someone is planning something for tackling the traffic woes he/she should have a perspective plan which will support the carrying capacity of the city and also accommodate the exigencies which may arise in the near future and this goes for the "New Shillong Township" as well. Is this thought kept in mind? We have seen in the recent past, many attempts were made to solve the Shillong Traffic imbroglio, but to no avail. If we are to investigate this, it would appear that solutions may have been put forth based on assumptions and not on actual ground study. If it was on assumption, then any Tom Dick and Harry can come forward and suggest anything but will that solve the problem? It is crystal clear that many localised factors contribute to the "Shillong's Traffic Congestion," and there are many intricacies involved in unbanding this imbroglio.

(The writer is a Geospatial Technology Expert and all views are personal)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

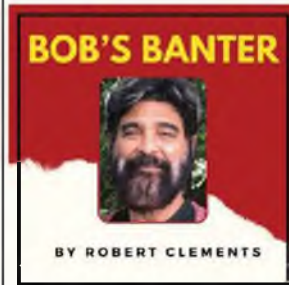
Tiger Statistics and Shooting Messengers. A few years ago, a news item appearing in Indian newspapers mentioned that people had found that tiger blankets offered by the Indian Railways to its passengers for their overnight journeys were washed only once in two months! This meant, realized horrified passengers that they had slept in the sweat and dirt of sixty other passengers, before the blankets went for their bi-monthly cleaning!

How did the railways react? Did the minister in charge or the general managers put their heads down in shame? No, they didn't!

made to concentrate on tigers instead of human beings last Sunday. Front page headlines of a leading national English daily on Sunday carried news that the tiger population had increased by five hundred tigers!

Not in the fourth or fifth page, but headlines on the front page at the same time as the more important news of twenty-one of our country's elected representatives going on a fact finding mission to see for themselves the atrocities, murders, rapes and dastardly happenings in the Indian state of Manipur was placed elsewhere in the newspaper!

That is how callous we



BOB'S BANTER

BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

They decided to punish the people for refusing to sleep in those filthy blankets. "No more blankets!" they cried in unison, and decided to stop offering blankets to passengers.

Many years ago, I wrote a play about a man caught in a lift. Different people came up to the shut doors and offered different pieces of advice to the poor man inside. Some told him not to panic, some made him sing religious songs, some even told him to breathe slowly so as to not use up all the air in the lift. Suddenly everybody was quiet and the man inside realized somebody important had come. "Sir, I am stuck inside!" he shouted.

"Help me!" A minister had arrived. He looked around, saw he had an audience and declared, "From today all lifts are banned!"

Instead of finding solutions to let the man out, to see that lifts don't stop midway, the lift was banned and people dragged wearily up staircases as much as they had to spend cold nights on trains, because the railways were caught with unwashed blankets!

In the last few years, banter has become a popular pastime in our country.

Is this how we address problems? By punishing the people?

Which brings me to my very quirky question, why was the minister, which very frankly revealed the depth of horror happening in Manipur banned? And why the government say it was going to take action against Twitter for showing the atrocities committed? Is it just like honning the blanket and the lift? And the same happens everywhere; instead of taking the blame for a rape or assault on a woman we blame it on clothes women wear, or that she was out too late. So, we ban women from dressing the way they like, instead of making our villages, towns and cities safer.

A paradigm shift from the resource-based approach inwards greater accountability for governance on ecological protection will not happen unless the common man demands such a transition.

Civil society should put pressure on the government that a balanced approach be adopted, taking care of both facts such as warning of global as well as local warming.

Yash Pal Rallan, Via email

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have become: The increase of a tiger population takes precedence over massive human rights abuses and sickening atrocities on Indian women!

As I study the failings of the press during the Nazi regime, I find that even as major atrocities were committed by the state the press either remained silent or took the official line. The press like the judiciary should have been coming to be strong pillars of democracy and not makeshift bamboo bridges, being swept away by a dangerous current below.

What have they found out realized somebody important had come. "Sir, I am stuck inside!" he shouted.

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"Learning never exhausts the mind."

— Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times

THE SHILLONG TIMES, SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2023

Antipathy to NEP Hurts Students THE New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is facing stiff resistance from the Meghalaya College Teachers Association (MCTA). Their contention is that the Policy calls for drastic reforms and re-engineering of the curriculum for which adequate resources are needed and which seem out of their reach for now. This has left students and their parents in a state of uncertainty. States like Tamil Nadu feel that the spirit of federalism will be eroded if the Centre takes on itself the task of directing the states to follow a centrally determined Policy, since Education is a state subject.

The NDA Government which is the architect of this Policy believes it is visionary and tuned to the needs of students in the 21st century. Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan feels that this is the time for India to harness the capabilities of each student so that no one is left behind and the inglorious term "drop-out" is done away with because a student who cannot reach the final destination will still have acquired some skills and certification. The NEP envisages to make education more than just bookish learning. To that extent it is on the right track. The NEP also aims at tracking education holistic, affordable, accessible and equitable. To achieve these noble objectives would require close monitoring and retraining of teachers and would therefore require a robust monitoring system which has been lacking in Meghalaya. State funding has also not been adequate. In Meghalaya state-funded schools and colleges have been most lax in their outcomes. Some such schools in rural areas have not been able to produce a single student who passed the Senior School Leaving Certificate Exam held by the State Board. The NIP has brought in much-needed change in the curriculum to include artificial intelligence (AI) and financial literacy. Primacy has also been given to the mother tongue or regional language although this is still in the experimental stage. The Education Ministry has also launched the much-talked-about Academic Bank of Credit—a programme that will provide multiple entry and exit options for students in higher education.

The NEP's stated objectives is to improve children's learning competencies in reading, writing and numerical skills by the end of the third grade and this is imperative after repeated studies have shown that students of Class 5 cannot read or comprehend what is taught in Class 3. Of course, teachers of both schools and colleges will need capacity building and re-orientation but that change is part of life. Education cannot be status quoist simply because teachers fear change and resist it. This would require that the country raise its spending on education. It's important to accept the reality that education is in a crisis and is unable to meet the demands of contemporary times when technology is moving at a frenetic pace. If India is to capitalise on its demographic dividend it has to implement the NEP.

I strongly believe that unity and collaboration are the key ingredients for progress, especially in our diverse and culturally rich state. As a concerned citizen, I have been closely observing the reservation policy and roster system issues that have been a cause of discord among our people. I am committed to contributing constructively to the dialogic and finding equitable solutions that address the concerns of all communities and promote harmony within our society. Having been engaged in mentoring and skilling activities, I understand the importance of inclusive policies and support systems that uplift every individual, ensuring that no one is left behind. It is my earnest desire to be a part of the positive change and contribute towards creating a stronger, more harmonious Meghalaya.

We all acknowledge the historical context and significant

Open Letter to Chief Minister Conrad Sangma & Other Ministers of Meghalaya

By Ankush Kurkalang

The purpose of writing this piece is to offer constructive measures for resolving Reservation and Roster System issues in Meghalaya. As a young and concerned citizen deeply committed to the welfare and prosperity of our beloved state of Meghalaya, I am writing this open letter to draw your kind attention to the pressing issues surrounding the reservation policy and roster system, and to submit a few humble suggestions for your kind consideration.

During the challenging times of the Covid pandemic, I established the "Kurkalang Skilling and Learning Center," a humble initiative aimed at providing valuable mentoring and skill development opportunities to fellow tribals, utilizing whatever little I learned from my teachers here in Meghalaya or during my studies in New Delhi or at George Washington University, USA. Despite greater opportunity in richer environments, I decided to set up my center in a remote village here as I felt more connected and more concerned for my fellow tribals here. My center has been dedicated to preparing our youth for securing better jobs and services, thereby enhancing their socio-economic prospects.

In addition to my work with the Kurkalang Skilling and Learning Center, I have been actively associated with Rotary International, a renowned organization known for its humanitarian efforts worldwide. Through this association, I have been able to extend my services and support to various social causes, working alongside like-minded individuals to create a positive impact in our community.

I strongly believe that unity and collaboration are the key ingredients for progress, especially in our diverse and culturally rich state. As a concerned citizen, I have been closely observing the reservation policy and roster system issues that have been a cause of discord among our people. I am committed to contributing constructively to the dialogic and finding equitable solutions that address the concerns of all communities and promote harmony within our society.

Having been engaged in mentoring and skilling activities, I understand the importance of inclusive policies and support systems that uplift every individual, ensuring that no one is left behind. It is my earnest desire to be a part of the positive change and contribute towards creating a stronger, more harmonious Meghalaya.

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ance of the reservation policy, which was enacted with the intention of empowering our tribal communities and fostering socio-economic upliftment. However, recent controversies and the judgment by the honorable High Court have brought to light the need for constructive action to address the discord and inequalities stemming from the policy.

In the words of a learned Khasi NRI professor at George Washington University (at their Foggy Bottom Campus, where I was fortunate to learn some valuable lessons), most prevalent reservation policies in various Indian states are akin to "BANDAI BAANT," a Hindi proverb that loosely translates to the division of spoils by a cunning cat, who ultimately takes the lion's share, leaving the unsuspecting monkeys to believe the cat acted as a fair elderly umpire.

The efforts of the current state government in working towards forming a panel to investigate reservation policy reforms and issues related to employment are commendable. We are heartened to see that prominent leaders and experts from different domains, several church leaders, social elders, and political leaders like VPP MLA Arden Basiaziwot and senior ministers, Kong Ampareng Lyngdoh, Bah Paul Lyngdoh, and others, have already shared their valuable insights and views. It reflects a collective determination to address these challenges.

In my humble opinion, it is imperative that we approach these issues with a positive, inclusive, and empathetic mindset. Our state's progress lies in unity, and we must work together to find equitable solutions that cater to the aspirations of all communities.

Hence I propose a positive and inclusive approach to resolve the reservation and roster system issues, focusing on the principles of unity, empathy, and merit-based opportunities. My humble suggestions encompass both short-term and long-term measures to ensure sustainable development and social harmony in Meghalaya.

Comprehensive Stakeholder Dialogue: Initiate an inclusive and respectful dialogue involving representatives from all tribes, experts, youth representatives, social leaders, and government officials. Such engagements can help identify concerns and aspirations and guide the formulation of more inclusive policies.

Equitable Distribution

Based on Need: Revise the reservation distribution to address the needs of each community, moving away from rigid percentages. Ensuring equitable opportunities will foster genuine and mutual respect among the tribes.

Transparent Policy Framework: Establish a transparent policy framework that clearly outlines the rationale behind reservation and roster implementation. This will enhance understanding and accountability among the citizens.

Emphasis on Skill Development: Prioritize skill development and vocational training programs to equip the youth with the necessary skills for better employability and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Long-Term Measures: Promote inter-tribal economic development and job creation. Focus on economic development by promoting investments and job creation in various sectors. A diversified economy will reduce the reliance on government jobs and lead to a more balanced job market.

Strengthen Career Counseling: Establish career counseling centers in different domains, offering support to students and jobseekers. Empowering individuals with information will lead to more informed career choices.

Promote Inter-Tribal Cultural Exchange: Encourage inter-tribal cultural exchanges, events, and festivals to foster a sense of unity and mutual respect among the different communities.

Inclusive Leadership

Meghalaya Procurement must change its

By Amer Pariat

Public procurement — the process by which governments purchase goods, services and works — amounted to 5.11 trillion out of global GDP of nearly 500 trillion in 2018. In other words, 12 percent of global GDP (GDP spent following procurement regulation). And as per an OECD report from 2014, the total volume of public procurement in India is estimated to constitute about 10% of gross domestic product (GDP). So, I think it is safe to say that Public Procurement is a big deal. Meghalaya must have a larger share of Government Procurement as part of overall GDP but data in this regard is sparse. But it is very clear that governments are the single largest purchasers of goods and services anywhere, anytime. Thus, governments have tremendous power to negotiate effectively and to secure the best possible outcomes. Of course, prices are surely embedded in this idea of "best possible outcomes" but they cannot be the only determinant for procurement decisions. There are numerous other factors to consider and we might turn to the principles of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) to help our own government make better decisions for the "best possible outcomes".

Thus far, in spite of numerous recruitments of procurement professionals, specialists for the various government departments and various governmental agencies like MDDA, the procurement policy within the state seemed flawed on the task of purchasing without giving any consideration whatsoever towards DEI. But why is DEI so important? Let us look at the constituents of this concept to better understand.

First up is Diversity. Diversity involves all the ways that people are different, including various characteristics that distinguish one demographic from another. Diversity is not a binary belief; it is a good thing and must include those demographics who aren't broadly represented in society or certain industries and sectors. Perhaps the most important element of Diversity in the context of Meghalaya would be along the lines of our ethnicity. For the sake of simplicity, let us look at ethnicity through the broad categories of Tribal and Non-Tribal. On this front, Meghalaya is making good strides because — as compared to 20 or 30 years ago — more and more Tribals have benefited from Government Procurement. It is no exaggeration to say that as of 2023, the Tribal population seems to be doing much better for itself and in the years to come, seems set to achieve even better results in terms of participation and professionalism. I refuse to believe that in a state with a population of 30 lakh, only a few privileged players are the best at their jobs and certain industries and sectors. To promote equity, the government must focus on understanding the causes that underlie disparities in society. The aim of equity is to promote justice, fairness and impartiality in the way things are done and in the distribution of resources within social structures, systems and institutions. In our particular context, one's Socio-economic status might just be the most important consideration. That is to say that in awarding tenders, the government must diligently consider this parameter. It is time to talk about another idea: "kamaling kiwlang", namely to "earn equally, climb equally".

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Letters to the Editor

Traumas are hard to erase

Editor, The news reports about the boy being forced to wear a garland of flowers and clapping by the teachers including the head teacher is heart wrenching. We don't know yet what other abuses, humiliations the boy and possibly other students of the same school had to undergo at the hands of these abusers unless a thorough investigation is carried out. However, I doubt this will happen considering that the boy in question is a rural boy of poor parents who may eventually be convinced to reach a "compromise" and withdraw the First Information Report filed with the police.

It cannot be over-emphasized that the boy in question needs prolonged counselling and that too not from those dime-a-dozen pretenders who masquerade as counsellors or from those church elders who might pompously tell the child "to get over it." It doesn't work this way because psychological traumas don't get erased so easily. Unless the boy gets serious help from professionals, he may even suffer injuries on

himself and others. I reiterate that psychological traumas are not easily erased. I say this from personal experience albeit under different circumstances from that of the boy's. Being a child of parents who belong to two different racial groups can sometimes be a curse. I remember as a six year old I was frequently mocked, belittled, humiliated and brutally rejected by my teacher in front of the whole class because I looked different and because my mother, according to said teacher, did not choose her husband wisely. This went on for the whole academic year. I was almost totally broken in spirit. How I was promoted to the next class and escaped from the said teacher is a story that is not relevant here.

In subsequent years, I had the great fortune of having good human beings as teachers and this mitigated the trauma inflicted on me to a considerable extent but many consequences of my negative experiences continued, until, in my early adulthood, I started becoming more self-aware and noticed that I most of the brutal rejection during early childhood/my behaviour and actions in relation to other

people was mostly to avoid rejection or to gain the acceptance of others. I also noticed that I always automatically rejected myself when others reject me and this made me depressed. I further noticed that I was timid and had mild panic attacks (kept in control by exercise of will) when required to approach any authority figures.

These insights helped me a lot but it was not the end of the road but only a new beginning. To cut a long story short, when I reached my early thirties and with more insights along the way, I found life to be more tolerable and had more confidence to navigate the ups and downs of life. Please note that it took more than 25 years for me to internally reach somewhere relatively meaningful and that is a very long time, human life being short. But that was me and I was privileged for being a teacher and for accessing decent education and access to resources (only books during my time, but better resources now) and living their innate peaceful and civilized behaviour. Humans on the other hand have proven to be the most cruel creatures.

Here, the main question is: what are the reasons for this cruel and unobedi-

ent violence leading to the heartless killing of the innocent, including children and women? One clear reason is "hatred." Hatred for fellow-brotherhood is the root cause. Why do we need to hate those with whom we should be living together in harmony? Should we not again find out the causes of that hatred? The causes of hatred, we will not resolve the Manipur issue permanently. Peace and the idea of co-existence will continue to elude us. The police and paramilitary forces patrolling the state are only a quick-fix solution. Hatred surging from within cannot be shot down with bullets from guns and pistols.

Yes, for true peace and to foster love, we should turn to religion. It provides a ray of hope and spiritual solace. All religions teach us why we need to love our neighbours and serve them in their needs, regardless of their creed, ethnicity, and economic status. Religion is also one of the main vehicles that take us up to the doorway of the Almighty.

However, going by the present circumstances, one doubts if the "way and style" in which we have been practising our sacred religious

will ever take us to the creator. The hatred we harbour against others for "various reasons" has completely numbed our humane sensitivity. Hence we see our fellow brethren approaching God a little differently as our arch-enemy. We have taken up arms to burn them because they call Him by different names and him in different times.

If violence and cruelty can lead us to God, religion has been wrongly understood. Many of us have also been using "religion" as a licence to unleash our inner demons. We were sacred religious places not the first casualties of this Manipur outrage? How does the desecration and destruction of religious sites delight God in Heaven? I think we have been thoroughly misled in all these years. We need to understand that hurting humanity would hurt God the most.

Yours etc., Satil Gwalji, Shillong

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"In crises the most daring course is often safest"

— Henry Kissinger

The Shillong Times

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Uninspiring dynasts

CURIOSITY, with just six months left for the EC notification on the next Parliament polls, the mood in the opposition camp is palpably downbeat. Its decision to hold the next round of conclaves later this month in Mumbai is by itself not sufficient to create the right momentum for a huge electoral battle. First and foremost, the leaders are hemming and hawing as to who they would project as the PM nominee. Such a trend has already set in on the Indian electoral landscape, as in the US, since 2014. This is because parties today centre mostly if not exclusively around individuals. Mere so as most parties are family enterprises, a trend set by the Congress party from the time of Indira Gandhi. Now, every crook is subverting the cause of democracy and heading a party on the dynasty model. The big question therefore, is, what their credibility would be when they collect themselves into one heap. Prime Minister Modi has rightly zeroed in on this aspect in his first response to INDIA.

Some recent opinion polls give an edge to the BJP-led NDA, set against the new opposition political formation. There is no perceptible anti-incumbency mood. If the electorate's mind must change, at the last minute, that could happen at the behest of the BJP or PM Modi, who has a knack to spring surprises a la Balakot. The failure of the united Opposition to floor the ruling dispensation in most respects — be it matters of development, economy, defence or national communal temperature — could signify that this alliance of elders would be incapable of working the electorate to a frenzy and dislodge the present dispensation.

The Indian electorate, with the spread of the electronic media and net-linked mobile phones at most homes, is more aware today about the difference between local elections and a parliamentary poll. In their perception, Modi towers over others while the INDIA alliance s rudeness. Rahul Gandhi is legally handicapped. Nitish Kumar or Sharad Pawar could be a laughing stock for different reasons. Mamata Banerjee too has less clout outside Bengal. Goa put paid to her PM ambitions. Some 17 parties of the alliance have one member each in Parliament. These are virtual non-entities and parasites. They can feed only on the strength of others. The ruling parties of Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are not with INDIA. The opposition in Maharashtra is ruptured. There has been no serious effort on the part of the Opposition to assert itself or challenge the Modi establishment. This situation is tailor-made for defeat unless someone hectors its cause with a stronger sense of resolve even at this late hour.

Letters to the Editor

Whither Meghalaya!

Editor, I often write my observations on matters of interest to me after reading "The Shillong Times", but I don't post them. The Niy Ayogyo findings that place Meghalaya at the lower end in many areas filled me with deep anguish and shame. How has Meghalaya "booked" its place as India's second poorest state? It began when both politicians and bureaucrats shamelessly lost their commitment in their "Duty of Care".

I expected a response from the Government the very next day denying Niti Ayogyo findings as has been the habit when Meghalaya's index fell to the lowest in education, school dropouts, most corrupt state, etc.!! Not nothing was forthcoming. Of late the daily news have been shocking and depressing. The news report, "INYM arms villagers with bows and arrows (ST July 5, 2023)", opened my eyes to the financial bleeding of the state! INYM President Louis Duhindong highlights, "wasteful expenditure of public money" that has to be plugged too! Political appointments are not just appointment posts, but also suspiciously nefarious! Then bringing in outside private consultants costs the exchequer heavily. I know first hand how exorbitant are their charges!!

Imagine who: 60 consultants are charging (over and under the table. Under the table is just my assumption!) And appointments of "MLAs who were defeated in the Assembly elections," are another bleeding jug-

lar! The CM says that these (failed) MLAs who are appointed as Chairmen, Co-Chairmen, etc. of various Boards get Rs. 20,000 per month as salary. For the total compensation is never disclosed! If my estimation is correct, they receive probably two lakhs at the minimum!! And I wonder if the state can turn around and accomplish the target of a 10 billion dollar economy in five years time! How political leaders are taking the ordinary people for a ride by painting rosy pictures of the future and with false promises just beats me! They are not afraid of God it appears! And this belief together with Friday's devotional theme, "Authentic Christianity of Our Daily Bread," has prompted me to write this letter. I learn that, "Those who are involved in and dependent on the Spirit of Jesus are humble and self-effacing." It goes on to say how such people are touched by the suffering of others, and they long for the goodness in others because they are merciful to those who struggle and fall.

Our state is now in a severe debt trap and its possible that we are going to be another Sri Lanka. And the less we speak of a Smart City the better.

Yours etc, Kevin Phillips, Shillong - 19

Meghalaya in the doldrums

Editor, The current state of affairs in Meghalaya seem to have reached a dead end and its deplorable governance is a laughing stock in the print, electronic and on social media. From the mishandling

Democracy, Rule of Law & Bureaucracy in Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

There are few facts we have to accept so that we can come to grips with reality. First, Meghalaya like India is not a democracy in the real sense of the term. Inequality and distorted power equations make democracy impossible to work. A good example would be the relationship between the Block Development Officer in the village and the people. In a democracy where it is said power belongs to the people, the villagers can and should approach the BDO, not the other way round. Both agree that while the rule of law is necessary to guide society it cannot be arbitrarily applied. It is generally accepted that the creation of laws, their enforcement, and the relationships among legal rules are themselves legally regulated, so that no one — including the most highly placed official — stands above the law. In simple terms this means that those running the government are also subject to existing laws as much as citizens are. We are supposed to stand before the law and hence no person shall hold special privileges because of the position that she holds, in the application of the rule of law. The rule of law does not mean the application of judicial processes; nor does it relate only to policing processes but across all government functions. The enforcement and adjudication of legal rules by various government officials are to be impartial and consistent without taking into account the class, status, or relative power among the citizenry or indeed their educational status.

If the law to be applied equally across all sections of society, citizens should know the law so that they can contest its arbitrary application. Can that happen in a society that is not just illiterate but which is wallowing in poverty? In Meghalaya 32.7 people live below the poverty line and that reduces their to a powerlessness, only they can understand. This has happened because the bureaucracy which is tasked with bringing enabling schemes closer to the people spend more time in their office cubicles and

hardly visit the people. Naturally, people learn to depend heavily on their politician (MLA) who they feel is one of them and in a better position to understand their plight. But considering that the MLA too is no longer one of them and lives in comfort of his fort in Shillong, the concerns of the villagers remain unaddressed and the governance a distant dream.

Every-stricken villagers are centred only once in five years. Poverty forces them to accept doles and being conscience-stricken they vote for the highest bidder for their votes. These are the people who today are realizing that they have been given short shrift by the system of governance and that if they do not stand and demand their rights they will not have access to those rights. Hence the demand for a winter capital in Tura! The arguments put forward are that most government establishments will function from Tura and that would bring governance closer to the people. But the question that follows is, what are the plethora of district offices doing that people need to come all the way to Shillong? Aren't the district offices meant to address the needs of the people in their respective districts? Perhaps the more pertinent question is - What are the Block Development Officers (BDOs) doing? Who is to monitor the BDOs and the outcomes? Aren't some of the BDOs the best among bureaucrats? Don't they own several buildings that others can only envy? When do they get their earnings from? Can anyone in the Government answer this? This is the broken link in the governance system and it needs to be fixed. I am not sure that a winter capital will be able to address the broken bureaucratic frame.

This brings me to the contentious issue of relationship between the political class and the bureaucracy. Ironically, just a few days after his election in 2014, Prime Minister, Modi made a pledge to revitalize India's administrative set-up which

he said was suffering from the perception that corrupt bureaucrats are despised but thrice, while the honest are respected but do not rise. Modi pointed out that many of those wanting to do something end up in the bonobooks. In its true sense the bureaucracy is meant to implement policies by the book and to blow the whistle when politicians waylay the smooth implementation of schemes because they need to make money on the sly. Why have our bureaucrats become complicit in what their political masters have excelled in? What is also problematic is the political intelligence of bureaucrats instead of following their training module learn in the LISNAA Mussorie. Of course, many are only looking at professional mobility and rising the political class means a punishment posting. It is unfortunate that the civil servants are not protected from political vengeance.

Of the many training modules the important one is to handle law and order so that it does not completely collapse as happened in Tura some weeks ago and in Manipur for 3 whole months and counting. But everywhere we see this aspect of the IAS training module falling into disrepute. Studies have shown how IAS officers have instead of investing in upgrading their skills and developing expertise in their respective tasks have instead used their affinity to politicians to leverage important postings. The absence of appropriate yardsticks to measure performance-based outcomes is also a huge drawback. It is important for an IAS officer and for the public to know what and how much an officer has achieved in the department he/she handles. And promotion should be based on performance and not on seniority alone. This would be a good indicator of how equal to the task a bureaucrat is.

In Meghalaya as in other states, some bureaucrats have allowed themselves to be used by all shades of politicians. This is a disservice to their profession and to the people of this country who they have professed to serve by using the rule of law equitably.

In the heart of the nation, where the union in diversity has been our strength for centuries, it is painful to see such riots in Nuh. The clashes that erupted in this region have not only shaken the local populace but have also raised crucial questions about our country's resilience and harmony. Nuh, often referred to as the 'Mecca of Meos', has long been known for its diverse communities living side by side. Communal violence is often fuelled by vested interests seeking to exploit sentiments based on religious or ethnic identities for personal or political gain. Inflammatory speeches and divisive narratives circulated through social media can incite emotions and lead to a breakdown of the social fabric, turning neighbours into enemies. The role of law enforcement and community leaders cannot be underestimated in addressing and preventing such outbreaks.

Political leaders should prioritise the well-being of the community over personal gains and work towards dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents. Only through open dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents. Only through open dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents. Only through open dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents.

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A Theatre of Betrayal

By Janet Hujon

Following the recent attempt to let us call it 'unseal' the chief minister and his entourage in Tura, the health minister made a couple of comments that I found rather curious (Shillong Times, July 28th 2023). Firstly, she advised putting an end to the "mafia political warfare" that is disrupting the "otherwise peaceful state". She urged the people of the state to say "no to this intrusive application of political patronage which is becoming a dangerous trend" (italics mine). Taken out of the context of Meghalaya today, both statements are definitely goals worth pursuing. But surely describing Meghalaya as an "otherwise peaceful state" where political patronage is only 'becoming a dangerous trend', could not be further from the truth!

What about the recent arson attack in Laitumkroh, which led to the imposition of a curfew (albeit short-lived) by Deputy Commissioner Karbh on grounds that 'Shillong is no longer safe' (ST, July 12th); the attack on the health minister herself cannot be shrugged off just because the assailant was labelled mentally unstable; the wider implications of why she was targeted should be probed; the continuing unrest in the border areas following the Mukrah firing; the alleged extrajudicial killing of Christoford T. Mangthoh and its aftermath; the deepening of communal tensions and the exploitation of the same by parties interested in deepening the divide is becoming more apparent despite counter arguments from the government. And this time it is not only between djar and tribal but between one tribe and another as seen in the HNY's opposition to the Garo demand for a winter capital. Many years ago my grandfather Joseph Ryagah noted: "Ri Khsi - disunity is by name", but now it looks as if the Garo camp too is increasingly fragmented. Who is going to blink first and who will press the trigger? And will those burying their heads in the sand behind their gated mansions escape the carnage, and will only the innocent get caught in the cross hairs?

As for the minister's second comment, I guess we should be grateful that at least the presence of political patronage is acknowledged. Although, with a few exceptions, hasn't political patronage been the modus operandi in Meghalaya all since its inception? Why else should we see political appointees being parachuted into departments where they are not only out of their functioning of which, they have no clue or where they are not necessarily needed. And talk about the persistent practice among current and wannabe politicians to buy support and no one willing to betray the gaggle of geyse laying the golden eggs - Lucky patrons. As long as this cycle of calculation and dependency on easy money continues, Meghalaya will be forever crippled and impoverished by her self-seeking politicians and their minions. 'Trend'. Fear is too innocuous a term for a practice that has torn the moral fabric of Meghalaya to shreds exposing to light a profound sense of dark helplessness.

Meanwhile the deputy chief minister's contribution to the conversation is unhelpful. Eyes roll everywhere because it 'seems' the violence is politically motivated, that's what we hear, and that the police should be more 'aggressive' and "proactive in investigating such issues" (July 28th). As usual the buck stops elsewhere. I would have thought that a thorough investigation automatically follows any act of unlawful violence and no offender is required. And what self-serving hypocrisy! Why should this threat to the chief minister matter more than the actual brutal killing of Sub-Inspector Pearlstone Marban in 2015, or the death of millions in coalmines where safety

standards are non-existent? But did we see a thorough investigation there? No, and why not? Apparently fear of disturbing the stench of political patronage which any police action would have stirred up. Yet now it is because your own tails are scorched, that you suddenly become less complacent and feel the need for urgent vigilance? Thank goodness that in this bleak and unjust universe the flame of justice burns bright in the heart of hope called the High Court someone cares.

And what is exactly meant by 'aggressive'? In this current volatile climate where emotions are running high, it is inadvisable to use words that could come back to haunt you. And as written, it is authoritarianism that has moved in. Coercing narratives to become to emerge. NGO's now consider the arrests following the Tura incident as a violation of an authoritarian (sic) but should it not be authoritarian? government. (Note: authoritarian means someone who is not likely to be respected or obeyed, which is exactly not the way the NGOs feel towards the government at the moment.) Authoritarianism is favouring or enforcing strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom, and this my friends more accurately describes the mood of the agitators in Tura.

Ultimately what the Tura 'incident' must make us do is interrogate what we mean by a 'peaceful state'. It is not just the absence of overt violence that indicates peace, although that is undeniably crucial. But ensuring peace of mind built on trust in a government working for and not against you is even more important for it is this that will guarantee lasting grandeur. Joseph Ryagah said that struggles are part of the human condition but hardship is bitterly resented if one notices that one's unhappy lot is because those in power seek nothing wrong in pampering themselves by the gross accumulation of looted wealth while ignoring the basic needs of the majority. I wonder if in their plush mansions, they ever spare a thought for those who can barely afford to put food on the table. Herminia is not purely resides at the heart of government. Yet most revealing of all we are made to endure the scream of screams continuing the long suffering heli-poli aside so our ministers can whiz their way through our traffic-choked streets. What a shameless display of power whereby only of tin-pot dictators.

Leading a charmed and easy life untouched by the struggles of the common people among those who have removed themselves from the life as the rest of us know it — they have in effect systematically added another facet to the "Them & Us" culture. We can no longer recognise ourselves in 'Them' (not that we want to) even though we may belong to the same tribe and speak the same language. Thanks to their life styles they are no longer one of us - they are in essence 'foreigners' in our midst. No more are we privileged to feel that comforting sense of being a distinct community of 'revlum', of hill people nurtured by common ideals.

"Ka lon ka wan ka lein ryngkut, Kai iap ka im rih dang kunei

Synhah kai kai Snieh Pyrbvi.

Comings and goings an sympathy in step

Wellfare and ease of covion contrivance

Comon's idiom on the face of land'

(Sivo Thum: Ki Sngi Barim U Hnyahv Trep, Ka Merlung)

A cross the ring of puppets and puppeteers has replaced the poet's vision of a homeland once gentle with harmony and compassion. (The writer can be reached at jan.moore@hmail.co.uk)

of the state finances to a dwindling fall in the per capita income. Combating with Bihar, from the highest drop-out rate in education to the least performing state in the country, it is the "most corrupt state," in the country as certified by none other than the Prime Minister himself during his pre-election tour to Meghalaya. We have a hilltop of garbage stacked up with each passing day and no solution. Political leaders are taking the ordinary people for a ride by painting rosy pictures of the future and with false promises just beats me! They are not afraid of God it appears! And this belief together with Friday's devotional theme, "Authentic Christianity of Our Daily Bread," has prompted me to write this letter. I learn that, "Those who are involved in and dependent on the Spirit of Jesus are humble and self-effacing." It goes on to say how such people are touched by the suffering of others, and they long for the goodness in others because they are merciful to those who struggle and fall.

Our state is now in a severe debt trap and its possible that we are going to be another Sri Lanka. And the less we speak of a Smart City the better.

Yours etc, Dominic S. Wankar Via email

Hate speech should be curbed immediately

Editor, The present tension-ridden

environment in some parts of the country due to various reasons must be curbed immediately so that it does not trigger similar incidents elsewhere. In a shocking instance of a hate crime, a railway train in Faridkot, Punjab, was set on fire, resulting in the deaths of several passengers and the injury of many others. The train was carrying a large number of passengers, and the fire broke out in the middle of the train, leading to a chaotic scene. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of public transport and the need for stricter security measures. The hate-filled rant and the cold-blooded murders leave no room for doubt that the communal virus has deeply permeated our society and there is need to control such ideology which is already tarnishing the image of the country.

Even as the 620 conference is being held in India such incidents are being transmitted outside the country within a short period. In the present incident the accused mentioned the names of the Prime Minister and the Union Minister. The Minister while giving a blood-curdling warning to India's Muslims, lays bare the unwillingness of the political leadership to deal with such type of hate speeches. Communal tensions have torched countless neighbourhoods across India into a tinderbox that gets ignited by a mere spark - a remark inciting violence or a provocative use of language in a minority-dominated locality. The clashes that erupted in Jaryana's Nuh over a religious procession are now seething other

districts of the state too and now the onus is on the police to arrest and prosecute rioters and also those indulging in hate speech else the government's inaction would be read as its complicity. It would be a good idea to monitor the hate speeches used by a BJP spokesperson has tarnished the country's image in other countries also. The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the government to take steps to curb such hate speeches. The nation's unity must remain intact and there should not be any harm to the social fabric of the society which the country has achieved after a long and continuous struggle and the nefarious designs of antisocial elements should be defeated at all levels.

Proper enquiry should be conducted and the guilty should be punished after compensation paid to the injured families of those killed. It is imperative that this issue is addressed with utmost seriousness and those responsible for orchestrating the riots should be brought to book and full justice be provided to the innocent victims. We should not forget that there are forces at work which want to create Manipur-like situations in other parts of the country and this is evident in the manner in which revengeful action was taken against the peaceful protesters. Come to think of it, had the law been enforced properly, a man accused of lynching two would not have been roaming around fomenting

trouble.

In the heart of the nation, where the union in diversity has been our strength for centuries, it is painful to see such riots in Nuh. The clashes that erupted in this region have not only shaken the local populace but have also raised crucial questions about our country's resilience and harmony. Nuh, often referred to as the 'Mecca of Meos', has long been known for its diverse communities living side by side. Communal violence is often fuelled by vested interests seeking to exploit sentiments based on religious or ethnic identities for personal or political gain. Inflammatory speeches and divisive narratives circulated through social media can incite emotions and lead to a breakdown of the social fabric, turning neighbours into enemies. The role of law enforcement and community leaders cannot be underestimated in addressing and preventing such outbreaks.

Political leaders should prioritise the well-being of the community over personal gains and work towards dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents. Only through open dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents. Only through open dialogue, economic empowerment, and political integrity can we hope to prevent the recurrence of such unfortunate incidents.

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

Women's World Cup: Scope for improvement

By All Bowes

The FIFA Women's World Cup is just 32 years old and on its eighth official edition, while the men's competition began 93 years ago and has enjoyed 22 tournaments.

After the success of the 2019 WWC in France, the women's competition has progressed to new heights for 2023 in Australia and New Zealand. There are more teams than ever competing, in front of the biggest TV audiences, with each player to be paid directly, guaranteeing prize money for the first time.

It's fair to assume that this Women's World Cup is probably the most significant women's sporting event in history, although this won't be the last time we hear that phrase. The trajectory of women's sport is continually rising – and arguably there has never been a better time to be involved in sport as a woman.

But for so long women have fought for a more equal footing within the male-dominated world of sport, and researchers have long highlighted the lack of equality in the game. So, as participation levels rise, TV viewing figures increase and sponsorship income improves year on year, we might ask: what's left to achieve for women in football?

Alongside other researchers, I have written about the gender gap in professional and elite-level women's football in the last few years. This body of work pays attention to some key – and in many ways overlapping and interlinked – issues in women's sport, including equal pay, injury, menstruation and maternity rights.

One of the most significant developments for women's sport is the discussion on equal pay in football, advanced mainly by the US women's national team.

This World Cup has seen the biggest investment of money from FIFA yet: \$152m (£118m) to ensure that all players are paid and prize money is increased and on a "parity to equality" with the men's tournament. FIFA has also ensured that standards across staffing, base camps, accommodation and travel are delivered to the same level as the men's competition.

Facilities and healthcare



However, despite the starry heights reached by the qualified teams, a recent report by the world players' union FIFPRO found that there remain stark inequalities in women's football across the globe.

A total of 362 women across teams attempting to qualify for this World Cup were surveyed, with 78% reporting poor gym facilities, 66% reporting poor or non-existent recovery facilities, and 54% saying they were not provided with a pre-tournament medical.

In addition 66% players had to take unpaid leave or vacation from work and almost 33% did not receive any compensation. So there is work to be done in the elite women's game.

Injuries

Given the findings from FIFPRO on facilities, pitches and payment, it comes as no surprise that injury has become a hot topic of interest within women's football. According to sports medicine specialists, women are six times more likely to rupture their anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), and for this World Cup, nine of the top players

are absent with the injury.

Gendered environment

The field of sport science has been heavily criticised for its male-dominated approach, where only 6% of research looks exclusively at women. Only now are we seeing a drive to develop female-specific equipment in response to player concerns, as scientists start to address the gender imbalance in sports technology.

A powerful piece published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine highlights a gendered environment approach to understanding ACL injuries. This work describes how the social construction of gender affects the ACL injury cycle across the whole life of the athlete.

This includes how boys and girls learn to move (often differently) alongside inadequate training and competition environments for girls, and gendered cultural body norms. Often women competing in sport are considered "unfeminine", with athletic, muscular bodies traditionally associated with being male.

In some countries, like Brazil, for example,

female players in the past have struggled to be accepted in the face of "cultural disapproval". It's an interesting and useful approach that highlights the complexity of women and girls' involvement in sport.

Proper football kit

Menstruation, menopause and female hormone profiles across puberty, have been thought to have some impact on sports performance and injury. However, we're only now seeing changes made to player uniforms – namely no white shorts – in response to player fears around menstruation and leaking, to take one example.

This is part of a broader shift in sportswear manufacturers finally creating women-specific kit instead of the "hand-me-down men's kit" culture many ex-players experienced.

Women's bodies and experiences

This World Cup will see a number of players taking to the pitch as mothers. Despite the increasing number of professional women footballers, their employment rights as mothers have often been overlooked. This has led to numbers of women quitting the sport early to have children, and research has shown that players have struggled to combine professional football careers with motherhood.

FIFA regulations launched at the end of 2020 provided players with paid maternity leave for the first time. However, we know in some cases players have concerns about taking maternity leave.

For example, would their clubs think they are less committed to the sport? Would their bodies recover to their pre-pregnancy form? Here, access to health support and adequate facilities, as well as being properly paid, becomes key, as well as broader cultural change within the sport to normalise pregnancy and motherhood.

It's clear that women's football has never been in a better place, and the World Cup is currently a fine showcase for it, but it's crucial that the female game continues to strive for improvement in areas that fundamentally affect the lives and careers of its players. *(The Conversation)*

(The author is Senior Lecturer in Sociology of Sport, Nottingham Trent University)

Go-Karting going strong in India

By Pravuk Jain

In recent years, the sport of go-karting has revolutionised the racing scene in India, capturing the imaginations of young aspiring drivers and providing a breeding ground for future motorsport stars.

Beyond its thrilling entertainment value, go-karting has become a stepping stone for budding racers, fueling their dreams and serving as a catalyst for their pursuit of a career in motorsports.

With state-of-the-art tracks, increasing participation, and a growing support base, go-karting is not only transforming the Indian racing landscape but also empowering dreams like never before.

An Accessible Entry Point

Go-karting serves as a gateway for young motorsport enthusiasts to experience the exhilaration of racing in a safe and controlled environment. With its smaller, lightweight vehicles and confined tracks, go-karting provides a platform for beginners to learn and develop essential racing skills, such as speed management, cornering techniques, and strategic decision-making. The early exposure kindles a passion for motorsports, instilling a competitive spirit and laying the foundation for aspiring racers to progress to higher levels of racing.

Professional Training and Development

The surge in go-karting's popularity in India has led to the establishment of world-class go-karting academies and training programs. These institutions offer professional coaching, mentorship, and cutting-edge facilities to nurture the skills of budding racers. The focus extends beyond driving proficiency, encompassing physical fitness, mental resilience, and sportsmanship, creating a holistic development platform for future racing champions. Through these dedicated training initiatives, go-karting is nurturing talent and equipping young drivers with the tools they need to excel in the fiercely competitive world of motorsports.

Stepping Stone to Success

Go-karting has played a pivotal role in the rise of several successful Indian racers who have made their mark in national and



international motorsport competitions. The experience and skills acquired in go-karting serve as a solid foundation for aspiring racers, opening doors to national and international racing championships and increasing their prospects of reaching the pinnacle of motorsports, such as Formula 1 or other prestigious racing leagues. Regular racing championships and tournaments, catering to both amateurs and professionals, foster healthy competition and provide a platform for emerging talent to shine. The thriving racing community in India not only fuels dreams but also cultivates camaraderie, propelling the growth of motorsports as a whole.

Inspiring the Next Generation

The impact of the go-karting trend extends far beyond the racing circuit. As young enthusiasts witness the rise of Indian racing stars and experience the thrill of go-karting themselves, it sparks inspiration and encourages them to dream big. The sport serves as a wellspring of motivation for future generations, instilling values like determination, discipline,

and perseverance. The growing presence of Indian racers on the global stage further amplifies these aspirations, demonstrating that with passion, talent, and unwavering dedication, dreams can indeed become a reality.

Shaping Dreams, One Lap at a Time

The growing trend of go-karting in India is not merely about entertainment; it represents a powerful force that ignites dreams and nurtures the potential of future racing champions. By providing accessible entry points, fostering talent development, and cultivating a vibrant motorsport community, go-karting is reshaping the Indian racing landscape and empowering the aspirations of young motorsport enthusiasts. As more aspiring racers take to the tracks, the Indian racing scene is poised for even greater success, and the dreams of future racing champions are being set in motion, one thrilling lap at a time.

(The author is the Managing Director of Snow World Entertainment - Formula 11 Karting)

American Centre holds exhibition A Quest for Equality

The American Centre in the national capital is hosting an art exhibition titled 'Interrogations and Ideologies: A Quest for Equality' (till August 7) which brings together artists Savi Sawarkar and Poonam Grover, who have used different installations as an expression of social equality and justice.

Curated by Prof. V.S. Alanc, the exhibition highlights the principles of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and questions social prejudices and discrimination.

The art displays the social fabric of marginalized communities, which speaks of the shared vision of the US and India.

Ambedkarian aesthetics seeks to subvert the narrative of the status quo, calling for the dismantling of deeply ingrained inhibitions nurtured over time.

Drawing inspiration from historical trajectories, both ancient and modern, the exhibition presents a vivid exploration of contradictions that have shaped lives, including those of artistic creations.

It serves as a constant engagement to break free from the shackles of 'protected ignorance'.

The exhibition also highlights the intriguing realm of performance art, an innovative genre where artwork is brought to life through actions performed by the artist or other participants.

Witnessed live or through documentation, these artistic actions integrate time, space, body, and the artist's presence, creating an immersive experience for the audience.

Transcending traditional fine art contexts, the exhibition offers an interdisciplinary mode that breaks the boundaries of art galleries and museums. The performances can unfold in any setting, be it a street, an unconventional space, or during any period. *(IANS)*



Authentic friendships in social media world



By N. Lathungheni Humtsoe

Building a friendship is no less than forming any kind of relationship. While many meet soulsmates through friends, there are also people out there who struggle to find genuine friends. Especially in the world of social media, in many instances we come across the 'friends for benefits' kind of relationship.

Not everyone that comes into our life has good intentions, but hey! it is also how we turn the table. This Friendship Day, let's find out how your favourite personalities from the internet are dealing on maintaining authentic friendships in the social media world.

Palak Rathi, Gen Z Finance Content Creator, "Do you know what's the best thing about social media? Accessibility. Accessibility to literally anyone and everyone. It's up to us how we use that accessibility - to just network or to actually build meaningful relationships beyond networking. Don't connect with people only when you need a favour or there's some work to be discussed but rather keep talking to them once in a while, check on them, appreciate them, celebrate their small victories by maybe reacting to a story or sending them a sweet message or calling them to congratulate them. While staying connected online is great, whenever and wherever possible try to meet them in person. Make efforts. Look and build real friendships."

And most importantly - stay genuine and don't try to be someone you're not. Because only then you'll be able to find people who you can really connect with on a deeper level rather than just likes and comments on the surface level. Talk about your interests, your likings, your struggles



(trauma bonding is a thing, haha), your goals - just be yourself and you'll be surprised to see how it will lead to the start of some extremely meaningful conversations and lifelong friendships. Engage with people whose interests align with you or should I say whose "niche" matches with you. That will help you make friends and not just connections."

Adete Dahiya, Gen Z Lifestyle Content Creator, "Whenever we talk about the impact of social media, romantic relationships often take precedence over anything else. But its impact on friendships and other interpersonal relationships

is even more profound. Social media has made it so easy to stay in touch with friends and make new ones online - you can just like their photos on Instagram or react with an emoji to their stories, or just drop a short comment on their latest post and you're done. But the flip side is that it has made it much harder to maintain meaningful connections and bonds. A few things you can do to counteract this is to schedule regular call times with your friends. It is essential to check in, speak to them face to face and get a deeper understanding of what is happening in each others' lives. If you live in the same city, make it

a priority to meet weekly. The key is not to become lazy because of social media but to use it to deepen your connection."

Reshi Magada, Gen Z Finance Content Creator, "Maintaining meaningful friendships as a Gen Z individual navigating the social media environment needs a balance of virtual relationships and in-person connections. To begin, I value honest communication by being open about my views, feelings, and experiences. Sharing both highs and lows helps friends understand each other better."

Second, I try to engage in real conversations that go beyond likes and comments. I send individual rates, check about their well-being, and show real interest in their life. In this way, I display that I value and care for my friends."

Third, I maintain digital boundaries. To keep my friendships from being superficial, I restrict my screen time and prevent idle scrolling. Instead, I invest in face-to-face interactions and meaningful time spent together, which strengthens the bond."

Finaly, keep in mind that social media is a highlight reel, and comparison may stunt true friendships. I create a healthy climate for genuine friendships to grow by appreciating my friends' wins without feeling envious. Through these methods, I am able to form and retain genuine friendships in the ever-changing social media world."

Caslynn Qusay Naha, Gen Z Finance Content Creator, "Maintaining authentic friendships in the social media world is crucial as we navigate the digital age. It's essential to remember that the principles that apply to real-life friendships can also be applied to our online connections."

First and foremost, authenticity is key. Just like in face-to-face interactions, being genuine and true to yourself fosters trust and openness. Share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences honestly, and encourage your friends to do the same."

Taking the time to actively communicate and stay connected with your friends is vital. Initiate conversations, respond to messages, and participate in online discussions."

By showing interest in their lives and making an effort to stay connected, you demonstrate that you value friendship."

Remember, it's not about the number of friends you have, but the quality of the relationships you build. Be present for your friends, celebrate their successes, offer support in their struggles, and be a positive influence in their lives."

So, maintaining authentic friendships in the social media world is all about being genuine, avoiding comparison, actively communicating, and valuing the quality of your connections over quantity." (ANSIStic)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 6, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'
Moon lining Sun on your solar return chart and will give fantastic results. You will get victory in your related matters. Differences between siblings will get resolved. You will get in good mood. Most of your time will be spent in entertainment. You will achieve material success. You will pay attention to increase your income. Students will get success in exam/interview. Your earnings will rise. Your prestige comes from and respect will increase. You will start some new project. You will take time from decision in business. You will buy something new for the house. You will also plan to buy a new vehicle. You will get in a good mood to work or business. You will be in a very strong position and will feel a lot secure about future.

'This week for you'
Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Some changes look imminent this week. You will feel some adjustments in your work place and in business. In fact there is little harm in doing that and as for your partners it only. You may look upon them as insignificant, least of all no controversy but that is not the case. It will lead to increase in your self-esteem and your business will run well. You will also buy new items for your house. Your time will be filled with activities and excitement. You will plan to go on a vacation with your family. You will also clear up your accounts. New job but no opportunity. But will come to you. You will also see your happiness and fun from your family life. You will also overcome hurdles with ease.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This week will bring fortune and luck for you. You will acquire money with your efforts. You will get recognition name and fame. You will also take important decisions in your life. You will be excited with your partners to complete your work. Your self confidence will improve and you will move on the road to success. Money will keep coming. You will also care about the care of your children and decide where they will be taken soon in future. You will make good progress in your job/business. You will also decide about making right investments. Your abroad trip will be successful. You will have an opportunity to increase your business. Low odds will have a wonderful time.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) Time is favorable and you will be well placed in your job/business this week. You will have no shortage of money. You will be a suitable use of appropriate resources at your disposal. You will get a new look to your work in doing so, you will be creative and imaginative. This will make you a lot more productive and trust in the process leading to any sort of loss of money. You will make good progress in your job but not all. Your goals will be supported by you. Life looks easy simple and smooth. You will be spending money on buying new items for your house. It is a way you are improving your life style and way of living. Your health will pose no problems. You will focus on major goals.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You will be a winner this week. You will experience good luck and happiness in your life. You will be enjoying with all a leader with ease. All your desired tasks will finish this time. You will be successful and that get support from one and all. You will buy new items for your house. You will also receive a good news from somewhere. You will spend in case of what you want but it is appropriate if you have out the things evenly. In search for something new you will perform something extraordinary in your work. Students will do well in examinations. You will have wonderful bonding with your life partner. The time is full of fun and entertainment. There will be peace in family.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) This time will be well spent this week. Though you will be all you will see. You will have perfect partner that effectively. Those who are unemployed will be suddenly employed. There will be general peace and happiness in family. Your health and well-being will prove to be helpful. But take care of your health. In your age next to become friendly with some person you may appreciate your own interests. Hence you need to move with care. The only person in your life you will have wonderful bonding with your mate. You will also plan to go on a wedding function. You will also make preparations for the same. Meeting with your friends and family members after a long time will give you immense pleasure.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) It is a wonderful week. You will perform your job well. Though you will be overburdened with responsibilities you will not complain about anything. You will not make mistakes about any matters and will be your normal self. You will spend time with your family members. Students will

be devoted to their studies and will prepare for coming tests in your career. Don't waste your time in unproductive activities. You will settle business disputes through mediation. Your partner will support you a lot and will be a source of inspiration. You will set your goals and then start working upon them. This is also the time for self-analysis and self-reflection.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This week will bring changes for you. Your time will be well spent in your family and in your work. You will earn lot of money. You will see social status and standard of living will increase. You will get lot of opportunities everywhere. This will make you a lot more happier. You will be satisfied with the general outcome of your efforts. The results will be the good. You will give time to your family and do your best for them. They will have complaints. You will give importance in every step and you will not get ego come in between. You will remain ever minded and grounded. You will identify with others as saying because they are saying because they also have their point of view.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You will save lot of mental peace as your work will get done with ease. There will be an increase in your income, status and fortunes. Your earnings will grow. You will also explore and explore sources of income. You will do one time work and bring about in long term in your work. You will take decision only after consulting others. You will also run your business efficiently. New job, you could be promoted. There will be mutual understanding between husband and wife. You will get love of respect from family members. Everyone in the family will give you lot of respect. You will also plan to go on a vacation with your family.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) Success will be yours this week. You will do a major competitive activity in your life. You will be a winner in every step you go. You will complete all the work at your undertake. You will be the winner in your life. You will be honest and dedicated. You will not compromise with any person or your principles. You will earn well. You will get well get rewarded for it too. Your financial condition will be quite satisfactory. You will also plan to go on a tour destination with your family. Despite efforts by your enemies as opponents you will be successful. Low odds will have a wonderful time.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) It is a fantastic week for you. Your partner will be your biggest strength. He/she will support you fully. Those who are unemployed will plan to be the best. You will get favorable response in your business. You will be busy in preparations for a holiday trip. You will also come good health and wealth and luck after them. You will also get good help on your family affairs. Your earnings will be good and you will have money in your pocket to spend. There will be success in relation, love and career. You will feel a lot more energetic all the time. Your children will do well and you will be proud of their achievements. You will remain in the good books of your partners and will be given important responsibilities too.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Time is favorable. Your effort will yield good results as you will focus on your work with sincerity. Your financial position will keep improving and you will remain devoted to your task. You will plan to buy some goods or items which will bring comfort to you. Your relationship with your boss, colleagues and family members will also get better. Your enemies will get defeated in their desire to harm you. You will remain average overall. You will do every possible thing from your side to make it progress smooth. You will pay your tax charges in your life. Your health will also be good. You will not miss your views on others. You will also achieve success in your work.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) It is going to be a fantastic week. Your self confidence will increase and you will complete your task with ease. You will make a budget for your professional and household expenses. You will make your own financial arrangements in your hands which is of prime importance. There is nothing to worry about much. Your social circle will increase. You will attend parties, meals and gatherings and will have a lot of fun. You will have fun and enjoy in your business. Students will focus on their studies and will get success too. You will get love and blessings of your parents. You will need old friends of good old days and will be lost in the memories. You will get your work and get it done with team efforts.

What's the trend with denim skirts?



By N. Lathungheni Humtsoe

In the ever-evolving world of fashion, some pieces transcend the fleeting trends and seasons to become timeless icons of individuality and self-expression. Among these coveted garments, the denim skirt stands as a powerful symbol, embodying the essence of freedom, empowerment, and personal style. Rooted in the rebellious counterculture of the 1960s, denim skirts have journeyed through the ages, leaving an indelible mark on the realm of fashion.

Today, as the world celebrates the beauty of self-expression, denim skirts remain at the forefront, empowering fashion enthusiasts to embrace their unique identities.

Universally ageless and versatile, they appeal to the young and the young-at-heart, celebrating life's diverse stages and offering a seamless blend of nostalgia and contemporary charm.

Rupanshi Agarwal, co-founder of QUA says, "The beauty of denim skirts lies not only in their ability to bridge generations but also in their remarkable adaptability. From minis to midis, distressed to tailored, and classic blue to an array of washes, denim skirts cater to every taste and preference. They have become a blank canvas, allowing wearers to express their true selves through creative styling, making each denim skirt a personalised work of art."

"The distressed denim trend, an art form in itself, adds a unique touch to denim skirts. With every fray and tear, these skirts become storytellers, symbolizing the wearer's journey through life's battles and victories. Embracing imperfections,



they celebrate the beauty of life's individual path, empowering individuals to embrace their true selves. Denim skirts champion inclusivity, embracing diverse body types and celebrating the beauty of individuality. With various cuts and styles, they become a powerful tool for positive self-expression, fostering an environment where all can feel confident and beautiful."

Embodying fluidity and acceptance, denim skirts have played a significant role in breaking gender norms. Evolving into a unisex garment, they provide a stylish and comfortable option for those seeking to express their identity beyond conventional roles.

"Denim skirts have graced the wardrobes of iconic fashion figures, solidifying their status as a timeless fashion staple. From style icons like Jane Birkin, who popularised the denim mini skirt in the 1970s, to modern-day fashion influencers, denim skirts have consistently held a place of reverence in the world of haute couture," adds Rupanshi.

"Their diverse colors and washes further highlight their versatility. From the timeless classic blue to a myriad of washes, denim skirts offer endless possibilities for personal expression, reflecting the wearers' personality and style. Denim skirts, not content with remaining confined to casual wear, have seamlessly integrated into professional settings."

"When paired with tailored blazers and sophisticated accessories, they become a chic and contemporary choice for the modern workplace, proving that self-expression and professionalism can harmoniously coexist," Rupanshi summed up. (ANSIStic)

"The worst times can be the best if you think with positive energy."

—Domenico Dolce

The Shillong Times

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Judiciary, propriety

The lightning speed with which the Lok Sabha disengaged Rahul Gandhi after the Surat court verdict in March last was a shocker. Now, after the Supreme Court stayed the lower court order and the Congress leader won the judicial nod to remain as MP, it seemed a sense of paralysis has gripped the legislative authority. The SC order came on Friday. Congress leader in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury moved from pillar to post on Saturday with the apex court order, seeking reinstatement of the MP. It was understandable that the Lok Sabha secretariat or Speaker wanted to first get the court order in hand. But they opted to delay the whole process. Be that as it may, they cannot unduly delay the follow-up action. Nor are they equipped to stall Rahul Gandhi's return to Parliament with the full authority of a member. The apex court order was clear.

While the apex court has stayed the Surat court order, arguments for and against Rahul Gandhi's appeal against the lower court order would take place now. A final decision would follow in a matter of weeks. This is not time yet to pronounce the last word on the senior leader's saga. Significantly, the apex court has given sufficient hints, prima facie, that there was an overdose of judicial response. It found no reason why the maximum sentence was given to the appellant by the trial court. The apex court also noted, significantly, that the ramifications of this conviction were wide and had the potential to affect the right of the electorates (of Wayanad) who elected him to Parliament as their representative in 2019.

It was clear as sunlight that the Surat court judge opted to give the "maximum" punishment to the Congress MP. Herein lies the crux of the matter. This will have wider implications also in relation to the sense of wisdom on the part of a judicial officer as to how far he should or should not go, and more so in such a sensitive subject. Sitting on an exalted seat of a judicial officer or judge is no child's play. A sense of maturity is supposedly inbuilt in a judge's thoughts and action. It's premature now to conclude as to whether the Surat court has erred in its judgment or whether there was valid reasons for it to pass such an order. But, feelings of impropriety strengthened in view of the apex court observations while granting a stay to the lower court order. The whole issue of judicial propriety has, meanwhile, taken centre-stage.

Letters to the Editor

Let us not create another Them Meteor-like situation

Editor, The recent incident in Mahadev Khela, had jolted us from our slumber, once again. No doubt, Mahadev Khela is a much revered site and as a youngster, I had my share of adventures here, especially during Shivraatri, several years ago. As someone who stays in Lawsohthun and uses this route to the highway, when required, it's true that over the years, many structures have come up in the vicinity of the temple, perhaps illegally. While maintaining the sanctity of the temple, no illegal settlements should be allowed in its vicinity. Its borders should be clearly demarcated and the management of the temple must operate within the rules of the District Council and the State Government and disallow all illegal structures. No one should be allowed to encroach on Government land. The Forest Department is expected to be farighted and not caught napping. The

Debarh Shingm, Lawsohthun, on its part, should be equally vigilant to avoid any unwanted incidents in the near future that can disrupt peace and tranquility of the Shingm and adjoining areas. I believe we all agree that none of us want to see another Them Meteor-like situation in any part of our city. Let's remember A stitch in time saves nine.

Yours etc, Prof. Lakshmi Knu Shillong-4

Manipur today, Meghalaya Tomorrow

Editor, Looking back at how society has become what it is today there is the compulsion to question whether it is what it was intended to be or has it gone astray. It is not enough to prove that it has gone astray; what's more important is that we must tempt the people to develop an interest in reasoning the matter out and exposing the culprit behind the menace. It is upon the discerning citizens to learn to disseminate what it is they are observing and thereby convey their observations to others so that

Indigenous Peoples: Custodians of bio-diversity

By III Mohrmen

With the passage of time evidence has started to emerge which shows that the indigenous people around the world are indeed unique and their lives need to be celebrated. Hence the United Nations commemorates every August 9 as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples to raise awareness of the needs of these population groups. The effort is also to promote and protect the basic Human Rights of indigenous people around the world.

The uniqueness of the Indigenous People So why are indigenous people considered unique? Of course, there is another argument that every community is indigenous in their land, but one cannot deny that the indigenous people are unique and they are different from the other races in the world. They have something special and share some common principles of life which are distinct only to this group of people.

A small interaction with a group of people comprising community leaders and school teachers from the districts in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills helped establish the fact that the indigenous people of Meghalaya and the following are the major principles that they have in common.

Living a morally upright life

In the tribal society, everyone in the community is required to live a morally upright lifestyle. One of the basic moral tenets in the tribal culture, which include that of the Hynnew Trep Society, which comprises the Khasi, the Jaintia, the War, the Jhoni, the Lyngngam, and others, is the phrase, "ka tip bries tip bies," which translates as "know man, know god, it can also mean someone courteous, polite, or well-mannered. Living according to the "ka tip bies tip bies" principle, which means to do only what is right and true, is another ideal in the indigenous society of the state. Living with propriety and honour which is referred to in Khasi as "ban doh doher, don bursum," is the ideal of a perfect life in the society.

The Hynnew Trep People hold the spoken word in the highest regard. Once a commitment has been made, one is required, "ban bat ia ka nia ka jiang," or maintain the words that has been uttered. The expression, "ka jingkorud ka shiyonien ka huk" (literally, "the honour of the single word of truth"), also conveys the value of the spoken word. The expression

"a thyllyk kster thyllyk rapa" which symbolises the tongue that helps a person speak words that are as precious as silver and gold also serves as an example of keeping one's word or upholding one's commitments.

"Ka kama ia ka huk," means living righteously or achieving righteousness being the principle of life in their way of life. When interacting with others, this is the principle that one should uphold. One is required to act righteously, not deal with people ad not only seek what is right in one's life.

In the tribal society in Meghalaya the clan is the foundation of the life of an individual and it also influences how one interacts with

The ultimate goal of every human life is to strive for the happiness of the collective. The general tenets of the indigenous way of life shared by all is 'ka bhalang uba bun bhalang' or 'ka bhalang ka imlang' which translates to 'common good or well-being of all.' It permeates every aspect of a person's life when one interacts with society. It is also ironic that this human tendency manifests itself when there is bereavement in a family.

the community. A person is known by the clan he/she belongs to; one's identity also extends beyond one's surname. Relationships extend beyond the family to include the clan as well as one's relatives from the father's side too. "Ka tip kur tip kur," which translates to "respect one's relation both on the father's and mother's side," defines the value that has to do with the individual having to maintain relationships on both sides of the family. These are some principles that people hold in high respect, and every member is expected to maintain these common moral principles and these ethical standards in life. Tribal culture places a high value on character and "ban inka jingim badon bursum," which means leading an honourable life. It is also the definition of the ideal life in the society.

Caring and Giving Society

People are expected to care for each other in the society of the indigenous people of Meghalaya. The ultimate goal of every human life is to strive for the happiness of the collective. The general tenets of the indigenous way of life shared by all is 'ka bhalang uba bun bhalang' or 'ka bhalang ka imlang' which translates to

common good or well-being of all. It permeates every aspect of a person's life when one interacts with society. It is also ironic that this human tendency manifests itself when there is bereavement in a family. When someone dies, the entire community takes part in sharing their sorrow to lessen the hardships of the bereaved family. The visit is also intended to comfort and console the family during their difficult time. The pursuit of the common good or well-being of all the community appears in other aspects of society too.

Deep-rooted relationship with Mother Nature

The indigenous people of Meghalaya also refer to nature or the Earth as their mother (nei ramesh/Bei rama), the giver, the nurturer, and the one that takes care of all creations. The "Kiryngkaw ki kasa" or nature deities that are worshipped are what make nature a sacred site. They consider rivers and mountains as gods and deities. They create tales about one's relation both on the rivers, hills, mountains, animals, and even the local natural phenomena in these stories. They also accept animistic beliefs in natural beings, and in the Hynnew Trep society, celestial bodies are seen as being on par with terrestrial beings. Tales of the interactions between humans, animals, and celestial beings were woven by people. The close relationship they have with nature in turn helps them conserve biodiversity.

Keepers of Bio-diversity

It is now established that the indigenous people who live in a territory that covers about 25% of the world's land surface with a population of 370 million only, are the custodians of about 80% of the global biodiversity. With just a small population comprising less than 5% of the world's population, and living in just a quarter of the Earth's total land surface, the indigenous people have succeeded in conserving the

biodiversity in their region. Indigenous people can be found in 90 countries. They live and occupy approximately a quarter of the world's land and water and keep the world's major biodiversity. In India, the northeast region of the country is also known as the biodiversity hotspot. The area on which biodiversity is conserved at least a fifth of all land on Earth. Environment-friendly farming practice Since ages, farmers in the state farmed different crops which vary according to the region and the seasons in the year. In the southern slopes bordering Bangladesh and on the border with Assam, millet was popular in the area where jhum cultivation is popular. The area on which biodiversity is also a once popular orange orchard and is now an arcaut and betel leaf plantation. In the plateau region of Jaintia hills, upland rice cultivation is popular and in the Khasi hills bunds and terrace cultivation are popular. In general farmers in the state engage in mixed farming practices like shifting, bund, subsistence, plantation, terracing, foraging from the forest, and wild cultivation. Their position system is not based which is regenerative and environment friendly.

Keepers of the World's Diverse Culture

Indigenous Peoples live in all regions of the world and own, occupy, or use some 22% of the global land area. Numbering between 370-500 million, indigenous peoples represent the greater part of the world's cultural diversity. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures. Despite their cultural differences, Indigenous Peoples from around the world share common principles related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples. Many indigenous peoples continue to be poor and marginalised, living in extreme poverty and having their basic human rights violated.

These are major principles that are common in all the indigenous people around the world which differentiates them from the others. In conclusion, the indigenous people's lifestyles which include diverse cultures and their close relationship with nature enable them to keep the biodiversity in their regions. In a world where climate change is staring at us, indigenous farming practices and nature-based food system are going to be the game-changer.

Yours etc,

Gregory Shullai, Via email

St Edmund's College in a quandary

Editor,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the prevailing state of affairs at St. Edmund's College, Shillong. It is with a heavy heart that I address the issues that have been plaguing our educational institution and adversely affecting the quality of education and student experience.

It has been over a month since the commencement of classes, and yet the students have not been provided with a proper class routine. This lack of clarity creates unnecessary confusion and hampers the students' ability to plan and manage their studies effectively. The last-minute issuance of timetables only exacerbates the problem, leaving students and instructors struggling to adapt to sudden changes.

Yours etc, Gregory Shullai, Via email

The atmosphere within the college is further strained by the behaviour of the office staff, who display a lack of professionalism and rudeness towards the students. A healthy and supportive administrative environment is crucial for fostering a positive educational experience, and the current demeanour of the office staff does not align with this objective. The principal's absence and seemingly abrasive attitude contribute to the negative perception of the college's management. Students and faculty alike need a leader who is approachable, available, and responsive to their concerns. The principal needs to reflect these qualities and create a climate of inclusiveness and unity within the college fraternity.

An equally pressing concern is the state of the college's facilities, particularly the toilets. The inadequate size and unhygienic conditions not only compromise

students' health but also encourage undesirable activities such as smoking and the use of tobacco and alcohol. It is essential that the college takes immediate steps to address these hygiene-related issues and create an environment that promotes student well-being.

In conclusion, I urge the college's administration to take a proactive approach in addressing these pressing issues. A well-managed educational institution should provide a safe and conducive environment that fosters learning, professionalism, and respect. I hope that by shedding light on these concerns, we can collectively work towards making St. Edmund's College, a place where students can thrive academically and personally.

Yours etc, A student of St. Edmund's College Name withheld on request, Via email

A debate on being "tribal"

By Barnes Mawrie

Recently there was a statement from the Chief Minister of Assam of introducing a law to derecognize tribal Christians as STs. In other words, it means that a tribal becomes a Christian he or she ceases to be a tribal and loses all the privileges that others enjoy. This law has already been enacted in some other states of India as a tribal strategy to discourage tribal persons from choosing the religion they desire. This is first of all a violation of the fundamental right to religion.

It is as well an insult to the tribal people who are the real natives of this sub-continent. According to the renowned anthropologist, Dr. Verrier Elwin in the tribals are "the real swadeshi products of India, in whose presence all others are foreign. The fact that the ancient people with moral rights and claims thousands of years old. They were here first and should come first in spite of their being in North East India, the whole region originally belonged to the tribal people. So how can someone make a law to reduce a tribal person to being a "foreigner" just because he or she becomes a Christian? This is ridiculous law which is most illogical, inhuman and unbecomingly.

The argument that a tribal person loses his/her tribalness because he or she becomes a Christian is totally unacceptable. Let me cite an example here. If tomorrow the government decides to pass a law that elephants should be called horses and no longer elephants, will that not be the most absurd and stupid law ever made? Precisely because we know full well the biological constitution of each of these animals. Now similarly you pass a law saying that tribals who have become Christians will be tribal no more. Is that not a question as to how a person becomes a tribal or non-tribal? The answer is as simple as anyone could understand. We are tribals because of our biological ancestry and nothing else. I am a Khasi because my parents, grandparents and ancestors are Khasi. I possess the Khasi DNA. Therefore, if I live in America, Europe or Africa, I will remain a Khasi. Place of habitation or religion does not change my DNA or my biological identity. Only a motion or a mentally deranged person would state that I am no longer a Khasi because I happen to be a Christian.

A tribal person as a member of his or her clan is inextricably bound to every member of the clan. Clan or kinship ties among tribals is so sacred that it is maintained at all cost. That is because members, there is no such distinction whether one belongs to his or her religion or that. Every member feels closely bound to each other because of a common ancestry. As a member of a tribe, every tribal person feels closely connected to each other and feels proud about his or her tribal identity. The community sense is stronger among tribals than in any non-tribal community. This is best expressed in the manner they manifest their solidarity with every family in the village. Even in a large village, each family knows the other intimately. In many farming villages, there is community pooling of labour during the

sowing and the harvesting seasons. When there is a deceased member in any family, there is material as well as emotional solidarity with the bereaved family. This sense of solidarity goes beyond religious affiliations. This is the reason why when it comes to matters of life and death, members of the clan or village come together in solidarity and no one cares about being a Christian or a non-Christian.

It is a sad irony that our Indian leaders, including our Prime Minister, when they go abroad, boast of the achievements of Indian-born individuals like Rishi Sunak, the UK Prime Minister or Kamala Harris the US Vice President and still dare to claim their Indianness in spite of the fact that they are non-Indian. Individuals are actually no longer individuals. But when it comes to our own country, these same leaders want to ostracize their own citizens and discriminate them from the rest just because they happen to be Christians. It is not difficult to see that if the Hinduva agenda is to be implemented, day will come when Muslim Indians will also be declared foreigners and they would be deprived of their rights and privileges.

The ethnic violence that is going on in Manipur has thrown more light on the

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minister plan to exterminate the tribal and to grab their ancestral land. It is clear to everyone that the new law to deprive a tribal Christian of his or her basic rights and privileges or to de-tribalise him or her, is a step towards an all-out attack on tribal communities in India. By doing this and by inciting the traditional religious tribals they are sowing the seed of division within the community putting them at loggerheads with each other. In other parts of India like in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, the believers of the Sarna religion (traditional religion) are being alienated from their fellow tribals who are Christians and a wedge is being driven within the community. For example, the good relationship that used to exist between the Church and the Seng Khasi in the past, has suddenly turned sour since the last one decade. In fact, Fr. Abel, a Salesianan missionary who had the first printing press in Northeast India, was a close friend of the Seng Khasi and their newspaper U. Nongthliem edited by Sib Charn Roy and it was being printed by him since its inception in 1903.

There is an undercurrent anti-tribal and anti-Christian force that is operating in Northeast India and in the country as a whole, whose intention is to decimate the tribal population and take control of their mineral-rich endowed land and to exterminate Christianity from the country. Therefore, the greatest enemy of the tribal people is evidently from within our own country and not from outside. As I have said in my previous article, the tribal communities of Northeast India need to stand up together today (the leaders as well as the people) and defeat these evil forces that are trying to destroy the integrity and identity of our communities. "Together we

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

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Education a state subject

IT is not surprising that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been implemented in nearly all the BJP ruled states since 2021. Karnataka was the first state to do so, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra etc. The southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have refused to implement the NEP saying they will, after due considerations and deliberations, come up with their own state policy. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, MK Stalin announced that the state would follow the Policy - Illam Thedi Kalvi - which translates to 'education scheme at our doorstep.' According to MK Stalin, Tamil Nadu would be working on a State Education Policy to implement an improvised education system. This makes better sense as it will be suited to the needs of the students in that state. One of the reasons for most states resisting the implementation of the NEP 2020 is because one policy does not fit all. India is too diverse a country to have a uniform policy on anything. Is that not why the Planning Commission was dismantled by the Modi Government in 2014? In its place the NITI Aayog became the hallmark of what was called competitive federalism where states compete with one another and with the Centre in their performance. Whether the NITI Aayog has been able to achieve this idea of independent thinking among the states so that they are able to progress better than having to implement schemes not tailored to their needs. Why then is the central government pushing the implementation of the NEP-2020?

In a booklet titled 'What NEP 2020 Speaks, Where Reality Stands,' published by All India Save Education Policy Committee (AISEC), the first chapter speaks of the reality checks needed before implementing the NEP-2020. The NEP laments that India is presently in a learning crisis. The AISEC says that it has become customary for all education policies to lament the present state of education and to promise much by way of improvement but they ultimately end up as empty rhetoric. They point to the 1986 Education Policy with the slogan 'Operation Blackboard' which achieved nothing in 35 years, but instead opened the floodgates for privatisation of education right from the school level and divested the government of all responsibility for providing universal education and creating the required infrastructure for schools and failing to appoint teachers, thereby leaving students in a quagmire.

What the AISEC discounts is the propensity of the NEO 2020 to eulogize the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) to the point of forgetting to draw the line between fact and fiction. In fact the AISEC says the claims of ancient Indian wisdom such as that there were airplanes or vimanas and pushp rathas flying between planets or the practice of plastic surgery are not backed by evidence. If Education is a State subject it is incumbent on states to develop a culturally relevant curriculum so that the learner does not need to learn what is alien to him/her just to pass exams. Students can learn things that interest them. That would ignite in them a passion for learning. Time for Meghalaya to learn self-reliance.

Letters to the Editor

NEP-2020: Let's get the perspective right!

Editor,

One cannot escape the weight and implications of the ongoing issue between the NEHU Vice Chancellor and the MCTA; and it is immoral for one to stay silent as a tired spectator, especially when being in such a case is no way affordable. Simple and honest, objective and eclectic preliminary observations would reveal that on one hand we have the State machinery pushing on with its prescriptions for change and on the other hand we have the Association of one of the most primary of stakeholders resisting the push! Sometimes, the obvious needs to be stated! Careful observation will also ascertain that no side is opposed to change, but it will do very much good to remember that cautious minds prefer good change rather than careless change; careful preparedness to bull-dozed maneuvers. However, what is most strikingly obvious is that the main murmur, the decadal bone of contention, is the path by which the powers that be chose to take in bringing about the change; and by any measure of natural justice, their actions are condemnable!

How does one arrive at this conclusion? First, at the time I fell back on the simply tested approach of

Honest data and a worrying suspension

By Jagdish Rattanani

The International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) is a prestigious deemed Indian university and a pioneering 67-year-old institution that is known for, among other work, its highly-regarded and oft-quoted National Family Health Survey (NFHS) series and attendant reports. The reports analyse mounds of data under NFHS rounds that for the last three decades have provided an independent grassroots view of India's demographic and health-related information to tell us if the policy directions are translating to change on the ground. The IIPS, thus works in a significant space on crucial data that can hold a mirror to the executive, and help drive policy actions in the right direction.

Last week, the director of this valued institution, Prof. K. S. James, a noted demographer, researcher and former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) faculty member, was suspended and asked not to leave his headquarters region, which is Mumbai city, pending an inquiry. IIPS faculty and alumni are said to be in shock. His opposition to leave his headquarters region, which is Mumbai city, pending an inquiry, IIPS faculty and alumni are said to be in shock. His opposition to leave his headquarters region, which is Mumbai city, pending an inquiry, IIPS faculty and alumni are said to be in shock.

spread of modern-day life style disease, like diabetes and blood pressure. It is the latest release of this NFHS report that has told the nation that 10% of Indian households defecate in the open. NFHS-5, for 2019-2021, an improvement from 39% who were reported practising open defecation in NFHS-4, for 2015-16. For rural India, NFHS-5 said 26% households still had no access to toilets, and so practised open defecation.

"Though the IIPS is a part of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), it is an autonomous institution and has never faced questions on its surveys and findings. In fact, the IIPS is a survey that has global standing and works with global partners like the ICF of USA, the United States Agency for International Development, Britain's Department for International Development, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Indian health ministry."

This is an improvement in numbers over the years but still (if you like to look at it that way) punctures the Prime Minister's sweeping claim that rural India is open defecation free already, made by Narendra Modi himself in 2019 as part of ongoing programmes to celebrate the

150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

The contradiction between the political claims and the on-ground numbers reinforces the significance of a strong IIPS running an independent NFHS and reporting the numbers freely rather than varnished numbers by the authorities to look at and be pleased with themselves.

For rural India, NFHS-5 said 26% households still had no access to toilets, and so practised open defecation. This is an improvement in numbers over the years but still (if you like to look at it that way) punctures the Prime Minister's sweeping claim that rural India is open defecation free already, made by Narendra Modi himself in 2019 as part of ongoing programmes to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

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UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Indian health ministry. NFHS-5 (2019-2021) has other statistics that tell us that India is not really doing well. Anemia, for example, has risen. As many as 67% of children aged six months to five years under NFHS-5 had anaemia (haemoglobin levels below 11.0 g/dl), which is higher than the NFHS-4 (2015-16) estimate of 59%. Anaemia in children leads to slower growth and impacts neurodevelopment. NFHS-5 reported that 36% of children under age five years are stunted (too short for their age), only marginally changed from 36% seen in NFHS-4, which is chronic undernutrition. Similarly, 19% of children under age five years are wasted (too thin for their height), only slightly down from 21% seen in NFHS-4 - a sign of acute undernutrition. And 32% of children are underweight. These are not good during NFHS-4.

These numbers in one way point to challenges before a government that is in a rush to claim success and talk victory in all the battles, schemes and missions it seeks to highlight. The true story is a little different from the tall claims being made. There is nothing wrong in accepting the truth, fine-tuning policy and prioritising spends to reach the targets that are desired. Empty claims are not helpful, sooner than later. They will show the government in poor light, sooner rather than later. The government cannot build a narrative of an India that is a global giant and a robust economy with children who are anemic, wasted, stunted and undernourished. India cannot be cleaner with open defecation free. Instead, the government can rightfully claim full marks for trying. Even if efforts take longer, that will be a journey well-run. It is good to recall that the rush to announce 'Mission Accomplished', with well-set optics about a US-Navy aircraft carrier after the Iraq war brought nothing but disaster for the USA under President George Bush. We don't have to go there. And keeping to honest work are independent reports of the kind the IIPS produces. Disturbing such work by suspending the director may therefore not be the best way to proceed in an age of development for the people of India.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJ's Institute for Personal Growth Through the Billion (IPIG). Email: editor@techilliantpress.org)

Rahul Gandhi finally back in Lok Sabha before no confidence motion

PM has reasons to be worried as wayanad MP is fully prepared

By Sushil Kutty

Wayanad got its Member of Parliament back on Monday, August 7, 2023. The Lok Sabha Secretary reinstated disqualified Congress MP Rahul Gandhi though there were complaints that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla did not display the same agency the Lok Sabha Secretariat had shown when disqualifying Rahul Gandhi after his conviction and sentencing in the Modi mannequin defamation case. With Rahul Gandhi's return, the Congress party's No-Confidence Motion against Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets a significant boost.



The Modi government will be nervous. The Modi government will overcome the No-Confidence Motion but the presence of Rahul Gandhi in the House will be unnerving for the treasury benches, especially in light of allegations that Gandhi's disqualification was part of a bigger game-plan to remove him from the "scene" as he had become a threat to the Narendra Modi government, especially after his hugely successful 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'.

With his comeback, the Gandhi seat is expected to roast Prime Minister Modi. He has few done, or could do, in Modi's nearly 10 years in Parliament. Also, with Rahul Gandhi's return, the Congress is no longer headless, though it has an elected 'President' and the rejuvenated leadership will be back in its nesting box. The last time Rahul Gandhi roared Prime Minister Narendra Modi, even the treasury benches sat mesmerized. Then, Rahul Gandhi assigned Modi's "friend" Gautam Adani in the dock and outlived with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's helping hand, what all Adani was into - from ports to airports to cement and media at all - all because the friend was a friend in need!

That day in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Modi lost the dock and outlived with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's helping hand, what all Adani was into - from ports to airports to cement and media at all - all because the friend was a friend in need!

Then Rahul Gandhi had started walking and as he walked so he changed, and the Congress changed. The rest of the Opposition waned and the BJP sat up and took notice. They hadn't expected such a transformation and it worried Modi's party, BJP. Rahul Gandhi was no longer the BJP TV Cell's 'Pappu' and after walking 3750 km, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, there was no stopping Rahul Gandhi, the man with the salt and pepper beard who barked 'Modani'.

But for how long? The Wayanad parliamentary constituency broke out in celebration on Monday. It was a miracle after the doubts over whether Rahul Gandhi would ever make a triumphant comeback? The Muslim-dominated Wayanad parliamentary constituency is staunchly Rahul Gandhi and it looked like somebody would replace Rahul Gandhi perhaps, Priyanka Vadra Gandhi. That emergency no longer exists and Kerala will remain a Gandhi family political bastion.

Now, for Rahul Gandhi to return to his official MP residence after 135 days in the political wilderness, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said the Congress is revived. Gandhi was given a rousing welcome by Congress and other opposition MPs. Gandhi sat in the People's House and is expected to take some of the shine Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been hogging for nine years and after Gandhi's disqualification. The No-Confidence Motion against Prime Minister Narendra Modi promises to be edge of the seat stuff with Rahul Gandhi's presence and Congress MPs, particularly will be fired up. Gandhi's reinstatement will go a long way in impacting the upcoming assembly elections and the 2024 general elections. Opposition alliance 'INDIA' is in high spirits. The BJP will be wondering how close it was! (IPIG Services)

vehicle simply ignored the No Right Turn No Entry sign at the junction, and behind the vehicles behind it at random refused to go through Anjaloo Petrol Pump. In spite of the honking from all other vehicles, the driver refused to obey the law. An army personnel intervened but to no avail. While all eyes were on the lone policeman hoping he would forbid the driver from breaking the rule, but the policeman ironically, tried to clear the road making way for the government vehicle to pass. If an ordinary citizen did that, he/she would be snarled at and even booked by the traffic police for breaking the rule. In fact that's how it should be for all citizens. No one is above the law. Rules and laws are formulated for citizens, both ordinary and those in government to adhere to. If law makes and law upholders themselves become law breakers, then whether democracy? Yours etc., Janifer Dikar, Via email

No VIP is above the law

Editor, The high-handedness of those in power is not a new thing. It is usually the law makers who are also law breakers. One such scenario took place on a busy Monday morning when a government

attention that an illegal and unjust method of revenue collection has become prevalent, particularly at popular locations like Police Bazar, Hara Bazar, Laiumkhrah, and other tourist spots. The issue at hand certainly is the arbitrary charges levied by parking attendants without providing proper documents receipts. It is disheartening to note that a significant number of parking collectors seem to be under the influence of alcohol for extended periods, leading to erratic and disproportionate charges. The severity of their inebriation appears to influence the amount they demand from patrons. In some instances, an exorbitant fee of Rs 40 is being charged for a mere 15-minute stay. Furthermore, these collectors frequently distribute parking slips without recording any information or, worse still, decline to issue them altogether. Should a visitor dare to request a slip, they are met with hostility and menacing glares. Contrastingly, during a recent visit to the Global Park at Polo, I was pleasantly surprised by the professionalism exhibited at the S.R.G.T parking facility. This establishment introduced an automated system that dispensed entry and exit slips, complete with accurate timestamps. This automated process ensures transparency, accountability, and a fair approach to collecting parking fees. The convenience it offers is highly

Parking fee collection should be automated

Editor, I write to address a pressing concern regarding the alarming practices observed at various parking lots in Shillong. It has come to my

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Or, till sat year - 2022.

"Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence" — Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times

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PM Modi's silence on Manipur

NO conflict in any state of this country has continued for over three months with no signs of abating. Manipur has been on the boil since May 3, yet the Prime Minister has not spoken a word in Parliament or outside it except to condemn the indignities meted out to the two Kuki-Zo women, one of whom was gangraped. In the past, Prime Ministers have made public appeals on television and other media calling for a halt to the ethnic clashes and an end to the violence. Prime Minister Modi has done neither. He actually is known to remain silent on crucial issues that embarrass his Party and Government. It has taken the combined Opposition to move a No-confidence against the NDA Government because of the Prime Minister's continued absence from Parliament and his unwillingness to face questions. What is also troubling about Modi is his complete disdain for the media and his intentional avoidance of press conferences and to try and make up for that by his Mann Ki Baan where he says he addresses the people of the country directly. This is a big hoax because the people listening to Mann Ki Baan can hardly question the Prime Minister on major issues confronting the country. Inflation has hit the roof; people have been discussing the abnormally high price of tomatoes besides other essential commodities.

There has been a stout defence of the NDA Government and Prime Minister Modi in particular by members of the BJP in the Lok Sabha. Kiren Rijju former Law Minister who had several run-ins with the judiciary during his tenure showered unending praises on Modi calling him the most sensitive Prime Minister insofar as the North East is concerned. He pointed out how central ministers have been asked to visit the North Eastern states and beyond the state capitals to feel the pulse of people and to see if the pace of development and the ministries concerned are having an impact on the lives of people. This no doubt is a positive development but if such is the Prime Minister's concern for his Ashta Lakshmi then why the silence on Manipur? Why is he not concerned about the scale of displacement of Kuki-Zo people who are now unable to enter Imphal and whose children have had to seek admission into schools and colleges outside the state? Isn't this the worst humanitarian crisis ever? So why is Modi hesitant to take action on a Chief Minister who is seen as overtly supporting extremist groups that have committed indescribable atrocities on the Kuki-Zo people by first terming them as 'illegal immigrants'? These are questions that will reverberate in the hearts and minds of people of the North East for a long time.

Letters to the Editor

Urgent Reforms Needed for NEIGRIHMS and Civil Hospital

Dear Sir, I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the deteriorating conditions at NEIGRIHMS (North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences) and the Civil Hospital. Recent incidents have shed light on alarming issues that demand immediate attention from the concerned authorities. It is disheartening to note that a prestigious institution like NEIGRIHMS lacked a doctor to attend to an accident victim in a recent incident. This highlights a grave lapse in the hospital's operational protocols and monitoring mechanisms. Patients, in many instances, are left waiting for weeks to undergo tests that have been prescribed by their doctors. The chaos surrounding the issuance of OPD tickets only exacerbates the situation, causing unnecessary distress to patients. A glaring concern is the unavailability of senior doctors at the hospital, leaving junior doctors to shoulder overwhelming responsibilities. This imbalance compro-

mises the overall quality of care provided. It is high time that the hospital administration takes serious measures to address these shortcomings and upholds their roles and regulations. In order to rectify these issues, I strongly urge NEIGRIHMS to consider the following reforms: Expertise in OPD Section: The hospital should prioritize providing expert doctors to handle the OPD section, ensuring patients receive specialized care from the initial consultation. Recruitment of Experienced Doctors: Hiring experienced and expert doctors is crucial to enhance the quality of medical services and provide patients with the level of care they deserve. Timely Testing and Medication: The hospital must streamline its processes to ensure timely testing and medication. Patients' time should not be wasted, and efficient healthcare services should be a priority. Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana: The hospital should ensure that patients receive the full benefit of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, including adequate medication provision, without unnecessary financial burden on patients. Similar concerns extend to the Civil Hospital, which

Why such haste in implementing NEP 2020 at the UG level

By Prof. Lakshon Kma

The ongoing impasse regarding the implementation of the NEP2020 at UG level is a very serious matter. As a teacher, it pains me to see such disconnects between the North-Eastern Hill University-the Implementing body, the college teachers and administration-the main serving body and the State Government-the regulating authority. Perhaps, it is a case of 'no understanding of the spirit of NEP2020' that has led the University authority and the State Government to take their responsibilities for effective implementation taking all stakeholders on board. Let me put the following excerpts taken from the National Education Policy 2020 document, released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Now, Ministry of Education) Government of India, which is the last part of the document on page 61-62 as the onus lies on the implementing agencies.

27.1. Any policy's effectiveness depends on its implementation. Such implementation will require multiple initiatives and actions, which will have to be taken by multiple bodies in a synchronized and systematic manner. Therefore, the implementation of this policy will be led by various bodies including MHRD, CAHE, Union and State Governments, education-related Ministries, State Departments of Education, Boards, NTA, the regulatory bodies of school and higher education, NCERT, SCERTs, schools, and IITs along with timelines and a plan for review, in order to ensure that the policy is implemented in its spirit and intent, through coherence in planning and synergy across all these bodies involved in education. 27.2. Implementation will be guided by the following principles. First, implementation of the spirit and intent of the Policy will be the most critical matter. Second, it is important to implement the policy initiatives in a phased manner, as each policy point has several steps, each of which requires the previous step to be implemented successfully. Third, prioritization will be important in ensuring optimal sequencing of policy points, and that the most critical and urgent actions are taken up first, thereby enabling a strong base. Fourth, comprehensiveness in implementation will be key; as this Policy is inter-linked and holistic, only a full-fledged implementation, and not a piecemeal one, will ensure that the desired objectives are achieved. Fifth, since education is a concurrent subject, it will need careful planning, joint monitoring

and collaborative implementation between the Centre and States. Sixth, timely infusion of requisite resources - human, infrastructural, and financial - at the Central and State levels will be crucial for the satisfactory execution of the Policy. Finally, careful analysis and review of the linkages between multiple parallel implementation steps will be necessary in order to ensure effective implementation of all initiatives. This will also include early investment in some of the specific actions (such as the setting up of early childhood care and education (franchise) that will be imperative to ensuring a strong base and a smooth progression for all subsequent programmes and actions. 27.3. Subject-wise implementation committees of experts in cooperation and consultation with other relevant Ministries will be set up at both the Central and State level to develop detailed implementation plans for each aspect of this Policy in accordance with the above principles to achieve the goals of the Policy in a clear and phased manner. Yearly joint reviews of the progress of implementation of the policy, in accordance with the targets set for each action, will be conducted by designated teams constituted by MHRD and the States, and reviews will be shared with CAHE. In the decade of 2020-40, the entire Policy will be implemented in a modular, following which an other comprehensive review will be undertaken. I have the full confidence that the planning, synergy and cohesiveness among the University and State governments and the teachers vis-a-vis keeping the interest of students to ensure that the policy is implemented in its spirit and intent. For the record, the Academic Council of University never took the decision to implement it from 2020.

2. At clause 27.2, it stressed on implementation of the spirit and intent of the Policy which is the most critical matter. It is intended to implement the policy initiatives in a phased manner with careful planning and execution in a systematic way. What is our priority to implement a half-baked policy and make it a piece meal? The policy implementation against the spirit of the Policy or a full-fledged implementation to ensure that the desired objectives are

achieved? Now the amended NEHU Ordinance '08 and Regulation RC-12 governing the UG Courses, Course Structure and Subject Combinations are in place which was approved by the 110th Meeting of the Academic Council (AC) held on 19th May and 2nd June 2023 while Minutes was out only on the 28th of June 2023. There was so much haste that the MDC courses approved by the AC, which was minuted and circulated to members does not match with the MDC courses sent to the colleges by the OSD, CDC NEHU in the first semester; this is the result of what we call in Khasi 'Bann ja khluud', you are bound to get some new faculty in NEHU against more than 150 vacant positions, can't we wait for a question on the annual implementation of NEP2020 at UG level?

Indeed, I am against those faculties who are implemented and many more are in the coming years and we are not the last one left. Moreover, the Policy was always intended to be implemented in a phased manner across the country. We should wait for almost 10 years to get some new faculty in NEHU against more than 150 vacant positions, can't we wait for a question on the annual implementation of NEP2020 at UG level? Indeed, I am against those faculties who are implemented and many more are in the coming years and we are not the last one left. Moreover, the Policy was always intended to be implemented in a phased manner across the country. We should wait for almost 10 years to get some new faculty in NEHU against more than 150 vacant positions, can't we wait for a question on the annual implementation of NEP2020 at UG level?

haphazard manner. Thankfully, here everyone seems to be in agreement with implementing it at the UG level, perhaps from the 2024-25 session. Between now and 2024, why not wait for a year, fine tune it, prepare the syllabi for the remaining semesters; allow colleges and the State government to understand its implications in totality for subsequent effective implementation from 2024-25 without any exceptions. It is a fact that some universities have implemented it and many more are in the coming years and we are not the last one left. Moreover, the Policy was always intended to be implemented in a phased manner across the country. We should wait for almost 10 years to get some new faculty in NEHU against more than 150 vacant positions, can't we wait for a question on the annual implementation of NEP2020 at UG level?

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Going long on Long Pepper!

By K.N.Kumar

In May 2019, the State Government made a significant policy change in the mandated crop of the agricultural sector by reclassifying 'Wild Black Pepper' (Piper longum) as 'Long Pepper' and re-designating it, along with Tizpatia (Bay Leaf - Laurus nobilis), as the mandated crop of the Agriculture Department. This move eliminated the 'minor forest produce' label, allowing farmers to cultivate and source these crops from defined non-forest lands. Let us explore the reasons behind this decision and the potential opportunities it presents. The previous classification of Long Pepper as a 'minor forest product' had posed challenges. Despite farmers cultivating it on their own lands for decades, it was still considered 'Wild Black Pepper' under the purview of the forest department, which collected royalties, affecting the competitiveness of the produce. The issue had been raised by farmer bodies multiple times, but it was not addressed until a meeting was convened by the Chief Minister. After understanding the legal aspects, it was then decided that both Long Pepper and Bay Leaf, being cultivated by farmers, should no longer be treated as 'minor forest produce' and were transferred to the Agriculture Department's jurisdiction. This is a part of the story. Now that the above two plants have been de-cluttered, their cultivation, promotion, branding and marketing would follow as the next steps.

There are about two thousand species of genus Piper found all over the world, which fully 100 species are found in India. One of the important species of this genus is Long pepper (Piper longum), a spice crop of high medicinal importance both in the traditional and modern medicinal systems. In Ayurvedic medicinal system, there are about 135 ayurvedic formulations with Long Pepper as a major ingredient. The main parts of long pepper are the fruits and stems. (In some hills parts of Vishakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, long pepper is grown for its roots). Long pepper has a pungent pepper-like taste and produces salivation and numbness of the mouth. The fruits are used as a spice in high-end cuisine as well as in pickles and preserves. The roots and thicker parts of the stem are cut and dried and used as an important drug (Pippal-mool or Pippali) in the Ayurvedic and Unani systems. The phytochemistry and the pharmacological profile of Piper longum will have to be further researched. Long pepper is most commonly used to treat chronic bronchitis, asthma, constipation, gastro-intestinal, paralysis of the tongue, diarrhoea, cholera, chronic malaria, liver hepatitis, respiratory infections, stomach-ache, diseases of the spleen, and tumours. The plant has been reported to improve microbial infections, cardiac disease, and protection against the effects of radiation.

Long pepper is a very slender, perennial, and aromatic climber that grows well in shaded areas. Long Pepper grows very well in the southern parts of Meghalaya, in the War area (parts of Jaintia Hills, Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hill districts). Also called Pippali, and grown commercially in Kerala and parts of Mizoram, it has a good market and is highly valued for its therapeutic properties. The spikes of long pepper, which are the flower of the plant, are harvested in January while they are still green, tender, and pungent. The spikes are then dried in the sun till they turn grey. Due to its high

market demand, this plant is widely grown by the farmers as an additional crop to main crops like Areca nut, Citrus, turmeric etc. April-June is the peak production time. India is a global leader in the Long Pepper trade. Indian share in the global export was 65% in 2021 with a production of about 4.6 lakh metric tonnes. There are no reliable estimates as to how much is the annual production of Long Pepper in Meghalaya. However, some wholesalers report that our annual production is approximately 150 metric tons. The Commission has started encouraging commercial cultivation in the state by making available excellent quality planting material to the farmers. Our preliminary scouting revealed that we have a variety (a selection from the wild) by the name Vishwam, developed by the Kerala Agriculture University (KAU) no other variety is widely known. It is estimated that about one hundred cuttings from KAU, Thrissur and started multiplying our research farm at Umsing. He that as it may, the Research Wing at the Department of Agriculture also has been given a target of 1.2 lakh long pepper saplings locally to be raised by 12 identified farmer-owned nurseries in four selected blocks i.e., Mawkyrawt, Mawsynram, Pymbla and Shella Bhologang. Even getting a small percentage of monthly export that we should be able to make at least 1.00 lakh saplings available to the farmers by August, 2023. (In addition to the 2000 saplings already made available to the farmers last year). That would be a significant step forward. Our target is to cover at least one hundred acres this year and to keep expanding the area under Long Pepper till we reach at least ten thousand acres. That is when we will start counting in the global scenario. It may take anything up to a decade for that to happen, but the process has been kick-started. Much will depend upon the farmers, the technical officers, and the continued funding support.

The economics is very favourable to the farmers because the plant is not a very demanding one and is highly adaptable to the local conditions. With the current prices ranging between Rs. 800 to 1200/- per Kg, depending upon the global market conditions. A production of 1000 kg should give at least a 100-crore income every year to the farmers. We will need to master micro propagation methods and invest in the necessary technology to help the farmers in the coordination, marketing, and price stabilization. In conclusion, the transformation of 'Wild Black Pepper' into 'Long Pepper' marks the dawn of a new era for agriculture in Meghalaya. This transition presents an excellent opportunity to leverage the inherent potential of Long Pepper and elevate it to global prominence. Meghalaya can emerge as a leading producer and exporter of Long Pepper as the world becomes increasingly conscious of the need for sustainable and nature-based spice products. With diligent efforts, technical expertise, and market access, Meghalaya's Long Pepper could become a choice product also because of its organic nature. The journey may take time, but the foundation has been laid, and the horizon awaits its moment of splendour. As of now, globally it is a \$ 1.5 billion industry. There are no serious competitors for us and we should continue to dominate this narrative. Who wants to spice it up? (The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

frequently refers cases to NEIGRIHMS. The dedication and professionalism of doctors and nurses need to be reinforced, and punctuality should be strictly enforced. It is imperative that these issues are addressed promptly to ensure the highest quality of healthcare services for the people who depend on these institutions. I call upon the hospital administration and relevant authorities to take swift action, rectify the existing shortcomings, and restore public faith in these essential healthcare institutions. Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

Making life miserable for residents of Police Bazar

Editor, This letter is meant to draw attention to the inconvenience faced by the residents of Police Bazar because of hawkers. The hawkers have blocked the entrance of the passage to our residence. Anyone who has to visit us has to stand for minutes requesting them to vacate the passage to the house. The customers who visit them crowd the doors to our residence. This is terribly annoying, so much

so that minor and domestic helpers sometimes don't want to wait and go away without entering the house. Not only this they cut, drink tea and eat food in the entrance leaving all the packets and glasses for us to clean when they go away late in the evening. When asked not to dirty the entrance or to vacate the passage, they shout back in their local (Khasi) language trying to frighten us using words like KSU, dikhar etc. They rub time on the walls outside the gate, kick the door in anger behind us and make fun of us every time we enter or exit our own house. This is causing a lot of mental stress for us residents every single day.

Is this a civilized society we are living in? Why are we deprived of our right to live in a clean and hassle-free environment? Every morning and evening we have to queue with the hawkers to clear the passage to our houses. Naturally this is stressful and causes irreparable damage to our mental state while disrupting our daily routine. We request the concerned authorities to look into this matter and take the necessary steps to relieve our grievances. There have to be specific rules for hawkers to set up their stalls in a way that the entrances to all the residences are kept clean and free for easy movement

of the residents. Yours etc., Neecha Jhunjhunwala, Via email

SMB & PHED stop supplying muddy water!

Editor, There is a continuous disgruntled murmur in the town against PHED and the Shillong Municipality. The reason is because they do not supply clean water to the public. Residents have been getting muddy and untreated water regularly. At times it is sticky and oily. This is completely uncalled for and it violates the ethics of governance that the very departments entrusted with ensuring access to 'safe and clean' water have been callously disregarding their responsibility.

Do these departments know that the majority of urban population is considerably poor and cannot afford to filter the muddy water that runs through PHED and Shillong Municipality pipes. The dirty causes the spread of a deadly disease. Should the officers in the departments not empathize with the plight of the

poor people who cannot even boil water with the steep rise in the cost of cooking gas? Yes, some people who can "afford" have started buying 20-litre and 40-litre water for drinking purposes. But each time they go to buy bottled water from vendors, they curse PHED and the Shillong Municipality.

A lady who sells second hand clothes and others like her say that they have to use the best interest of the students and teachers of the affiliated colleges in co-operation with the State Govt. It has to be clear to all that the State Govt. is the ultimate authority in all academic matters, including the year-wise revision of implementation of any new curriculum as per the NEHU Act, Statutes and Ordinances and so let's follow the rules in the larger interest of the University, its students and the state of Meghalaya as a whole. (The author teaches in NEHU)

is not ironic that in this advanced age of technology, people are forced to live like in the primitive ages? Dear SMB and PHED, please note a non-biodegradable glass of polluted water in the other do not go together. Wake up, pull up your socks, and discharge your duties with sincerity. Yours etc., Sall Gwalii, Shillong

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"Better to be called something positive and inspirational than something negative."

—Donnie Yen

The Shillong Times

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Parliament disruptions uncalled for

OVER the past few years both houses of parliament - the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have seen disruptions of the kind not witnessed in the past. Gone is the decorum and decency to listen with respect to votes both from the treasury and opposition benches. Since 2014, attacks have been more personal and sustained, with slogan raising inside the house becoming commonplace. As a result, important matters affecting the common people such as price rise that is galloping at a furious speed remains unaddressed. In this monsoon session, both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have been disrupted on account of the Prime Minister's obstinacy in not attending parliament to discuss the Manipur violence that has carried on for over three months. Primarily, the question to the Prime Minister is why is he evading questions on such a grave situation?

As the head of the Government the Prime Minister is answerable to the people. That is a constitutional duty and he is doing no one a favour. The entire responsibility for answering questions on Manipur cannot be laid at the doorstep of the Home Minister alone. The Prime Minister is the head of the Government and answerable to the people of this country. There is no getting away from this! It is bad enough that on the rare occasions that the Prime Minister deigns to give an interview to the media he handpicks the media persons and channels he has cultivated. This disdain for the media would not have been tolerated in the past but now it has become the norm because large swathes of the majority Hindu community in this country believe in the slogan, "Hindu Khare Mein Hain" (Hindus are in danger) and that Prime Minister Modi and the BJP are their only saviours. Narratives that are carefully constructed and packaged by tech-savvy social media warriors have been able to spread disinformation at great speed and to brainwash the large majority that are incapable of differentiating between disinformation from correct information.

On Wednesday, when the reinstated MP of Wayanad, Rahul Gandhi spoke he was bitterly critical of the BJP Government's silence on Manipur and accused it of dividing the state. As an Opposition MP, Rahul Gandhi has the right to criticise the central government's inaction on Manipur. But his bitter rival Smriti Irani who holds the important portfolio of Women and Child Welfare spat venom on the Opposition, Irani should have been the first to travel to Manipur and visit the relief camps where hundreds of men, women and children are cramped together and some have even delivered babies in these camps because hospitals are not accessible. This is the basic duty of a minister of the concerned department and a woman at that! Yet her speech in parliament was a round of whataboutery on West Bengal, Rajasthan et al. Clearly, democracy is in the docks and ordinary citizens are fusing out.

Letters to the Editor

Rejoinder on L. Kma's article

In his article, "Why such haste in implementing NEP 2020 at the UG level (ST Aug 9, 2023)", Prof Kma voiced his strong disagreements, at "faculty that are spreading wrong information about having lesser number of papers under UG under the current Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) compared to other universities". While respecting Prof Kma's right to oppose he immediate implementation of NEP in our colleges from this session, I place the following clarifications to his comments in paragraph 12 of the above article.

In my article in this paper is the poor quality of the undergraduate curriculum in Meghalaya hindering students' achievement (ST July 3 2023). I've compared the numbers of papers in UG courses in colleges affiliated to NEHU to show that while we teach only 40 papers, other states cover 14 core papers (excluding discipline electives) which is as per UGC Minimum Course Curriculum For Undergraduate Courses Under CBCS of 2016. There is nothing factually wrong in what I've shared and compared and the writer has not placed evidence to the contrary, except to say that we should not reduce the number of papers but the quantum and content of

syllabi that matters." I leave it to our esteemed readers to ponder as to how the NEHU UG programme can still maintain its standard even as we are covering only half of the main honours papers taught compared to other UG programmes, and whether this does not put our graduates at a disadvantage in competitive exams.

Prof. Kma further questions why the issue of following the CBCS was not raised earlier by "such faculty" in the academic council (AC) of NEHU. The answer to this is that, unfortunately, some of us became members of the AC of NEHU only a few years back and not for over a decade. However, I must admit that personally, I became aware of the disadvantage of not following the CBCS in recent years and I wrote about it in the ST in 2022 in an article Undergraduate Reforms for Meghalaya, well before this debate on NEP implementation in our colleges exploded in recent months. I wish I had taken up the matter much earlier in the interest of our students.

Religion: the common thread in the Manipur scenario

By Albert Thyriang

The Manipur Violence is complex. It has many dimensions. The latest talking point is the drug angle. Though the details were known since 2018, yet the "revelation" by the former Additional Superintendent of Police Thounaojam Brinda against chief minister N Biren Singh has prominently brought the focus back to the "narcotic" story. In interviews, Brinda who had to resign from the police for political apathy mafia, the agitator, informs that in 2018 her team raided the house of the then chairman of the Chandel Autonomous District Council, Lhakhatesi Zou and recovered 4.555 kgs of drugs. As the BJP MP, Zou was the "right hand man" of Chief Minister N Biren Singh who sent several emissaries, to the senior officer, including his aides and police officers, to pressure the officer to release arrested accused. Standing from the Narcotics and Affairs of Border Areas (NABA) was refused to entertain pleas to go soft on the politician just because of his proximity to the CM. Zou was subsequently charged, tried but unfortunately acquitted in 2021. Disillusioned Brinda returned the Chief Minister's Police Gallantry Award Medal accusing the chief minister of being flip-flop in eliminating the drug menace. Now the imperial based activist has labelled the most damaging charges against the chief minister as "drug trafficking" (against drugs). He is part of the drug cartel. He is protecting them. He is their Patron."

So, now it can be read that the Manipur "ethnic clash" is at the behest of the drug mafia. The "Kuki" planters are only soft targets. The drug lords might have instigated mobs to attack rival communities so that the so-called "War against Drug" does not catch up with them. The violence might have been orchestrated by powerful drug traders and dealers to divert attention away from them. The focus would be on the deaths, the destruction of villages, the desecrations, the camps, the security forces, the political muddling while they escape the law. Most drug kingpins are in Imphal and they include politicians, bureaucrats and the police.

The same holds true of the Kuki militants. They could have prompted the general police against the militant community so that they continue to enjoy the profits of drug trade. They could be actively involved in smuggling poppy seeds and innovation.

However, the most disturbing sentence in the write-up I respect friend and colleagues when he alludes that the call by some faculty for the implementation of the new curriculum structure at the UG level is being done as a "pussy to pussy". To this malicious accusation, I say: Let us not cast aspersions on others, but strive to improve our arguments (with due apologies to the venerated Desmond Tu who said: Don't raise your voice, improve your argument). With malice toward none!

Sumarbin Umdat Via email

The Unqualified Bunch

Editor, After so many revolutions from primary stakeholders and concerned and careful citizens, especially those with first hand information about the ins and outs of the NEHU Academic Council, at least in relation to the present scenario, it is quite clear that two things are evident: that the actions of the NEHU Vice Chancellor are indeed shameful and outrightly despicable; and that the implementation of the NEP, at least in Meghalaya, under NEHU, will end up with unqualified teachers and instructors.

to Myanmar and elsewhere and trafficking drugs back to Imphal and the rest of the country through Meitei and Churachandpur district. They do not wait the government and the police to go after them and hence went for violence.

This crucial drug angle has to be investigated thoroughly and understand the Manipur unrest, considered even worse than the Gujarat and Kandhamal pogroms. The chief minister sits under the scanner. Powerful and influential politicians in Delhi could also be involved in the drug business. The topmost political leaders could also be aware of this. Is this the reason why the violence in Manipur continues unabated?

Just as the drug angle is critical, the religious dimension must also be grasped because the violence in Manipur follows the pattern of the rest of India. It is said that the Manipur violence is intertwined with religion. Imphal Archbishop, Dominic Lamun opines that elements took advantage of the ethnic clash to target churches and church properties. The fact that 249 churches were bombed down within 36 hours of the clash means that the destruction was pre-planned. So, anti-Christian bias has done it. But the Manipur Archbishop, Oswald Gracias is convinced that "Manipur violence is not a Hindu-Christian conflict but it is a tribal conflict". The RSS used its statement to deny any religious dimension in the three-month long violence and given themselves a clean chit of any involvement.

It is acknowledged that the RSS has done a lot of work in Imphal. The Sangha may be linked to radical and revival groups like the Meitei Lopeu and Arambai Fengegl, the main accused in the prolonged violence. Does that work count building up of an Christian sentiments? Does that work include instilling majoritarian supremacy among the Meiteis? The RSS's ideology is the supremacy of the majority Hindu caste system. Therefore, the Imphal valley might have been a hotbed of this anti-Christian/minority laboratory.

Christian groups might have also been at fault, though minutely. In April, a month before the start of the violence, the pastor or allegedly made a high blasphemous and offensive remark against the Meitei indigenous faith in Imphal. Though the pastor

in a civilised society and by civilised individuals. Consideration of the road to modernity is an end in itself, not a means to an end. It is a civilisation, not a religion. The indifferent and callous nature of the VC has affected students, especially those from the margins of public and private property.

The attack on Mahadev Khola Dham in Shillong will have no communal colour.

later apologised the damage was done. There are also allegations that Christians indulged in conversions. There are reports claiming that the population of the Meitei Hindu and traditional Samahli religion is declining while that of the Christians is rising. This is contrary to the 2011 census. Christians must be sensitive to the incorrect Public radical statements like, "Christ is the only Saviour" do not facilitate communal harmony. The number is not absolutely necessary. Caring for those who are already Christians is the key. Life based on the values of Christ is even more important. Elsewhere in the country, Christian organisations advise that the churches strain the law. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, a church was burnt without permission. An attempt was made to ban the church to vandalise it.

These days we are seeing church rallies against Mahant. The other day it was in Shillong. One is amused to hear prelates and pastors thanking God for choosing the very leaders who are presiding in the country at this troubled time. Some specifically named the Prime Minister, the Chief Minister of Manipur, Political leaders are not chosen by God. They are elected by voters. Mahant is a religious leader. Church leaders should have asked people whether they have made a mistake in electing the Mahant. The RSS used its statement to deny any religious dimension in the three-month long violence and given themselves a clean chit of any involvement.

The Haryana community Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad took out a procession through Edward Chowk, a Mahant dominated locality. Shiv temple in Nuh, as part of the 'Brij Mandal Jalabhishek Yatra' Members raised provocative slogans like 'Ram, Lord of arms like swords. Prior to the violence, the Bajrang Dal saw vigilante, Motu Manoj, a Hindu nationalist leader of two Muslim men provoked by insisting on social media that he himself would lead a mob to demolish the mosque. This angered local Muslims who dared him to appear in Nuh. The police, on their part failed to take control of the violence which has now spread to other parts of the state taking away six lives and injuring over 200 people and causing damage to public and private property.

The attack on Mahadev Khola Dham in Shillong will have no communal colour.

It may have no connection with the volatile situation in Manipur. The July 24 incident might have been an attack on a shopkeeper over trivia. It could be defined as looting of phones and money by miscreants but the very fact that it took place in a temple premise where devotees were also attacked is bound to create religious ripples. Whether we like it or not, a tinge of religious element is at work.

The Legal Rights Observers (LRO) attempted to amplify and worsen the regrettable incident. The Twitter handlers of the LRO who are reportedly affiliated to the RSS made inflammatory, premature and highly communal statements, one being, "Khasa State Union-KSU groups attacked Mahadev Khola mandir". We see them assailing priests, women devotees including families of the Will Fresh (Ponybyeran) Church stop hate mongering? The LRO also said, "The churches strain the KSU. It is right that the police are on the look-out for LRO members."

We can clearly see the religious thread in the above-mentioned cases of violence. Why does religion have to be at the centre of violence? Plurality and religious diversity in the world. The inherent principle of religion is co-existence. Hindu, Christian, Islam, Buddha, Jain, missionaries etc, have converted, are converting and will convert others to their respective faiths. In Manipur there is a strong sentiment that Hinduism was imposed on the Meiteis. Most of us have changed our religion. In the absence of Hinduism have evolved from a pre-Hindu origin. Something else existed before Hinduism. The Hindu fundamentalist groups have a grudge against Muslims and Christians for conversion. The Haryana Sangha is taking over the Mao Muslims, converts from Jats, Meenas, Rajputs and Ahirs. That is part of history. Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and others, too have come out of Hinduism. In India 'ghar wapsi' is on.

In the US and Europe many Christians are embracing Hinduism. Many flock to Ashrams to alter their faiths, find a better life. This conversion they must understand the reasons. Is it the caste system in Hinduism that is responsible? It is not true that they have opted away from Hinduism are better off, socially at least?

The Tura violence has no religious thread but on account of politics. For want of space it is not considered here. Hope it remains relevant until the next opportunity.

critical thinking where would society be: and it is a truth that Gandhi himself was a staunch critic of blind and mechanical obedience. It is for this highly moral and noble role that teachers play that fascist regimes, especially the nazi, had to target them. For the journalists, the first targets to be taken out of the way or won over, so as to make it more convenient for them to take over Germany.

Blindly and obediently following orders would mean that there would be no opposition to the VC's dictates and the VC would have his way. There would be no inconveniences and insults hurled at teachers who are standing with their Association. They never planned for this outrageous surprise! If the interests of those at the margins of society are not taken into consideration, who does that say of our society? And what does that even say about teachers who are complaining against their own Association?

The last unpardonable one, at least in our discussion here, is intellectual integrity. Intellectual integrity has always walked hand in hand with all the aforementioned items on our shortlist. An intellectual is a technician or a technocrat. With no intention to offend technicians who have their own roles to play, I would like to remind here that an intellectual is not a Yes-man who is given a list of things to be done and goes about doing them in a mindless, orderly manner, upholding the rule of law carrying out duties

Harmony of religion and faith

By Naba Bhattacharjee

The concern and question that is in the country is centred on the identity of force or forces responsible for the emerging trend of religious unrest, whether simmering or underlying in nature, spreading to a pattern. The apprehensions on the minds of people is whether creating an ambience of disharmony has its epicentre within or outside the country. There is a lack of clarity and answers to such and many more similar questions. It is time to be on guard and counter such disruptive forces in union, particularly in the states of north east.

As far as Meghalaya is concerned it has a vibrant tradition of intimate bond and harmony among different religions and faiths, which dates back much before attaining statehood. The unique feature has withstood the test of time and continues even today, without any erosion in the core values which cemented its understanding. Since childhood, we have witnessed the ambience of inclusiveness, borne out of genuine reverence for each other's religion and faith. It is imperative to sustain this distinctive character with sincere effort and contribution by each and every Meghalaya.

Over the decades, we have seen the consolidation of this distinctive culture and tradition. The observance of Christmas, Ramkrishna Mission has been a memorable event since my childhood.

"The observance of Christmas in Ramkrishna Mission has been a memorable event since my childhood. Similarly, harmony visit of Piya pandavs by leaders and faithful of different religious groups is a credible gesture. Equally inspiring is the attendance by individuals of diverse faiths during Guru Nanak Jayanti, Ramzan and Id celebrations, Buddha Jayanti observance, Unitarian Day commemoration, festivity of Shad Suk Mysicem or Behdienkhlam of Seng Khasi Kmie and Seinraj respectively."

Similarly, harmony visits of Piya pandavs by leaders and faithful of different religious groups is a credible gesture. Equally inspiring is the attendance by individuals of diverse faiths during Guru Nanak Jayanti, Ramzan and Id celebrations, Buddha Jayanti observance, Unitarian Day commemoration, festivity of Shad Suk Mysicem or Behdienkhlam of Seng Khasi Kmie and Seinraj respectively."

It is also imperative that all of us in Meghalaya have to be extra careful and vigilant about external forces, which may be out to destabilise the prevailing general peace and calm in our State. We believe that such forces have no home, base or stake in our State except to cause disruption and create social strife. These insidious forces follow the concept of "hit and run" and create fissures along socio-religious lines. It is important not to be influenced or fall in the trap of provocation by such divisive forces, with origins from within or outside the country.

The religion of humanity is sublime and needs to be honed and cultivated among all, more so, during peace times. The religious and faith-based institutions which may be out to destabilise the prevailing general peace and calm in our State. We believe that such forces have no home, base or stake in our State except to cause disruption and create social strife. These insidious forces follow the concept of "hit and run" and create fissures along socio-religious lines. It is important not to be influenced or fall in the trap of provocation by such divisive forces, with origins from within or outside the country.

many others in the country could not realise our request to strengthen religious concord in their respective States. It was only in early August, after almost three months of unrest, that similar conflagration of diverse religion and faith was organized at the initiative of Raj Bhawan there. Cultivating such interactions on a regular basis becomes a repository of humanitarian good will and security for the future. Moreover, majority of the national media has been deflected and economical reporting the positive initiatives in a proper perspective, while highlighting mostly the negatives, and showing the States, at times, in poor light without any knowledge of ground realities. Most mainland media still harbor the notion that Meghalaya with other NE States are primarily a conflict zone, without making an effort to study and understand the all round socio-political structure and dynamics of the region.

The Manipur saga is one of heartbreak and intense anguish, which is rare, in other's respect of the nature of provocation from one section or the other. Human actions and reactions there have been burdened with intense anger, hatred, demeaning basic human instincts and values at times. While we pray, and hope that sanity and peace return soon in the most peaceful manner, it is also true that if lines of honest communication be-

between communities and different religious groups were open during peace times, the scope for reconciliation could have probably been much higher.

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

"Choose rather to be strong of soul than strong of body."

— Pythagoras

The Shillong Times

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Women in Dorbar Shnong

IT is encouraging to note that at long last the Lymphung Ki Seng Kynthei headed by some of the most empowered women of Meghalaya has made public their demand for representation in the executive committee of the Dorbar Shnong. This has been a long-standing topic of debate in matrilineal Meghalaya. It is also a contentious topic because visitors from other states of this country and foreign scholars who visit Meghalaya have never ceased to wonder why there are so few women legislators in the state assembly not more than five at any point of time. It is only when they are told that women are not allowed by 'tradition' to stand for office at the lowest rung of the political system - the grass-roots institution - the Dorbar Shnong, that they understand why aiming for a place in the legislature is a huge challenge. Women are already made to feel they are jostling for space with men when they seek election to the Dorbar Shnong. Some women have even argued publicly that the Dorbar Shnong is the last male bastion and since Khasi women already enjoy the right of lineage through their clan then politics should be left to the men. Is it any wonder then that Meghalaya fares very poorly in women and child health and nutrition and why the total fertility ratio is so high; and why anaemia is claiming the lives of young mothers during childbirth? It takes a woman to understand the plight of other women. The present Health Minister - a woman - has been able to look at maternal and child health more closely because she knows what she is talking about.

That the advisor of the Lymphung Ki Seng Kynthei, a former principal of a college and a progressive woman should stop short of claiming the right of women to contest for the post of Rangbah Shnong and to be contented only with women being executive members of the Dorbar Shnong is like taking one step forward and two steps backwards. What is wrong if capable women hold the office of the Rangbah Shnong? When will women come into their own? What sort of example is being given to young, progressive, ambitious women who are capable of providing good governance when a leading women's organisation says that it is unwilling to displace men as Rangbah Shnong? Where is the much-talked about gender equity? Should gender equity not mean that women and men compete on an equal footing and allow the public to decide whether they prefer to elect a man to a woman? A beginning has to be made somewhere. Women have to come out of the shadows and stop playing second fiddle to men. This is the 21st century. If Khasi society does not change its captive mindset now, then when is a good time? A debate on this matter is urgently called for!

The 1956 judgment of the Bombay High Court in "State of Bombay v Narayan Appa Mali" is the precedent when it comes to case laws regarding religious personal laws. The case is with regards to Hindu Bigamous Marriage Act, 1946 which prohibits Hindu men of having more than one wife. IPC section 494 which prohibits polygamy is exempted for Muslims. Justice Chagla observed that while the religious personal laws referred to original Scriptures & Texts, the 'customs' in India were not the same as "customs & usage" in Article 13. Justice Chagla argued that the intention of the Constitution assembly to exclude Personal Laws from Article 13 is clear from other provisions such as Articles 17, 25(1), 25(2)(b), 26, 372. These provisions already limit some aspects of religious personal laws such as abolition of Untouchability in Article 17, qualification for the Right to Religion by public order, morality and health in Articles 25(1) and 26, allowing the State to pass laws reforming Hindu religious institutions in Article 25(2)(b). Such provisions would be redundant if Article 13 automatically invalidates personal laws. Moreover, "laws for" include Religious Personal Laws, then Article 372(1) (2) would mean the President is empowered to amend or repeal Personal Laws, which cannot be the intention of the Constituent Assembly.

Letters to the Editor

Untenable claims?

In the article, 'A debate on being inbred' by Barnes Mawrie (ST Aug 7, 2023) the writer made a reference to the friendship between Fr Abel and my grand uncle, Sib Chaney Roy. They were certainly friends - moral at the intellectual and spiritual level and spent time together debating and discussing their respective faiths and other religions as well. Neither of them would claim that their faith was the better one nor try to emphasize that the two denominations were one and the same thing because they are not.

We have several copies of U. Nongphri in our family library and on the first page of the papers it is clearly written that the paper was printed at the Ri Khasi Press by Sib Chaney Roy, I wonder why it should be named by Fr. Abel in his press when Jacob Roy had already established the Press in 1896?

If there are copies printed at Fr Abel's we would like Ish Barnes Mawrie to share them with us.

Yours etc., Bijoya Sawian, Via email

CUET & PG Admission in Meghalaya

I write to bring to the attention of the concerned authorities that there are many candidates who were not able to attend the CUET PG exam as they were allotted exam centres in faraway places. Subsequently, there was also another round of exams for those who were left out but unfortunately most of them could not download their admit cards.

Currently, admissions are going on in NEHU and in some colleges which offer PG courses and the CUET score is mandatory. As a result many students were left out.

I therefore request the

Personal Laws and the Judiciary - A brief history

By Kitor H. Blah

The Supreme Court of India has always exercised restraint when it comes to religious personal laws. It has never invalidated any personal law on constitutional grounds as personal laws are protected under Article 25 of the Constitution, the Right to Freedom of Religion. However, the way that the Judiciary has dealt with personal laws, has evolved throughout the years, although it has also maintained its consistency of protecting Article 25. While Article 25 protects the freedom of religion, Article 13(1) says that all laws in "State of India before the commencement of the Constitution shall be null and void if, and to the extent that, they are inconsistent with any of the Fundamental Rights and Article 13(2) says that the State shall not make any law which contravenes any of the Fundamental Rights, and any law which is null and void to the extent of that contravention. So, besides upholding Article 25, the question before the Judiciary is always been whether religious personal laws qualify as "laws in force" or "law" in Article 13, which can be invalidated if they contravene any of the Fundamental Rights.

The 1956 judgment of the Bombay High Court in "State of Bombay v Narayan Appa Mali" is the precedent when it comes to case laws regarding religious personal laws. The case is with regards to Hindu Bigamous Marriage Act, 1946 which prohibits Hindu men of having more than one wife. IPC section 494 which prohibits polygamy is exempted for Muslims. Justice Chagla observed that while the religious personal laws referred to original Scriptures & Texts, the 'customs' in India were not the same as "customs & usage" in Article 13. Justice Chagla argued that the intention of the Constitution assembly to exclude Personal Laws from Article 13 is clear from other provisions such as Articles 17, 25(1), 25(2)(b), 26, 372. These provisions already limit some aspects of religious personal laws such as abolition of Untouchability in Article 17, qualification for the Right to Religion by public order, morality and health in Articles 25(1) and 26, allowing the State to pass laws reforming Hindu religious institutions in Article 25(2)(b). Such provisions would be redundant if Article 13 automatically invalidates personal laws. Moreover, "laws for" include Religious Personal Laws, then Article 372(1) (2) would mean the President is empowered to amend or repeal Personal Laws, which cannot be the intention of the Constituent Assembly.

Justice Gajendragadkar opined that "laws in force" under Article 13 have not been used in the general sense but specifically refers to statutory laws, which have been passed by the Legislature or other competent authority, and UNTIL the Personal Laws satisfy this test, they could not be included in definition of "law in force." In "Krishna Singh vs Mathura Ahir", 1980, the Supreme Court overruled the ruling of the Allahabad HC which had invalidated Hindu custom whereby a Sudi cannot become a Sanyasi, saying that the custom has ceased to be valid because of the fundamental rights guaranteed under Part III of the Indian Constitution. The Supreme Court however, in overruling the Allahabad HC, stated that the learned judge failed to appreciate that Part III of the Constitution does not touch upon the personal laws of the parties, and that the law as derived from recognised and authoritative sources of Hindu law should be enforced except where such law is abrogated by an usage or custom or is modified or abrogated by statute. So, while refusing to invalidate personal laws, the Court nevertheless recognised that only the Legislature can abrogate any personal law, just as Justice Gajendragadkar opined above.

The 1985 judgment in "Shah Bano Begum vs Mohd Ahmed Khan" presented a subtle evolution in the Court's ruling with regards to personal laws. While Muslim law says that alimony is to be paid to the wife after divorce within the Iddat period, which is roughly three months, the Court ruled in favour of Shah Bano Begum for right to alimony as per Section 125 of CrPc, which is not exempted for Muslims, unlike the polygamy law under section 494 of the IPC. While the Court did not invalidate the Muslim personal law of Iddat, yet the Court enforced the payment of alimony because the consistent view of the Court has been that only a statutory law can abrogate a personal law. In this case, section 125 of the CrPc overruled the personal law of Iddat. However, the government of the day moved to protect the Muslim personal law of Iddat by enacting the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 which allowed the "reasonable and fair provision and maintenance" during the Iddat period, thus overruling the Court's ruling for maintenance under Article 13(2). Here, the Court had overruled the personal law of Iddat by the statutory law of the CrPc, but the Legislature passed another statute, which protected the personal law. Again, the consistency here is that only statutory laws can abrogate or modify personal laws, not the Judiciary.

In "Maharshi Aavadesh vs Union of India", 1994, the petitioner's prayer was to declare the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 as void being arbitrary and discriminatory and in violation of Articles 14 and 15 of Fundamental Rights and Article 44, 38, 39 and 39-A of the Constitution of India and also not to enact the Muslim Personal Laws (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 in respect of those personal laws which adversely affect the dignity and right of Muslim Women. The Court ruled that there are all matters for the Legislature and the Court cannot legislate in these matters.

"Dattal Lalit vs Union of India", 2001, the Court overruled the Muslim Personal Law of Iddat by appealing to the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 on the grounds that the Act is in derogation of certain provisions of the Constitution such as Articles 21, 14, 15, in cases where the wife is unable to maintain herself after challenging the constitutionality of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. The Bench of the Supreme Court upheld the view that the wording of Section 3(1)(a) was interpreted to mean that a husband must pay maintenance to the wife beyond the Iddat period in the case of the wife's destitution, thus making reasonable and fair provision and maintenance. Thus, while the Court cannot invalidate personal laws because of Article 25, but because Iddat has been codified in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, and this Act is a statutory law, which qualifies as a law in Article 13(1), therefore the Court could overturn the custom of Iddat by appealing to section 3(1)(a) of the Act which provided for reasonable and fair provision and maintenance. This broad and progressive interpretation of section 3(1)(a) of the Act saved it from being struck down under Article 13(2), and upheld the rights of divorced Muslim women to fair maintenance, and the Court maintained its consistency in not touching upon personal laws, but only statutory laws.

The "Shayara Bano vs Union of India" case, 2017, is perhaps the most recent Court ruling which evolved the most, yet also maintaining its consistent stand regarding personal laws. Shayara Bano vs Union of India, 2017, the Court to assail the divorce pronounced by her husband by Triple Talaq, which is codified under section 2 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1937. The Court ruled that it could not accept the contention that the practice of Triple Talaq ceased to be personal law and got transformed into statutory law once it was

codified and entered by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 as the law of Triple Talaq was applicable to the Muslims even prior to the enactment of the said Act and has been followed for more than 1400 years. The Court also ruled that the practice of Triple Talaq does not violate the qualifications of Article 25, i.e. public order, morality and health and it has equal stature as other Fundamental Rights and therefore, the practice cannot be set aside through judicial intervention.

Thus, the Court followed the same consistent principle that the Judiciary cannot invalidate any religious personal laws. However, the Court also ruled that the practice itself is discriminatory towards women, and thus while the practice is protected by Article 25, the Act which codified it is not. Further, the Court stated that socially unacceptable personal laws in India have been reformed only by way of legislation and such legislative reform is permissible under Articles 25(2), 44, and entry 5 of the Concurrent List. Therefore, in consideration of the gender discriminatory nature of Triple Talaq and the fact that it can only be reformed by legislation, the Court passed an injunction order against the practice of Triple Talaq for six months. If legislation is initiated to redefine Triple Talaq or to prohibit it altogether, then the injunction shall continue until the said legislation is enacted. However, such legislation failed to bring such legislation, the injunction would cease to operate and the practice of Triple Talaq would be left untouched. Subsequently, Triple Talaq Bill was passed and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 2019 made the pronouncement of Triple Talaq void and illegal.

Thus, we can see from this brief history that the consistent principle and restraint that has been exercised by the Judiciary is that it cannot invalidate any personal law, but only statutory laws, if they are inconsistent with the Fundamental Rights. Moreover, any statutory law which codifies such unjust personal laws may be invalidated by Article 13, even if the personal law itself is protected.

Hence the downside to the codification of any personal law or social customs is that the statutory law which codifies them qualifies as law under Article 13, and can be invalidated by the Judiciary. Moreover, such statutory law which codifies personal laws may be modified or abrogated by an Act of Legislature. Lastly, the evolution of the Court judgment thus far, is that the Court may advise the Legislature to take cognizance of any unjust and discriminatory personal law, and advise it to pass legislative reforms, as permitted under Articles 25(2), 44 and entry 5 of the Concurrent List.

It is unfortunate that the LGs teachers have a limited representation in the AC. Majority of the AC members are from the University and they have little understanding of the difficulties of the colleges and the college teachers. The college representatives expressed their difficulties in the AC, but their objections were ignored by those who were bent upon pushing the FYUP from this year itself. The ordinance to introduce the FYUP was introduced only in June 2023. Only the syllabus of the first year was approved, and no one is clear about what papers will be introduced in subsequent years. But they are not enough. The move has to be accompanied by changes in the relevant statutes, ordinances and regulations relating to affiliation. The issues teachers, teaching material, exams, evaluation, and a host of other related issues. The syllabus is prepared and approved only for the first year, just a couple of months back. It is most likely that the syllabus for subsequent years will be prepared in piecemeal every year and made known to the teachers a couple of months before the new system begins. That means neither the teachers nor the students are aware of what all they would be studying under the FYUP. In the absence of a comprehensive syllabus, it is difficult to procure study material for new courses that are going to

The Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) Stalemate

By H. Srikanth

Is there no need for any changes in educational policy in the state of Meghalaya? Are the educational standards in the state so satisfactory that we need no more reforms? Should we remain sceptical and resist all university and government initiatives for improving education standards in the state? The answers to all the questions are a big NO. Everyone in the state knows that there are serious problems in the education sector that need to be addressed. One should bring out reforms at all levels - at school, college, and university levels. There is indeed a need for revising the syllabus, introducing new relevant courses, increasing the number of teachers, improving infrastructure and re-look the administration at different levels to bring about the desirable changes in the education sector that what changes should be introduced would depend on an objective assessment of the ground situation? If the state is at the level of AHCID, it can move to FGLI, even try to jump to UKL. But it cannot straight away aspire to reach the XYZ position.

The authorities aspiring to introduce the NFP 2020 immediately are committing grave mistakes again. A couple of years ago, they tried to push the CUET. The people who were not ready forced the government to seek exemption to the state from the CUET. Next, the University tried to implement the CUET for the PG admission again without thoroughly discussing it in the Academic Council. But when it was put into practice, it was found that the local students for whom the university was established hardly found a place on the list because of their unsatisfactory performance. The university was then compelled to announce an additional 40 marks to satisfy the local demands, making a mockery of the CUET. Not learning from the mistakes, the university has taken up yet another decision to introduce the FYUP immediately from this year without proper preparations. The consequences of the hasty decision have now become apparent in the present stalemate.

It is unfortunate that the LGs teachers have a limited representation in the AC. Majority of the AC members are from the University and they have little understanding of the difficulties of the colleges and the college teachers. The college representatives expressed their difficulties in the AC, but their objections were ignored by those who were bent upon pushing the FYUP from this year itself. The ordinance to introduce the FYUP was introduced only in June 2023. Only the syllabus of the first year was approved, and no one is clear about what papers will be introduced in subsequent years. But they are not enough. The move has to be accompanied by changes in the relevant statutes, ordinances and regulations relating to affiliation. The issues teachers, teaching material, exams, evaluation, and a host of other related issues. The syllabus is prepared and approved only for the first year, just a couple of months back. It is most likely that the syllabus for subsequent years will be prepared in piecemeal every year and made known to the teachers a couple of months before the new system begins. That means neither the teachers nor the students are aware of what all they would be studying under the FYUP. In the absence of a comprehensive syllabus, it is difficult to procure study material for new courses that are going to

be introduced subsequently. At the PG courses, the teachers recommend scholarly books and articles. But in the UG courses, it is necessary to have standard textbooks in advance to ensure quality and uniformity across the colleges. How could the teachers prepare for the classes if they don't have the complete syllabus or the study material? In the AC, the need for increasing the number of teachers was also highlighted. But it appears that no efforts are made in the ordinances and regulations to fix the number of teachers required for running the FYUP in the colleges. There is written commitment from the government to manage the number of teachers to implement the NFP through the number of college teachers. It is then natural that the college teachers who are already overburdened get agitated.

All this acrimony and stalemate could have been avoided had the university and the state government expected and deliberated all issues beforehand. It appears both the university and the state government were in a hurry to implement the NFP 2020. There was no need to rush, as the UGC has come out with the FYUP guidelines only at a far end of 2022. Barring the Delhi University and a couple of BJP ruled states, the FYUP is not yet implemented in most states and universities in the country. After the state elections, even Karnataka, the first state to introduce the FYUP, is reconsidering the NFP 2020. The FYUP can be introduced for a trial in certain universities first and then replicate in all the states gradually later. Unfortunately, in Meghalaya, the university is a central university, but the colleges are administratively and financially under the state government. Hence, there are many loose ends which need to be tied before we plan to implement the FYUP in all colleges in the state.

One need not question the sincerity or integrity of the university authorities, the state government or the college managements who believe that the NFP 2020 helps the state improve the educational scenario in the state. One should not have any hesitation to acknowledge some positive initiatives taken at the university and the state levels in recent years to address certain long pending issues. But when it comes to the NFP 2020, I don't have any hesitation to state that they have acted in haste. The consequences of their actions are likely to be disastrous, as neither the university nor the state government have the resources to implement them effectively. If all that one wants is the old wine in new bottles, we could bundle and fool ourselves and others. But, if we hope to contribute to meaningful changes in education that benefit all sections of the people, it is necessary to need a slow and steady path taking all stakeholders into account. The issues that the MCTA has raised are relevant and they need to be addressed and resolved before deciding to implement the FYUP. Let there be no ego issues. Education is a serious matter; it is not a game to be played for the pleasure of the superiors. Again, education is not a race; there is no one there in Delhi ready to give us an award or reward for being among the first to implement the FYUP. There is no harm in taking a little more time. Let all stakeholders play a positive and responsible roles keeping in view the needs, interests and the ground realities in the state.

rush of modern day living with parents and care-takers carrying a livelihood, children see adults angry and frustrated most of the time. Let me give an example of a genuine case that happened on August 9 at 12:30 pm. I spontaneously decided to fetch a ward from Shillong Central School and had taken a small private vehicle since it was raining heavily. Most care-takers felt and acted fully.

On reaching the junction and reading to the main gate of the School and the surrounding government offices, two private cars were parked next to the houses on a very narrow stretch of the road and hence there was a deadlock for two-way traffic. There was no policeman to regulate the deadlock and eventually the cars behind me and I backed up to a point where I could see the one side of the traffic to manoeuvre their way out of the situation.

All this happened in the span of one hour and one can only imagine the agonizing wait and feeling of neglect of a seven year old child, among many others. When much of the city, with much wider roads are made 'No Parking Zones', would it not serve the interests and safety of young children - who have to jostle for space to walk on this road, along with traffic both ways - to make the already narrow road a 'No Parking Zone especially during school hours'.

This is a humble request to the Headman of the locality, the MLA of the constituency and the Police, who must be aware of the situation, as it affects one of their own very closely. Yours etc., (A concerned citizen and educator, with a hope to see incremental changes for the public good)

competent authority to take note of the same and help us students out of this predicament else we will lose a year.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

SMB and PHED should not play with public health

It is indeed a matter of shame that the very Departments entrusted with safeguarding public health have become the root causes of public ill-health. Guesalf's letter rightly underscores the vital importance of clean and safe water, not merely as a convenience but as a fundamental human right. If we do not speak up now and let the Shillong Municipality and the PHED tamper with public health, our future would be worse than Hitler's Period.

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Safe walking space for children around a School in Laitumkhrah

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"In a false quarrel there is no true valor." — William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 2023

No-Confidence Motion is serious business

SECTIONS of the media have woven a narrative around the No-Confidence Motion moved by the combined Opposition now known by the acronym INDIA (Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance) against the Narendra Modi led Government. The narrative is to pit one group against the other and to frame the narrative - Who won the No-Confidence Motion and who made the best speeches. So Parliament is reduced to a debating platform where parliamentarians are to be given brownie points. Is that the only purpose of the No-Confidence Motion? It is rightly pointed out by political observers that this Alliance is yet to come up with a Common Minimum Programme considering there is very little time left between now and 2024 May. The purpose of an Opposition Party/Parties is to put the government in the docks and corner it with facts, figures without dramatizing the entire affair and without the use of pulchering language. There is neither need for rhetoric or diatribes and certainly Parliament is no place for personal attacks such as "Naamdar" to suggest 'dynasty,' and we know who the dart is aimed at.

The politics in this country today is so deeply polarised that this ideological divide has now been dragged into Parliament. As a result, issues that require serious and intense debates such as inflation and the galloping prices of essentials are forgotten even while those in government read out their litanies of achievements which mean nothing to the common man. But the very purpose of the No Confidence Motion was to corner the Prime Minister who seemed to have been tongue-tied insofar as Manipur is concerned. After a nearly two-hour rhetoric laced with sarcasm the Prime Minister designed to speak on Manipur for just about 5 mins and a few seconds. He lacked the compassion and empathy that those who have lost their homes, the bereaved and those spending sleepless nights in relief camps need at this point. The Prime Minister's sole concern is to use every narrative to ride himself for the battle royale in 2024. All else is forgotten in this battle where holding on to power is the only objective. Is this the reason for democracy? And what democracy can we speak of when the 'people' with whom powers should legitimately reside have been rendered completely powerless and most in abject poverty. The three trillion dollar economy handed about means zilch to them. It is in this hilly divided polity that the BJP will be entering the fray with its bombastic claims. To counter this would require a well-armed Opposition combine that does a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the ruling conglomerate and hits it where it hurts the most. To be able to carry people along is the strength of any political party. Once the people are alienated, defeat is imminent.

Letters to the Editor

Glaring Ignorance of Geographical Location

is too well-known to feign ignorance of their existence. If the present Jaintia leaders are not aware of this fact, the senior citizens and intellectuals of Jaintia Hills are well acquainted with it. For the information of the M.L.A. of Nongpoh, we would like to clearly state that Block-I comprises the whole of Nongphlyun doloiship and a huge part of Ri Bhoi district comprising known as the Pangam Raliang part of the all the doloiships of Shilliang Myntiang, Nangngi and Nangiang along with Langshoh Myntiang Sirdangshoh while Block-II comprises the whole of Myntiang doloiship and a huge part of each of the doloiships of Nangiang & Nangngi. It is indeed regrettable that Block-II has been entrusted to the R.C. of Ri Bhoi district instead of West Jaintia hills district thereby denying and depriving the people of Block-II area who are the stake-holders to air their problems and grievances. The Jaintia Hills Solidarity & Welfare Union (JHSWU) had promptly written last year about this to the Chief Secretary & the Deputy Chief Minister but the Union has been ignored. We submitted a Memorandum to the Chief Minister as well and later a request was made since the May 9, last for an interview with him for constructive discussion but we have not been granted any audience so far for reasons not known to us. The C.M.'s office did not give us proper reasons; every time we met them we were told that the C.M. is out of station. We have been waiting patiently for some time now. If at all the Nongpoh

No-Confidence Motion: Ten Takeaways

By Rajdeep Sardesai

The bugle for the 2024 general elections has been sounded. The no-confidence motion might have been won, expectedly, by the Narendra Modi-led NDA government but the competing narratives for the big battle that lies ahead have been set. This no-confidence motion was never about numbers in the first instance; it was about the perception game, something more intangible but often decisive in deciding who wins the hearts and minds of voters. So here is the critical question: who now has the momentum going into the 2024 battle? Here are ten key takeaways from the bruising parliament confrontation.

1) Prime minister Modi remains the central focus of the 2024 storyline. Ahead of the 2024 elections, the TIMO (There is Modi Only) factor looms large over the political horizon and reflected in voter preferences too. Five years later, the TIMO factor still shapes the political discourse. If the opposition, especially the I.N.D.I.A. alliance seeks to reflexively target the prime minister, the government checkleaders buzz around the cult of Modi. The rapturous applause for the prime minister from the treasury benches, even as the opposition walked out is indicative of how the larger than life Modi persona has deeply divided the political class.

2) A newly minted Rahul Gandhi, armed with good-will from his Bharat Jodo Yatra and sympathy from his disqualification as an MP, is now envisioned in the mascot of the anti-Modi forces. During the 2018 no-confidence motion, Gandhi had challenged the government on the Rafale defence deal but then, quite inexplicably, chosen to go across the aisle and hug the prime minister and later with his Congress colleagues. Now, it seems that Gandhi has abandoned any pretense of civility and chosen the path of outright hostility to his ruling party. His likening the prime minister to Ravan while suggesting that 'Bharat Mata' had been murdered by bloodshed in Manipur indeed is an uncontrolled anger

ahead of the 2024 polls. 4) While the I.N.D.I.A. alliance has been caricatured as a mass opportunistic 'shag-bannda'; by the BJP, there is certainly a greater spirit of accommodation within its constituents. The manner in which the Aammi Party (AAP) for example has chosen to build bridges with the Congress suggests a flexibility in approach that is lacking in 2019. AAP's reach out to the Congress may be more out of mutual self-preservation than ideological conviction but it does solidify the opposition's challenge. If the TIMO factor makes the BJP a front-runner for 2024, the opposition I.N.D.I.A. alliance is finding a voice with an ABM (Aysone But Modi) credo. 5) The opposition's Manipur-centric interventions might yield temporary political dividends but they are unlikely to set the national agenda for 2024. The no-confidence motion was largely driven by the oppo-

sition's determination to get the prime minister to break his conspicuous silence on Manipur inside parliament but amongst the wider public it is economy-related issues from jobs to prices to welfare schemes that are likely to find greater resonance. 6) The prime minister and home minister Shah might have captured eyeballs with their two-hour long speeches in parliament but there is also a growing fatigue with the familiar 'naamdar' (dynasty) versus 'kaamdar' (worker) trope. After nine years in power, the Modi government can't escape accountability by pinning the blame on the Congress's past failures; how, for example, can the 'double engine' government

escape accountability for Manipur in 2023 by harking back to Mizoram in 1967? 7) If the BJP will have the momentum heading into the big election year, it is because the opposition still hasn't found a compelling narrative. The change in the BJP has clearly decided to make 2024 a 'Modi versus Who' presidential-style national leadership contest once again. For the opposition, the challenge and the opportunity lies in making the electoral battle a sum of fierce state-level contests. Localised battles, as seen in the war between the Shiv Sena factions in parliament, could yet prove decisive in key states like Maharashtra. 8) The Congress in particular needs to get its act together within and outside parliament with a more coherent strategy. Most of its experienced hands are in the Rajya Sabha with the party facing an acute talent deficit in the Lower House. Moreover, the excessive focus on de facto captain Rahul

"During the 2018 no-confidence motion, Gandhi had challenged the government on the Rafale defence deal but then, quite inexplicably, chosen to go across the aisle and hug the prime minister and later with his Congress colleagues."

Gandhi has meant that Team Congress isn't making full use of its bench strength. Why, for example, did the Congress not choose to line up Shashi Tharoor as one of its star speakers in the no-confidence vote? 9) Parliament as an institution is being systematically undermined. This was yet another session when several days were lost to adjournments, when important bills were pushed through without discussion or any parliamentary oversight. Suspension of members that were once the exception are now becoming routine. A brute Lok Sabha majority without any checks and balances is a danger signal for the health of parliamentary democracy. 10) There is a nagging sense that any debate in parliament isn't quite a level playing field with the role of the chair in both houses also under the scanner. Every time a major opposition leader sharply criticised the government during the no-confidence motion, the camera angles would swiftly cut away from the speaker. Mainstream media may have its loyalties but Sansad, is funded by the tax-payer, is surely expected to be non-partisan. Post-script: A defining image of this turbulent week in parliament was during the Delhi services bill debate in the Rajya Sabha: a visibly ailing nonagenarian former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh seated on a wheelchair and listening quietly to the debate. When in power, Dr Singh was mockingly referred to as 'Mam-Muhan' (or silent) Singh by his political opponents. Truth is, in his decade in office, Dr Singh spoke almost 70 times in parliament on different issues. The more charismatic Mr Modi, by contrast, has been specifically chosen to avoid contentious issues. In his more reflective moments, former prime minister Singh might wonder why he was ever lampooned as a silent leader.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

Springs- An endangered water source for hilly region

By Ereneus K Marbanung

At present there is water crisis in every part of the country. Rivers and streams are drying up and there appear to be plans for rejuvenation. For any settlement, be it a family household, or Government Institutions water is always the topmost priority. We may survive without food for a number of days but cannot live without water for even a single day. By any means we need to quench our thirst. Water is the most basic and essential thing for human survival. Water is useful for our daily



lives to meet household requirements be it for drinking, cooking, bathing, washing, personal cleanliness or an extra gallon for washing a car. An average person would require a minimum of 100-150 litres of water in a day. In every locality especially in urban and semi-urban areas, people would rush to a public tap early in the morning to form a queue just to get a turn for a bucket of water. For drawing water from such public tap, there are also many peculiar rules or some sort of roster system followed by residents which differs from locality to locality. So, in this situation, in many cases, they have to spend at hours in the queue just for a bucket of water. This daily scenario of fetching water from a public tap costs as dearly, as we lose precious time leading to delay in our works, office, schools etc. Sometimes quarrels happen at the water stations and lead to hatred and jealousy among neighbours. To avoid all these, many families would get a private tap connection to their households to meet all their water requirements. But the taps are unable to supply water regularly sometimes due to power failure or water scarcity due to poor discharge from the springs or pump failure etc.

Springs are the most primitive source of water for humans especially in the hilly regions. It fills our daily requirements for the family and the whole community even during lean periods. Sadly, our springs have gradually dried up; there is less water discharge from the springs and hence they can no longer support our household requirements. The possible reasons may be rapid urbanisation, deforestation, reckless quarrying, lack of maintenance but above all, a lack of responsibility by the people themselves who are the main beneficiaries of these springs. Perhaps the fact that people do not connect the tap water is another source of springs. People only remember springs in times of difficulty. A time has come that we as the community especially those who are residing in villages have to do something to revive these drying springs.

Springs are the underground water sources created due to water pressure. It may come up from the soil, between the rocks and are of many types viz. contact depression and fractured. Springs are unique to the hilly regions and are very rare to find in the plains. Spring water is more suitable for drinking purposes as compared to tap water. Nowadays, springs found in the hilly regions of Khasi Hills have an average water discharge rate of less than 5 litres of water in a minute which reduces during the lean dry season. A time has

come to initiate meaningful measures and means to increase the water discharge of springs through various soil and water conservation treatment measures. Springs are used for multiple purposes, and besides supplying drinking water to households and other home activities, water can be used for irrigation and for creating a living ecosystem in a spring-based area and is thus helpful in conserving the natural resources. The N.A.B.A.R.D. - Springshed based watershed development project is one such project which had been initiated in the field level for the purpose of revival of springs, preservation of the underlying ones, increasing water discharge, afforestation, livelihood development with the overall objective of conserving soil and water resources. Such a project was first implemented in 2020 by Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) West Khasi Hills in two villages of Mairang, Mairang and Pyndongmuing under Mairang C & RD Block with 300 households as beneficiaries. Various treatment measures such as silted trenches, afforestation, spring chamber, water harvesting structure, dug out pond, terracing, etc. was demonstrated to achieve the project objectives. Livelihood components such as poultry, piggy farming, horticulture coupled with capacity building programmes were also supported to the individual households. As climate change is a concern for mankind, villages could benefit from such a project to a very large extent. Even in MGNREGS more such interventions could be incorporated by the VEC to tap and preserve the water source as every village in the hilly region has potential for such springs. Gradually such interventions could be incorporated by the VEC to the benefit of the rural community. This is very much possible through community participation and cooperation with all the stakeholders at the grassroots level.

(The writer is SMS T. Ereneus K. Marbanung, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) West Khasi Hills and can be reached at ereneusmarbanung@gmail.com)

Concerns regarding Rapido's pricing & captain behaviour

Upon arrival, passengers are often met with unexpected demands from the captain. Initially, the ride's cost is communicated, but upon completion, the captain might suddenly request Rs 100 to be paid. This erratic pricing strategy, coupled with the pressure to cancel the ride, puts passengers in a dilemma. In many cases, individuals opt to cancel the ride and continue with the captain's terms. The pricing structure of Rapido should be transparent and courteous. It is imperative that the company provides comprehensive details about the charges for various routes. This clarity would greatly enhance the service, foster trust between the riders and the service. Moreover, the behaviour of some Rapido captains is a cause for concern. Instead of utilizing their job as an opportunity to provide reliable service, some captains resort to coercive tactics. Encouraging passengers to cancel rides and then renegotiating the fare based on their own preferences is both unprofessional and detrimental to the service's reputation. Further, the presence of unregistered captains in areas like Mairang poses a potential risk, especially during night time travel. To mitigate this, Rapido should take necessary measures to ensure that all captains are properly registered and adhere to a recognizable dress code and identification system. This would help passengers distinguish between authorized captains and potential impostors. To conclude, while Rapido holds the promise of convenient transportation, these highlighted issues need to be urgently addressed. By establishing transparent pricing, professional behaviour from captains, and a robust identification system, Rapido can elevate its service quality and restore passengers' faith in this mode of travel. Yours etc., R.K. Sarki, Shillong

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

Elephant conservation in India: Still a long way to go

By Meenukshi Iyer

As the world observes Elephant Day on August 12 to raise awareness about preservation and protection of the largest land mammals, a top Indo-Canadian conservationist says India has miles to go when it comes to saving their gentle giants. With almost 1,200 elephants killed in the last 10 years across India — 245 of them in the past three years in Odisha alone — the gentle giants are at a grave risk, with just 27,000 left in the country at present.

And with Kerala losing 58 per cent of its wild elephants in the last six years, according to a 2023 forest department data, there "seems no sense of urgency to implement solutions and deal with a crisis unfolding in India," says multiple award-winning wildlife filmmaker and elephant conservationist, Sangita Iyer.

"India still has a long way to go when it comes to elephant conservation, and appreciating the interdependencies of every creature in this magnificent web of life," Iyer, founder of Voice for Asian Elephants Society (VAES), told ANS in an interview.

The pressing issues

According to Kerala-born Iyer, India has some of the best wildlife protection laws, but they are not being enforced.

"The recently amended Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (Section 43) allows the transfer of elephants between states, creating loopholes that will be exploited, potentially emboldening illegal elephant captures. Additionally, even the existing laws are not being enforced," she says.

Citing the tragic case of a pregnant elephant in West Bengal, who died last month after officers allegedly dangled mistaking it for a bull elephant,



Iyer rues that many untrained forest officers are given the task of protecting elephants, wildlife and the natural treasures of India, which is causing a lot of harm.

"What a heinous crime against nature is this! Now, the question is, will these officers be held accountable? Will they face the seven-year jail sentence as per the Wildlife Protection Act?"

Along with British MP Henry Smith, Iyer had addressed the UK Parliament in June, exploring Indian authorities to act urgently in the wake of the alarming number of elephant deaths caused by electrocution, poaching and habitat loss, among other growing threats.

Calling Odisha the "largest elephant graveyard", Iyer told

the Parliament that "electrocution and train track deaths of elephants are happening at an alarming and appalling rate in Odisha where mining and poaching are out of control".

Rampant mining aside, roadways and railways cutting through core forests, illegal human encroachment and unsustainable extraction of forest resources have resulted in elephants losing 80 per cent of their habitats.

The roar versus the trumpet
This year, India witnessed a surge in the number of tigers, which were endangered and on the verge of extinction due to massive poaching, with mere 1,411 in 2006 to 3,682 in 2022.

Calling tiger conservation in

India a massive success story, Iyer says that the Project Tiger authorities did a "phenomenal job" using the funds allocated by the Union government, and in comparison, Project Elephant "seems to have failed miserably".

"Nobody knows what this unit has achieved over the years, except produce the Gaja report, and conduct elephant census every five years, although even that has been stalled due to Covid. It has now been seven years since the last elephant census was conducted in 2017," Iyer told ANS.

The need for an elephant census is all the more pressing to understand the elephant gender ratio. According to Iyer, as of now, only 4 per cent of the total elephant population in

India are males, which is creating a serious gender disparity in the wild. "At this rate, elephants will become extinct in less than 10 years," she says.

Simple measures to save precious lives

According to Iyer, there needs to be an authentic acknowledgement of the challenges facing the elephants of India, and a genuine willingness to implement tested and tried solutions that are working elsewhere in the world.

To begin with, she says simple measures like imposing fines for tossing garbage out of the trains would help save elephants, as they can sniff out food from as far as 19-20 km away, using their highly evolved olfactory senses.

Additionally, the decision makers need to be sensitised with awareness programs specific to elephants, their vital role as climate mitigators and ecosystem engineers, and the cascading effects of their disappearance from our planet, says Iyer.

An International Monetary Fund report estimates the carbon value of each forest elephant at \$1.75 million.

But of paramount importance, says Iyer, is taming the jobless and unproductive youngsters in the elephant range states in India.

"They simply don't know what to do with their time. So, they chase and bully elephants, a punishable offence. Yet, hardly any charges have been levied by the state or Central government against them. And a few instances in which charges had been laid, are still pending in the courts," says Iyer, a Nari Shakti Puraskar recipient.

Haunted by the pain and suffering of Asian elephants, Iyer and VAES have launched more than a dozen projects in India since 2018 in collaboration with grassroots organisations and state governments.

Some of these include planting saplings and creating water holes in Odisha forests by employing tribal people; installing road signages and technology to warn truck drivers in elephant crossing zones; and barricading more than 100 open wells in Odisha.

Apart from providing elephant-friendly fencing, Iyer and her organisation have implemented a device called EleSense, which detects the elephant presence around 500 metre.

According to VAES, between January 1 and July 12, 2023, EleSense has potentially saved 161 elephants in the Doars region of West Bengal alone. It is in discussions with the authorities in Odisha to implement the technology. *(ANS)*

The power of the scent!

By Kunal Sharma

In the realm of interior design and architecture, many elements contribute to the overall experience of a commercial space. The layout, lighting, colours, and furniture are all carefully considered to create an appealing and functional environment. However, one aspect that is often overlooked but holds incredible potential in shaping the atmosphere is the scent.

Workplace scent, also known as Smellscaping, is the art of using carefully chosen fragrances to enhance the ambience and user experience in a commercial setting, particularly in the workplace. This often underestimated sensory element can have a profound impact on employees' well-being, customer perceptions, and overall business success. Let's delve into the world of

tions and memory. This direct link between scent and emotion can influence mood, behaviour, and even decision-making. As such, strategically incorporating scent into the design can positively impact the overall atmosphere and the people within it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Well-being and Productivity: The workplace environment greatly affects employee well-being and productivity. Studies have shown that certain scents, such as peppermint and citrus, can increase alertness, focus, and cognitive performance. Introducing these scents into the workplace can boost employees' energy levels and concentration, resulting in higher productivity and job satisfaction.

Reduction: High-stress environments

that align with positive experiences, businesses can create emotional connections with their customers, increasing brand loyalty and repeat visits.

Enhancement: Smellscaping complements other sensory elements in the design, creating a multi-dimensional experience. Just as lighting and colours influence the visual aspect of a space, scent contributes to the overall ambience, making it more immersive and appealing.

INTEGRATING SMELLSCAPING INTO DESIGN AND BUILD BRIEFS

When planning a commercial space, it is crucial to consider smellscaping in the design and build briefs. Ignoring this aspect means missing out on the opportunity to create a holistic and impactful environment. Here are some steps to incorporate smellscaping effectively:

The Brand and Space: Begin by understanding the brand's values, target audience, and the purpose of the commercial space. This will help in selecting scents that align with the brand identity and resonate with the intended users.

Appropriate Scents: Consider the function of the space and the emotions you want to evoke. For instance, a spa or wellness center may benefit from calming scents, while a retail store might use uplifting scents to create an energetic atmosphere.

Balance: It's essential to maintain consistency in scent throughout the space, but also be mindful of not overwhelming the occupants. Subtle, well-balanced fragrances are more likely to have a positive impact without becoming overpowering.

Adapt: Before fully implementing a scent, test it in the space and gather feedback from employees and customers. Be willing to adapt the scent if necessary to better suit the preferences of those who frequent the space.

Help: Working with scent designers or fragrance experts can ensure that the chosen scents harmonise well with the space's purpose and brand identity. They can provide valuable insights into scent selection and application.

Workplace scent or smellscaping is a powerful tool that should not be underestimated when designing and building commercial spaces. By tapping into the emotional and memory connections that scent can create, businesses can elevate the experience of their employees and customers alike. A well-executed smellscaping strategy can enhance productivity, reduce stress, and strengthen brand identity, making it an essential element in creating successful and memorable commercial spaces. As businesses strive to create meaningful and immersive environments, the art of smellscaping should not be ignored in design and build briefs. *(ANSlife)*

Cardamom: The Superfood



Want to maintain a lean body weight and reduce fat? The humble cardamom may be the perfect option, according to a new study that revealed a range of health and dietary benefits of consuming cardamom, including increased appetite, fat loss and inflammation reduction.

Cardamom is a popular spice in many parts of the world and has a warm herbal flavour and an aroma that blends eucalyptus, mint and pepper.

Researchers at the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, called the spice a "superfood".

"What we found is that this small spice can burn calories and maintain body weight while increasing appetite and food consumption," said principal investigator Luis Cisneros-Zevallos from the varsity.

The study, published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences, was conducted using live animal specimens and applied various doses of cardamom seeds in a regular diet. Researchers found that cardamom increases appetite but also increases energy expenditure and fat mass reduction. Cisneros-Zevallos said.

It also provided estimated dosages for humans -- at least 77 milligrams of cardamom bioactives for an adult around 132 pounds. It stated this beneficial dose may be obtained from consuming at least eight to 10 cardamom pods every day.

The study confirmed cardamom modulates neural circuits that regulate adipose tissue lipolysis and mitochondrial oxidative metabolism in liver and skeletal muscle.

Cisneros-Zevallos said other related studies have shown cardamom has anti-inflammatory properties. His research indicates that cardamom may reduce low-grade inflammation that can lead to chronic inflammation and the development of a range of diseases.

"Our team has discovered an amazing opportunity to utilise cardamom as a promoter of overall health," he said. "Cardamom seeds, with this new functionality, can be used in different industries, including the sports industry, functional foods and dietary supplements to favour the production of healthier foods."

Cisneros-Zevallos said the research showed cardamom consumption helped appetite and weight loss. He believes this new functionality discovered in cardamom can be used in the growing market of sports nutrition or as an aid to increase appetite in convalescent people.

"There is a wide range of potential health products for cardamom and its naturally occurring compounds," he said. *(ANS)*



smellscaping and explore why it should not be ignored when understanding design and building briefs for commercial spaces.

UNDERSTANDING SMELLSCAPING

Smellscaping is more than just the application of pleasant fragrances to mask unpleasant odors. It involves thoughtfully curating scents that align with the brand identity and desired emotional response of the space. Like a symphony conductor, scent designers must consider the harmony of different aromas to create a cohesive and captivating olfactory experience.

Commercial spaces can benefit greatly from smellscaping due to the powerful connection between scent and emotion. When we encounter a particular smell, it triggers the olfactory bulb, which is part of the brain's limbic system -- responsible for emo-

can take a toll on employees' mental and physical health. The right scent can act as a stress reliever, promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety. Fragrances like lavender and chamomile have calming properties that can create a more soothing atmosphere, helping employees manage stress more effectively.

Identity and Customer Experience: Scent can play a significant role in shaping a brand's identity. Consistently using specific scents in a commercial space can create a powerful association with the brand in customers' minds. A distinct and pleasant scent can enhance the overall customer experience, making it more memorable and enjoyable.

Emotional Connection: Scents are closely linked to memory and can evoke powerful emotions. By using specific scents

"An intelligence test sometimes shows a man how smart he would have been not to have taken it."

—Laurence J. Peter

The Shillong Times

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Crime and punishment

REFORMS were the two terms of the Modi government did very little about. Even when reforms were attempted as in the case of the farm laws, it cut and ran midway through the process. The GST, or market reforms, was only a follow up on what the UPA-II did. There have been calls for reforms in the judicial system, but the government is hesitant and the Supreme Court is not enthused either. However, at the flag end of Modi's second term, the government has come up with three bills in Parliament to reform the criminal justice system. Better late than never. As Home Minister Amit Shah has admitted, the criminal justice system here functioned from 1860 to 2023 as per laws introduced by the British Raj. It's a pity that no government attempted an overhaul to suit the interests of the people while the British cared mainly for their colonial interests. This is a sad commentary on the seriousness of those whom the people elect to run governments. Electoral and bureaucratic reforms are also a matter of urgency to make the entire governance system function in more meaningful ways.

Overall, the three bills aim at introducing major changes to the way crimes are handled. A principal means being adopted to settle cases is to drag investigations unendingly; and so with the judicial process thereafter. Cases go on and on for decades. Justice delayed is justice denied. The bill sets a maximum limit of 90 days, or three months, for the police to do the investigation and file the charge-sheet; which can be extended by another 90 days if a court grants the sanction. As of now, cops take their own time to complete the investigations. They drag on for years at the behest of the accused if they are politically influential or moneybags. At the end of it all, the conviction rate is (unacceptably) low. The present aim is to raise this to 90 per cent, as the Home Minister has stated. Forensic collection of evidence would be made compulsory so as to avoid tampering of evidence at later stages. Numerous other changes have been proposed in the bills.

The bills have been referred to a parliament panel for scrutiny and likely amendments based on discussions with informed segments of the public. However, all these are bound to take time. This government has an effective functional life of only eight months. If the bills are not passed and not turned into law by presidential assent, they would lapse and the next government may or may not reintroduce them. Urgency is a matter of prime importance. Judicial reforms are imperative.

ALC: A platform for farmers to co-learn and co-create knowledge

By H H Mohrmen

It was for the first time in the history of the state that two projects under MBMA, namely Agroecology Learning Circles and Natural Resource Management approach under the World Bank Funded Community-Led Landscape Management Project (CLLMP) shared the same forum. It is also for the first time that the farmers were given a prominent space in the program as they not only shared their best practices but also debated amongst themselves on issues related to their lives. It was also the only program where there were no politicians to grace the function and media presence at the event was also scant. The event highlighted various spheres of indigenous natural landscape management and solutions that have been successfully implemented by different communities.

The workshop also served as a platform for networking and collaboration among indigenous communities, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective action toward achieving resilient and innovative natural resource management practices. Whether this is the way forward for the farmers of the state, is the question on everybody's mind.

Inter-learning amongst the project under MBMA. The first session was sharing best practices from the project namely 'Empowering indigenous communities through Agroecology Learning Circles (ALC) for resilient, integrated and innovative natural resource management.' Six farmers presented their best practices on three different topics, namely, knowledge on practice for the management of soil, knowledge on practice for the management of pests, and knowledge on practice for the management of seeds. The second session was sharing CLLMP best practices which included a speech on Forest management plan, Payment for Eco-system services, living root bridges, water resource management at Mawteibab village, Ri Bhei Traditional Healer Association, and Reclamation of mining affected land.

Sharing and Co-learning. Despite the impediment of translation between Khasi, Garo, and English the session was very interactive in which the farmers asked each other questions on an issue which is dear to their hearts. Farmers and community members from diverse fields shared their knowledge and experiences, emphasizing the importance of traditional

ecological knowledge in sustainable resource management. It was the first time that the farmers asked questions and farmers also answered. Hence in a sense it is not only sharing but it is co-learning and the enthusiasm was such that during the session on the following day, the farmers were unanimous on the need to have a regular forum like this for them to share their best practices and problems.

Government's different initiatives. In the government's efforts to provide a livelihood to the people and help them improve their economy, it has made so many interventions to achieve its goals. Self Help Groups, promoted by Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society have done a commendable job not only helping create livelihood opportunities for the women in the state but have also been able to empower them.

The MBMA itself has a bouquet of livelihood programs like farmers' Collectivization for Upscaling production and Marketing System (FOCUS) which support funding, value chain development, machinery support, market linkage, transportation, aggregation of produce, and others support. FOCUS's goal is to form a producer group (PG), which will help the farmers upscale their production and link them to the market.

The integrated Village Cooperative Society (IVCS) is another innovative project in the list of MBMA interventions. Financial inclusion is still very poor in rural areas, so the IVCS was created to help overcome the challenges and access to financial services in rural areas. IVCS is like a bank in the village for the villagers and is owned by the community themselves. MBMA has another project which deals with Natural Resource Management under CLLMP project also, including forming of Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMC) which manages the natural resources in their respective villages.

The Cooperative Department on its own also promotes different cooperative societies which include multipurpose or specific societies that deal in activities like piggy, dairy, poultry, tourism cooperative society, and others. The government also promotes different missions to help the people of the state. Piggy mission, jackfruit mission, diary mission, Lakadong mission to name a few. Apart from that the Department of Soil and Water Conservation also promotes SHGs and these interventions target the same group of population and that is the farmers.

Extension institutions which were interventions initiated by both the central and the state government like the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), Kisan Vikas Kendra (KVK), and Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) are meant to help the farmer. In some cases, research has been done by ICAR but the technology is yet to be transferred to the farmers. There are gaps in between that need to be bridged. There is no doubt that all the government institutions and projects have done a commendable job, but there is also need to rethink the way these institutions engage with the farmers.

There are also interventions from the Tourism Department and the focus is now shifted to promoting rural tourism. Again when the target is to promote rural tourism why is there no convergence between the Tourism Department and the Department of Rural Development or the Agriculture Department if the agenda is to promote tourism in the rural areas? Or why are the rural communities not involved when the department is also targeting to promote their culture as one component of tourism promotion? Even the Autonomous District Councils which are the custodian of culture were not involved in promoting culture tourism.

The intervention's unachieved objectives. It is a no-brainer fact that the sole objective of all the intervention by both the state and the central government is to increase the income of the farmers and improve the economy of the state. But the question is - why the state is still poor? It is also true that in the communities sometimes the same people reap the benefits of most of the schemes and projects because they are active members of the committees and they grab every opportunity to showcase their work. In some cases when the projects are implemented by different departments, there are duplications of approaches and activities.

The problem is that those implementing central and state government schemes and projects seldom talk to each other. Like in the different departments in the state, there is no opportunity for the schemes or the projects to converge. Everything works in silos in this state and there is no convergence between the projects or between missions.

The need for convergence of schemes and projects. The outcome of the workshop shows the farmers need a platform where farmers can interact amongst themselves. The need for continuity and to set up for knowledge network to share issues to co-learn and co-create solutions for the farmers was also felt so they can share their best practices, learn, and co-learn from each other and others. The recommendation from the workshop was that the government should organize workshops that would serve as a platform for the farmers to come together and discuss their problems. The government should also initiate a similar kind of initiative at the village or block level. These platforms will not only help them share their experiences and learn from each other but more importantly will help the projects and the missions complement each other. The platform will also help government officials who are working for the same cause to interact and exchange ideas between themselves. It is believed that these platforms will also serve as warning mechanisms that can be useful for the government administration in tackling the challenges, faced by the farmers.

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Suggested Action
The consensus arrived at the workshop was it would be helpful if the suggestions serve as a policy for the government and particularly the MBMA to implement for the benefit of the farmers in general. It is also a matter of time for the state to have a comprehensive development plan where all the schemes and projects for the state's developments come as a convergence point. The interventions can be designed that operate at different levels, at the local level or the block level and the state level. At the district level or the State level, it should also coincide with the commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This proposed approach is looking at the farmers not only as empty glass which needs to be filled with knowledge from the officers or the expert, but as partners in co-learning and co-creation of knowledge.

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Indian govt steps into mould of British who considered themselves aliens
Claim of exorcising Indian criminal law of colonial spell is a sham

By K Ravendran

Home Minister Amit Shah's legislative package in relation to the country's criminal law system, hailed by his ruling party as path-breaking, has more symbolism than real reform and even includes a good measure of deception. Of course, there are a couple of good things, such as stringent punishment for mob lynching, though without specifically mentioning as such, and crimes against women, but Shah makes the vital mistake of confusing English with British and in assuming that the two are freely interchangeable. His package ends up changing names of existing laws while in the process betraying an Indianised version of the British anger on the part of the present day rulers. The propriety of giving

communication, financial means, or any other means, starts up or tries to stir up secession, armed rebellion, subversive activities, fosters separatist sentiments, or poses a threat to India's sovereignty, unity, and integrity, or engages in such acts will be liable to imprisonment for life or imprisonment up to seven years, along with a potential fine. Attempts at secession cannot be tolerated by any means, but the real danger here is that there is no proper definition of secession. In fact, the very word secession is missing in the new provision. This makes it easy for the government to interpret anything as secessionist and use the provision to suppress criticism. The new provision, in fact, brings through the back door



Hindi names to the three main criminal laws - the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Evidence Act - when the entire judicial process in the country is being conducted in English has already been questioned. There is nothing whatsoever to the change of nomenclature than symbolism.

Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin has missed the red flag over the change, accusing the Modi government of a certain linguistic imperialism and describing Shah's package as representing neo-colonialism in the name of de-colonialism. He is not much off the track.

The British considered themselves aliens, for logical reasons too, and perceived people as their enemies as the colonialists were aware that they had usurped their rights. But BJP, despite all its protestations about Indianness, has stepped itself into the shoes of the British and its likewise treating people as their adversaries.

Shah's introduction of the new bills was marked by a dramatic announcement that the British-era law replaced treason was being repealed completely. But even before the excitement died out, the realisation came that he had incorporated a new provision which is more draconian than the one that was being abrogated.

Yours etc, Jennek K Diengdo, Shillong-2

what the Supreme Court had struck down more than one year ago.

In a landmark development the Supreme Court, asked the Central government and States to refrain from registering any cases for the offence of sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code. A bench of Chief Justice of India NV Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Himanshu Kohli directed that India should be kept in abeyance till the government's exercise of reviewing Section 124A is complete. The bench also asked governments not to continue investigation or take coercive steps in all pending proceedings under the provision till the government's exercise is complete.

Should such cases be registered, the parties are at liberty to approach court and court has to expeditiously dispose of the same, the bench added. "It would be appropriate to put the provision in abeyance," the order further said.

The government's intention behind the new provision is to circumvent the courts in cases relating to what it considers as objectionable conduct or event. This was essentially a law that the British framed to deal with any challenge to the imperialists' authority and by retaining it in the new Sarkitis, the government has got into the mould of the British, whose distrust for the people was a cardinal aspect of their rule in India. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

People of India shortchanged

The editorial "No Confidence Motion is a serious business" (ST Aug 12, 2023) made interesting reading. It is a fact that No Confidence Motion is a serious business but the recent No Trust Motion in Lok Sabha was to woo Narendra Modi, Prime Minister to attend the House of the People (Lok Sabha) so that he speaks on Manipur. Unfortunately, it was not the way the Opposition planned and narratives became the name of the game. The editor has rightly pointed out that "there is neither need for rhetoric (Jambhaler diantabes and certainly Parliament is no place for personal attack such as "Nandam" to suggest 'dynasty' and we know who the dam is aimed at". Politics in our country is not only polarised but it has come to such a level that someone has rightly said, "Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, factotums; all Indian leaders will be of low calibre and men of straw. They will have sweet tongues and silly hearts. They will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles." Even if Winston Churchill

never said these words, the one who framed them is highly intelligent. Shyama Mandal says, "Take a look at this publication 'Hindu Regeneration, Volume 3' (1973) page 400, seems to be by Ithani Sivasubram Sanga (a right-wing Hindu org). The text reads: "... this juncture is to hand over the rich and poor members of India's 1.4 billion population is glaring. Poverty is rife and, according to the World Poverty Clock, more than 44 million people (around 3% of the total population) are living in extreme poverty and surviving on just \$1.90 (Rs. 157.40) or less a day. More shockingly, as much as half of the population doesn't have access to safe drinking water, while child mortality rates remain alarmingly high. These are the pressing issues that our parliamentarians have to address."

Let us not forget that at our (People of India)'s expense Members of Parliament are drawing salaries, daily allowances etc., to attend Parliament besides constituency allowances, office expenses etc. Their wage is tax free and comes with additional perquisites such as free petrol, free telephone calls and free housing. Most household expenses, furniture, electricity, water, laundry, is also paid for. Members of Parliament travel any-

where in the country by rail, first class, and get 14 free air tickets for themselves or their companions a year. Spouses of MPs can travel free by air from residence to New Delhi 8 times a year when Parliament is in session and unlimited number of times by rail. If all is added up the Cost to the Country (CTC) of an MP is close to Rs 35 lakhs annually according to benomyawala.com.

Yours etc V.K. Lyndab, Via email

Agony of the Kuki people

Last month I chanced to read two letters to the editor appearing in these columns of your esteemed daily dwelling on the on-going unparalled apathy of the Manipur government between the competing communities of majority Meiteis and the minority Kuki tribes. One of the letters titled, "Peace in Manipur" (ST 14 19, 2023) written by Chhangbam Thangama Meitei has pointed out that the Kukis were the first to initiate the current turmoil by attacking the Meitei villages, thereby leading to the present in-

evitable hell being let loose. Refuting this contention, Dr. Jangkhao Hangshing, in his rejoinder 'Let truth prevail' (ST July 21, 2023), has exhaustively detailed the pre-emptive sequences that led to the unleashing of the Meitei militias from May 3, 2023 by burning the iconic Anglo-Kuki war centenary flag. Incidentally, it was reported that on May 3rd last when the members of the Kuki Union of Tribal Solidarity under the aegis of All Tribal Students' Union of Manipur returned to their respective destinations after an on-sight vigil, a purported consideration of granting ST status to the majority Meiteis, the returnees were welcomed by the Meitei miscreants.

Subsequently, churches of Kukis were burnt down and 114 Kukis were mercilessly annihilated, not sparing even women as unprovocably parading two naked Kuki women before raping one of them in broad daylight. Additionally, 197 Kuki villages were attacked and people displaced.

To add fuel to fire, Manipur's Chief Minister N. Biren

Yours etc, Jennek K Diengdo, Shillong-2

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

"Freedom is never given, it is won."

— A. Philip Randolph

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 2023

India's Tryst With Destiny

WHEN India became independent Nehru - India's first Prime Minister called it a 'Tryst with Destiny'.

Much less is talked about the role of Khasi women in the freedom movement and their political discourses during the pre-independence era.

Today in independent India we have the State of Manipur that has been burning for three months since May 3 last and its people, particularly the Kuki-Zo community that are being targeted by the majority Meitei common ty have been left to lick their wounds even as the Prime Minister of the country spoke for precisely 5 minutes out of the 2-hour speech he made in Parliament in reply to a No-Confidence Motion.

With over 70,000 displaced people seeking refuge in the neighbouring states and over 180 dead, this civil war is raging on with no signs of abating. The Kuki-Zo people occupying the hills of Manipur but working and studying in the Imphal valley are today overwhelmed by fear psychosis and cannot think of returning to their workplace or to their schools, colleges and university in Imphal.

How did India and Indians arrive at this point in history? Today it is ethnic cleansing in Manipur followed by Nuh and Mewat. Tomorrow this hatred will spread and consume us.

Letters to the Editor

In praise of the police

Editor, Can you imagine going to work each day and seriously wondering if you'll survive your shift and see your family again? I'm sure most people can't. But for the Meghalaya police and their families, that is an everyday fact of life.

Over the past few weeks, there has been a growing amount of misinformation, unwarranted negativity and, tragically, even physical and deadly assaults on some Meghalaya police personnel.

Must be openly investigated along with accountability. But all of us depend on protection from these men and women in khaki uniforms.

Meghalaya like the rest of the country faces countless threats from several anti-social elements, including from extremists where some groups even actively attempt to recruit the unemployed youth into their cause; especially ones with special skills such as the Lawai bo Phynai hacker who was arrested in April last year.

India's Independence: Khasi Women in Political Discourse

By Kyrsohor Pyrluh

For so long a clamour is given to U Tost Sing and U Kiang Nangbah as the local indigenous freedom fighters. Nonetheless, the two were men of valour and had resisted and confronted the British incursions in these hills.

"In an era where the body of a woman becomes a battle field of religion, nation, region and race and also in the context of Khasi society where a woman is still taboored to take active part in 'traditional institutions', it is imperative to rediscover the vitality of women in the socio-religious and political evolution of a nation or community, so as to put an end to the culture of subjugation and violence against women."

women possess more votes than their men-folk and as such have a legitimate claim to voice their views on any matter affecting the future of their community.

From time immemorial...the Khasis have had their own elaborate democratic system of life and administration. The people (tax members of their respective clans) have absolute and unrestricted freedoms in the exercise of their rights.

That in spite of the penetration of British influence into these hills, the people have retained their independence and are growing in their own democratic system evolved by the genius of their forefathers.

laws and the indigenous and democratic administration through the Syiems and their Darbars. By recognizing the right of self-determination, India is partitioned and provinces are also being partitioned.

As regards the Jaintia Hills, it is our rightful demand that the status of a State should be restored to them; so that these hills also could join the Federation of the Khasi States.

We remain...your humble memorialists. Sd Mavis Dunn Jaid Lyngdoh, K. Khasari, R. Saens, Shrim Kir Jaid Syiem of Khyrim, (Mrs) B. Diengdoh-Taylor, Clayna Diengdoh, Glays D. Diengdoh of Cherra, P. Inlornine Clynx of Shelle State, S.M. Ropmay, Klesina Rynjah, Enralda Rynjah, Dr. Estherly Lalo of Jaintia Hills, Miss R. Blah, Miss Sabina Nangrum, Miss Rufina Nangrum, Dr. (Mrs) D. Lynn, Jaintia, Wessly Rani, (Mrs) J.M. Ladia, Jaintia, Miss J. Lyngdoh, Miss G. Roy (Cherra), Tripsohor Rynjah, Nislan, D. Inban, Sharmam, Shabang (Laitkhyngkot), Jointisbon Rynjah, Winola Sumar, T. Eincynora, Kathleen Lyngdoh, Nurse R.S. Synrem, Laitryah, Nurse Seshion Nongkhalim, Laitkynsey, Nurse S. Willa, Jaintia, Nurse D.L. Lyngdoh, Jaintia, Nurse S.B. Sohtun, Mawphu, Nurse Enly, Mawlat, Nurse D. Basaiamoid, Nurse Shan, Tyronng, Nurse Carvia, Cherrapunjee, Sister Sida, Cherrapunjee, Noramai, Mawlat, Glosimom of Nongkhal State, Ka Biantim, Jaid Syiem of Mvlien, Enid Blah, O. Parait, Dr. S.M. Ropmay, B. Rynjah.

securing to them this right. We have reason to apprehend that full justice to the existing rights and traditional institutions of these hills will not be meted out if there is any attempt or suggestion that the old-age institutions like the Syiems and their Darbars are to be abolished and substituted by something new, however high sounding in theory it may be.

It may be known...Our language, religion, mode of life and customs and manners are entirely different. Absorption of a small race like ours in any constitution which is predominantly Hindu or Muslim means gradual extinction. However small we may be, we see no justifiable reason as to why we should not continue to exist as we are in the atmosphere of our own institutions and customs.

As we celebrate this year's Independence Day, we should also celebrate our dedicated and hardworking M.L.P. Whether they gave their lives in the line of duty and left behind a family who still mourn, whether they have retired, or continue to serve, Meghalayans owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women in khaki. It is fitting that we take a moment to go out of our way to stand up, speak up, and show up to let them know we appreciate them. Positive relationships are not based on controversial disagreements; so don't let hate for the police grow... Ja Hind!

Let's face it. Without the police we would have anarchy and lawlessness on the streets. Our lives would be in threat daily and we would not be able to live a safe and secure life and nor would our families. Police officers aren't perfect - nobody is. Law enforcement isn't perfect - no profession is.

On hate speech Editor, This is in reference to the news item captioned, "No body can accept hate speech, harmony needed between communities." The Court, (ST Dated 12, August, 2023), despite the court monitoring hate speech cases, hate speech expressed at the highest levels of political authority remains unchecked.

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times. Yours etc, Joseph M. Kharkongor Shillong-8

People of Manipur need concrete action on ground, not lip services SC monitored committee has tough task at hand to restore normalcy

By Tirthankar Mitra

Manipur is passing through the worst of times. The better state in one of the hinges of India's North East needs special treatment from the centre. Bordering Myanmar, after having witnessed one of the bloodiest battles of freedom struggle where Ne-

Thankfully the Supreme Court has directed former Maharashtra DGP Dattaraj Padsalgikar who is functioning on the apex court's order to "investigate the allegation that certain police officers colluded with the perpetrators of violence (including sexual violence) during the conflict."

"The state has about 3.3 million people living in it. Of these 53 per cent belongs to the ethnic Meiteis for outnumbering Kukis and Nagas. State government of Manipur cannot wash its hands off the violence and arson made worse by crimes against women and displacement of children. The violence has been fuelled by weapons looted from the armories of police, Manipur Rifles and IRB battalions."

Not even baby steps have been taken to break the peace process. In this grim and gruesome situation, the daily death toll is merely "total number of lives lost." Men are being murdered, women raped and molested and every day in relief camps is one of dismay and the nights are sleepless. Meanwhile, the state which provides pivotal

sexual violence) during the conflict." The nation needs to know whether the acts of abject surrender to a mob was further justified by the complicity of some of the men in uniform.

As regards the Jaintia Hills, it is our rightful demand that the status of a State should be restored to them; so that these hills also could join the Federation of the Khasi States. We trust Your Excellency will see the justice of this demand in view of the fact that a division of the Khasi States into sections will be cruel and inhumane.

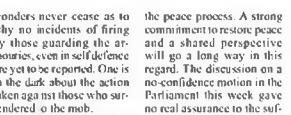
stability to ASEAN ferrets continues to be in flames. Mere appeal to surrender the weapons looted and used in ethnic conflict will be cries in the wilderness. A weaponised society, being a rare recipe for disaster, concerted operations have to be launched to recover the arms and incentives offered to those surrendering them voluntarily. The perpetrators of violence need to be put behind the bars sans any regard to community or socio-political group. This has to be done with alacrity. The ruling dispensation has to reach out to all political players, youth and civil society groups and take them on board to explore the path to

Manipur cannot wash its hands off the violence and arson made worse by crimes against women and displacement of children. The violence has been fuelled by weapons looted from the armories of police, Manipur Rifles and IRB battalions. Even before the smoke of the burning hills has cleared and vigilante parties continue to mar the state, questions arise as to why the loot was allowed to happen. After all, state forces' armories stocking arms and ammunition for upkeep of law and order are not guns lying on the walls of a householder to be taken down in self-defence. Usually, these arms depositories are heavily guarded. The

The situation warrants that the responsibilities on the police, intelligence agencies and civil administration have to be fixed. No pick and choose approach can restore normalcy. Thankfully the Supreme Court has directed former Maharashtra DGP Dattaraj Padsalgikar who is functioning on the apex court's order to "investigate the allegation that certain police officers colluded with the perpetrators of violence (including sexual violence) during the conflict."

wonders never cease as to why no incidents of firing by those guarding the armories, even in self-defence are yet to be reported. One is in the dark about the action taken against those who surrendered to the mob.

The situation warrants that the responsibilities on the police, intelligence agencies and civil administration have to be fixed. No pick and choose approach can restore normalcy.



Manipur cannot wash its hands off the violence and arson made worse by crimes against women and displacement of children. The violence has been fuelled by weapons looted from the armories of police, Manipur Rifles and IRB battalions.

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." — Lao Tzu

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXV No. 7 SHILLONG, THE ASSAM, AUGUST 17, 2023

Bombshell from CAG

THE genie is out of the bottle — so to say — and the Modi government at the Centre will have a lot of explaining to do. The big question as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has zeroed in on it, how did a road project that was initially estimated to cost Rs 18 crore per kilometre ultimately spend Rs 250 crore for the same length, as in the case of the Dwarka Expressway. This is cost inflation by 14 times, which is unfathomable and raises many more questions. This fell as a bombshell on the eve of the 77th Independence Day, and at the right time for the Opposition to latch on to and dig further into what's really happening on the highways sector. The Modi government in its two terms concentrated its principal attention on this sector and earned a name for the way it transformed the road transport sector. This kind of passionate engagement might have a shady side too — and of epic proportions. The Bharatmala project stretches 75,000 km.

Prima facie, a response from the government was eagerly awaited. It cannot afford to run away from an explanation. There were allegations that the works for the highways have been contracted mostly to select entities close to the seats of power in Delhi. This was unlike the previous practice of awarding contracts to agencies in the respective regions. One presumption was that the BJP was collecting huge sums from these contractors for its election campaign splurges, by way of unholy cuts from the allocations. At the centre of the new highway architecture is seasoned BJP leader Nitin Gadkari. This apart, the bigger question is, how did estimates overshoot targets to such Himalayan proportions. Experienced engineers and agencies are involved in the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR), based on which fund allocations are made for each project. It is also a pity that, these days, DPRs are not prepared by government engineers but by private agencies that can make a fortune, even for the project report for erection of a flyover. Such works are mostly "outsourced" so that engineers of the establishment can sit back and relax. Many of them do no work other than pocketing bribes. Those at the higher levels might take a cut from each phase of each project. The system itself is corrupt to the core and the scenario is worsening by the hour. A CAG report by itself means nothing, as we have seen in the past too. It would be worth a check whether even a penny was recovered from those who virtually looted the exchequer in the past. Governance here has become more of a drama.

The Shillong Times: A 78-year journey

By Albert Thyrning

The Shillong Times, one of North East India's oldest English daily newspaper, turned 79 on August 10. On its online home page the newspaper that was launched in 1945 a poster appears reads, "Today, we turn 78. Thank you for being a part of our journey." The Shillong Times has indeed been on an incredible journey. From a humble beginning of a weekly to a daily then back to a weekly to again switch to a daily; from a tabloid-sized paper to the broadsheet format; from a treacle machine to a modern computer typesetting and offset web printing system; from black and white to multi-colour on the first page, the famed paper that has been guided by four editors so far, has come a long way. On its 78th anniversary the paper also modified the online edition to make it more user-friendly.

The name The Shillong Times might have been inspired by the fact that Shillong was the headquarters of British-ruled Assam which included nearly all the north-eastern states, barring Manipur and Tripura. Hence the paper carried the whole of the region. Of course, now that is history. The Assam province has become seven states. Shillong is now the capital of Meghalaya alone. However, to its credit, The Shillong Times has been covering not only the north-eastern states, but the entire black and in fact regional, national and international news are part of its content besides, the editorial page, sports and the weekly special feature stories. One can only imagine the challenges and achievements of this venture in its publishing journey.

One guesses that reports on the glorious India's Independence, the painful partition, the Constituent Assembly, the first general elections, the drafting and approval of the constitution filled the pages of the young The Shillong Times. On its turf the Hill-State Movement, the creation of Meghalaya and other states and the twist and turn, the twists and turns, the highs and lows, the ups and downs, especially of this state and this region, have marked the 78 year old. Currently, ST is giving wide coverage to the excruciating "Manipur story." Besides the news stories, numerous articles, letters to the editor and a couple of editorials on the man-made tragedy have appeared on its pages.

The Shillong Times is a platform for varied points of views. The debates and commentaries on its opinion page are fascinating. Perhaps, few provide such a stage. The "Letters to the Editor" section is perhaps the most popular. The brief presentations penned by members of the public are the favourite spot for readers. This writer has seen this paper only in its present format. In high school, in the last three years of the 1980s, that too in a residential set-up, one didn't get the opportunity to read newspapers. It was only from 1991, while in the Pre-University (PUC) stage, that The Shillong Times became a daily read. Those that stood out were the columns by the current editor. With three years in Dimapur and four years in Bangalore the "friend" had to be left behind in the late 90s and early 2000s. When one returned to the state the connection was re-established. To cut the story short one is now associated not only as a regular reader but a contributor by way of 'letters to the editor' and articles. Thanks to The Shillong Times for the platform to express my thoughts.

This author missed the "Citizens, Constitution and Law" event on its 79th "Birh Day" on the August 12, evening, where political and social thinkers, activists, writers, educators, politicians, and columnists assembled to listen to and interact with the famed lawyer Vinod Grover in person. One missed the opportunity to meet the human and women's rights activist who has fought many a battle for women and children, victims and survivors of communal massacres, extrajudicial killings among many others. She has presently taken up the cases of the sexually assaulted women in Manipur. It would have been wonderful to lend one's ears to the "Time magazine one of the 100 most influential people" in 2011 who, formerly, elucidated that "Secularism and our rights are in grave danger."

The miss was not intentional. A meeting on migrant workers in Guwahati that was fixed well in advance was the deciding factor. The deliberation made the participants aware of the facts about migration. It is the need to act. Referring to the report by a media house in 2020, necessitated by the mess following declaration of the COVID lockdown, a resource person details the large-scale movement of migrant workers even today. There are as many as 45.36 crores of migrants or 37% of the population consisting of both interstate migrants and migrants within states. As per the 2011 census the size of the workforce is more than 50% of the population, out of which 20 or 10 crores are migrant workers. NSSO and the Economic survey data show that there are 65 million interstate migrants, 33% of them daily wageers. It is also estimated that 29% of the population of big cities are daily wage workers. Migrant workers include daily wage earners or self-employed workers. They are low income workers. They lack formal contract. There is no protection whatsoever in case of abrupt cancellation as evidenced by the COVID lockdown. Expensive and unhealthy conditions of living means that migrant workers move without their families. Hence these workers move back and forth between their place of work and their villages twice to three times a year. The highest sector that absorbs migrant workers is construction, at 67% in urban and 73% in rural areas. Modern services account for 16% in urban and 40% in rural settings. Statistics tell us that there are monthly earnings of daily wage workers are (1) Rs 2000 - 2250, between Rs 2000-3000 - 32%, between Rs 5000-1000 - 25%, between Rs 10,000-20,000 - 13% and over Rs 20,000 only 0%.

The destinations for workers are cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Surat, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai and others. Migrant workers come mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. It is obvious that less developed states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand record more out-migration of workers while more developed states like West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat are Kerala have few of their people moving out to other states. The same applies to districts. In Guwahati and other richer districts have low out-migration while in poor districts workers migrate to more developed districts within a state. Now, surprisingly the report left out the North-East completely. There is no mention of the region at all. When one enquired about this information gap about the North East, the reporter cited lack of data from the states. Probably there are little or no records with the State Labour department. However, we know that there are a large number of migrant workers, both to

other states and within states. What would be the number of migrant workers from the North Eastern states outside the region? We don't know. An activist who was present for the aforementioned meeting informed that a survey was conducted in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala but as he will be reaching his office only by the 23rd we have to do without data for the time being. How many workers from outside would Guwahati, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Imphal, Shillong, Tura, etc., have? Actual data are hard to come by. Migrant workers move without any registration anywhere.

We who are from the region don't care, but the activists in metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune etc., are quite alarmed at the sheer number of workers from the north-eastern states. This is hardly surprising because except for Manipur and Tripura all others are among the poorest states in the country. Meghalaya is the second poorest state of all. Workers migrate because there is hardly any opportunity at home. The fact that they migrate is normal but the concerns are something else. Living conditions are generally poor. In line with the statistics above the pay is usually low. Many are youngsters that dropped out of schools and colleges. They face exploitation and abuse but are unwilling to tell their stories. There are cases of minors being detected. Trafficking of young girls has come to light several times. These are among many other issues.

The discussion also touched on Manipur. The displaced people are in thousands. What do we do about it? Many are students. These who are out of school. They are with guns instead of books. A few are lucky to be relocated elsewhere. The Bishop of Bangalore has promised to fund education for Kuki students. A couple of Church organisations and NGOs have followed suit. But what about others? The plight of migrant workers is a major issue. The government should spend its energy on social causes rather than tugging this nation into a religious entity as is evident from the brazen display of religiosity at the new parliament building inauguration.

For now, Congratulations to The Shillong Times for turning 79! May you continue to serve with distinction, the journalistic way!

explosion to initiating digital revolutions, we have carried on their heritage. However, the Indian population's hearts and brains have undergone the most dramatic transformation. Our strength rather than a source of conflict has been our diverse tapestry of languages, religions, and civilisations. We have repeatedly demonstrated that our ability to work together in difficult times is our greatest strength. The peaceful coexistence of numerous traditions and beliefs in India is a daily celebration of its enduring ethos. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which translates to "the world is one family". But assuming that our road has been without obstacles would be false. We have experienced times of reflection and reckoning, just like any evolving nation. India has overcome these challenges, though, and its people have banded together to ensure that progress never stops. Remember, every Indian reading this, that our freedom was more than just a shift of power; it was a promise — a promise of a better tomorrow, created in unity and cooperation. Let's be sure to uphold the legacy of our freedom fighters as we continue to achieve new heights. We hold the key to

realising their vision of a united and thriving India. Let's treat it with respect, take care of it, and pass it down as the most precious heritage.

India lives on in the echoes of Jana Gana Mana, the energy of every festival, and the unity of every movement. Let's maintain the spirit of 1947 by standing tall and proud, walking hand in hand, and speaking heart to heart. Yours etc., Shubho Paul Via email

the declaration of this year's board results was followed by different programmes and functions organised by Government, NGOs, different Dorab Shomng, political parties and numerous groups who wish to facilitate the meritorious students of the state. Such initiatives to inspire and motivate the hardworking students are well appreciated by all especially the concerned students and their families alike. However, in my personal observation, I have noticed

Navigating True Independence: A Quest for Harmonious Progress

By Ankush Karkulung

As a country we have celebrated yet another Independence Day to mark our nation's hard-won independence. At this time my heart and thoughts are drawn to a recent encounter that has left an indelible mark on my perspective. On the eve of the 77th Independence Day, while engaging with the vibrant souls of spirited youths in this remote village of Meghalaya, I couldn't help but contemplate the essence of true independence. While we commemorate the sacrifices of our valiant forebears who fought for freedom from colonial rule, it is imperative that we introspect and discern if we have truly achieved the harmonious, prosperous society envisioned by those who laid down their lives for a brighter future.

In the tapestry of our nation's journey, I perceive three distinct threads that intertwine to create our contemporary fabric. The first strand comprises those who, seemingly content in their material abundance, perceive Independence Day as an opportunity for grand festivities and exhibitions of opulence. Draped in resplendent attire, they revel in the superficial glamour while perhaps losing sight of the deeper significance of our freedom.

Contrarily, there are those whose involvement may be more symbolic, participating in events and contributing to charity, not without a tinge of self-aggrandizement. These individuals, often part of the "Page Three" society, engage in acts of benevolence as a means to bolster their public image, sometimes overshadowing the true essence of altruism. Nevertheless, as a society, we are yet to fully unshackle ourselves from the chains that bind us. The echoes of our past, the inertia of our cultural biases, and the apathy that has pervaded our society still linger as barriers to our complete liberation.

Our economic disparities, myopic perspectives, and the spectre of division loom like shadows on the path to true independence. Yet a glimmer of hope pierces through the veil of uncertainty. The dawn of a new era is slowly breaking, carried on the wings of our youth. Their aspirations, their unquenchable thirst for knowledge, and their willingness to transcend the limitations of the past are the rays of optimism that illuminate our future.

However, the ascent journey is fraught with perils. The slightest deviation from the path of righteousness, a fraction of a misstep, can lead these promising souls astray, plunging them into the abyss of vices like drug addiction, violence, and ethnic divisiveness. The responsibility rests on our shoulders, as mentors and guides, to nurture their potential and

steer them towards a harmonious, prosperous, and compassionate future. To navigate our society toward a future devoid of the clutches of drug addiction, Manipur like ethnic tensions, an violence, a comprehensive roadmap is essential. Our policymakers and social elites must prioritize the following initiatives:

Educational Empowerment: Collectively invest in quality education that instills values of tolerance, empathy, and respect. Strengthen vocational training to equip the youth, especially single mothers, with skills for sustainable livelihoods.

Mental Health Support: Establish accessible mental health services to address the emotional well-being of the youth. Special attention should be given to the unique challenges faced by single mothers.

Community Engagement: Foster a sense of community and belonging by organizing cultural exchanges, dialogues, and community celebratory events and promote social cohesion.

Economic Opportunities: Create avenues for entrepreneurship and employment, particularly for single mothers, to enhance financial stability and reduce vulnerability.

Preventive Measures: Implement comprehensive drug prevention programs in schools, colleges, and communities, focusing on awareness, counselling, and rehabilitation.

Local Leadership: Empower local leaders and activists to take ownership of the development process, ensuring that the voices of the grassroots are heard and acted upon.

Collaborate with media to disseminate positive narratives, success stories, and campaigns that inspire and educate the youth against drug abuse and violence. Establish support networks for single mothers, offering mentorship, childcare, and financial assistance to empower them to provide stable environments for their children. Having just celebrated our 77th year of independence, let us not rest on our laurels in the festivities, but introspect and take stock of our progress. Let us recognize that recognition is not merely a reward but a reflection of our collective efforts to dismantle the barriers that hinder our progress and to instill in our youth the values of respect, empathy, and integrity.

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

Letters to the Editor

No roll-back on NEP 2020 please!

Editor, In connection with your letter published in your esteemed Daily (ST, August 12, 2023) on "Clearing Ignorance of Geographical Location," I would like to state that I love an apology to the Nangphak MLAs, Mayzatham System as the "Clarification" (though not so clear to me) published in your Daily (ST July 28, 2023) with regard to the news item appearing on the previous day (ST July 27, 2023), had escaped my notice. Yours etc., Prof. P.M. Paszab, President, Jaintia Hills Solidarity & Welfare Union, Via email

Kashmir pundits too are displaced people

Editor, The Editorial captioned "India's Tryst with destiny" (ST 15th August, 2023) has rightly highlighted the disturbing trend of displacement of minority populace in our country particularly in Manipur and Haryana on the basis of their ethnicity. History of independent India is witness to the fact that

An Apology

minority community and vulnerable sections in many States had been cleansed ethnically including our State Meghalaya. In our own backyard, the capital town of Shillong had witnessed large scale ethnic cleansing in Mawpiem, Wahingol, Ratsambrah and Malki area just few decades ago and the victims never got any support or sympathy or justice from the Government. Surprisingly, the colonial forgot to mention India's greatest ethnic cleansing post independence which displaced thousands of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir valley who are still living as refugees in their own country. Yours etc., N.K. Kchar, Shillong-3

Kudos to The Shillong Times

Editor, It is great that The Shillong Times daily completed its glorious 78 years on August 10, 2023. It is no doubt a victorious journey! In this connection I convey my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the administrators of The Shillong Times, Shillong for facilitating me, in the dignified gathering, held at the Pinewood complex on 12th evening, though I sincerely

Feel. I am not worthy of such a big honour. With all humilities once again I write, "I love you"

The Shillong Times, daily is just like my morning tea. I can't imagine my day without having a look at Shillong Times. I am personally indebted to The Shillong Times for publishing my write-ups on different topics in different times since 1979, when it was the only English journal from Shillong. Prior to 1979, I started with 'Letters to the Editor' column, and was encouraged to continue that contribution by (L) P.N. Chaudhri, the then Editor of The Shillong Times. I am indebted to the great soul, I wish this success and every success and pray to God for its long-long victorious journey. Yours etc., Una Parkayakina, Shillong - 4

A Legacy of Unity and Progress: India's 1947 Declaration of Independence

Editor, When our beloved Tricolour was unfurled on August 15, 1947, with the

Fort serving as a backdrop, we wrote as creeds, with emotion. But this is a tribute to the innumerable individuals who sacrificed their lives, hopes, and goals in favour of a single goal: a free and unified India.

The fight for independence in India was more than just a political movement. It served as a tribute to their perseverance, to their faith, and sacrifice. The courageous stories of Bhagat Singh, Rani Laxmi Bai, and Subhas Chandra Bose, and countless other unsung heroes, continue to inspire our hearts. India free from restrictions, where each person lives proudly and with this success and every success and pray to God for its long-long victorious journey. Yours etc., Una Parkayakina, Shillong - 4

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"The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance." —Nathaniel Branden

The Shillong Times Vol No LXXV No. 8 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 18, 2023

'Third' top economy

OUTSTANDING statesman of the American Jewish stock, Henry Kissinger, had predicted that the 21st Century will be Asia's, just as the previous was America's and the 19th Century was Europe's. Not many believed him 20 years ago, at the start of this century. Today, situations are evolving in a way that this prediction is coming true. The hyper-activity on the Asian continent is best exemplified in the huge growth of China and Japan remaining on a strong economic footing and India recording a steady growth in recent years. Put together, Asia is where things are happening though Americans and Europeans still have an edge, either alone or through an alliance as was seen during the Iraq War, led by the 'Coalition of the Willing' with strong backing from the UK under Tony Blair. But, thereafter, political instability caught up with the UK and the Americans too are taking hits, starting with the World Trade Tower bombing by Al Qaeda and the events that followed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi crooned at his Independence Day speech from the ramparts of Red Fort this time that India "will rise to be the third top global economy in five years from now." This is more possible not because India has a great leadership but because France and Germany are no longer growing at the desired pace. With a manpower strength of 1.4 billion, India can work wonders while the population of both Germany and France are ageing. India and China have a huge demographic dividend to power the economy, backed also by technological advances. India is more fortunate in these respects than China, whose population control measures started working to the red nation's disadvantage. This is the time for India to fully utilize its youth potential. A prerequisite for harnessing this strength is the right vision and commitment on the part of the government. Rather than youths lining up for jobs, they should first and more prominently be reoriented to start units, small or big, with government encouragement. An effort in this direction had been conceived by Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister, extending youths small loans without guarantees. Even if half such initiatives fail, the other half would make up for the loss to the national exchequer. Most people would hesitate to start a unit - which can eventually give jobs to many - because getting the licences is a bureaucratic task. One has to grease the palms of bureaucrats and politicians, together forming a black hole, which burns the energy and resources of potential entrepreneurs. The Prime Minister must, first and foremost, be mindful of such dampeners if India has to emerge as the world's third top super power in a short span of time.

On Saturday last while returning from the Umiam Lake area after a tree-plantation programme at a group of us saw tourists parking by the roadside and cooking Maggie noodles on a gas stove and other utensils they had carried along with them. Just about 500 metres away were roadside stalls that also served Maggie noodles amongst other things but the Assam tourists were just not willing to spend an extra buck on food. With me was Roma Nongpatrik who reached a senior officer from Government of India Tourism Department. We both stopped to talk to the tourists and asked them why they came all the way and grudgingly the little that they needed to spend on food. The tourists gave some wishy-washy replies but they were not the only ones. All along the way from Umiam Lake to the town of Jorhat we will see such people spreading their wares and eating by the side of the road.

The other aspect is that unlike Sikkim in Meghalaya have lost the battle of using local cabs to ferry tourists to tourist destinations. This of course is an organic industry and should be an entrepreneurial venture by someone with a good business plan but we don't have such an entrepreneur, sadly. Those behind the wheels in the Assam vehicles drive like crazy, stop wherever they please and don't seem

Maggie Noodles Tourism killing Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

Very few local people would want to venture out to any of the best destinations with their family members for a relaxing weekend. The reason? Every tourist spot is overcrowded with tourists being beat up in some distant part of Meghalaya. With the attitude that tourists display, one is no longer surprised that they would be roughed up by locals who resent the intrusion and the arrogance both. It actually takes two to tango.

On Saturday last, I took some guests to the Arwah Cave. The number of visitors there was mind-boggling. Does the Tourism Department not understand that there is a carrying capacity beyond which any destination will collapse? Why can't there be a limit to the number of visitors to the cave? Each visitor is paying Rs 50. If there are 500 visitors, the collectors are actually raking a cool 25,000 bucks a day and believe me on a given day there are more than the above cited number.

Go to the Kyntam Falls on the Shilla-Solra road and the number of tourists there too is mind-boggling and there is no one to regulate any tourism fee there. So, it's a free for all about a magnificent waterfall. The only visible structures there are small shops selling Uncle Chips and other predictable knick-knacks along with bottled mineral water and leaves, e-cigarettes etc. I have not learnt to add value to our tourism assets.

Let me now come to the Mawmluh cave which is now made famous after it was selected by UNESCO as one of the first 100 among the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), the next level of the cave. There are places where the opening is narrow and we had to crawl on our stomachs and at other places we had to wade through waist length water. It's one of the most interesting learning curves and a memorable expedition - my second after Krem Kotsang which was led by our local geologist Brian Kharman and his team. The Mawmluh cave is currently being polluted by the waters flowing from a drain cum canal adjacent to the near-defunct Mawmluh Cement Limited (MCL).

Many hold the opinion that the MCL establishment which has stopped producing cement for over decades, should be converted into a multi-purpose performance centre cum museum where the geography and history of the Mawmluh cave could be narrated to visitors before they actually enter it. A tour

operator said that would fetch more employment than Government continually pouring in money into a dead project just to pay salaries. Bansan Lyngdoh, a tour operator who has set up camp sites and homestays for tourists beyond the Mawmluh cave at a place he calls the 100 waterfalls is now learning up with the Tourism Department of the Martin Luther Christian University in May this year. While there are a group of young men as tour guides at Mawmluh and they are courteous and knowledgeable, they need to learn to tell stories to interested and curious visitors. Covered of course have to rent a suit, belts with lighting facilities and gumboots. At some point the climb is high and I recall a guide telling me to put my weight on his thigh so I can climb up to the next level of the cave. There are places where the opening is narrow and we had to crawl on our stomachs and at other places we had to wade through waist length water. It's one of the most interesting learning curves and a memorable expedition - my second after Krem Kotsang which was led by our local geologist Brian Kharman and his team. The Mawmluh cave is currently being polluted by the waters flowing from a drain cum canal adjacent to the near-defunct Mawmluh Cement Limited (MCL).

Many hold the opinion that the MCL establishment which has stopped producing cement for over decades, should be converted into a multi-purpose performance centre cum museum where the geography and history of the Mawmluh cave could be narrated to visitors before they actually enter it. A tour

operator said that would fetch more employment than Government continually pouring in money into a dead project just to pay salaries. Bansan Lyngdoh, a tour operator who has set up camp sites and homestays for tourists beyond the Mawmluh cave at a place he calls the 100 waterfalls is now learning up with the Tourism Department of the Martin Luther Christian University in May this year. While there are a group of young men as tour guides at Mawmluh and they are courteous and knowledgeable, they need to learn to tell stories to interested and curious visitors. Covered of course have to rent a suit, belts with lighting facilities and gumboots. At some point the climb is high and I recall a guide telling me to put my weight on his thigh so I can climb up to the next level of the cave. There are places where the opening is narrow and we had to crawl on our stomachs and at other places we had to wade through waist length water. It's one of the most interesting learning curves and a memorable expedition - my second after Krem Kotsang which was led by our local geologist Brian Kharman and his team. The Mawmluh cave is currently being polluted by the waters flowing from a drain cum canal adjacent to the near-defunct Mawmluh Cement Limited (MCL).

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China's consumer demand decline helping India get more foreign investment

It's now certain India will be 3rd largest economy by 2027

By Subrata Majumder

Consumer demand in China plunged into deflation, reflecting onslaught on consumer price. Its consumer price index fell by 0.3 percent in July, 2023, year-on-year basis, demonstrating a failure of Xi Jinping's new policy to retrieve the economy, which was dented by zero-COVID policy and domestic oriented demand.

A series of policy measures were introduced to reboot the growth. It introduced 'Amanibar Package' (Production Policy) which included PLI scheme (Production Linked Incentive), investment opportunities under National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), India's Industrial Land Bank (ILB), National Single Window system and others.

The PLI Scheme has been a big success for attracting FDI in the economy. While the world FDI inflow registered a downturn, India pinned a marked growth. In 2022, Global FDI inflow declined by 12.5 percent, in contrast to spurring growth in India by 10.3 percent.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 supply chain disruption jolted global growth and eventually FDI inflow. Ironically, global supply chain disruption turned boom to India instead. It gave a new lease of life to 'Make in India', which was losing steam.

Arguments were made and doubts were raised against India's potential for the ambitious vision for a new hub for global supply chain. According to the World Economic Forum's South Asia Institute, China - Institute for Contemporary Industrial Relations, expressed concerns on India

emerging as a substitute for the China supply chain. There are three major challenges of Modi government policy, according to him. First, introduction of the PLI scheme (Production Linked Incentive), second, the global search for China alternatives and third, enhancing free trade agreement routes to topple the burgeoning import from China - Global S&P was upturn to project India's annual growth by over 6 percent annually till 2030. Morgan Stanley, in its last November report, projected India to be the 3rd biggest economy by 2027.

Demographic and digital dividends are the key factors, attributed to India shining in growth amidst the slower growth in the world. It is supported by nearly 900 million working age population, with 759 million 'active internet users' and 650 million smartphone users in 2022, the second biggest after China."

According to a State Bank of India research report, India was forecasted to be the 3rd biggest economy by 2030. Global S&P was upturn to project India's annual growth by over 6 percent annually till 2030. Morgan Stanley, in its last November report, projected India to be the 3rd biggest economy by 2027.

Demographic and digital dividends are the key factors, attributed to India shining in growth amidst the slower growth in the world. It is supported by nearly 900 million working age population, with 759 million 'active internet users' and 650 million smartphone users in 2022, the second biggest after China. India ranked 2nd biggest manufacturer of mobile phones and 3rd biggest in the world for start-ups and Unicorn.

Letters to the Editor

Have some empathy for children

A video clip showing children standing in the sun, humid weather and collapsing one by one during the Independence Day celebration at Polo ground has gone viral. It is a heart-breaking sight and shows how shabby and rudely the district authorities treat young ones in such a scenario. Why should children be made to stand for hours listening to bombastic speeches which have little or no impact on the audience. In fact it sounded like an election rally. This also goes to the other personnel of the police department and armed forces who are and should be treated equally as well. This is not right to equality, this is utter rudeness and unjustified harassment.

While provision to allow them to sit in a tent where they can get some shade would have been humane, making them stand in that kind of condition is nothing short of inhumanity while nincompoops sit in comfort. This is not the kind of Independence Day that we should be celebrating. National day celebrations are not about VIPs, but where as 'We The People', but where has that important part of the Constitution disappeared?

Yours etc, Dominick S Wankhar, 5.4 via email

Illegal check-gate set up by KHADC

I wish to inform you that in the last two days there has been illegal collection by KHADC from trucks and other smaller vehicles coming from Assam to Meghalaya at Umiam Lake, Ribhoi district. The Government set up gates and collect money at the rate of Rs 200 per vehicle and under what law? And who has given the KHADC the permission to collect the toll and when was the tender for the check gate funded?

As it is, today the prices of essential commodities in the markets have spiralled. Add to this the illegal collection and prices will further escalate. I therefore request the media to take up this matter and bring it to the notice of the State Government and the Meghalaya High Court so that this illegal collection through this way is stopped forthwith and that those involved should be arrested.

Umiam dam & bridge in danger

The entire North Eastern Region and Shillong in particular was jolted on the eve of Independence Day when an earthquake measuring 5.4 on the Richter scale hit

the region. Fortunately there was no report of any damage or casualty. Here the question is that had the earthquake been of higher severity (God forbid) what would have the effect on Shillong and particularly the Umiam dam which is already weak and the impact can well be imagined. This is a warning sign to the Government to take immediate steps and think of an alternative solution. A number requests in the past had been made in this context by the people but it appears that the Government is not considering the future of the Dam with any seriousness. In case of any damage to the Dam, it will leave Shillong totally cut off from the rest of the country and the fate of Shillong will be in complete jeopardy. It is a earnest request to the Government to take some concrete steps at the earliest to create an alternative route on a war footing.

Yours etc, SL Singhania, Via email

The Bill introduced by the Government in the Rajya Sabha seeking to exclude the CJJ from the panel to select the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners is deeply flawed. In seeking to do away with the non-partisan presence of the members like the CJJ along with the Prime Minister, who heads the panel, and the Leader of the Opposition, it attempts to undermine the very democratic foundation of picking executives to oversee the election process in autonomous and neutral roles. The change being contemplated now will provide

Status of ECI must be beyond doubt & its purity maintained

The status of the Election Commission of India should remain beyond reproach since as many as 108 countries had deputed their delegations to our country to study the electoral process of India. Some months ago the Supreme Court had advised the Government to adopt the

selection process of Election Commissioners but now Government has come up with a new section process where the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is excluded from the process. Previously the Supreme Court had raised objections that a person who has been nominated by the Government cannot be expected to be independent and neutral. Now the view of the Government is that if an Election Commissioner is nominated by CJI then in case of litigation against an ECI the CJI may not remain neutral. Increasingly, the Bill not only overturned the SC verdict but was not part of 31 bills listed for passage during the session. Four years ago too when the Bill for abrogating Article 370 was presented in Rajya Sabha no Opposition member was aware about it. As per version of Ghulam Nabi Azad who was leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha he renounced sitting on stairs of Rajya Sabha for four hours but was not shown on Rajya Sabha TV.

The Bill introduced by the Government in the Rajya Sabha seeking to exclude the CJJ from the panel to select the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners is deeply flawed. In seeking to do away with the non-partisan presence of the members like the CJJ along with the Prime Minister, who heads the panel, and the Leader of the Opposition, it attempts to undermine the very democratic foundation of picking executives to oversee the election process in autonomous and neutral roles. The change being contemplated now will provide

the worst possible optics to the appointment of election commissioners. Instead of chosen bureaucrats or others by a panel of government officials. No system of picking officials to the EC may be perfect and nothing can guarantee that an official chosen will not behave in a partisan manner. But the idea of an autonomous Election Commission, provided over its history by a few dedicated bureaucrats, who understood all kinds of pressures from ruling dispensations in states and at the Centre, to bring fairness into the poll process, is being upended by a total takeover of the system of appointments.

The downgrading of the status of the ECI members is another change that must be addressed before the Bill is allowed to become law. In all fairness, the Government should reconsider the proposed change by which any ruling party at the Centre will have unfettered say over who mans the EC with a Cabinet Minister as the third member of the panel. It is generally seen that the selection of CEC or ECI by the government has been problematic due to various reasons prevailing at each time. Presently it is felt that such an appointment weakens the institutional apparatus and leaves there was a need to insulate the system against political and/or executive interference. This is the very reason of the recommendations of the Law Commission's 25th Report of March 2015. Second, Administrative Reforms Commission in its fourth Report of January

Yours etc, Vash Pal Ralhan, Via email

"Partia culture runs to the ornate, extreme culture to simplicity."

— Christian Nestell Bovee

The Shillong Times

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End to Gender Stereotyping

THE Supreme Court has recently come out with a 'Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes.' This handbook aims to assist judges and the legal community in identifying, understanding and combating stereotypes about women. It contains a glossary of gender-unjust terms and suggests alternative words or phrases which may be used while drafting pleadings as well as orders and judgments. The Handbook identifies common stereotypes about women, many of which have been utilised by courts in the past and demonstrates why they are inaccurate and how they may distort the application of the law. The intention is not to criticise or cast doubts on past judgements but merely to show how stereotypes may unwittingly be employed. Finally, it encapsulates the current doctrine on key legal issues which may be relevant while adjudicating certain cases, particularly those concerning sexual violence.

This Handbook offers guidance on how to avoid utilising harmful gender stereotypes, in particular those about women, in judicial decision making and writing. Among the 43 words that are gender stereotypes are the words 'hooker' which is replaced by 'sex worker', 'adulteress', 'a woman who has engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage', 'housewife' now 'homemaker', 'child prostitute' is a child who has been trafficked and 'whore' to be known simply as 'woman' and nothing more. The handbook also tries to accurately describe the individual's sexual orientation such as homosexual or bisexual. Stereotypes are strongly embedded in our consciousness and internalised. They are then translated to words, and actions. This is due to our societal, cultural, and environmental conditioning. Judges may unconsciously rely on stereotypes which are preconceived assumptions about people or groups when deciding cases or writing judgements and cause incalculable harm. Stereotypes impact the impartiality and the intellectual rigour of judicial decisions. Even when judges reach legally correct outcomes, the use of reasoning or language that promotes gender stereotypes undermines the unique characteristics, autonomy, and dignity of the individuals before the court. Using stereotypes, instead of objectively evaluating the situation, goes against the constitutional principle of 'equal protection of laws', which states that the law should apply uniformly and impartially to every individual, irrespective of their membership to a group or category. The use of stereotypes by judges also has the effect of entrenching and perpetuating stereotypes, creating a vicious cycle of injustice.

It is heartening that in the 76th year of India's Independence the justices have found it fit to challenge and overcome gender stereotypes to ensure an equal, inclusive, and compassionate society. Since the judiciary is daily challenged by cases relating to women in different circumstances it is vital that judges not only avoid relying on stereotypes in their decision making and writing, but also actively challenge and dispel harmful stereotypes. This is precisely the reason for the handbook which was conceived during the Covid lockdown.

Letters to the Editor

CAG blows the whistle

was published in Parliament last week, has flagged several irregularities in the awarding and implementation of the project. Some of the major findings of the report are: The project cost has increased by 65% from Rs. 5.35 lakh crore to Rs. 8.84 lakh crore due to changes in the scope, specifications, and land acquisition rates. The project authorities have selected ineligible bidders based on falsified documents or without fulfilling tender conditions, resulting in undue favour to some contractors and loss to the exchequer. The project authorities have not followed the prescribed procedures for preparing feasibility reports, detailed project reports, and cost estimates, leading to errors and inconsistencies. The project authorities have not ensured timely completion of land acquisition, utility shifting, forest clearance, and environmental clearance, causing delays and cost escalation. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has refused some of the findings of the CAG report, especially regarding the cost hike of the Dwaraka Expressway, which was attributed to a 13-fold increase in land acquisition rates. The ministry has also claimed that the CAG report has not taken into account the benefits of the project in terms of improved connectivity, reduced travel time, and enhanced economic activity. However, sources in the Road Transport Ministry revealed to PTI that the 'project cost was much higher than the established cost structure.' The problem is that when there are 'no cost norms for flyovers, ring roads etc.', then there is room for manipulating the cost of the project. The issues flagged by CAG cannot be wished away. Let us not forget that the Prime Minister who calls himself a 'Pradhan Sevak' (Prime Servant) had in 2014 said, 'NA KHAUNGA, NA KHANE DUNGA'. Now the ball is in the court of the government and it is for the Ministry to submit their comments on the issue to CAG as and when they come up for discussion in the Public Accounts Committee.

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Unfortunate events leading to bifurcation of Hima Shillong into Hima Mylliem and Khyrim in 1853

By Basan Nongkseh

Hima Mylliem
Before the advent of the British East India Company, the Hima Shillong was one of the largest and the most important Hima (Syiemship) in the entire North Eastern part of India extending from Umngot River in the South to Brahmaputra River in the North. The Hima Jaintia (Jaintia kingdom) and River Kupli formed the Eastern boundary while the Umnew (Digrua) River formed the natural boundary with the Hima Nongkhlaw in the West (Barth). The Syiem (Chief) of Hima Shillong was also known as Bar Manik of Assam-Shillong owing to his rule over a large Raid Ri-Thor (a plain Community) lying in Lower Assam valley along the Southern bank of the Jima-muptra River, known as Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah). A massive monolith was erected by past Syiem of Hima Shillong at Nakuuchi (Nakuuchi village, Khrei, Kamrup (M) District, Assam) to commemorate the goodwill rapport with the Ahom Swargadeo (King). On 26th December, 2017, the Administrative Body of Nakuuchi Village handed over the plot of land to the Hima

Chiefs) of the Amri Karbi tribe, who are the indigenous inhabitants. Two years later, another age emissary visit was received by the Bar Phukan at Bharalumukh (Kamrup M. Assam) on the 17th April, 1786 (Barth, 1967 reprint). The Basan and Syiem Shillong travelled extensively by elephants all over Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah) to interact with the subjects and usually halted at the residence of the Racho Dumria (Chief of Desh Demoreah). A massive monolith was erected by past Syiem of Hima Shillong at Nakuuchi (Nakuuchi village, Khrei, Kamrup (M) District, Assam) to commemorate the goodwill rapport with the Ahom Swargadeo (King). On 26th December, 2017, the Administrative Body of Nakuuchi Village handed over the plot of land to the Hima

1830. Bar Manik, the aged and simpleminded Syiem (Chief) without informing the Darbar (Council) hurriedly left to Nongkhlaw, accompanied by only his nephews U Kan and U Joy Syiem. But on the way he was arrested along with his nephews. In order to secure release, he was required to sign a declaration relinquishing all claims of Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah) and abdicate in favour of Shan Sing Syiem. Unfortunately while in custody, young Joy Syiem died and the aged Bar Manik Syiem devastated by the cruel incident decided to lose all the will to fight (Barth, 1967). However, the Baktrax(s) of Hima Shillong retreated against the forced relinquishments and refused to accept Shan Sing Syiem as the Syiem of Hima Shillong.

1853 (Giri, 2012). The Basan Nongkseh and the Basan Mylliem had decided to remain with the Hima Mylliem but continue to be an integral part of the Hima Khyrim in religious traditions associated with the Syiem Hima Shillong. The Lyngdoh Mylliem went to the Hima Mylliem while Lyngdoh Nongri and Lyngdoh Nongkrem remained in the Hima Khyrim. But owing to the past complication on Nongkseh, the Lyngdoh Nongkrem was not allowed to partake of traditional sacrifices. To this day, a wooden pillar (Rishat Sawkher) is kept at the foot of the Ing Sad at Smit, East Khasi Hills in honour of the four Sawkheri/Basan, the Founders of the Hima Shillong. After the bifurcation of the Hima Shillong, Shan Sing Syiem the successor of Bar Manik Syiem had demanded for the restoration of Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah) wherein Captain F.G. Lister and Captain Jenkins had agreed to it but due to the objection raised by A. Hogle, the Collector of Kamrup District the matter was kept in abeyance. Although Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then officiating Governor General of India had declined to accept the proposal, he expressed his willingness to approve the arrangement provided that it would not jeopardise the interests and convenience of the occupants (Barth).



A Monolith at Nakuuchi (Nakuuchi village, Khrei, Kamrup (M) District, Assam)

Mylliem for development of the surrounding areas around the monolith. When the colonial British took administrative control of Assam, they gradually collected revenues from Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah) as well. Fully aware that it was under the Hima Shillong, immediately on getting information, Bar Manik Syiem along with the Basan Nongkseh went down to Raid Dumria (Desh Demoreah) on March 1828 to seize the illegal revenues collected. A year later, in 1829 the British began to claim the Lyngdoh of Mylliem and Lyngdoh Nongkrem and it was only through the timely intervention of the Basan Nongkseh that the royal lineage of the Syiem Shillong was kept safe. Shortly after the burning of the Ing Sad, the Basan Swer and Hima Syiem proposed to proclaim themselves as the new rulers of the Hima Shillong at a Darbar held at Sadev (Sadev village, East Khasi Hills). While the fierced crowd shouted in support of the proposal, the Basan Nongkseh with his supporters stood up and thundered 'Why should we elect the Syiem-briens (people Syiem) when we have the Syiem-bis (Gods-Syiem) who is still alive'. With this revelation, the Darbar abruptly ended and the Basan Swer dejected by the disclosure defectived to Hima Sohra while the Basan Syiem moved to Shella and remained anonymous up to this day (Giri, 2012).

Gradually after the year 1833, the Hima Shillong began to slowly disintegrate and following a report by AJM Mills it was finally bifurcated into Hima Mylliem and Khyrim in

Ultimately, this led to a civil war known as Thang Ich Thang hung (hum the white-British, and the black) amidst the full rage of Anglo-Khasi war. The line of the Syiem Shillong at Nongkseh was razed to the ground by the Lyngdoh of Mylliem and Lyngdoh Nongkrem and it was only through the timely intervention of the Basan Nongkseh that the royal lineage of the Syiem Shillong was kept safe. Shortly after the burning of the Ing Sad, the Basan Swer and Hima Syiem proposed to proclaim themselves as the new rulers of the Hima Shillong at a Darbar held at Sadev (Sadev village, East Khasi Hills). While the fierced crowd shouted in support of the proposal, the Basan Nongkseh with his supporters stood up and thundered 'Why should we elect the Syiem-briens (people Syiem) when we have the Syiem-bis (Gods-Syiem) who is still alive'. With this revelation, the Darbar abruptly ended and the Basan Swer dejected by the disclosure defectived to Hima Sohra while the Basan Syiem moved to Shella and remained anonymous up to this day (Giri, 2012).

India alliance partners must show maturity in seat sharing Congress & AAP have joint responsibility in defeating

BJP in Delhi

By Sushil Kuttu

So, 'INDIA' is vacillating. Home Minister Amit Shah says Prime Minister Narendra Modi will get his wish, a majority and a third term. This, when all that INDIA has to do is prevent the BJP from voting for Modi. The Congress should get its leadership role in INDIA right. Rahul Gandhi must get real. Wanting to become a 'tapaw' is the worst that can happen to man. Even at age 53, Rahul Gandhi should sit down with every opposition leader he can collie and read them from the book. He should give them a quick summary of the UP's experience. The AAP should be made to fall in line or booted out. The BJP should be looking for an alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AAP

"The truth is, Arvind Kejriwal and AAP cannot defeat Narendra Modi and BJP alone. Neither can Rahul Gandhi and his party Congress."

conquer Arvind Kejriwal cannot prevent an alternative from emerging.

In fact, no opposition leader, however tall and muscular, should get the notion that he/she is bigger than the alliance INDIA. If the AAP wants to skip INDIA's Mumbai meeting, good luck to Kejriwal, but can do whatever the fanatics. But drum it into him that he is not indispensable. The Congress party's AKA Lamba might have riled Kejriwal with his statement that the Congress would contest all 7 seats Delhi Lok Sabha seats.

But AKA Lamba is not the last word in the Congress. The 26-party INDIA will not be INDIA with 25 parties? This is the only time in nearly 10 years that the Modi-led BJP looks vulnerable and almost committed to commit har-ari. At this time for INDIA to develop cracks is like snatching bread from the jaws of victory. The AAP is the only discordant note in INDIA, which is actually like giving Kejriwal the right to dismantle INDIA, why? If AAP thinks it is the only discordant note in INDIA, let it go and prove itself right.

The INDIA alliance's Mumbai meeting likely to be held on August 31-September 1, has to happen in spite and despite of AAP. Chief AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar's rant that being in INDIA requires the Congress to not contest all the 7 Delhi seats is unsustainable. Her 'top leadership' can take a walk. Who knows,

Some people may detect a stink when it comes to the above schemes and missions but I think the biggest stink bomb should be the promise of a \$ 10 billion economy. In this regard, let me raise a hypothetical question: What will a \$ 10 billion economy for a population of 30 lakhs mean for an ordinary Meghalayan? The answer is that this ordinary Meghalayan will have a per capita income pie of Rs.2,77,000 approximately. This seems great but let us have a reality check. According to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, Meghalaya's per capita income presently stands at Rs.98,572. The question is, will Meghalaya be able to raise its per capita income by almost 3 times which will require a rate of growth of more than 30% per annum in the next 6 years? Highly unlikely because according to the above Ministry's statistics, the average rate of growth of our state's Gross State Domestic Product stands at 7.76% in the last 9 years also ranking it at 32nd place among 33 states and UTs.

Another important point: This promise of a \$ 10 billion economy is proposed to be achieved without having a comprehensive, unified Economic Policy which means that we don't have a plan or vision. This resembles a scenario when blind men try to follow other blind men by themselves are stumbling in a dark alley which leads nowhere.

Under the above circumstances, it seems that the \$ 10 billion economy is a Janta or false dream being sold to make us somehow forget our present nightmare. It also seems that most of us believe in this Janta because only a few people are raising questions. By the time we wake up, if ever, elections will be at hand and for meagre amounts, we may again vote for the same street talking merchants of dreams.

Yours etc., Samuel Sweet, Shillong-2

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

Khasi women then and now

I would like to thank Kyrsoibor Pnyum for his write-up 'India's Independence: Khasi Women in the Political Discourse', and for sharing an extract of the memorandum, dt. June 24, 1947 signed by the collective of Khasi Women. The memorandum was so well articulated that it has left me in awe of these women's intelligence and far sightedness. Till date we are still a very strong matriarchal society, with women leading our lineage from our mothers. Of course there are some who will otherwise be if one will never exchange it for anything in the world. I hope I echo the sentiments of many of my Khasi-Jaintia brethren. Women then and more so today engage in trade and business, make good and profitable decisions to sustain and enhance their businesses. It must not be forgotten that women are also taking care of the children, every member in the family alongside handling household chores. At this juncture, I would like to bring to mind the demand of the Syujuk Ji Song Kynthei. I agree with some of the need to permit women to be part of the local Darbar. Shong Yes, customs and traditions have never laid women as part of such Darbars but we need to move along with the times and acknowledge the fact that women play an integral part not only at home but also at work. Some juggle home and work very well. Certainly, women do not want to surpass men but to have an equitable access to resources and power share.

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10 Billion Dollar Jumbia

Any average thinking person will smell a rat, when, not the moon, but heaven is promised to us with schemes and missions having fancy names like 'Eleva', 'Fokus', 'Lamp' and what have you which promise to create 5 lakh jobs or to develop 1000 entrepreneurship in Agriculture, etc. This surely is a gigantic con system of semantics and arithmetic.

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How the Victorians invented the 'staycation'



(LEFT) Victorians on holiday on a beach in Hastings, Sussex in 1898. (Dave Bagnall Collection); (RIGHT) A poster from the year 1900 advertising the seaside at Skegness. (Shawshots)

By Joan Passey

Holidays feel like an important tonic after such a tough year. While international travel is possible, it's not exactly easy, so many are choosing to stay closer to home, opting for a "staycation". This year holidaymakers are discovering the treasures of the UK's coast and the rugged beauty of its landscapes.

Domestic tourism as we know it began in the 19th century when the idea of the holiday was just becoming popularised. Expanding railways and changing work practices meant people had more leisure time to dedicate to travelling. International travel was becoming easier but wasn't accessible to all, so the Victorians chose to spend this newfound "free" time in the UK.

This gave way to the creation of hot new holiday destinations, mostly on the UK's coast. Great British seaside towns, from Bournemouth to Brighton, enticed people with promises of fun, sea and clean air — many of the things that continue to lure people today.

The great summer holiday as we know it was conceived by the Victorians. The 19th century saw the industrial revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism, where factories were thriving and work structures were more clearly and rigorously defined and delineated. This led to the emergence of administrative professions, like clerks, and an emerging middle class.

There was more structured working time, including shift work in factories and time off on

Sundays. As a result, working-class people had leisure time to use, and by the 1890s some skilled workers had half days on Saturdays, leading to the birth of the "weekend" — though this was not formalised until much later in the 20th century.

In 1871 the Bank Holidays Act was passed. This designated certain days as holidays on which banks closed, though, over the years, more businesses began observing these days of work. Before 1830, banks closed only on the 40 saints' days of the year, though by 1834 this was just four days, including Christmas day. From 1871, any day could be declared a bank holiday, not just saints' days.

These new leisure hours were used to explore the surrounding countryside and seaside as cities expanded at exponential rates. The working class took day trips and the wealthy stayed in hotels along the coast, many of which still stand today.

Travel was previously only accessible to the wealthy, but an expanding rail network meant that travel across Britain was easier, faster, cheaper and more accessible than ever before. The railway boom began in the 1840s, and by 1850, 6,000 miles of track had been laid and 18,000 by 1880. This meant that smaller towns were connected, as well as big cities.

The rise of mass print literature went hand in hand with the rise of the railway — British train station stalwart WH Smith was established to sell cheap books to train passengers, a brand new audience, as it was previously too bumpy to read

on a carriage or cart.

That a greater variety of people could access the margins of the country than ever before caused a lot of anxiety among the upper classes. Poet William Wordsworth famously protested the expansion of the rail into the Lake District, the site that inspired some of his most famous poems, as he thought its beauty would be tainted and that the poor did not have the capacity to appreciate its sublimity.

There was also anxiety that the railway and encroaching tourists would spoil seemingly untouched regions. Protesters in Cornwall thought tourism would dilute the country's particular identity, language, history and culture. This is not dissimilar to anxieties about tourists buying holiday homes in Wales and Cornwall today.

An emerging tourist industry meant emerging tourist boards eager to promote UK travel over increasingly accessible foreign travel. By 1870, the Great Eastern Railway was publishing advertisements for "A Day at the Seaside".

Places in the UK were sold as being somewhat exotic or foreign — Cornwall was called "the Cornish Riviera" and maps of Cornwall were flipped upside down and displayed next to maps of Italy to show their similarities.

As a result, sunny seaside resorts were developed by investors — Bournemouth, Brighton, Weston-super-Mare and Blackpool, to name a few. Their influence can still be seen in finely wrought piers, promenades and pavilions of these seaside towns, which have gained renewed popularity

during the COVID pandemic.

As seaside getaways became popular, many of the things we associate with the British summer holiday came to be, including deckchairs, ice-cream, donkey rides, Punch and Judy shows (violent puppet shows primarily aimed at children), rock (a hard sugar candy), and games arcades.

Ice-cream became very popular in the 19th century and was a welcome cool treat on summer beaches, as the Victorians developed icehouses (essentially deep wells) to store ice and keep it cool. Queen Victoria had her preferred clear ice imported from Massachusetts, USA. Many popular ice-cream flavours might feel unfamiliar to us today, such as cucumber ice-cream.

The tourism that emerged, however, wasn't always sunshine and deckchairs — one of the first Thomas Cook holiday packages in the 19th century was a railway journey to Bodmin Jail where passengers could look out of the window to witness hangings from the comfort of their own carriage.

While a day out to see hangings or a scoop of cucumber ice-cream may not be quite up modern holiday seekers' street, many of the things that the Victorians popularised remain a huge part of a British holiday today. So, while enjoying a stick of rock or a game on the pier, spare a thought for the pioneering Victorians who made some of the best bits of your much-needed holiday possible.

(The Conversation)

(The author is a Lecturer in Victorian Literature and Culture, University of Bristol)

Gulzar: The ageless & timeless 'master of words'

There are a number of stories about how Gulzar, who turned 89 on Friday, became one of Hindi cinema's most celebrated lyricists after being better known in his years as a struggler after Partition in Mumbai for his expertise in re-pairing cars mangled in crashes.

The one that seems most credible, however, has come from him. Despite his skill with car colours, Gulzar's first love was the written word and he was a regular at the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), which was then a creative hub of just about every Titan in Hindi and Urdu literature.

It was at PWA meetings that the undiscovered poet struck up a friendship with lyricist Shailendra, who introduced him to Hiral Roy, who, in turn, told him that he was wasting his time and talent at a car workshop.

Roy drafted Gulzar, till then known as Sampooran Singh Kalra, for his last film, *Bandini* (1963). It was for *Bandini* that he wrote the lyrics for his first song in Hindi cinema — *Mera Gara Rang Le Le* — pictured on Nutan and memorably sung by Lata Mangeshkar to the music of Sachin Dev Burman.

The film's star cast also included Ashok Kumar and another rookie, Dharmendra. The song was a hit and Gulzar was not: even 30.

This is of course how Gulzar would like to remember his entry into Hindi cinema. Apparently, it was not so straightforward.

Shailendra, the film's official lyricist, had a tiff with Burman, and he refused to write more songs, leaving Roy in the lurch. A desperate Roy

requested Shailendra to complete the assignment. Shailendra, instead, recommended Gulzar.

It is a recommendation that generation of cinema goers and top music directors, from Salil Chowdhury to Rahul Dev Burman to A.R. Rahman and Vishal Bhardwaj, would thank Shailendra for.

Born in a Sikh family on August 18, 1934 to Makhan Singh Kalra and Sujay Kaur, at Dina in Jhelum District (now in Pakistan), Gulzar got addicted to writing when he read the translations of the works of Rabindranath Tagore in school.

Following Partition, he had to stop his studies and come to Mumbai to join his elder brother. The two did not quite get along and Sampooran started painting cars to support himself in the big city.

After *Bandini*, Gulzar's path wasn't one of tinsel glory, although he was establishing his reputation for his "daringly defiant" Urdu poetry, but over the years, his oeuvre has ranged from the prayer song of Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Guddi* (*Hunka man ki shakti dena*) to the anthemic *Jai Ho* from *Slumdog Millionaire* and the lyrical *Kajra* re from *Banti Aur Babli*.

In between, his words have provided the soul to songs as different as the Amir Khusraw-inspired *Ay haurthe aashiqui* for Mani Ratnam's 2007 Hindi film *Guru* (music: A. R. Rahman) to the all-time hit song *Chaiyya Chaiyya*, from *Dil Se*. (another Ratnam-Rahman joint venture), based on the Sufi folk song *Thaiyya Thaiyya*, with lyrics by Bulleh Shah.

And imagine Vishal Bhardwaj's

three iconic films — *Omkar* (2006), *Kaminey* (2009) and *Ishqiya* (2010) — without Gulzar's lyrics, from *Beedi*, to *Dhan Te Naa* and *Dil To Bachcha Hai Ji*.

Gulzar may have got his break in Hindi cinema because of his way with the Urdu language, but his films as director have left behind an equally big mark.

They range from the Khwaja Ahmad Abbas-scripted *Achanak*, based on the Nanavati case that shook Mumbai's moral fibre in 1958, to *Aandhi* (Sanjeev Kumar and Suchita Sen), which was banned during the Emergency because it was too uncomfortably close to Indira Gandhi's life, to the Shabana Azmi-Naseeruddin Shah-starrer *Libaas*, whose portrayal of an extraordinary relationship was considered too daring for Indian audiences — it has been censored only twice in India, both times at the International Film Festival of India (1992 and 2014).

Gulzar started with Sachin Dev Burman and it was the music legend's son, R.D. Burman, who composed the music for almost all the movies directed by him in the 1970s and 1980s (*Parichay*, *Khushboo*, *Aandhi*, *Angoor*, *Ijaazat* and *Libaas*).

Many of the hit songs of these films were sung by Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle. And these include *Musafir hoon yaron* (*Parichay*), *Tere hain zindagi se kai* (*Aandhi*), and *Mera kuchh samaan* (*Ijaazat*).

A multi-faceted, evergreen force in Hindi cinema, and in Urdu poetry, Gulzar can never grow out of fashion — or become irrelevant. (ANS)



The dark side of social media influencers



Counterfeiting has become a global economic crime with far-reaching consequences, and a new study by the University of Portsmouth reveals how social media influencers are facilitating this illicit trade.

This study published in the *Deviant Behaviour Journal*, marks the first estimate of its kind and highlights the significant impact these influencers have on counterfeit demand. Researchers found that counterfeiters are leveraging the popularity and trust of social media influencers to promote their illegal wares, making it easier than ever for consumers to find and purchase counterfeit products.

The research, based on UK surveys of 2000 people, estimates 22 per cent of consumers aged 16-60 who are active on social media have purchased counterfeit goods endorsed by influencers.

Counterfeit goods pose a massive global threat, with an annual value of up to \$509 billion, comprising 2.5 per cent of global merchandise trade. This illegal activity results in significant economic losses for legitimate businesses through violated intellectual property rights and a surge in counterfeit factories with exploitative

working conditions. It also fuels criminal enterprises, compromises national security and supports terrorist groups. There are also thousands of deaths each year from counterfeit pharmaceuticals and risks posed by fake cosmetics, substandard food, toys, electrical goods and batteries. Addressing this complicated issue requires a deeper understanding of the forces driving the demand - which includes the use of social media influencers.

The study indicates that the success of the deviant social media influencers lies in exploiting certain consumer characteristics that make them susceptible to their charms. Key factors include high susceptibility to the influence of trusted digital others, low risk awareness, high risk appetite and a tendency to rationalise morally questionable purchases.

Professor Mark Burton, Director of the Centre for Cybercrime and Economic Crime at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Portsmouth, said: "Social commerce is the new frontier for deviant social media influencers as the new royalty. Consumers in this marketplace often rely on remote recommendations by third parties, and these influencers have increas-



ingly replaced the customers' own evaluations of purchasing risk."

The research also suggests that young consumers are most likely to fall prey to the persuasive tactics of these influencers. The findings show that young adults aged 16-33 years are three times as likely to purchase endorsed counterfeiters as older consumers aged 34-60 years. Males account for 70 per cent of all buyers, with their risk tolerance and susceptibility to influencers contributing to this high prevalence.

Dr David Shephard, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Portsmouth, said, "Counterfeit products injure and kill hun-

drreds of thousands of people across the world. The working conditions in the counterfeit factories are unsafe with subsistence level wages. Don't be fooled by social media influencers. We strongly urge everyone to check the products they endorse. Why are they promoting the products? Are they too cheap to be true? Where do they come from? Do you really want to be involved in an exploitative and deadly trade?"

While this research focused on the UK, its implications are far-reaching, considering the global nature of the counterfeit market and the interconnectedness of social media platforms. As counterfeiters find new ways to exploit digital marketing

techniques, there is an urgent need for industry players and authorities to collaborate and combat this growing threat.

The study also highlights the role of social media platforms and legitimate brands in either fostering or discouraging the counterfeit trade.

Researchers call for a more robust approach in policing the content and advertisements that feature on social media platforms, ensuring legitimate brands do not inadvertently contribute to the counterfeit market.

The fight against counterfeit goods is a multi-faceted challenge, requiring a systemic approach involving consumer education, stronger regulations,

and more stringent enforcement efforts. By addressing the root causes of consumer susceptibility and targeting deviant influencer marketing tactics, stakeholders can work together to curb the spread of counterfeit products and protect consumers from economic, social and personal harm.

Professor Burton says, "This study raises serious concerns about the impact of deviant influencer marketing on consumer behaviour, particularly among vulnerable demographics. It is crucial for brands, regulators and law enforcement agencies to take action and disrupt the activities of these illicit influencers and the networks that support them." (HANSI)fe

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Nambi

Sunday, AUGUST 20, 2023

'BirthDay Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn on your solar return chart and it is going to be a terrific year for you. Your work will be appreciated. Your expectations and hopes will get fulfilled. You will overcome hurdles and will be full of enthusiasm and energy. It is going to prove a great year for you. And you will have benefits in business and job. You will have the power to make even difficult tasks look simple. Your personality will develop. You will be able to resolve legal issues smoothly. You will enjoy a wonderful love life. Your relations with your parents and family members will be good. You will also go on a vacation with family. Job/business offers will keep coming. Students will get success in studies/exams.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) You will not postpone your work and will get it done. You will be in control of the situation and your colleagues will follow your orders. There will be a major responsibility on you if you cannot afford to get slack. You might have to make a lot of efforts in order to get your job done. Those trying to get admission into any course, school or college will get success. The results will be good. You will also take care of your health. You will prove to be a good leader and will help people to come out of their problems. You will have wonderful affairs with your life partner. You will remain committed to your work and business.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will feel mentally peaceful. Good news from outside of your will make you feel happy. There are also business deals also get very big contract on an order. You will also get these deals through your acquaintance. You will be in a mood to celebrate your success with your family. You will also do additional responsibilities. You will be able to help the needy people. You will be favourable and on your side. You will meet some of your old friends and they will make you very happy. Your partner will be pleased with your efforts. You will have lot of money in your hands and you will spend it wisely. There will be no shortage of luxury and material comforts in your life but you will be able to maintain a balance between you as per desires and income.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You will involve yourself in your work and business. You will remain motivated to complete your work and will move ahead getting over all the hurdles. You may find some improvement in any aspect of life. You will also develop interest in spiritualism and religious matters. This will give you a lot of mental peace. You may also get some big orders. You may receive additional responsibilities. You will be able to help the needy people. You will be favourable and on your side. You will meet some of your old friends and they will make you very happy. Your partner will be pleased with your efforts. You will have lot of money in your hands and you will spend it wisely. There will be no shortage of luxury and material comforts in your life but you will be able to maintain a balance between you as per desires and income.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You will have some money related problems. But if you get involved with the passage of time. You will make some important person who will help you a lot. This will also get the support and guidance of your seniors. Your enemies and opponents will not be able to harm you even after trying their level best. Guests will arrive at your home and this will make you happy. You will be busy in looking after them. Expenses will be more than your income but this will not take away your money. You will also get an increase in your work efficiency. Many will get involved with your partner (but you will take the things easy. They will not be able to take advantage of your good nature as you will remain watchful.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) You will have some good results. You will be pleased with the outcome. You will get cooperation on the domestic and work front. You will be able to produce actual results. You will also get the support and guidance of your seniors. Your enemies and opponents will not be able to harm you even after trying their level best. Guests will arrive at your home and this will make you happy. You will be busy in looking after them. Expenses will be more than your income but this will not take away your money. You will also get an increase in your work efficiency. Many will get involved with your partner (but you will take the things easy. They will not be able to take advantage of your good nature as you will remain watchful.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You cannot afford to keep postponing your work. You need to complete them on time. You also get cooperation on your work. You have some commitments that you had made to certain persons. It is important that you fulfill them

otherwise people will lose trust on you. Jupiter will give you lot of happiness. Some major responsibilities will be entrusted upon you which you will be afraid to take. Your emotions and behaviour will undergo a positive change. You will bring about an increase in your business. You will also go to some business related trip. You will be making lot of new contacts.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) You will have discussion with your family on some vital matter. There will be general consensus that it should be resolved peacefully in the satisfaction of all. You will continue to earn money. You will avoid useless discussions. It is important you keep your tone and anger in control. You will be able to make your enemies also to join your hands. They will also help you a lot when you need their support. You will also bring new techniques in your business. You will accept your goals. With these you will also try to bring your past back. There will be an increase in your respect and popularity and your good deeds. There will be also a situation of new thing happening. You will hear some good news related to your friend.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You will have lot of mental peace and happiness. You will attend a major function of some relative or friend. You will remain busy in your work and business. There is highly auspicious. You will have necessary gains. You will receive money from unexpected sources. You will do well in your business despite all the competition from your competitors. You will plan to buy a new house or commercial property. You will remain mentally agile and take to meditation, exercise and do regular walking. Your dream will be established at your workplace. You will come across as a lover of nature.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) The week will bring good fortune for you and you will be happy with your work. You will be involved in social work. Your name will come up in the office as well as home. You will have to work hard to earn money. Your expenses will also be on the higher side, do not trust strangers in financial matters. There is also a great possibility of your meeting old colleagues or friend of yours. You will have a great time. You will continue to enjoy happiness and satisfaction. You will also get lot of love and support from your parents. You will progress in work and personal relationships. You will fulfil your responsibilities well.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) The result of examination and tests will be your favour. The time is favourable. You will be in touch with old colleagues. You will also learn new things at your work. You will also make significant and committed to your work. You will also develop interest in spirituality. You will be working hard to earn extra money. Matters of family and friends will be your top priority. You will also make new investments in business and financial matters. You will also make new investments. The health of your partner may be a cause of worry but you will seek medical opinion. The obstacles in your life will be over gradually.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You will work from a position of strength. You will be a real partner in business. You will not take any extra load in your job and will work with lot of independence and creative approach. You will finish your projects ahead but there is nothing to worry about it will be very soon. You will have a very comfortable and satisfying phase. Your spouse and family members will remain with you. You will have no financial problems. You will also keep yourself busy in some creative work. you will be imaginative. You may face a very dear thing that you want but it will not bother you much. Your health will remain good and you will be mentally agile.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This is going to be a great week for you. You will earn a lot of money. Senior officials will be on your side and you will complete your pending work with ease. You will bring the situation at work under control. You will be busy in the office as well as home. Your better half will give you full support. Your hard work and efforts will prove fruitful. You will have no shortage of money. You will do all work with energy and dedication. You will get rid of your problems that you are facing for some time now. You will finish more on that which was about to complete. You will also plan to go on a trip with your family. You will also receive a pleasant news from somewhere. The misunderstanding that you are having with your siblings will come to an end.

Through The Lens



Everyone is a photographer these days, if Instagram is to be believed, and we enthusiastically encourage that.

The art of taking pictures is to preserve memories. All it takes to capture moments in time and preserve memories is a single camera flash, a slight shutter sound, and everyone grinning.

The world comes together to recognise and celebrate World Photography Day on August 19 every year.

'Understanding Clouds' serves as the topic for 2023. Where should you go? Rest assured that we will have your back. As present the top 5 locations in the nation from which you may take the most breathtaking cloud photographs, grab your camera and reach for the skies (quite literally).

KODAIKANAL, TAMIL NADU

Located in the Palani Hills in Dindigul district, Kodikanal in Tamil Nadu is one of the most beautiful attractions of the Western Ghats. Make Dolphin's Nose a must-visit destination as this attraction will give you gorgeous panoramic views of plunging hills and foggy skies. Try the Mair point or Perumal peak for more dramatic captures of the town.

SRINAGAR, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Adorned with beautiful landscapes and heavy snow during the winters, Srinagar is just as pleasant and picturesque in August. With such a rich culture, the city becomes the ideal location to take pictures from.

Climb up the Shankaracharya hills and take pictures of the clouds against a stunning backdrop of Dal Lake and dense green vegetation. Or ride on a boat and take snapshots of the sky right before the sun rises. If you're not an early riser, go at dusk to capture the vibrant hues of the late-evening skies.

Book your stays through CRED escapes at discounted rates and narrate enchanting stories through your lens. Now that you have the list, pack your camera, and get going. After all, there are clouds calling your name. (HANSI)fe

COORG, KARNATAKA

Cradled in the southernmost part of the country, Coorg promises an unforgettable experience for nature lovers. Capture this quaint little town in all its glory of misty waterfalls, dewy grounds, imposing mountains, gushing waterfalls and cotton-candy skies. Check out Talacauvery, the origin points of Cauvery River in Brahmagiri hills for a spellbinding hilltop view. Carry your camera and make sure you don't miss out on the sunset from here.

LONAVALA, MAHARASHTRA

There is no denying that Lonavala makes a perfect weekend getaway, with its intriguing caves and picturesque roads. What not a lot of people know is that it also makes for a fantastic

"For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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Fall In Meghalaya's Living Standards

WHILE much has been said about India becoming the third global economic power by 2027, the growth has shown a sharp contrast among different states. NASA's Global Gridded Relative Deprivation Index (GRDI), a measure capturing poverty, health, education, stellite imagery, and more, exposes these stark regional differences. The poll-bundled states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Mizoram exhibit GRDI higher than the national average, indicating low standards of living. But amongst all these states Meghalaya has the highest GRDI at 79.8 which indicates severe deprivation despite the abundant natural resources. On the other hand, Chandigarh and Delhi measure a mere 19.1 and 31.9, respectively, thereby reflecting relatively higher living standards. The GRDI showcases poverty levels on a scale of 0 (least deprived) to 100 (most deprived) and is calculated based on Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), child dependency ratio, built area and nighttime light intensity. What is interesting about this data is the Nighttime Light (NTL) Intensity imagery which is unique among remote sensing data sources because it provides a uniquely 'human' view of the earth's surface. The presence of lighting at night across the globe indicates human activity late into the night.

GRDI isn't just numbers; it measures real lives, aspirations and challenges which makes it a unique database. In India, that needs attention is not just growth but inclusive growth that encompasses populations across states. GRDI is unique in that it uses a 10 years data from 2010 to 2020, thereby showing long-term trends in deprivation. GRDI is calculated on the basis of six components used to determine the degree of relative poverty in the final index Child Dependency Ratio: Quantifies the ratio of children (0-14 years) to the working-age populace (15-64 years). It measures the balance between young and working-age populations. A higher ratio indicates a younger, burgeoning population. Infant Mortality Rates: Represents fatalities in infants under a year per 1,000 live births within that year. Acts as a health barometer, where higher rates hint at pronounced deprivation and health challenges.

Subnational Human Development Index: Assesses overall human well-being through education, health, and living standards. A lower index points towards areas with increased challenges in human development. Built Area: Examines the ratio of developed to undeveloped areas, indicating urbanisation rates and infrastructure development. A lower ratio suggests a region may face challenges often associated with rural areas. VIIRS Night-time Lights Intensity: Uses night luminosity as a proxy for economic activity and development. Dimmer regions typically align with areas facing economic hardships. VIIRS Night-time Lights Slope: Observes changes in night-time luminosity over nearly a decade. A declining brightness can signify waning economic activity and increasing deprivation. Meghalaya needs to take this and other data seriously and focus on rural poverty which is growing exponentially.

Letters to the Editor

Is India too ambitious?

editor, The editorial "Third top economy" (51 August 18, 2023) made interesting reading. The Prime Minister may have hummed a 2nd song in a soft low voice, especially in a sentimental manner from the ramparts of Red Fort on the eve of the 75th Independence of India that the Indian economy is going to be number three by 2027. But there are different projections and opinions on whether India can become the third largest economy in the world by 2027, surpassing Japan and Germany. Some of the factors that may influence this outcome are: India's GDP growth rate, which is expected to rebound strongly after the pandemic and reach around 8-9% in 2023-24. India's demographic dividend, which means that it has a large and young population that can contribute to the workforce and consumption. India's reforms and investments in various sectors, such as technology, energy, infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, and education. India's foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, which have increased significantly in recent years and reflect the confidence of global investors in the Indian economy.

However, there are some challenges and uncertainties that may affect India's economic progress, such as: India's poverty and inequality, which means that many people still lack access to basic services and opportunities. India's environmental and social issues, such as climate change, pollution, health, education, gender, and human rights. India's geopolitical and security risks, such as border disputes, terrorism, cyber attacks, and regional conflicts. Therefore, it is not possible to say with certainty whether India can become the third largest economy in the world by 2027, but it is certainly a probability that depends on many factors.

Yours etc., VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Urgent Need for Regulating Parking Fees

Editor, I am again writing to draw attention to a growing concern that has plagued our city's parking facilities and threatens the convenience and safety of its residents and visitors. A recent experience has prompted me to address the issue of unregulated parking fees and the unscrupulous practices employed by unauthorized individuals in various parts of Shillong. Just last week, I found myself charged a staggering Rs. 80 for parking my vehicle in the area opposite the Synd Complex in Moulplan for a mere one hour and thirty minutes. What is most concerning is the lack of consistent rules and regulations governing parking fees in our city. It seems that virtually anyone, including individuals who may not have the best intentions, can assume the role of a fee collector without any oversight. What is even more alarming is the presence of individuals who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol acting as fee collectors. This not only compromises the safety of those visiting these parking areas but also contributes to a general sense of unease and mistrust among the public.

Whether the Pnar of Jantias are Khasi

By IIII Mohrmen

Of late debates on the identity of the Jantias vis a vis the Khasis has become a topic of hot debate on social media and inside it. That the two communities the Khasi and the Pnar are different communities within the grand Hlynaw Trep tribe, yet there is another view which thinks that Pnar, the War, the Bhoi, the Khyntam of belonging to the same tribe known as the Khasi. The word Jantia, is an exogenous name that generally pertains to the geographic area, but is also used to denote the different tribes like the Pnar and the War, which is a sub-tribe of the Hlynaw Trep. The Pnar live on the plateaus and those who live on the slopes along the border with Bangladesh call themselves War Jantia, which is also their preferred name. The Pnar and the War dialect belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family and it is the group to which the Khasi language also belongs. (Mohrmen IIII. Cultural History of Jantia in story stones and traditions). From the language point of view, the Pnar, the War, and the Khyntam speak the language which belongs to the same language group.

Jantias are sometimes referred to as Synting by outsiders, which could be the corruption of the word Jantia, synting, then Synting. It may be related to the word Sungta, the place from which the Jantia kings came. In due course of time, it was then changed to 'santing' and ultimately 'synting'. The origin of the word Synting could also be from Sungta or Synteng but the Pnar abhor the word Synting and they consider it to be derogatory. The term Jantia is also used when referring to all the tribes that live in the area which include the Khasi, the Pnar, the Bhoi, the War, the Khyntam, like the Bhoies, Hmar, and the Hadem of Saisama. The autochthon of Jantia hills preferred to call themselves 'Khasi Pnar' and those who live on the slopes as 'War Jantia'. The two names are endogenous names for the two groups of people. There are also two narrations about the origin of the word Pnar. The Pnar live on the plateau, a Miat Kyndiah thought that the origin of the word Pnar derives from the hyponymized term, 'Pyn-ar' which means both. This could reflect the

introduction to the Jantia Buranjis, said that the inhabitants of Kamrup area till recently still use the term Garo in speaking to their Khasi neighbours. The Assamese were not able to differentiate one tribe from another and hence used to even call their Khasi neighbours to the south as Garo. The non-Hlynaw Trep people who lived in the region till today are the Bhoie Bhoie which the Pnar call as Hadem. Whether the Garo chief mentioned in the Bhoie Bhoie which the Pnar call as Hadem: Whether the Garo chief mentioned in the Bhoie Bhoie is a Bhoie Bhoie is the question that needs to be dealt with? The first story about the beginning of the Jantia kingdom also mentioned the Hadem chief who sold the Pnar princess to the person who was from Jowai.

Sungta is known to be occupied by the Pnar and there is no evidence of Garo people living in this region. In the Jantia Buranjis the Jantia king was started by Brahmanical rules Jayanti Rai and since he does not have a male child to succeed him, hence Jayanti Devi succeeded her father. Jayanti Devi married Landabhar and was dispelled from the kingdom because of his misdeeds. Jayanti Devi later repented, she called Landabhar and prayed to her favorite deity to help her. The deity took Jayanti Devi to heaven and sent a fish to swim upstream till it was caught by Landabhar who forgot to cook the fish and only later realized that it was not an ordinary fish, but a human in disguise of a fish. She told him that she was sent by divine intervention to help him start a new dynasty.

The interesting point to note here is that the story of the kingdom is to unite and win over the tribal chieftains around and started a new tribal kingdom. The kingdom was known as Ka Jantia and it became so powerful that the territory of the kingdom extended to the plains. In all likelihood, the name was given to him by the plains people to the chieftain who conquered their territories. One of the kingdom's most powerful kings is known as Prabhat Rai, meaning the Lord of the hills and he was the only one to unite the entire hill area under his leadership but he also defeated some non-tribal kingdoms on the hills.

The Suingta regime was able to annex the Jantia kingdom to its fold and the kingdom became very powerful till through an act of treachery it was annexed to the British kingdom. The outcome of that was the disintegration of the kingdom with the hills portion keeping the name Jantia, Jantia, or Jantia. The Suingta regime was able to annex the Jantia kingdom to its fold and the kingdom became very powerful till through an act of treachery it was annexed to the British kingdom. The outcome of that was the disintegration of the kingdom with the hills portion keeping the name Jantia, Jantia, or Jantia.

It is my mention that even the term Khasi is an exogenous name that others, which means our immediate neighbours, gave us. In the Jantia Buranjis, the first chapter deals with the Genesis of the Jantias and it narrates a short story of how the Jantia came to be known as Khasi. This is also a story that tells about the birth of King Jantia. It says that since the days of Vudhibhri, Jayanti Pnar was ruled by a succession of Brahmin kings. The story has it that once when King Yudhibhri decided to perform the Rajashuya Yaga a royal sacrifice, King Indrasen refused to appear before him. An infuriated Bhoi shared

awareness and pushing for the necessary changes. Our city deserves an efficient and insurmountable parking system that caters to the needs of its citizens and visitors alike. Yours etc., R. Sarki, Via email

Communal Incident on Independence Day

Through my letter, I wish to bring to the notice of the concerned authorities and the public an incident which occurred on Independence Day. On what was a huge occasion for our country, many events were conducted throughout the city. One such event was organized by the 'Marwadi Association' near Keating Road. I along with my son wanted to attend the event to delve into the spirit of patriotism and celebrate the historic day. However, we had to happen about. The volunteers members of the Association used us entry, saying that the event has already started. However, we had reached there around 12 pm and the event was due to start at 12:30. We overheard a couple of volunteers talking amongst themselves that 'Khasis should strictly

not be given entry." Still, I requested the volunteers there to kindly allow us entry, but they replied in a rude manner and we had to leave the premises. Again, they spoke among themselves and what they were saying was communal. The two volunteers, here (according to the name on their badge) were Amit Chokhani and Shalini Chaudhary. The latter in particular was literally chucking us out. I am not sure if this was something that the management decided or the volunteers did on their own. I hope the heads of the Association would not happen as long as it is against the Khasis. Over 4000 arms with lakhs of ammunition were looted from police stations across the capital with the latter facing least resistance in the process. However, the state chief minister's attention remains the same every time he makes his visit, it is to fight away Kuki militants. Since the violence began, over a hundred have died with thousands displaced from their homes both in the hills and the valley. However, there has never been any tangible initiative in words or deeds coming from the Chief Minister. It clearly appears that he represents Meiteis and their interests alone, not

Is Central leadership part of the Manipur crisis?

By Haoginlen Chongloi

I begin this article by stating that the Centre must act hastily against the state authority and come up with a definite plan before the entire nation is convinced into believing that it is a state-sponsored terror against Kukis.

In the recently concluded Lok Sabha session, Union Home Minister Amit Shah told the House that his government is working closely with the Chief Minister of Manipur and that there is no intention of replacing the chief minister of the conflict-ridden state. Shah's statement indicates the level of trust and confidence the Centre has over N Biren Singh who presided over three months of ethnic violence between two communities, the Meiteis and the Kukis.

The statement came after the opposition parties attacked the Centre over its failure to control the situation in the state. However, Shah pointed fingers at the Opposition parties for politicizing the conflict for selfish gains. Nevertheless, the remarks made by the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah in accusing the opposition parties of investigating the violence, and his defence of N Biren Singh suggests that violence in Manipur may continue for some more time with Singh leading the state forces, ready to seize any opportunity to create mayhem in the pretext of flushing militancy in Kuki areas.

Meiteis who constitute the majority population of N Biren Singh as the only capable leader who can save the Meiteis, and therefore Shah's statement gives a new motivation to continue what it had just begun three months ago. On the other hand, the Kukis are shocked that the Union Home Minister's defence of N Biren Singh, the continuation of Biren Singh's leadership that the central leadership is not interested in solving the root-cause and it indicates the free-hand being given to him to carry out attacks in the name of neo-terrorism in the hills.

The Kukis, a Zo ethnic group, have accused the State Chief Minister of instigating and leading the violence from all fronts. They accuse the State Police of colluding with banned militant organizations in unleashing terror against them. For all these, the Kukis have opposed to be a part of the peace initiative, pressing for inclusion of N Biren Singh as a member of the peace committee. Now, when the Centre is adamant in not removing Biren Singh as chief minister, the Kuki-Zo groups possess something to offer as a condition for a ceasefire in the Centre-State relationship.

Mistrust over Singh's government are not unfounded. Numerous violations and accounts have surfaced as to how the state forces colluded with the Meitei extremists and mobs in burning down villages and killing of innocent Kukis. There are multiple instances of an all-out war being declared on Kukis by individuals and groups which should attract suo moto cognizance accordingly. But this would not happen as long as it is against the Kuki. Over 4000 arms with lakhs of ammunition were looted from police stations across the capital with the latter facing least resistance in the process. However, the state chief minister's attention remains the same every time he makes his visit, it is to fight away Kuki militants. Since the violence began, over a hundred have died with thousands displaced from their homes both in the hills and the valley. However, there has never been any tangible initiative in words or deeds coming from the Chief Minister. It clearly appears that he represents Meiteis and their interests alone, not

the collective leadership as a State Chief Minister should. In fact, he has been in the forefront of all hate campaigns against the Kukis since the past many years. He is the habit of labeling Kukis as foreigners, immigrants and terrorists. After understanding the entire ordeal and witnessing the total failure of the state machinery, the Centre is still reluctant to replace Singh who has been accused of being biased and involved in wrongdoings for the last three months. In a statement, the Union Home Minister does not simply rule out a change of guard but insists that Singh is 'cooperating' with them all this time. With this there are questions as to what relations will the Union Government share with the N Biren Singh government in Manipur for the last three months. The Kuki-Zo community has no doubt over the central leadership. They had believed of the complex situation to be the sole reason behind why the central leadership does not simply rule out a change of guard but insists that Singh is 'cooperating' with them all this time. The Union Home Minister's statement, the Kukis are deeply shaken. The Manipur Tribune Forum (MTFF), indigenous tribal forums like Lok (ITLF) and its ten Kuki legislators have expressed their disappointment over the Union Home Minister's remarks. In the event of conflict, deaths and destruction, the Home Minister shares a similar tone with the State Chief Minister. Taking into consideration the Chanakya principle of achieving objectives at any cost employed by Shah at several instances, the hold that Amit Prakash Anubekkar, President of Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) made this bold claim that it was the Centre which raked up the reservation issue for the Meiteis so that the Kuki areas rich in mineral deposits can be easily passed on to Adivi once they are in the hands of the Meiteis. Taking into consideration the Chanakya principle of achieving objectives at any cost employed by Shah at several instances, the hold that Amit Prakash Anubekkar cannot be denied altogether. If proven true, the violence can be something more than an ethnic conflict, where the aggressors are uniformed that they fight for a multi-million dollar corporation. While it is presumptuous to implicate the central leadership for having paved the way for Adivi and its corporations without any solid evidence, the statement of the Union Home Minister and the Centre's reluctance to remove N Biren Singh, its hesitancy to impose President rule, its adamant to act harshly against the culprits behind the crisis; its shared narratives with the Meiteis, and more importantly, his comment against the Kukis as investigators of the crisis has engaged every critical mind to ponder over the crisis more holistically. The statement suggests and establishes to a certain degree that it condones what the Biren Singh government with all its state apparatus has unleashed against the Kuki people for the last 100 days. It's time to question up to what degree the central leadership is willing to witness the Manipur violence and with what motives has the Centre allowed Biren Singh to continue to preside over the state-sponsored terror against minority Kukis.

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

"Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall."
— William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

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New CWC, old faces

AFTER a long pause, a decisive action to revamp the Grand Old Party's top leadership has been taken. The new line-up of the re-constituted Congress Working Committee however fails to impress. However, the party deserves praise for the inclusion of Shashi Tharoor and Sachin Pilot and some others for different reasons. Tharoor brings to the CWC a breath of fresh air. As he stood against Mallikarjun Kharge in the party president polls and won considerable support, speculations were that he would be kept out of the CWC despite his image as a well-informed leader with a global outlook. Hopes are that leaders like Tharoor can think afresh and inject new energy to the party, though he cannot be said to be young. Relatively young leaders like Sachin Pilot, Gourav Gogoi, GA Mir and Kamalshwar Patel too have been included, but there has been no significant overhaul of the CWC. The old order prevails for most part and the few new faces cannot majorly influence the decisions of the party. Overall, the Congress fails to change with the times. Its old format has been its problem set against the renewal of the BJP through a set of new leaders and ejection of the old guard in one go — they having been dumped in the Marg Darshak Mandal immediately after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took charge.

As for the Congress party, it has retained veterans like AK Antony, though he has left Delhi and opted for a retired life and his son having shifted base to the BJP. So too with Manmohan Singh. A new minority representation has been that of Syed Nasser Hussein, as also GA Mir, while Ghulam Nabi Azad quit the Congress and formed his own party. Tariq Anwar is another minority face. A notable woman representation outside of the Nehrus is of Deepa Dasgupta, a former Union minister and the wife of a former Bengal PCC chief. The North-East is represented by Lalhanlamlaw and Gourav Gogoi, the first being a former CM of Mizoram and the latter being deputy leader of the party in Lok Sabha and son of a former Assam chief minister. Put together, the new CWC has a heavier input of dynasts. Curiously, some 41 leaders have been drafted as Invitees to the CWC — permanent or special — if only to accommodate segments of pressure groups from various states. The CWC as the top policy formation panel of the Congress party takes all the decisions while the AICC meets less often and takes the backseat. Its composition is important. Overall, the Congress failed to give itself a spruced up look that's younger and smarter. This when the parliament polls are just a few months away.

Letters to the Editor

How low will Meghalaya sink?

Editor,
I wonder how many wined, clogged their tongues in horror or shock or shook their heads in emotional pain when reading the shameful low Meghalaya has attained in "Living standards in 'M' State" (ST August 23, 2023). The headline was so aptly printed in red symbolising for me the tears of blood of the people who are suffering! The state lows only seem to be increasing and the subterfuge our political leaders employ to distract us from the public from ground truths has scored wonderfully! I say this because I do not hear the angry voices and dissent from the public!
Now let me anticipate the letter to the editor by Samuel Sweet, "10 billion dollar Jhumla" (ST August 19, 2023) to get a deeper clarity and perspective on fantasy and truth! I couldn't find my brain around the economics of a 10 billion dollar economy promised by the CM. His letter educated me so precisely. I had no idea what Jhumla meant, but now I see the weight of its meaning.
And then on the same Sunday page 1 read the "Jhumla" that our state ministers are "low on education." No wonder the English TV serial, "Yes Minister" plays

out in our state so surreptitiously!
In closing a faux pas song during my childhood sung by the Kingston Trio comes to mind. It's "Tom Dooley" (hang down your head, Tom Dooley) when reading about our elected and failed leaders in high offices.
Yours etc.,
Kevin Phillips
Shillong - 19

Why the delay in announcement of B.Ed Result by NEHU?

Editor,
The editorial "Fall in Meghalaya's living standard" (ST August 21, 2023) made interesting reading. NASSA's Global Gridded Relative Deprivation Index (GRDI) uses a Statistical method called Principal Component Analysis (PCA) that combines six indicators of deprivation into a single index value. This statistical method says that India is a country with high levels of deprivation and inequality with a Global Gridded Relative Deprivation Index (GRDI) value of 64.4. This means that India has high levels of child dependency, low income, low life expectancy, low education, low nighttime lights, and low vegetation health compared to other regions in the world. India also has large regional disparities in deprivation levels with some states having GRDI values above 70 and others below 40. The GRDI reveals the spatial patterns and variations of poverty across India. It also helps to identify factors such as economic

Manipur conflict: Can we rise above ethnic affiliations?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The gathering organized by The Shillong Times to commemorate their 78th foundation year on August 12, 2023 was illuminated by the presence of Vrinda Grover, an eminent Supreme Court lawyer and Member of the Ukraine Commission of Inquiry. Listening to her talk about the legal landscape and the challenges that the Indian Constitution is facing has been very enlightening and highly inspiring. Of great importance to people from the North East, though, were her observations on Manipur. After all, the conflict in Manipur is something that is happening close to home, and how the country reacts to Manipur serves as a template for how they will react to such events in other parts of the region, including Meghalaya. Of particular interest was her observation of a clear divide based on ethnic affiliation among the human rights activists after the conflict began. Indeed, the interview of Meitei human rights activist Babloo Lonobhang by Karan Thapar was a very good example of that divide.

Many who watched the interview might have gained the impression that Babloo Lonobhang was attempting to bridge the divide between the Meitei and the Kuki-Zomi by commending fairness and impartiality. However, there were moments during the interview that indicated otherwise. One such occasion was when Karan Thapar inquired about the Kuki-Zomi's demand to prevent the Manipur police, who were reported to have taken a biased stance in the conflict, from entering the hills. Babloo responded by pointing out that the Manipur police comprised not only Meiteis but also other communities. This, in my view, appeared to push the narrative in two directions: firstly, suggesting that if any partisan conduct occurred within the police force, it wasn't exclusive to the Meiteis; and secondly, implying that apart from the Kuki-Zomi, other ethnic groups within the state had issues with the Manipur police. In essence, Babloo seemed to imply that the Kuki-Zomi demand lacked validity. It is as if only when Karan Thapar persisted in proposing a quid pro quo — suggesting that the Assam Rifles were to be withdrawn from the hills — did Babloo agree to the idea. Babloo's sympathetic inclination towards his ethnic community was further revealed on another occasion when he was questioned about the role of Meira Paibi in the ongoing

conflict. While acknowledging the Meitei's role as a perpetrator, he also emphasized their significance and accorded them greater importance than even the Army in safeguarding the society. However, the situation on the ground contradicts this perspective, as there is evidence that Meira Paibi not only assisted the rioters but have themselves faced accusations of engaging in violence and facilitating the violence. In fact, he also emphasized their significance and accorded them greater importance than even the Army in safeguarding the society. However, the situation on the ground contradicts this perspective, as there is evidence that Meira Paibi not only assisted the rioters but have themselves faced accusations of engaging in violence and facilitating the violence.

Then there's the statement towards the end where Babloo discussed the history of Manipur as perceived by the Meitei and the notion of abandoning it, whether one approves of it or not. In essence, the message conveyed was that Manipur's territorial integrity should and will remain uncompromised. Throughout this conversation, Babloo has been utilized as a weapon in two distinct ways: Firstly, there's the narrative portraying the Meitei as subjugators of the tribes, thus asserting their right to rule over them and their homeland; the hills indelicately. Secondly, Babloo indirectly alluded to this second aspect when he didn't entirely dismiss the idea of many Kuki-Zomi being recent migrants. He provided an example by mentioning the increase in Kuki-Zomi MLAs from eight to ten, which aligns with the number of Naga MLAs decreasing from twelve to ten. While this observation might appear simplistic, it raises questions about these two groups could possess an equal share of seats in a representative democracy, especially considering that the Nagas have roughly 10% more population than the Kuki-Zomi. This might be linked to the ethology of consentancy determination, ultimately a political decision made by those in power.

Returning to the topic of illegal immigration, despite Babloo's attempts to downplay this factor in the conflict, he never fully debunked the notion of a substantial number of Kuki-Zomis being undocumented immigrants. Even though their share in

the total population only increased during the period from 1951 to 2011 his response didn't definitively deny the idea. This isn't to deny that some level of migration likely occurred, but the question remains: has it reached a scale that threatens the demographic equilibrium of the state? The available data doesn't seem to validate such a claim. Regarding historical claims, whichever group makes them, be it the Kuki-Zomi, Meitei, or the Naga (who also assert unique histories) it all hinges on conventional and overt objectives behind projecting a particular narrative. Neither the Kuki-Zomi nor the Naga fully accept the claim that the Meitei had subjugated the hills, transforming it into their legitimate territory. When their lives are at stake, even if we were to assume that this were true, by that same logic, the entire subcontinent, including Jammu, should belong to the British since they once dominated the entire region. However, that notion belongs to the annals of history, has been abandoned, and the subcontinent is no longer under colonial rule; instead, the region now constitutes one nation-state, governed by India which is being governed by a Constitution.

As such, it's vital to remember that Manipur has consistently been a princely kingdom ruled over subjects to becoming a democratic state governed by the Constitution of India. The citizens of Manipur are entitled to live dignified lives free from fear and intimidation. When their lives are threatened, they have the right to demand the most appropriate arrangement to ensure safety from persecution and discrimination. The Kuki-Zomi are pursuing exactly this by advocating for a separate administration for equal citizens under a Constitution, rather than as subjects under a monarchy. The purported history of the Meitei and the Kuki-Zomi, however, is not the sole example. I have high expectations that Thounjam Brinda, who had taken a firm position against Binu Singh's alleged involvement in the narrative, will not shy away from the truth, does it not label him as a narco-terrorist?"

and complemented with other sources of information and analysis, was assessing Meghalaya's development needs or prospects. The reliability of the GRDI depends on the quality of the data sources used to calculate it, such as household surveys, census data, satellite imagery, and other indicators. Remember that the GRDI uses a statistical method called principal component analysis to combine different indicators into a single index value. This method has some limitations, such as being sensitive to outliers, assumptions about data distribution, and interpretation of results. The GRDI is not directly related to the reliability of the electric grid, which is a measure of how often and how well the power system delivers electricity to consumers. However, the GRDI may reflect some aspects of the access and quality of electricity services in different regions, as well as the potential for generating renewable energy sources into the grid. One should also keep in mind that the GRDI is a relative measure of poverty or well-being, but rather a relative and multi-dimensional indicator that may not capture all aspects of deprivation or inequality. The GRDI may also change over time due to changes in data availability, quality, or renewable energy potential.

The poverty ratio in India is 25.01 according to

Forest conservation Act, 2023, a curse for Meghalaya?

By Jerome K Diengdoh

On July 27, 2023, the Lower House passed the Forest Conservation Amendment Bill sans a shred of debate admissible to the opposition by the Modi-led government by cynically leveraging its brute majority. Subsequently, the same has been endorsed by the Upper House with the aid of a few opportunistic regional parties like JHD of Odisha and NSRF of Andhra Pradesh, to name a few. The President of India Draupadi Murmu has, obligingly signed the Bill to become an effective Act.

While recapitulating the historical context of forest land, it's well known that tribals vis-a-vis forest have been coexisting since time immemorial. The tribals consist of 7% of the national population who are inextricably homogenized with forest life. These are indigenous aboriginals like the Adivasis and the Hyakhtwrep of



of India. However, to have access to this mineral, the Corporation has had to procure consent of the District Council, local durbar etc. It was once reported that Khasi Hills Durbar Council was in the verge of endorsing UCL to mine Uranium but NGOs and the concerned

"The customary laws and cultural practices of tribals are closely knit with the virgin forests like the sacred groves of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. More often than not, the tribals linked to the forest milieu have had to counter various challenges and being on the verge of deprivations by forest legislations passed from time to time by those at the helm."

Khasi-Jaintia communities; the latter are per se the first dwellers of such stretch of landscapes. It's par for the course that tribals have had the right to forest land being the primordial dwellers thereof. The customary laws and cultural practices of tribals are closely knit with the virgin forests like the sacred groves of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. More often than not, the tribals linked to the forest milieu have had to counter various deprivations and being on the verge of deprivations by forest legislations passed from time to time by those at the helm. Nonetheless, to ameliorate such disabilities, the then government in its forest oriented policy in 1996 declared some forest areas as scheduled areas for the tribals to have self-governing powers, to avail natural resources of forest on the premise of it being self-dwellers for access. To add to the cake, in 1996 by way of The Scheduled Tribe & other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, the Government is to ensure the basic inalienable rights of the tribals whereby they can protect, regenerate, conserve, and scrupulously manage the community forest that is intrinsically dear to their heart of hearts!

Alas, the saffron government at the centre has slyly engineered this Act in collusion with the big corporates with a brach commercial mindset in order to leverage the rich forest natural reserves. The government has justified this Forest Act on account of so called climate change, whereby it can ensure better management of forest, improve productivity and usher seamless flow of ecosystem produce to their respective destinations; euphemistically, a term for minerals exploitation. Additionally, zoos, safaris and eco-tourism will be established therein. The knowledgeable friends of mine have visualized that in such Kafkaesque situations, corporates bigwigs like Ambani, Adani et al will be given spaces to have a free level playing field!

If we contextualize this

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

"Lost time is never found again."

— Benjamin Franklin

The Shillong Times

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Distress in china

CHINA, it is reported, has fallen on bad times. The economy is in "deep distress" and its successful model of growth for the past 40 years – after the economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s – is "broken," as per reports in the global media. Its much-slower growth in the past few years – 5.5 per cent year-on-year – has also been worsened by "unfavourable demographics and a widening divide with the US and its allies, jeopardizing foreign investment and growth," the reports say. China's total governmental debt climbed by a huge 300 per cent last year, up from the 200 per cent in 2012. China itself admits the growth model of the past decades has its "limits."

The well-being of a nation is measured primarily in relation to the state of its economy. If growth takes a hit, its impact would be felt across the spectrum and mass disenchantment with the governance system would be all too pronounced. While China maintained high growth rates since the turn of the century and more so after 2010, emerging as the strongest economy in Asia by outwitting Japan and also the second largest economy in the world in terms of GDP. The high growth rate for China was eventually trimmed by President Xi Jinping with a view to solidifying the economic growth. All was going well until the Covid-19 health crisis gripped the nation. Its economy, anchored in exports to world markets, was shattered. China is yet to regain its growth momentum.

Significantly, there is no social upheaval in China so far, other than by pro-democracy activists in largely westernised Hong Kong down east-south, or the militants in Xinjiang province in the western sector, where over a crore of Uyghurs or Muslims are reside. What keeps tempers low in China is the well-being on the economic front. If the economy fails to grow, matching with the aspirations of the people, the situation would be tailor-made for trouble. A similar fate awaits India too, where elections have the potential to unsettle governments. The Modi government's main strength so far has been that it managed the economy without much rupture. The ordinary people as such might have experienced only a trickle-down effect, while the rich got richer and the upper 20 per cent bracket provided a feel-good atmosphere to the economy by using their purchasing power. It must be admitted that India stood its ground despite the Covid-related hit it took. Still, with just eight months left for the next parliament polls, Prime Minister Modi will squarely have to face odds if the prices of essentials keep rising to unacceptable levels as is already the case with certain basic essential commodities. China's downward economic slide should serve as a lesson to all countries.

Letters to the Editor

Why is arbitrary parking & collection allowed?

Editor,
Volumes have been written about the traffic problems in Shillong city and many well intended citizens have given numerous suggestions to ease the situation. However, the situation seems to be getting from bad to worse day by day. Keeping aside the long term proposals of flyovers and plans of decongestion and decentralization of activities away from the city which will take its own sweet time, as an immediate measure, the government needs to free the city roads of unregulated on-street parking and restore back the old parking lots for parking purposes.
A new trend in Shillong these days is to pull a rope along any street of road at any junction and declare it as a private parking space or a taxi stand for some locality or the other. Shaky elements appearing out of nowhere demand parking fees from such stretches. All the concerned authorities seem to be looking the other way. It seems everybody has a claim over the road except the poor citizens. It was with a lot of effort and legal intervention

that unauthorized collections were stopped from toll gates collecting entry fee to Shillong and road side parking fee collection from various road stretches. The old trend seems to be back. Back to the days of shady characters demanding parking fees without any receipts and emergence of privately owned parking lots. It was surprising to find a new private parking lot at Lantimkhrah Police Point when the same land was requisitioned for acquisition for a parking lot way back in the 90s. It appears that the government has been abdicating its responsibility in favour of private players.
It is sad but it is true that development today goes against the very objective which was set in earlier decades by the government. The objective earlier was to free the roads of unregulated on-street parking and restore back the old parking lots for parking purposes.
A new trend in Shillong these days is to pull a rope along any street of road at any junction and declare it as a private parking space or a taxi stand for some locality or the other. Shaky elements appearing out of nowhere demand parking fees from such stretches. All the concerned authorities seem to be looking the other way. It seems everybody has a claim over the road except the poor citizens. It was with a lot of effort and legal intervention

Do festivals add to tourism vibrancy?

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Tourism in Meghalaya has come to a stage where the talk must now be of vibrancy and not just tourist inflows, scenic beauty, nature, etc. Due to revenge/vengeance tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic it is estimated that in the year 2023-24 there would be an inflow of 15 lakh tourists. This is around half of Meghalaya's population and as such is not small feat. What this also means is that vibrancy must be driven by sustainability. But how do festivals fit in the mix of things. Are festivals required to further increase tourist inflows? Has Paul Lyngdoh, Tourism Minister of Government of Meghalaya simply used tourism as a means to justify the holding of a series of festivals? Has the desire for fan-fare defeated the inherent nature and true goal of tourism? A feel-good factor is alright, but better if based on a strong platform with potency for sustainable livelihoods.

The starting point of tourism vibrancy is aesthetics and ambience. In Meghalaya, all tourism marketing campaigns have focussed on this aspect as the unique selling proposition (USP). But, if really delved upon in detail it is found that tourism vibrancy entails many other factors. It concerns a quantitative understanding of the economic sector rather than mere pictures, videos, commentaries, etc. The tourist always has a set of expectations from a destination. If the expectations are met by the destination, it leads to tourism vibrancy. Otherwise, it is vice versa. To delve on deeper, tourism vibrancy (also referred to by some scholars as 'tourism attractiveness') underlines the interaction between tourism supply and tourism demand. The supply includes what a destination has to offer and demand is what the tourist expects and requires. For Meghalaya, supply is natural resources, scenic beauty, pleasant climatic conditions, culture and recreation, adventure and wellness, infrastructure, safety and security, etc. Demands are tourist arrivals (domestic and foreign), number of overnight stays, average stay duration, tourist spending, service quality requirements, etc.

Globally, it is seen that destinations that do well are those that apply the construct of vibrancy. They understand the significance of interaction between tourism supply and demand. Tourism is a multi-faceted industry that involves a network of interrelated factors. While tourists may contribute to traffic, it's important not to place the blame on a single group, especially when traffic persists even without their presence. Addressing the topic of cooking Maggie noodles on the road side, it's important to recognize that tourism encompasses a wide spectrum of spending behaviours. While some tourists may spend less or certain items, their overall impact on the local economy can still be significant. Tourism is not solely defined by individual purchases but by the cumulative effect of visitors engaging with various services and attractions. As evident during the recent summer break, the high demand for hotel rooms and home stays were completely booked speaks to the allure of Shillong as a vibrant and attractive destination. This achievement is not limited to any specific group of tourists, but rather reflects a collective effort by all stakeholders in the tourism industry to enhance the city's appeal and infrastructure. In light of these points, it's

has the capacity to produce albums despite having wonderful lyrics/music. Their talents end up locally and the art-form can never be taken as a career. It is time to curtail on some of the festivals and instead invest the money in areas of performance. Coming to the theoretical aspect, it is true that festivals/events are a part of tourism. But, its propensity to impact upon livelihoods is limited in

terms of scale and time. It is on this basis that an amount is made for a limited focus on festivals. On the contrary, real and dedicated investment is required on the artistry performers. Meghalaya has to substitute the objective of attracting tourists with better service offerings, service quality, good infrastructure, improved connectivity, etc. 15 lakh tourists a year is more than enough for tourism to be sustained. Investment is required on the state GDP through proper planning. For this to be realised, money has to be invested in communities and rural areas by targeting and training of the stakeholders at the grassroots. This primarily entails enticing the tourists to have longer periods of stay through better services, more activities and benefits to the local community (employment, health, transportation, accommodation, transportation, trained personnel, etc). These are the loopholes that need attention for deriving the maximum benefits from tourism.

In the end, festivals do not add to tourism vibrancy. Again, festivals should be taken for what they are and nothing more – a means/medium to encourage and promote local arts and crafts. For long-term returns and sustainability, it is best to strategise investments into service offering quality. Will the Hon'ble Minister listen or shall it be as Roman Kapaandang, 'you say it best when you say nothing at all'. (The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin@nchu.ac.in)

important to remember that tourism is a multi-faceted industry that involves a network of interrelated factors. While tourists may contribute to traffic, it's important not to place the blame on a single group, especially when traffic persists even without their presence. Addressing the topic of cooking Maggie noodles on the road side, it's important to recognize that tourism encompasses a wide spectrum of spending behaviours. While some tourists may spend less or certain items, their overall impact on the local economy can still be significant. Tourism is not solely defined by individual purchases but by the cumulative effect of visitors engaging with various services and attractions. As evident during the recent summer break, the high demand for hotel rooms and home stays were completely booked speaks to the allure of Shillong as a vibrant and attractive destination. This achievement is not limited to any specific group of tourists, but rather reflects a collective effort by all stakeholders in the tourism industry to enhance the city's appeal and infrastructure. In light of these points, it's

Enact stringent laws against ragging

Editor,
The prevalence of ragging in education institutions has increased rapidly, sometimes to the point where the victims are driven to suicide. Ragging, literally means to torture someone in a planned manner. It is a sort of a ripple effect over the sensitivity of the case. The CM of Manipur condemned the heinous acts of the miscreants. The police also swung into action to arrest all those miscreants whose faces were recognizable. By July 22, 2023, five miscreants including the prime accused were identified and arrested by the Manipur Police. A social media byte circulating on the internet allegedly of an interview of the prime

accused's mother, saw her hitting at the fact that her son performed the heinous act for the love of the State. Reports also circulated that the unruly mobs were triggered by the fake news of rape of Meitei nursing students by Kuki-Zo community in Charachandpur. The CM's attempt at resignation also failed. Maybe, to propagate the myth, there has been shifting of narratives from Kuki illegal immigrants to poppy planters to Kuki mafiosos. The Kuki-Zo community on the other hand have adamantly stood by their demand that since there is palpable fear and danger to their culture and lives, the only immediate reasonable solution is separate administration. With more than 142 recorded deaths and 200 plus Churches belonging to the Kuki-Zo communities being razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023, the claim of existential crisis supplicated by them to the Central Government is not without merit. On the other hand, the Meitei counter claimed that they had also suffered losses of lives, properties and places of worship. They even claimed that more than 100 Churches belonging to Meitei Christians were razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023. Towards the end of the interview he narrated that he was a Kargil war veteran who defended the nation against external aggression but he could not defend the modesty and dignity of his wife. In an interview with the Wire, hosted by Karan Thapar, two women survivors belonging to the Kuki-Zo community narrated their horrific ordeal with utmost grace and grit. They described how they were separated with their husbands and suffered at the hands of the unruly mob on May 04, 2023. Towards the end of the interview he narrated that he was a Kargil war veteran who defended the nation against external aggression but he could not defend the modesty and dignity of his wife. In an interview with the Wire, hosted by Karan Thapar, two women survivors belonging to the Kuki-Zo community narrated their horrific ordeal with utmost grace and grit. They described how they were separated with their husbands and suffered at the hands of the unruly mob on May 04, 2023. Towards the end of the interview he narrated that he was a Kargil war veteran who defended the nation against external aggression but he could not defend the modesty and dignity of his wife.

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

Existential crisis in the state of Manipur

By Thangzakup Tombing

The ethnic clashes between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities have been continuing unabated for the last three months. By this time the State has witnessed many failed attempts to de-escalate the fire. The Meitei attempt to impose Article 355 had drastically failed; the CM's attempt at resignation also failed. Maybe, to propagate the myth, there has been shifting of narratives from Kuki illegal immigrants to poppy planters to Kuki mafiosos. The Kuki-Zo community on the other hand have adamantly stood by their demand that since there is palpable fear and danger to their culture and lives, the only immediate reasonable solution is separate administration. With more than 142 recorded deaths and 200 plus Churches belonging to the Kuki-Zo communities being razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023, the claim of existential crisis supplicated by them to the Central Government is not without merit. On the other hand, the Meitei counter claimed that they had also suffered losses of lives, properties and places of worship. They even claimed that more than 100 Churches belonging to Meitei Christians were razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023. Towards the end of the interview he narrated that he was a Kargil war veteran who defended the nation against external aggression but he could not defend the modesty and dignity of his wife.

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"It is alleged that both the warring ethnic communities believed and propagated their own sets of facts. The heightened polarization between the warring communities seems to be continuously stoked up by revelations of videos and images of brutalities and utmost disregard which were meted out against civilian lives and dignity."

is mired by confusion, propaganda, manipulations, and twisting and bending of facts.

It is alleged that both the warring ethnic communities believed and propagated their own sets of facts. The heightened polarization between the warring communities seems to be continuously stoked up by revelations of videos and images of brutalities and utmost disregard which were meted out against civilian lives and dignity. After the 25 seconds viral video of two naked Kuki-Zo women paraded by an unruly mob on May 4, 2023, it took the entire nation by storm. Since then, the opposition political party leaders in the Parliament have been demanding discussion on Manipur ethnic violence in the presence of the Prime Minister. The senseless weaponization of women's bodies as a tool of war had triggered relentless TV debates, protests across the nation and rallies and speeches organized by different NGOs, CSOs etc in condemnation of the same. Even the Chairpersons of the Women Commission, Delhi and the National Commission for Women, had to rush to Manipur to take stock of the gravity of the crime. In a sort of a ripple effect over the sensitivity of the case, the CM of Manipur condemned the heinous acts of the miscreants. The police also swung into action to arrest all those miscreants whose faces were recognizable. By July 22, 2023, five miscreants including the prime accused were identified and arrested by the Manipur Police. A social media byte circulating on the internet allegedly of an interview of the prime

accused's mother, saw her hitting at the fact that her son performed the heinous act for the love of the State. Reports also circulated that the unruly mobs were triggered by the fake news of rape of Meitei nursing students by Kuki-Zo community in Charachandpur. The CM's attempt at resignation also failed. Maybe, to propagate the myth, there has been shifting of narratives from Kuki illegal immigrants to poppy planters to Kuki mafiosos. The Kuki-Zo community on the other hand have adamantly stood by their demand that since there is palpable fear and danger to their culture and lives, the only immediate reasonable solution is separate administration. With more than 142 recorded deaths and 200 plus Churches belonging to the Kuki-Zo communities being razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023, the claim of existential crisis supplicated by them to the Central Government is not without merit. On the other hand, the Meitei counter claimed that they had also suffered losses of lives, properties and places of worship. They even claimed that more than 100 Churches belonging to Meitei Christians were razed to the ground in the Imphal valley in the ensuing nights of May 03, 04 and 05, 2023. Towards the end of the interview he narrated that he was a Kargil war veteran who defended the nation against external aggression but he could not defend the modesty and dignity of his wife.

"Every man has his own destiny: the only imperative is to follow it, to accept it, no matter where it leads him."

—Henry Miller

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 1001 No. 1 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 2023

Chandrayaan-3 Mission Accomplished

WEDNESDAY August 23 is a Red-Letter day for India. With the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 India became the fourth nation to land on the moon and the first to land on its South Pole. India's unassisted rocket scientist and Chairman Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), S. Somnath said that the success of this mission is the result of the work done by thousands of scientists, engineers, ISRO staff and industries and support teams across ISRO and other institutions. ISRO had launched Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft through its "Launch Vehicle Mark-III" on July 14. The launch happened from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in South India's Sriharikota island. As millions of Indians rejoiced over the success of this mission the wait now is for Pragyan to survey the local environment for one lunar day (around 14 Earth days) and carry out a variety of scientific experiments. These include using X-ray spectrometry to identify the elemental composition of the Moon's surface.

Chandrayaan-3 comes 14 years after India launched its first moon landing mission in 2008, which found evidence of water molecules in the lunar atmosphere. Although the lander-rover of Chandrayaan-2 crashed during touchdown, its orbiter is still in orbit and continuing its study of the moon. The Chandrayaan-2 orbiter was instrumental in locating the landing spot for the Chandrayaan-3 lander and will continue to assist in sending signals to Earth for communication with the lander. NASA administrator Bill Nelson also congratulated ISRO on the successful moon landing of Chandrayaan-3 through his post on Twitter stating, "We're glad to be your partner on this mission!" Chandrayaan means the moon vehicle in Sanskrit and Chandrayaan-3 aims to demonstrate safe landing and roving on the moon's surface and conduct on-site scientific experiments. The spacecraft, developed with a budget of less than \$75 million, comprises a propulsion module, lander and a rover that collectively carry seven scientific instruments. This time ISRO has paid great attention to overcome the problems faced by the previous lander. The Chandrayaan-3 mission includes improved sensors, software and propulsion systems. ISRO also carried out a number of simulations and additional testing to ensure a higher degree of ruggedness in the lander to achieve a successful landing. The lander will conduct experiments on seismic vibrations, near-surface plasma, lunar temperature, thermal conductivity, elemental composition, and spectral signatures of earth. Unlike the lander, the rover of the Chandrayaan-3 is identical to that of the Chandrayaan-2. Prime Minister Narendra Modi while speaking after the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 said India's approach of "one earth, one family, one future," resonates across the globe because India's moon mission is based on the same human-centric approach. Modi said this success belongs to all of humanity, and it will help moon missions by other countries in the future.

We must also protest the liberal use of the term "militant outfit" or "terrorist outfit" or "terrorist organization," etc. Is a group of 12 an outfit? ULFA and NSCN whose members number several hundred are outfits. Then why is a "football team" branded as an outfit? Is NSCN a terrorist group? Have its members carried out any terrorist activities? Some local media outlets even labelled the NSCN gang terrorists. Have they terrorised anyone? This is a clear case of exaggeration and the condemnation is insensitive. The name "National Liberation Council of Nongkyndang" (NLCN) reveals a lot. The last word "Nongkyndang" is to be taken note of. It means "rural villages" or simple "villages." So "National Liberation Council of Nongkyndang" (NLCN) is equal to "National Liberation Council of Villages." Why have the 12 decided on this nomenclature? And more importantly, what are the reasons for naming themselves so? Is there anything to be concerned about? The first obvious reason is that the members are from the villages. As per reports the members are from Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills. Both Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills are coal rich areas. In the era of rat hole

When the poor face the full force of the law

By Albert Thyrning

The arrest of the members of the "National Liberation Council of Nongkyndang" (NLCN) has turned into a sensation. Samples of headlines are "Meghalaya police busts new militant outfit", "Members of newly terrorist organization arrested", "Police bust nascent militant outfit". The NLCN was formed in the Eastern Range area (Khasi and Jaintia regions). The police have accused the arrested youths of planning to challenge the established government, engaging in unlawful activities and plotting terrorist acts. We have to watch and see whether the serious charges are true or not. The police have also made tall claims saying the 'new outfit' has established contact with Nagaland's NSCN. The first batch was to be dispatched on August 17, 2023 for armed terrorist training. As it turns out the 'chairman' is a juvenile - a class ten student! The total number of members could be 11 or 12 in all. Is a minor capable of establishing contact with the powerful NSCN? What resources do the dozen lack possess to send their cadres to Nagaland? The story lacks credibility.

transpiration has been going on unabated for more than five years now. How many have been arrested? Has any politician been arrested? Has any business person been put behind bars? A former home minister had to be sacked because of the rampant illegality? Has any responsibility been fixed? Is a section of the police too involved in facilitating illegal mining and transportation of coal? Do police personnel on duty not accept bribes to permit movement of trucks? Were/are not trucks of the 'high level' permitted to proceed freely by the men in uniform? Following court orders, illegal coke plants are being demolished. But what about the owners of these factories? Has the law caught up with them? Are they anywhere near any jail premises? Have criminal cases been registered against all of them? How did these illegal structures survive for so long? Did not the administration and the police know of their illegality? They were allowed to carry out their nefarious activities because they are high and mighty. Some are/were legislators or ministers. One owner of Departmental mines (GRD) has confirmed the fall in the

"The name 'National Liberation Council of Nongkyndang' (NLCN) reveals a lot. The last word 'Nongkyndang' is to be taken note of. It means 'rural villages' or simple 'villages.' So 'National Liberation Council of Nongkyndang' (NLCN) is equal to 'National Liberation Council of Villages.'"

development the reason for the NLCN to come into existence? Is the neglect of villages the reason for the NLCN to be formed? On reading my article the other day, a friend reminded me of one of my first letters to the editor way back in 2011 entitled, "Shillong is not Meghalaya". He recalled a portion, "Good roads are only seen in Shillong, good educational institutions are only in Shillong, good hospitals are only in Shillong - people see development in Shillong but not in Meghalaya." After more than a decade some progress has been made but the inequality is still very apparent. The road from Mawpliang to Mawkryvat has been as pathetic as ever, from Mawkryvat to Nongstoin is the same, the way to Nongthyllam from Mawkryvat is no better. The road to Mawak is a traveller's nightmare. I am informed that the road conditions in Jaintia Hills, particularly in War Jaintia are in miserable condition. The whole of West Khasi Hills and South West

state's living standards. Rural poverty is meagre. Rather than being dismissive about the findings the chief minister should do well to address real issues rather than be obsessed with the 10 billion dollar economy dream.

Criminal cases under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) have been registered against members of NLCN. If the NLCN members have done anything illegal they must face the music. But it is feared that the law is applied with full force mainly against the weak. The helpless often suffer from wrong implementation of the law. It was amply obvious in July this year when the police carried out the bizarre DC's order to shut all businesses by 10 pm. The vendors at Kyntialid, including mothers with babies, were seen defying the command. The poor faced the law while the rich retreated to the comfort of their homes by the deadline. The NLCN members might have broken the law. But what about the coal mafia? Illegal coal mining and

Move to bring CBI, ED under one supervision in PMO a blatant bid for abuse of power

Move to circumvent court debar against extension to Sanjay Mishra

By K Ravendran

The reported move by the Narendra Modi government to create a new post of Chief Investigation Officer of India (CIO) in the lines of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the National Security Adviser (NSA) is a blatant attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court as a collateral target and institutionalise the abuse of premier investigative agencies as the ruling party's, or to be more precise, the PMO's political tool as part of a nefarious design. According to reports, the chief of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) will report to the new officer, just as the three services chiefs do to the CDS and the two intelligence agencies to the NSA. The move has to be seen in the context of the Supreme Court coming down heavily



against what it considered as 'illegal' the extension of Sanjay Mishra's tenure as the chief of Enforcement Directorate despite a court direction disallowing such extension. The government had tried to take cover under an amendment to the law in 2021 that allowed the extension of the chiefs of CBI and ED for up to a maximum of five years, but the court said that the law cannot be used to nullify its verdict. The apex court, however, has allowed Mishra to continue till September 15 in view of the Modi government's plea that his continuance was required in the 'larger public and national interests'.

It has been widely seen that the Centre has been using the central agencies selectively to target political opponents both at the national level and in the states to level scores. So much so that the opposition parties had even approached the Supreme Court, seeking protection against arbitrary arrests of political leaders. While the court rejected the demand for a full-fledged third term for Mishra, who is considered to be the most pliant officer by the Modi government.

It has been pointed out that while under 60 percent of the political leaders investigated by CBI between 2004 and 2014 were from opposition parties, over 95 percent cases launched under the Modi government targeted opposition politicians. The same pattern is well aware of what has been going on in the country with regard to the misuse of central agencies. It is no rocket science to understand that the Financial

Union Ministry of Finance and the CBI under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. While technically the two would continue to be under the respective administrative machinery, the appointment of a common chief makes the agencies much more pliant to the wishes of the powers that be. The ostensible reason cited for the change is the risk of overlapping in the areas of investigation of the ED and the CBI. While the ED focuses mainly on financial fraud, including cases related to money laundering and FEMA violations, there is no dearth of cases where the CBI also takes up corruption and other economic offences. A common chief would help bring in a lot of synergy, but it is not difficult to see the consequences. There have been blatant misuse of the investigating agencies to crush political dissent and 'upend' the fundamental premises of a representative democracy. The agencies are also allegedly being used to facilitate horse trading so as to install pro-BJP dispensations in states. We are all too familiar with what happened in Maharashtra, Karnataka and other states, where the central agencies have been used as a political tool to change the situation in favour of the ruling party at the Centre. It has been pointed out that while under 60 percent of the political leaders investigated by CBI between 2004 and 2014 were from opposition parties, over 95 percent cases launched under the Modi government targeted opposition politicians. The same pattern is well aware of what has been going on in the country with regard to the misuse of central agencies. It is no rocket science to understand that the Financial

Letters to the Editor

Mischvious allegations based on untruth

Editor, This letter is intended to address you based on the information provided in a letter to the editor in your newspaper dated August 21, 2023 where my name was mentioned by the letter writer although I was not present at any such event and have no idea of the event mentioned. All the allegations are totally false and this is causing unnecessary harassment to me and my family. I hope that the mistake was not intentional. Hence please publish this clarification so as to correct the blunder while also making sure that such mistakes are not repeated in future. Yours etc., Shalini Choudhury, Via email

On dishonest Rapido Captains

Editor, Over the last few days I had come across news items on the objectionable deeds of the Rapido Captains that greatly disrespects their public services. We hear reports

of the Captains asking the two wheeler passengers to cancel the ride and then negotiate the offline price for the intended ride which is most often higher than what the Rapido App has to offer. Such an act is highly immoral and also unprofessional and illegal.

The Rapido customers that agree to such offers are to be equally blamed. They are well aware that the intention of the Captain is to avoid paying the Company its share of the commission from the earnings due from the ride and yet they comfortably agree to connive with the Captains, which is plainly a dishonest and a corrupt act.

Dishonesty in our society is so deeply ingrained that we tend to look the other way when such things happen, not realising that any form of dishonesty is cancerous to ourselves and to society. If Rapido is keen to continue its services for the public it must put any loopholes that may cause public inconvenience and having a uniform sign of identification of genuine Rapido Captains is one of the keys. While also appreciating the advent of job-based taxi aggregator in the Shillong market which is beneficial, it would be wiser on their

part if they foresee such unhealthy practices of the captains of the Rapidos, and take precautionary measures. Last but not the least I appeal to the general public who are using these services to not be party with the service providers in any of above mentioned acts of dishonesty so as to inculcate in the society a sense of honesty and accountability for future prosperity of one and all. Yours etc., D. Pynopre, Shillong-6

Supply of untreated water is a serious concern

Editor, The FKJGP has taken the right step by sending the water samples for testing. ("FKJGP sends water samples for test"), (ST), August 23, 2023. It's too much that SMB and PHED, have been supplying muddy water to the public. After the publication of the previous complaint letters in The Shillong Times some improvement was noticed for some days but later it relapsed. In all seriousness, the supply of "non-potable" or muddy water should be opposed tooth and nail. As citizens of

the 21st century, demanding bacteria free potable water is not a luxury, it's a fundamental right. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, the town's water supply must evolve from its current state of "muddy marvel" into something that truly reflects progress and what citizens should be assured of in this digital age. The standard of living of Meghalayans should not plunge any further. Yours etc., Saiti Gwailin, Shillong

Importance of harmony

Editor, I am writing in reference to the letter to the editor published on August 21, 2023, concerning the unfortunate communal incident on Independence Day. While the initial letter highlighted an alarming incident, I would like to shed further light on the importance of promoting inclusivity and equality during cultural and religious celebrations, particularly in light of the Ilanangum Jaintia. It has come to my attention that certain events hosted by the Marwadi association have raised concerns about

discriminatory practices based on caste and community. Specifically, the serving of Prasad during these events appears to be divided along caste lines, with some individuals being offered Prasad on an exclusive floor while others are relegated to the ground floor, regardless of their numbers. This kind of segregation contradicts the fundamental values of unity and harmony that our diverse society should uphold. Furthermore, the issue extends beyond just caste-based segregation. During Durga Puja festivities, an exclusive hall near Dibrangshala, Garhkhana, reportedly charges exorbitant prices for its offerings, many of which are only and unethically. Admittedly, religious seating arrangements have been noted, making it inconvenient for people to enjoy the festivities comfortably.

In a society striving for equality and inclusivity, such practices are deeply disheartening. Events that are meant to bring people together, foster unity, and celebrate our diverse culture should not become platforms for division or exclusivity. It is the responsibility of organizing committees to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, are treated with dignity and respect during these occasions.

I urge the concerned committees to take immediate action in addressing these issues. The essence of any celebration lies in the unity it promotes among people. Therefore, I encourage the Marwadi association and other organizing bodies to eliminate discriminatory practices and foster a sense of camaraderie that encompasses everyone. Additionally, steps should be taken to ensure that prices for items sold during festive occasions are reasonable and the quality of food meets acceptable standards. Adequate seating arrangements should also be a priority to enhance the overall experience for participants. In the spirit of our shared values and collective identity, let us work towards a society where all individuals are treated equally and cultural celebrations become true reflections of our unity in diversity. Yours etc., R. Sarki, Via email

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

"Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

— Hans Selye

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LV No. 45 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2023

TFR Meghalaya's biggest challenge

IT is unfortunate that Meghalaya should be in the news for its high total fertility rate (TFR). An official recently stated that about one lakh children are born every year. This is a phenomenon common to the rural areas of Meghalaya and the reasons are mainly teenage pregnancies. School drop-out is a common feature in rural Meghalaya. The reason is extreme poverty and hence the inability of parents to support their education. Such teenagers have to get into the workforce and support the family. Often the situation in most homes is so dire that girls are led to believe that if they marry they would have a better life apart from their maternal families and away from the other siblings. It is this idealism that prompts them to cohabit with the first man that approaches them. That cohabitation is equivalent to a marriage in Khasi society makes it easy for a couple to plunge into a relationship without knowing enough about one another and their ability to adjust to each other's temperament. More often than not, teenagers are hardly able to distinguish between love and fleeting infatuation. They quickly get into a relationship, experiment with sex and the girl becomes pregnant. After that, trouble begins to pile up. Rural Meghalaya also happens to live in ignorance about safe sex; condom use; birth spacing and every other aspect that is a burden on the woman. It is the woman who has to give birth and often it is one baby a year. There is no concept of planning for a family that a couple can afford. The belief drummed into the Khasi psyche that every child comes from God and must be accepted even that contraception is wrong or sinful has been internalised in most families. Religion reinforces those beliefs.

The Print, a leading online news portal did a story on this sordid aspect of Meghalaya which also reveals just how disempowered women are when they cannot decide what their family size should be. That every child born must also receive adequate nutrition and be able to go to school does not appear to be a concern of priority in most rural households. Churches and other faith institutions which are meant to show the way to a better more progressive lifestyle are stuck in medieval mindsets. Sex education which is core to understanding the implications of sexual behaviour is not communicated in a way that adolescents can relate to. Adult education centres that once functioned across rural Meghalaya have now wended up hence women are not exposed to awareness on the advantages of planning a family so that their own health and that of their children are taken care of. In such a situation it is not surprising that maternal and infant mortality are both high in Meghalaya. The Government needs to think of more innovative methods of disseminating information to teenagers on the importance of planning a family, of reproductive rights of the girl/woman and to incentivise couples that decide on birth spacing.

Letters to the Editor

China's economic downturn

The editorial 'Distress in China' (ST August 23, 2023 made interesting reading. The post-Covid economic rebound heralded by Beijing since 2023 seems to be false. If you put party politics first and the economy and the people second, this is bound to happen - economic slowdown. China was at an economic and political cliff-edge as dangerous as that confronting Deng Xiaoping when he took power and whose economic policy centred round, "It doesn't matter whether it is white or black, as long as it catches mice." A metaphor for his pragmatic approach to economic reforms in China, which emphasised the need for 'practical solutions' rather than 'ideology'. A Leninist Xi Jinping's doubling down on centralised economic authority, re-empowered the State-owned sector, interfered with the conduct of finetech and other entrepreneurs whose stellar success outshone the Chinese Communist Party, and fell back on the discredited policy of constructing his way out of nascent recession. The economy was already stagnating well before Covid hit. As well as all the other more Davos-friendly objectives of Xi's plan for economic globalisation, the (He) and Read

initiates core aims were to export China's excess capacity on concrete and steel, and to build debt traps wherever China felt the need of economic political and military influence. The stunning economic growth of the past 20 years made China to declare in 2022 that it has lifted nearly 800 million people out of poverty. But now the youth unemployment is rising so significantly that China has decided to stop releasing youth unemployment figures as the country's joblessness for the age group 16 to 24 years in urban areas reached 20 percent with an overall unemployment rate of 5.3 percent for that country last month. Then there is the warning of the Yuan and deflation woes. The US and western countries were struggling to bring down inflation but deflation in China means weaker trade, weaker sales, and a weaker outlook for its factories as the prices of goods fall as demand weakens. Last month imports fell by 12.4 percent and exports fell by 14.5 percent, as global demand for Chinese goods tumbled. Then there are troubles coming from the stock market exchange. Twenty five percent of China's GDP is on property and this is in the doldrums. As real-estate developers struggle in a slowing market, local governments are losing money on their land sales, leading to huge debts. This debt, in turn, puts more pressure on Chinese banks and

Education: An All-Encompassing Sector

By Ubahunlang Dkhar Tnar

Many have written and said enough about the NEP 2020 which is one of the core issues of the day across the country. There are various viewpoints and counterpoints that have their own legitimacy and flaws. Like all policies especially the ones that deal with overhauling of any systems it requires time to adapt to the changes, with numerous tweaks and improvements along the way. Those who have read or browsed through the 66 pages NEP 2020 document will know the humongous task that awaits if the NEP 2020 is to be implemented in both letter and spirit. There are no specified 'short-cuts' or 'fast-food' approaches in the document policy. Every sentence and paragraph in the document is loaded with directions and procedures accompanied by flowery language, easy to understand that grasps the reader's attention. To understand the NEP 2020 in its entirety, we have to read 'in-between-the-lines' to gather certain nuggets of the philosophy (educational, political and economic philosophy) of this document. The future of our state/country and society lies resolutely on how we implement this education policy, taking into account the diversity of the nation; from the local, regional to the national. We all know that education is one of the most important sectors. Many countries who are ahead now have adopted and spent more (6% of GDP) on the education sector. Education is also an asset (human resource, human capital) and it has multivariate impacts which range from the individual to societal, economic, ecology and so on. It is education that will define our individual and collective future. A state/country that neglects education and initiates 'half-baked' 'ill-conceived' approaches will reap havoc and chaos in the near future. The 21st century is a critical episode in human history.

NEP 2020: State Conundrum: To implement the NEP 2020, I believe is not only the prerogative of the VC of NEHU but also that of the State Government too, since education falls under the concurrent list. I am not an expert in constitutional law or jurisprudence to say who has the upper hand. But commonsense dictates a democratic system that if only the VC who represents the Centre agrees to the immediate implementation, it is only a 50% decision. We need the State Government too to fall in line. So far, the State Government has been

evasive. Nirmala Sitharam, the Union Finance Minister, categorically said that the "NEP 2020 is flexible and it is not imposed on States by the Centre. States can adopt the policy according to their requirements" (The Economic Times 17/8/23). Further, for a proper implementation of the Policy it requires all the stakeholders to agree and come together; the most important stakeholders are the teachers. Democracy should prevail not authoritarianism. At present we are in a conundrum. We only see the diplomatic silence of the State government, the unilateral move of VC and OSD of NEHU for immediate implementation, the unhelpful stance of the Principal's Council and the vocalization of the MCTA on the hurried implementation of the NEP which is related to higher education. This stalemate has created confusion among the students and parents. Again, those who voice their agreement were implementing the NEP now (2023) it would seem have not studied the 66 pages NEP 2020 document properly and comparing it with the ground realities. Further they have not provided valid justification. Those who are against the immediate implementation of NEP now (2023) it would seem have provided valid justification which can be attributed to certain ground realities (academic, infrastructural, linkage-cluster, rural-urban divide etc.).

It will be an anomaly if in the same state, the same under-graduate courses and policies running under the same University. We cannot deprive the students of the colleges in the rural areas, even if some of the urban based colleges are ready for NEP 2020. Are there any data on the assessment of the academic and infrastructural capacity of the colleges under different managements and funding in both urban and rural areas? Is a normal practice that we never invite people for a wedding, birthday, without first planning and preparing for seating arrangements, food items etc. It also seems that the term 'physical planning' (spatial planning) of the colleges, Pupil-Teacher ratio etc., has vanished from the vocabulary of this authority. As the VC at the end of week of August 2023, the first week of December 2023 all students will be appearing for the examinations. The Government as the state authority must take the ultimate decision and

handle this stalemate, bearing in mind that the NEP 2020 document page 41 has highlighted its responsibilities. The MCTA and the VC of NEHU have stated their stand on the NEP 2020. We must know that someday the VC of NEHU will go; the government will also change. Therefore will carry the burden of the NEP 2020, not implemented correctly. It is the students, parents, teachers and the institutions (colleges, schools) that will have to shoulder the burden. **Political Narrative:** Again, there is a false narrative that has perpetuated on social media that the teaching community (in this context the MCTA) are against NEP 2020. This is absolute falsehood. It seems that someone or interested parties are polarising this issue as a contestation of powers and authority. When it comes to education, the teachers (school, college) know better. They are the ones who are in the field of raising the students from diverse backgrounds with different capacities and capabilities. Teachers' expertise, knowledge, experiences have to be taken into account and considered. Teaching is a demanding profession; it is not only about giving content to the students. There are a host of duties, multiple committees, paper writing, paper setting, evaluation, security, research, college programmes: cultural, academic workshop, seminars, sports, college week, NAAC, NEP data accumulation, presentation, projects etc. Teaching is not a cakewalk in this present century. It is not only about Teaching but also about Learning (Unlearn) too.

Right now, there are unfounded fear-based narratives about the implementation of NEP 2020. It is not only about Teaching but also about Learning (Unlearn) too. Right now, there are unfounded fear-based narratives about the implementation of NEP 2020. It is not only about Teaching but also about Learning (Unlearn) too. Right now, there are unfounded fear-based narratives about the implementation of NEP 2020. It is not only about Teaching but also about Learning (Unlearn) too.

etc. This is not a valid comprehensive data-driven based argument and justification. The failure of our education system is systemic and encompasses government policies, institutions and society. We cannot conclude and justify anything without empirical evidence and by using anecdotal evidences. **Education (Academic and Vocational):** There is a difference between the term 'academic' and 'vocational' and also there is a clear-cut variation between the word skill (skilled) and education (educated). The present NEP 2020 has blended both of them in one single course - the Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP). The reason behind this is to cater to the demands of the economy for we need skilled manpower. The edicts are to expose the students to a holistic and multi-disciplinary aspects of education. In short, this is to give the students from our education system and in a common person, the FYUP is like a buffet where you can select any food item that you like and digest it at your own time and space, where at the end you only got a collective taste with no deep appreciation and experiences of a particular item. From a pedagogical and philosophical point of view there will be serious viewpoints and educated opinions about this system of education. Fifteen years down the line we will know what kind of citizens we will have and whether of them will be employable? Those who have taught the present semester system and students will be asked to be better. 2015 will work better, that the present semester system has harmed education (the true purpose of being educated). I also feel that the FYUP is converted into an annual system instead of the present semester system. The students will not comprehend better on the course subjects that they choose. Because learning and comprehension takes time. To conclude, our education system should also cater to both the local, regional and national needs (economy, ecology, society), therefore, in the NEP 2020 document, the policy framers also stressed on including the 'local context' while framing the syllabus/curriculum. Has our curriculum incorporated the 'local context'?

To those who are in a hurry to implement the NEP 2020 right away, have they thought and meditated properly about the true spirit, the function of education and the purpose of the right kind of relevant vocational education? In fact, this may help the government to build some infrastructure for students. One more critical question is - why is the Government so silent in this regard? Shouldn't the Education Department be sending notices to the teachers to stop planning for playing with students' lives and jeopardising their careers. According to MCTA, the decision to implement NEP was done without the consent of the academic council of the University. In that case, MCTA members have made the minutes of the meeting public. It could have also knocked on the doors of

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Perseverance and the Pass... What a wonderful feeling it was for each of us as we watched Chandrayan 3 land on the moon. Though, what made us tense was the memory of the crash landing that happened the last time. That we should all be proud of is that after that failure we didn't quit. We decided to do it all over again. That is perseverance! It means succeeding because you're determined to, not because you're entitled to. Achievers don't sit back and wait for success because they think the world 'owes' them. As God for direction, then go forward and refuse to quit. You must adopt the attitude of the man who said, "We are determined to win."



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

We'll fight them until hell freezes over, and if we have to, we'll fight them on ice." It also means, you recognize, life is not one long race, but many short ones in succession. Each task has its own challenges and each day its own events. You have to get out of bed next morning and run again, but it's never exactly the same race. It's said that Columbus faced incredible difficulties while sailing west. He encountered storms, experienced hunger, deprivation and extreme exhaustion. The crew of his three ships were near mutiny. But his account of the journey says the same thing over and over: "Today, we sailed on." And his perseverance paid off. Perseverance means you never quit. At a sales convention a manager said to his firm's sales force, "Did the Wright brothers ever quit?" "No!" they responded. "Did Charles Lindbergh ever quit?" "No!" they shouted. "Did Lance Armstrong ever quit?" "No!" they bellowed. "Did Thomas Edison ever quit?" There was a long, confused silence. Then a salesperson shouted, "Who in the hell is 'Thomas'?" Nobody ever heard of him." The sales manager snapped back, "Of course you haven't - that's because I quit!" I remember a verse I learned on my grandmother's knee, "Bob," she used to say quoting from the scriptures, "We will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Perseverance means you turn adversity into advancement. Just look back at every pitfall you've been through, every failure you've faced and you'll see it's all helped create a stronger, more resilient you. Adversity is a great opportunity to develop strength, so go ahead, build muscle today, don't cry and complain. Perseverance means striving not because you're tired, but because the task is done. Robert Strauss once said, "Success is like wrestling a 1000-pound gorilla. You don't quit when you are tired - you quit when the gorilla is tired." And finally, perseverance demands all that you have. It's more than just trying or working hard; it's binding your spirit emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually to an idea, purpose or task until it has been completed. As author Judy Wartzell Halliday said, "Success only becomes reality when we keep our commitments to them." Today, let's applaud our country or her perseverance...

But even as we pat ourselves on the back for our perseverance in landing a spacecraft on the moon, let us also use that same perseverance for something our country needs much, and that is to persevere to forget our past. We hoisted our national flag last week on Independence Day, but just imagine if the flag failed to hoist itself. "Why aren't you going up?" we ask, huffing and puffing to pull the rope that holds the flag, as the flag refuses to move! "Because I can't leave the ground, I have too much baggage, I'm stuck!" Now I'm going to move away from that rather grim picture I've painted for



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

we'll fight them until hell freezes over, and if we have to, we'll fight them on ice." It also means, you recognize, life is not one long race, but many short ones in succession. Each task has its own challenges and each day its own events. You have to get out of bed next morning and run again, but it's never exactly the same race. It's said that Columbus faced incredible difficulties while sailing west. He encountered storms, experienced hunger, deprivation and extreme exhaustion. The crew of his three ships were near mutiny. But his account of the journey says the same thing over and over: "Today, we sailed on." And his perseverance paid off. Perseverance means you never quit. At a sales convention a manager said to his firm's sales force, "Did the Wright brothers ever quit?" "No!" they responded. "Did Charles Lindbergh ever quit?" "No!" they shouted. "Did Lance Armstrong ever quit?" "No!" they bellowed. "Did Thomas Edison ever quit?" There was a long, confused silence. Then a salesperson shouted, "Who in the hell is 'Thomas'?" Nobody ever heard of him." The sales manager snapped back, "Of course you haven't - that's because I quit!" I remember a verse I learned on my grandmother's knee, "Bob," she used to say quoting from the scriptures, "We will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Perseverance means you turn adversity into advancement. Just look back at every pitfall you've been through, every failure you've faced and you'll see it's all helped create a stronger, more resilient you. Adversity is a great opportunity to develop strength, so go ahead, build muscle today, don't cry and complain. Perseverance means striving not because you're tired, but because the task is done. Robert Strauss once said, "Success is like wrestling a 1000-pound gorilla. You don't quit when you are tired - you quit when the gorilla is tired." And finally, perseverance demands all that you have. It's more than just trying or working hard; it's binding your spirit emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually to an idea, purpose or task until it has been completed. As author Judy Wartzell Halliday said, "Success only becomes reality when we keep our commitments to them." Today, let's applaud our country or her perseverance...

MCTA's unjustified non-cooperation movement

The editorial rightly pointed out that the economy fails to grow, matching with the aspiration of the people, the situation would be tailor-made for trouble. A similar fate awaits India after elections have the potential to unseat governments. Elections aside, as far as economies and business is concerned, India ought to draw lessons from China. While America is in a rolling recession (when some industries contract and suffer job losses, while others continue to grow, leaving the overall GDP growth positive, but low by historical standards), Russia, China, and South Korea are in a recession. India's growth rate declined over the last 15 years. From 10% in the 2000s to 6% last decade, he projects it to slow down further to 2-3% annually in the coming decade due to declining population growth and high debt levels. Sharma believes that demographics and debt dynamics will hinder China's economic growth, making it unlikely to surpass 2.5-3% as a trend basis. This year, the official data expects a 5% growth rate for China. This is in line with the growth forecast of Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Cit. ANZ, UBS, JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley and BofA. Yours etc, VK Lyngdoh, Via email

The Hon'ble High Court. This unjustified and unjustified move by MCTA has disappointed the whole student community and they must apologise for this kind of irresponsible decision. I am also like to know whether the protesting teachers are drawing their full salary without taking the reduced number of classes. Many MCTA members have spoken about upholding principles. Will they stand by their principles in regard to their salary for not taking classes? In fact, this may help the government to build some infrastructure for students. One more critical question is - why is the Government so silent in this regard? Shouldn't the Education Department be sending notices to the teachers to stop planning for playing with students' lives and jeopardising their careers. According to MCTA, the decision to implement NEP was done without the consent of the academic council of the University. In that case, MCTA members have made the minutes of the meeting public. It could have also knocked on the doors of

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Protecting endangered languages: Does it really help?

Headlines abound with the plight of endangered minority languages around the world. Read a few of these and you'll see some common themes: the rising number of languages dying worldwide, the distressing isolation of individual last speakers, and the wider cultural loss for humanity.

These stories often mention efforts to protect such languages. This is seen as a way to buttress their speakers' sense of identity, to resist the grinding homogenisation of globalisation, and to set right minorities' historical marginalisation.

However, these stories tend to focus less on how such efforts materially help speakers of endangered languages. As I explore in a near-reviewed, open-access article, such efforts sometimes help, sometimes harm, and sometimes they do both at once.

Questions of Identity
Encouraging someone to keep speaking — or to learn anew a shrinking minority language — certainly buttress his or her sense of identity. But when a bigger language is adopted somewhere, it doesn't erase everything that came before. Often, intense contact between big and small languages leads to a fascinating new mixture — for example, Sheng in Kenya, Tsotsitaal in South Africa and Nouchi in Côte d'Ivoire.

In other cases, such language contact results in something closer to the incoming language, a new localised dialect. But as linguist Peter Trudgill argues, this too can hold a highly local identity.

In another study in Ghana, one research interviewee says of the localised form of English: "I own this language that everyone speaks".

Similarly in Singapore, "Singlish" (a mix of English, Cantonese, Malay, and others) holds an important identity function. After all, these different new varieties are spoken nowhere else on earth.

These new contact-based vernaculars are globally unique, and many are spoken by disadvantaged minorities, but nobody calls for them to be celebrated or protected. Indeed, they are often looked down upon — for



example, Singapore's government has a campaign to eradicate the "blanders" of Singlish. Linguistically, though, these are just as fully structured as any other language. Perhaps it's harder to romanticise something new than something old.

Addressing historical wrongs
The theme of righting historical wrongs among minority groups assumes they will somehow benefit from defence of their language. Sure enough, enabling a people to use their traditional language can make them feel better about themselves. But is it really helping them? Let's take this one step at a time.

If a people lost their language after being oppressed by colonialism and then further trampled on by rampant globalism, they probably lost a whole lot more than language. Canadian researcher Chris Lalonde focused his work on health and well-being in Canada's indigenous communities, and what he found was much more complicated.

A co-authored report did find positive effects of increased fluency in their native languages, but here comes the most important — and politically most difficult — point. In a later analysis (chapter 30 of this book), he and his colleagues showed that simply promoting language on

its own — even language and indigenous culture — was not as influential on a fundamental measure of well-being, suicide rates.

"While culture [and language] are important, it is the integration of social, family, education and training, job creation and other elements that bring cohesion to a community. Indigenous youth suicide must be addressed as a community by forming community cohesion."

Simply adding your ancestral language as a new school subject isn't very helpful if your school is falling down, you're not eating well, your people are disproportionately incarcerated, or you don't have adequate political representation. To think anything much can be solved just by performing CPR on a minority language is to ignore how complicated human society is, and how many different simultaneous needs we have.

Details matter
If it's possible to intervene but not really help, is it also possible to intervene and cause harm? Let's look at a couple of examples.

In Wales, legal recognition of the Welsh language has been momentous, countering centuries of denigration and decline. There have been significant benefits, but closer inspection reveals drawbacks as well.

Welsh is currently taught in schools across Wales, and that's good news for families, be they Welsh- or English-speaking. Some schools use Welsh a bit, some a lot, and an increasing number use only Welsh.

According to the 2021 census, only around 20% of Wales's population (538,300) is fluent in Welsh and the government's plan is to reverse that decline and reach 1 million speakers by 2050.

It's an ambitious goal, and requires children from non-Welsh-speaking families to attend Welsh-medium schools. Sometimes parents actively choose this — indeed, it's often prized — while in other cases it's the only option. Either way, there are upsides and downsides.

On the one hand, students who leave school with Welsh proficiency go on to earn more on average than their monolingual peers, at least within Wales. There is also cultural enrichment that comes with any additional language, and some studies have suggested bilinguals generally enjoy cognitive advantages in life, though the evidence is mixed.

But on the other hand, those who didn't speak Welsh before entering a Welsh-medium school often struggle and their grades can suffer.

Overall, Welsh-medium

schools report lower grades than English-medium schools (page 120 of that linked report has some sobering detail), and this despite receiving equal or higher funding.

As is to be expected, Wales's ambitious plan to substantially increase the use of Welsh brings with it many challenges.

These include a shortage of teachers fluent in Welsh, reported tensions between Welsh- and English-medium students, and difficulties accommodating children with additional learning needs. Understanding and facing up to these and other challenges could enable a more accommodating and ameliorative approach.

Another example is in Canada, where French is a minority language that has been declining for decades. In Quebec, French remains dominant, with just under 75% of residents having it as their native language, but the percentage has fallen slightly over the past five years despite muscular policies to promote its use.

Most recently, in 2022 the Quebec Legislature passed Bill 96, which among other changes, requires civil servants to exclusively use French for official speech and writing, with certain exceptions.

While the government has said that the bill will not affect access to health care and social

services in English, medical professionals and students have expressed serious concerns about the law's potential impacts. This is an example of the prioritisation of language even in matters as essential as health care, yet it's unclear if the law will actually improve Québec residents' lives, or even help preserve French in Québec.

Uncomfortable questions
These are uncomfortable questions in ask given the scale of minority language loss worldwide, alongside an acrid legacy of colonialism and repression. However, it's in no one's interests to cause new problems while trying to right past wrongs.

So, next time you see a media report about efforts to preserve a minority language, think whether they'll be part of a broader range of support. Next, consider potential unintended negative consequences, and how those balance against the positive ones.

Promoting endangered languages can be a positive force, but we shouldn't assume that's universally true. In the end, and this is especially difficult for a linguist to say — perhaps we should focus less on languages in themselves, and pay more attention to the lives of the people who speak them.

(The Conversation)

How some rappers embrace Islam's greeting of peace

Ever since the United States' "war on terror" began, American media has been rife with stereotypes of Muslims as violent, foreign threats. Advocates trying to push back against this characterization sometimes emphasize that "Islam means peace," since the two words are derived from the same Arabic root.

Indeed, the traditional Muslim greeting "al-salamu alaykum" means "peace be upon you." Some Americans were already familiar with the phrase, thanks to an unexpected source: hip-hop culture, which often incorporated the Arabic phrase.

This is but one example of Islam's deep intertwining with the threads of hip-hop culture. In her groundbreaking book "Muslim Cool," scholar, artist and activist Saad Abdul Khaiber shows how Islam, specifically Black Islam, was a crucial part of hip-hop's roots — asserting the faith's place in American life. From prayerlike lyrics to tongue-in-cheek references, Islam and other religions are woven into hip-hop's beats.

That's the focus of a class we teach at Boston University. One of us is a professor of religion, history and pop culture, while the other is a graduate student in Islamic Studies.

More than 'hello'
In Muslim cultures, "al-salamu alaykum" is more than a way of saying hello. It points to the spiritual peace of submitting to God — and not only in this life. Saying "peace be upon you" is a prayer that God will grant heaven to the person with whom you are speaking. Many Muslims believe that "salam" is also the greeting heard upon entering heaven.

The Quran instructs Muslims that "when you are greeted with a greeting, respond with a better greeting or return it." This means that the proper response to "al-salamu alaykum" is, at a minimum, to respond in kind: "wa alaykum al-salam."

This exchange has been adapted by several rap artists — including Rick



Ross, who does not identify as Muslim, and turns the phrase's meaning on its head. Ross uses the greeting in the hook of his song "By Any Means," referencing a famous speech by civil rights leader Malcolm X, who was a minister of the Nation of Islam for many years until shortly before his assassination. In 1964, Malcolm X declared African Americans' right "to be respected as a human being ... by any means necessary."

Half a century later, Ross rapped, "By any means, if you like it or not, Malcolm X, by any means Mini-14 stuffed in my denim jeans. Al-salamu alaykum, wa alaykum al-salam. Whatever your religion kiss the ring on the Don."

Ross's use of the phrase, right after he mentions Malcolm X, appears to insinuate that if one wishes him peace, he will wish them the same. However, if one wishes him violence, he will not hesitate to respond in kind.

"Peace to all my shorties" Other hip-hop artists have used "al-salamu alaykum" in many different ways, including lyrics that show broad-



er familiarity with the laws of Islam. For example, it is sometimes contrasted with pork, which is prohibited in Islam, and by extension, the police — the "pigs," in derogatory slang — though it is more common for non-Muslim singers to use it in this way. "Tell the pigs I say Asalamu alaykum," Lil Wayne says in "Tapout," a song that has little else to do with Islam. Joyner Lucas likewise raps, "I say As-salamu alaykum when I enter a Welsh-medium school often struggle and their grades can suffer."

Finally, many rappers, particularly those who are Muslim, use the greeting in a more straightforward manner. In their 995 song "Glamour and Glitz," A Tribe Called Quest raps: "Peace to all my shorties who be dying too young. Peace to both coasts and the land in between. Peace to your man if you're doing your thing. Peace to my peoples who is incarcerated. Asalamu alaykum means peace. Don't debate it."

Here they affirm and assert that the



core of the greeting is one of peace and harmony — not only between people, but between all of God's creations.

Shared identity
But even if Muslims come in peace, society may not see them that way, and that experience of discrimination often comes through in some lyrics. Rapper French Montana, who immigrated to the Bronx — the birthplace of hip-hop — from Morocco, raps in his 2019 song "Salam Alaykum":

"As-salamu alaykum. That pressure don't break. It don't matter what you do, they still gon' hate you."

It's a harsh recognition that whatever one's actions, whether violent or peaceful, they may still result in racism — a realization he shares with some fellow Muslim rappers in Europe. A comedic take on this is done by Zuna and Nimo in their 2016 song "Hol' mit dein Cousin," where at the start of the song, Nimo states he has a shipment of "baze" — marijuana, but at the end of the video, it turns out the shipment is of "Haze" — bunnies. Yet, throughout the song the rappers speak about violence and drug trade, painting a conflicting picture of "innocence versus guilt."

Fatima El-Tayeb, a scholar of race

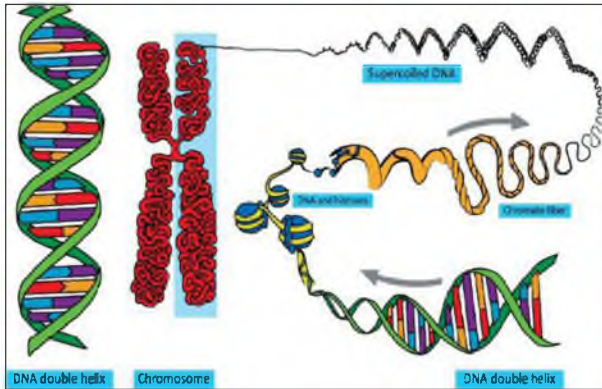


and gender, calls hip-hop a "diasporic lingua franca" in her 2011 book "European Others," highlighting how an art form created by African Americans, and speaking to their experiences, has become one of the main ways minorities around the world speak about their struggles and successes.

In hip-hop, "al-salamu alaykum" is not treated as though it were part of a foreign culture. These rappers' beats create a space where it's OK to be Muslim — a space in which Islam is not merely tolerated, but recognized as a valuable part of pop culture.

(The Conversation)

FOUR: The last remnants of the human genome missing in the Y chromosome



More than 20 years ago, the human genome was first sequenced. While the first version was full of "holes" representing missing DNA sequences, the genome has been gradually improved in successive rounds. Each has increased the quality of the genome and, in so doing, resolved most of the blank spaces that prevented us from having a complete reading of our genetic material.

The fundamental difficulty researchers faced in reading the genome from end to end is the enormous number of repeated sequences that populate it. The 20,000 or so genes we humans have occupy barely 2% of the entire genome. The remaining 98% is essentially made up of these families of repeated sequences, mobile elements known as transposons and retrotransposons, and — to a lesser but functionally important extent — gene expression regulatory sequences. These function as switches that determine when and where genes are turned on and off.

In March 2022, a major revision of the genome was published in the journal *Science*. An international consortium of researchers known as "T2T" (telomere to telomere, which are the ends

of chromosomes) used a novel strategy based a type of cell (K562) that retains on its one copy of each chromosome.

Combined with the latest techniques for sequencing DNA, the researchers managed to add some 200 million letters to the human genome, resolving most of the holes in chromosomes 1 to 22.

The only one left out was the smallest of all the chromosomes we humans have: Y. It's an exclusively male chromosome that is also the most complex, with repeated sequences of all kinds.

The Y chromosome, finally complete. Each of us has 46 chromosomes in our cells, arranged in pairs. There are actually 23 pairs of chromosomes, 22 pairs of autosomal chromosomes (1 to 22) and one pair of sex chromosomes (which can be X or Y).

From each pair of chromosomes we inherit one from our father and one from our mother. Most females have the 46XX chromosome configuration — the last pair of chromosomes, 23, is made up of two copies of the X chromosome. Most males have the 46XY chromosome configuration,

meaning that the sex chromosome pair consists of an X and a Y chromosome.

The Y chromosome, present only in males, contains the genes responsible for the development of the male sex organs, in particular the master gene SRY, which triggers a cascade of events that eventually converts an initial undifferentiated gonad into the testes, where sperm are produced. In the absence of the SRY gene (as in 46XX females), this primordial gonad eventually develops into the ovaries, where eggs are produced.

The T2T consortium solved the technical problems that prevented the completion of the Y chromosome sequence, and in so doing, discovered 40 previously unknown protein-coding genes. As detailed in an article in the journal *Nature*, this adds 30 million more letters to the length of the total human genome, which would now have 3.23 billion letters. The new reference genome, called T2T-CHM13+Y, has been made available to the entire research community by the authors of the study.

Alongside the complete sequence of the Y chromosome, *Nature* has published a second study on the sequences of 43 Y chromosomes derived from humans who lived over the last 183,000 years. Their analysis reveals great diversity in both the size and structure of this Y chromosome over the course of evolution. The researchers have

detected, among other things, large sequence inversions — DNA fragments that are flipped and inserted upside down.

That we know more about the Y chromosome is great news. Just about a year ago we saw another scientific breakthrough correlating the common loss of the Y chromosome in many cells with a shorter life expectancy for men compared to women. And it is clear that much more valuable information is hidden in the genes.

The pangenome initiative. These two new studies significantly increase our knowledge of human DNA, resolving what we have yet to discover about the smallest but most complex chromosome in our genome. They come on the heels of the pangenome initiative, which aims to capture the genetic variability that exists among human beings. While we all share a large part of our genome, we differ by approximately 0.1%. This corresponds to a difference of more than 3 million pairs of letters between any two individuals.

With the pangenome initiative, we will no longer have a single reference genome, but hundreds that will more reliably illustrate our genetic similarities and differences. Among other things, this should help us more easily detect gene mutations associated with the thousands of congenital diseases (*The Conversation*).

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhami Sunday, AUGUST 27, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'

So opposite Saturn on your solar return chart and it is going to be a favourable year for you. You will be able to perceive the trends of the time and will be in the progressive mood. Your outlook towards life will be positive. Your leadership qualities will help you a lot. You will be travelling a lot and meeting many persons. This will give you lot of practical experience in life. You will be able to handle the situation, be more better than you were doing in the past. Your charismatic personality will be on a peak at you will progress fast in your life. Your mother will support you fully. The service family members will lovingly bless you. Your life partner will be a major source of strength for you.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be an amazing week for you. There will be good starting in business. You will take up the opportunity and will get it done well as you. You will have the cooperation from your associates and colleagues. You will be able to do some new work as per planning. You will receive recognition for your efforts. You will be very much satisfied with your efforts. Your financial position will keep getting better. You will receive well also bring rich dividends for you. The money that was stuck up somewhere will get return to you.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will have monetary gains this week. Your talents will not very well. You will also perform well in your job and profession. You will be satisfied with the efforts that you have put in your work. With your strong willpower, you will start moving towards success. The time is extremely favourable for you. An old colleague of your work period will be a wonderful bonding with you, you will have a partner. Those who are in a relationship for a long time now will plan to get married. Some babies may arrive at your house and you will be busy welcoming them.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) What others think about you is not your problem. Perhaps it is more important how you about you and get it completed. Your eagerness and calling you are ready to help you and they will give you lot of cooperation. You will also take the things easy and refuse to get tensed. Enemies and opponents will be active. You will remain committed to your cause. With little bit of good luck on your side you will get success. You will have no shortage of money. And your financial position is going to be strong and stable. You will enjoy good relationship with your family members and there will be lot of warmth and bonding in family ties.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a wonderful week. This is the days of doing something good. Your spiritual talents will get recognized and your work will be appreciated. Whatever you will do will be done with full loyalty and dedication. You will be able to impress your superiors and they will be willing to help you in every stage. Your attitude towards your colleagues will be the one that there will be lot of give and take. You will make forward in the right direction because of your steady and right thinking. You will continue to do well in work and will thank. You will enjoy your life. Love affairs will be successful. Many good things can get on a flow. They will take some time to understand each other. You will receive attention will be on your family and home. You will be willing to take the challenges and will get it resolved.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Some persons may be cause of some tensions for you. You will get used for no reason but it is better you do not get involved in it unless arguments. You will learn something new, there will be no enmities and enemies to do something new. You will also plan to go on a vacation with your family. Your health will remain perfect and you will have no worries.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You will be getting a good news from someone which will set the tone for a good things to come ahead this week. You will be relaxed and happy. You will remain in a positive mood in attending your work with perfection. You will perform your duty to perfection and will balance out the things perfectly. You will have money and luxury in your life. You will have no shortage of funds. You will also have planning

to go with your family is do shopping and have lot of fun and entertainment. Everybody will praise you in your job and work field. You will make full use of your skill and talent and increase your profits. You will make some important decisions regarding future. The students will do well in exams and in interview.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) It is going to be a favourable week for you. Your image will improve. You will be successful in competitive exams, tests and interview. You will also solve your financial and business related matters. Help will be coming from all quarters to you. You will have mentally pleasing days. You will remain relaxed and in a positive frame of mind. Your health will be excellent. You will have wonderful bonding with your life partner. You will also get the blessing of your elders. You will keep your relationship happy. You will also participate in various cultural and social activities.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) The week is favourable for positive results in fund related matters. Your work plans will be successful. Your focus towards work will increase and support will be gained. Peace will be there in the family and there will also be complete fulfillment of new wishes. New contacts will be made. Support will be a lot of good luck for you. And you will get happiness from your family members. You will be happy and you will get an opportunity to meet your friends. Your land related disputes will be resolved. You will have wonderful relations with your life partner. Love birds will have a great week. Moon will be able to please you in your house. There will be an atmosphere of happiness at home and at the workplace also.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You will enjoy your time fully. You will do well in your job and business. You will explore new contacts. Those who are single will plan to get married. Students will perform well in exams and interviews. Those of you who have applied for job will also get success. You will be able to win a regular race at your workplace. This will be a good lot of cheer and fun. You will also have the confidence and support of your bosses and colleagues. There are who are planning to start their job but more on higher studies will get success. Those who are in a relationship for a long time now will plan to get married. Your investments will give you good results. You will also spend time for your family though you will be busy in official matters.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You will remain involved in your work. Your efforts will also bring success. You will be performing very well in your work and business. Your name, fame and prestige will rise further. You will make lot of new friends and your contact will prove to be fruitful. You will also travel a lot and will exchange your views with others. It is going to be a good time for you. You will be able to do some good things in your activities. You will enjoy dining, entertainment and leisure. Love matters will be a great time. You will achieve your objectives in your job. Those who are in a public and media will get lot of fame and time. You will be busy in learning new skills and enhance your knowledge.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Your attention will get your work done with ease. You will also not neglect your family life. Your sources of income will remain stable and you will have no shortage of money. You will get important decisions related to your job and will be in a right time now to take some important decisions. Even though you may be under some stressful conditions time and again but you need not waste your energy. You will also be able to manage your time in order to overcome problems and deal with the situation effectively. You will feel better and relaxed. There will be an increase in your working capacity. You may also receive money from someone.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) It is going to be a fortunate week. You will be involved in your work. You will explore additional source of income. You will also run your business effectively. You will also get lot of work contacts from abroad. Your friends and family members will help you when you require them most. Your partner will remain a lot of strength for you and will guide you. If you are looking for job you will get lucky. Money and wealth will be coming. Your health will remain stable and you will have no worries. You will be able to help your family and will not get disheartened in any situation. You will also get the blessing of your elders. You will also make new contacts in politics and business. You may also plan to renovate your house. You will also arrange fun for your new business.

A treasure trove of art works & poems



A chance discovery at the famous Rabindra Bhawan Museum housed in Jorasanko Thakurbari in Kolkata — the ancestral home of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore — which came into being in 1962, has led to a treasure trove of many unpublished works of Abanindranath Tagore. He along with Gaganendranath were the well-known artist nephews of Gurudev Tagore and was the principal artist and creator of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. His books, *Buro Angla*, *Khiter Putul* and *Nelak* are considered landmarks in Bangla language children's literature.



Born in 1871, he is credited as being the founder of Bengali school of art which resulted in modern Indian painting and the first major exponent of Swadeshi values in Indian art. Among the discovered works are a small black notebook which has poetry written in it that has never been heard of before, Persian-style calligraphy and paintings that have not been displayed in public earlier. The museum staff is arranging to publish these works early next year. The notebook has more than 30 poems, written by hand in 1886 and these are being studied by experts for more details. Dr. Baisakhi Mitra, the Museum's curator talking to Indian Express, described it as a true discovery and said that it pushes back the timeline of Tagore's earliest works by seven years. Interestingly, one of the verses talks about the poet's love and reverence for India whom he treats like his mother. This sentiment is reflected in the Bharat Mata series, made in 1905 when he was 34. Two other manuscripts found include the *Agni Upasak* and the *Raga-Ragini*. The former has a translated poem and six unpublished paintings which are dated 1888 thereby making them the artist's earliest-known works. This manuscript has 120 pages and interestingly also has the poet's impression of Thomas Moore's poem *Translation of Fire-Ship*. The latter includes chapters that have ragas penned in Bangla in Persian-style calligraphy. All these materials came into the possession of the Museum in the 1960s when the poet's son, Alokendranath Tagore donated them. (*IANS*)

"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."
—Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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Strict Penalty for Dangerous Driving

THAT the Shillong roads are choc-a-bloc at any time of the day or night except past midnight is a fait accompli that citizens have learnt to live with. But speeding in the narrow roads of the city especially around areas where schools and colleges are all concentrated is to look danger in the face. The accident near Don Bosco Technical School where a speeding two-wheeler hit a school boy is an example of dangerous driving. Besides there are several hit and run cases too. Two wheelers in Shillong city don't follow lane driving. They criss-cross trying to make their way through narrow spaces between two vehicles. They often come without warning from side roads and put other drivers at risk. With the number of two-wheelers at an all-time high in Shillong many more accidents at vulnerable areas such as Don Bosco and Dhankheti where crossing the road are expected. These places are a nightmare.

Even late at night, speeding vehicles can cause danger to other drivers and pedestrians. Often the drivers are drunk and swerve any way they want. Since traffic policing ends by a certain hour, drunken drivers get away with rash driving and endanger other peoples' lives every single day. In other cities, people who have taken a few drinks at a party can call an Uber/Ola and get dropped home. Such facilities are not available in Shillong hence drunken driving is a common phenomenon. But that aside, it is two-wheeler drivers who are causing the largest number of accidents today.

The idiom, "Speed thrills but kills" is appropriate for what's happening in Shillong today. With everyone in a rush and jostling for space in the narrow Shillong roads, are we looking at many more accidents since very few drivers are booked for speeding. There Meghalaya Traffic Police have a long list of Jo's and don'ts for drivers and there are fines for first offence and repeated offences. For instance, the fine for over-speeding is Rs 250 and for subsequent offences Rs 1000; for driving without license for minors is Rs 1000 for first and subsequent offence and dangerous driving is also Rs 1000 on both counts. The problem is that there is no satellite monitoring for speeding where a driver can be penalised. As of today it's only when a traffic police personnel catches someone speeding at a point on the road where the traffic policeman/woman is on duty that some action can be taken. But the fine being minimal, a repeat of the crime is inevitable. In Shillong today there are several minors that are behind the wheels and parents seem to encourage that. It angers people who see this licentiousness on the road but if a traffic police personnel ignores that lawless behaviour there is little that citizens can do. It is time to come up with more stringent laws against dangerous driving.

Letters to the Editor

Stop the irrational bashing of MCTA

Editor,
It would be best if people start looking at things objectively, but most importantly to look at things rationally and uphold principles before carelessly expressing themselves. MCTA bashing has not waned and if we take a look at the long list of democratic and principled movements in history, those that stand on the right side have been as relentless, but they persisted and prevailed. On being accused of jeopardising the future of students, it should be remembered that teachers can teach whatever is thrown at them, but it is not the nature of teachers to those students under the bus or ask them to cross a half-built bridge. If you are to blame anyone for jeopardising the future of students blame the NEHU VC for not being honest and sincere enough to prepare all the things required before imposing the NEP. Teachers will keep doing what they do, but what about the students who will wish to exit after the first year and require internship, for which no preparation has been made? With regards to the minutes of the meeting of the Academic Council, the MCTA could do so and may well be preparing to do so,

When borders are just imaginary lines

By H H Mohrmen & Niwanka Shylla

Initially, we thought that this would be an article based on the mental health issues observed across the globe. The write-up is a classic case of the plight of mentally ill patients across the world. But on second thoughts we asked ourselves how long can a person wait for freedom? How long can she wait for an opportunity to reunite with her near and dear ones? She is entitled to her rights, but when and how can she enjoy her basic human rights? Or does she lose all her rights just because she is on the wrong side of the divide?

Rights of People with Mental Illness. On the wall at the entrance to Meghalaya Institute of Mental Health and Neurological Science (MIMHANS), there is a big board with the Rights of the Mentally Ill Persons engraved on it. The rights are as follows: 1. The fundamental rights as their fellow citizens, including the right to a decent life, as far as possible.

2. Legal Safeguards against abuse. 3. Right to appeal. 4. Right to necessary treatment in the least restrictive setting and as far as possible to be treated and cared for in the community. 5. Right to rehabilitation, right to personal autonomy, privacy, freedom of communication. 6. Right to education. 7. Right to training. 8. Right to economic and social security. 9. Right to family and community life. 10. Right to employment. 11. Right to protection against stigmatisation and discriminatory, abusive, or degrading treatment. 12. Right for assistance, including legal, for protecting their rights. The question for the general public, are we even aware of these rights that people with mental illness are entitled to?

Freedom from Fear. On the eve of India's 75th Independence Day, when people across the country celebrated the day, there were citizens of this great nation who were suffering at mental institutions or were shifted to Halfway Homes. Some proud citizens took selfies with the Tri-colour and the chakra, yet some went on to do some good work and others attended the parade to commemorate the occasion while others spent time working with this vulnerable section of the population.

Society for Urban and Rural Empowerment (SURE) supported by the Office of the Director of Social Welfare Department is embarking on a new venture to run a Halfway Home for mentally ill persons who have been treated at different institutions and were found to be fit for rehabilitation in the city. These patients who have languished in the MIMHANS are now transferred to the Halfway Home at Sabah Muswang, Jowai. They are now under the Society's (SURE) care and the setting of the place where inmates are sheltered has changed from a mental institution to a homely environment. Even if the transfer had happened in the last few days, one can see the transformation that happened in the lives of the mentally ill.

Does Independence mean freedom? Perhaps for many of the inmates, the last Independence Day was the first meaningful Independence Day that they had ever taken part in. They had the opportunity to be part of the hoisting ceremony at the Home and some were seen to enjoy singing the national anthem. But the big question that remains is - What does Independence mean for them? For how many of the inmates, the last Independence Day was the first meaningful Independence Day that they had ever taken part in.

They had the opportunity to be part of the hoisting ceremony at the Home and some were seen to enjoy singing the national anthem. But the big question that remains is - What does Independence mean for them? For how many of the inmates, the last Independence Day was the first meaningful Independence Day that they had ever taken part in. They had the opportunity to be part of the hoisting ceremony at the Home and some were seen to enjoy singing the national anthem. But the big question that remains is - What does Independence mean for them? For how many of the inmates, the last Independence Day was the first meaningful Independence Day that they had ever taken part in.

Now that they are no longer in the Mental Institution, they are partially free, but they will ultimately attain freedom only when they are once again united with their loved ones. Sadly for most of them, this is going to be an impossible goal to achieve.

The case of a patient straying across the border

The patient's condition was stable but sadly, after three days of her stay, the inmate became homesick due to which she is not interested in any activities. She is anxious about trying to escape and her non-cooperative behaviour creates disturbances for other patients at the Home. The staff were not able to control her as she refused to get the whole day, and the Organisation had no other option but to re-transfer her on August 17 to MIMHANS. The patient does not belong to the Institution as she is a citizen of this country and due process has to be followed to deport her.

It has been more than one year since this case was taken up by the Government of Meghalaya Home (Political Department) with the Ministry of External Affairs for deporting the patient for her country of origin, but sadly nothing has moved and the inmate has to languish in the Institution for no fault of her. Her only fault is that she was perhaps mentally ill when she crossed the border and now she has to suffer for that. What is a border to a mentally ill person anyway?

Does the border have any meaning to them? When she crossed the border which is as porous as everybody knows, did she realise that she was in another country? Do these imaginary lines that we draw have any meaning to them? Now this same system is preventing her from going back home and meeting her family.

The country has failed her, and the system and even humanity have failed for her. We tried to persuade her to get in the car to take her to MIMHANS, we were able to convince her to travel only by telling her that she was taking her back to her home. After we had dropped her at MIMHANS when we reached the home and told the staff about her reaction when she realized that she had again returned to the mental institution, one of the staff nurses asked if she would ever trust humanity again.

(Niwanka Shylla has a Master's Degree in MPhil & Psychiatric Social Work and she is the Project Coordinator of Halfway Home, Sabah Muswang, JWH).

Will Shillong ever learn?

Editor,
I live in a small locality near the Wah Thangsiang which is a part of the Wah Thangsiang. It grew up around by trees, but now all I see are people building on the river bed cutting down the trees and the pine trees which have been there for decades which are crucial for holding the soil together. One of my neighbours has built on the river bed itself causing the river to overflow in his bank. I see people throwing small packets of garbage out of their windows into the stream because they could not be bothered to throw garbage on the garbage trucks. They also throw empty alcohol bottles into the once ferocious Wah Thangsiang. It is not just my locality corner of the world that does this but everywhere we go we can see people building so close to the river that it is a danger of the soil loosening and slipping into the water each time it rains heavily. We have seen how people are dangerously affected by floods and landslides in Himachal Pradesh and other parts of India. Even in the plains of India people are heavily affected due to improper drainage systems and the most important reason is building on river banks. We throw rubbish and bottles into the streams thinking they will be carried off but in reality,

Why Shillong city is no longer safe

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

It is very unfortunate to read the reports in the newspapers or to watch the news in different YouTube channels about how people are missing and then found dead in Shillong. Just a few days ago, two people (Richard Sing Khramuli of Mawdangiang village and Shanbor Sarong of Jowai Phek) were reported missing and then later their dead bodies were discovered. Why do such incidents happen regularly in the city of Shillong? What are the causes for such incidents? Who is responsible to protect and secure the city? Why has Shillong city become so unsafe?

Many Shillongites are asking the above questions and are afraid to walk alone especially after it gets dark. Perhaps, the increase in the number of drug addicts is one of the probable causes of such incidents in the city. In fact, not only are people missing and killed but thefts are also increasing in the city these days. Many thieves are caught on CCTV cameras while trespassing into people's houses. Shockingly, most of these thieves happen to be drug addicts. Therefore, if this situation continues in the city of Shillong, it will be very dangerous even for school children in the near future. Hence, it is high time for the District Administration and the village authori-

"Many Shillongites are asking the above questions and are afraid to walk alone especially after it gets dark. Perhaps, the increase in the number of drug addicts is one of the probable causes of such incidents in the city. In fact, not only are people missing and killed but thefts are also increasing in the city by the day. Many thieves are caught on CCTV cameras while trespassing into people's houses. Shockingly, most of those thieves happen to be drug addicts."

ties to prevent and to do the needful for the betterment of society.

As an educator and being in charge of one of the evening schools in the city, I am very much concerned for students attending evening classes as they leave the school when it is already dark. Most of our evening school students come from different cultural backgrounds. Many go to work during the day and come to attend classes in the evening. In short, the majority are from poor backgrounds. If the city continues to face such problems, when do these poor children go for education when the evening is no longer safe? The police and the district administration must do their duties in order to ensure safety in the city. It is very sad to say that many people are losing hope in the Meghalaya Police. Often we hear people complaining of delayed action taken by police to register an FIR because the victims are from poor families. For instance, the family of late Richard Sing Khramuli, who was found dead recently in the city, are not going to pursue his case. Perhaps, it may be due to lack of financial resources to go ahead with the case. But it is not the duty of the police to trace out the culprit? Why should the police lose the case if the family cannot afford to pursue the case? Killing is a crime and it is unacceptable in any society. Thus, to prevent and to ensure safety for the future generation, the Police Department must be seen to be doing its duty.

Drugs have become the major problem in the city. Many people are falling into the trap of this substance.

ATM rooms to reach the material to the customers. It is very unfortunate to hear this statement from several individuals. What will be the future of our children in the society if the law is so soft on people involved in drug trafficking?

Perhaps, to ensure safety in the city is also the duty of each citizen to remain alert and report this crime. Families may be one of the best resources to tackle crime in the city. The famous English statement runs "Clarity begins at home". Parents and family members play a vital role in fighting against drug in the state and in the city. Teaching children at home of the danger of drugs will be more effective than attending several programs or seminars. Looking at the new generation we can see that they can easily be lured into drugs. Smoking and consuming tobacco products is very common even at a very early age. On several occasions even in schools parents are called to settle problems of smoking and consuming tobacco products by students. If such instances happen even inside the school campuses, it will be very easy for young people to fall into the trap of drugs. Hence to fight against drugs is a collaborative responsibility. Parents, teachers, school management, police, village authorities and every section of society must collaboratively work together to tackle the drug menace and to ensure safety in the city. Let us make Shillong green again and ensure safety to every citizen.

(The writer is Vice Principal, St. Anthony's H.C. Sec School, Shillong.)

careless and callous! Need I remind the readers of how teachers were actively involved in JP's Total Revolution, in the protest against draconian dikats of do-do groups? Government notification forcing teachers to follow the NEP would only prove the despotic and shameless nature of those in favour of hasty execution of policy, and their blatant regard for sense and reason, justice and democracy; making the government of the day different from fascist Italy or Nazi Germany!! In fact, if we are to listen to sense, the MCTA has gone to great lengths to ensure that the career of students is not affected, not only immediately but in the long run!

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.
Via email

Discrimination of the 21st century

Editor,
Recently a viral video has been circulated by many of the news channels in Shillong regarding the clamping of tourist taxis by Traffic Police and public agitation on account of that. The crux behind this agitation was that the police who used to patrol on this stretch was unable to respond to a query as to why the discrimination between the commercial vehicles and

private vehicles, since most of the prohibitions like 'No Parking' were applicable only for commercial vehicles or tourist taxis.

The writer does not hold any ill will against private vehicles, but the sole purpose of this specific content was to treat all citizen as equal whether he is driving a local taxi, an auto or a luxury vehicle. The constitution of India guarantees that, as per the FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, PART III, under the Article 15 the Right to Equality which states that "No citizen shall be denied equality before the law. He shall be equal in front of the law." In fact, if we are to listen to sense, the MCTA has gone to great lengths to ensure that the career of students is not affected, not only immediately but in the long run!

I therefore urge upon the MLA of North Shillong, Adelben Nongrum to take this matter as a priority since these incidents are happening under his Constituency. It would be very much obliged if this matter is resolved amicably since it concerns the livelihood of the professional drivers.

Yours etc.,
Willbarstar Djangdoh
Via email

they get stuck in between the rocks and soil and fall into along the river which causes a blockage, and the river banks will overflow leading to massive soil erosion since there are no trees alongside but only buildings. Hence we are the ones who are in danger; we are the ones who should shelter us from the storm but God helps those who help themselves so if we continue to keep building on the river banks, cutting down trees that should be kept, throwing our rubbish into the streams, leaving our environment neglected, then calamities are bound to hit us too. So will Shillong ever learn from other states? Or will we wait until it happens to us to realize that we are at fault?

The point I'm trying to make is that perhaps it's time to give up being stubborn and curb our greed and also realise that there is no God help us in certain situations that we have created for ourselves. We should learn to help ourselves and learn from other states that have gone through the trauma and loss of landslides and flash floods.

Yours etc.,
Shailin H Lyngdoh,
Shillong-11

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

"It is not possible to go forward while looking back."
— Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2023

Science, Religion

A controversy has arisen over naming of the Chandrayaan-3 landing site on the Moon as 'Shiv Shakti' point. There are those who see this as a decision in conflict with the concept of secularism to which India is wedded. More importantly, this is seen as a departure from the post-Independence era under Jawaharlal Nehru, who was agnostic or one who doubted the existence of a supreme being. This, even as Nehru admitted that the belief in God brought mental peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls. "Too much dependence on supernatural factors may lead, and has often led to, a loss of self-reliance in man," Nehru wrote in his *Discovery of India*. The first prime minister strived hard to promote a scientific temper just as he put India firmly on the growth track with early reliance on the introduction of steel plants to promote industrialization and huge dams to irrigate barren lands. He treated these dams as the 'temples of modern India.' All these had much to do with his eminent exposure to the West, his higher studies in Cambridge and associations with the evolution of progressive thoughts there. Notably, Nehru was instrumental in the start of India's space explorations, though the present label ISRO came later. He had also made it a point to keep the department of space directly under the PMO so as to give it maximum governmental attention — as a happy scenario that continues even today.

India has been changing in recent years under the BJP rule and this is an era where faith is gaining a matching importance with science; the anti-thesis of a scenario that Nehru had visualized and tried to promote. The growth of the BJP as a national political establishment was itself anchored in the campaign to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya — which was finally accomplished by the demolition of an old, discarded and dilapidated Babri Masjid. Religion is currently gaining more prominence in public engagements due to sustained efforts by top governmental functionaries themselves. Religion is a private affair and should not be confused with governmental engagements. Notably, ISRO scientists offering prayers at a temple before the launch of space missions also drew criticism. Aspects of faith cannot altogether be denied or rejected as it is an individual pursuit; and every scientist is an individual too. Yet, the selection of the name Shiva Shakti for the Chandrayaan-3 landing site signifies an emphasis on religious beliefs. While religion's importance in the life of human beings cannot be wished away, an overemphasis might, as Nehru warned, work to the disadvantage of the nation. It could overshadow the spirit of inquiry and scientific temper.

Letters to the Editor

MCTA: Self Interest over Students' Future

Editor,
A lot has been written in the print media and a lot more debate has been heard on the issue of NEP and the unwillingness of the MCTA teachers to budge an inch to preserve its own egotistic stance to the point that they are willing to let the future of their students go down, forgetting the rightful obligation they owe the students who look up to them. The hard stance by the MCTA and at the same time the political gimmick they play as victims by pretending to seek the best interest of students is not fooling anyone anymore as it is very clear they stand for their own self-interest.
One question that bothers everyone is if the NEP is not implemented and other Universities are already implementing it, what will happen to our students who wish to pursue further studies outside? Can the MCTA guarantee that NEHU with a maximum of 45-50 seats

will be able to accommodate all students who want to study further?
Second, since all students have been made aware of the benefits that NEP will bring like flexibility in choosing courses and subjects without the limitations of streams as well as skill-based courses, won't they feel deprived of this opportunity they are getting in a hyper-competitive environment prevailing today? How will MCTA address this issue since they are the one opposing and acting as the main hurdle for students passing out this year and anticipating a new system which seems really interesting. Further a number of times senior teachers in colleges blame the system for the present state of unemployment of their own offspring. They are the ones posing it which shows their hypocrisy.
From conversations with my friends who are college sanctioned teachers, they say it's usually the senior teachers who are hell bent on opposing change and are the main MCTA followers and as such are willing to keep students as ransom for their own pride and self-interest while the young teachers coming from a fiercely competitive interview to get into teaching are more sympathetic with students and are more interested in just moving on to a new set up under NEP since they know what they have gone through and a new system with emphasis on skills will give their students an edge especially those students that can't afford to go out for further studies and NEHU is all they get.
We therefore hope we have learnt that change is inevitable and must be embraced just as we all accept that teachers can teach and enter politics without having to leave their well-paid jobs when why can't teachers accept that change in the education for students will benefit us all especially in the long run? Can we really see leaders among teachers who talk about the need for change in our education system especially the Indian economy and commerce classes, be the change they always talk of and not be a hurdle for the generations to come?
Yours etc.,
J.R.L. Mawphlang,
Via email

Khasi-Karbi conflict: A ticking time bomb

By Bhogoram Mawroh

On August 24, 2023, it was reported that a couple of Karbi houses were torched in the village of Tapat, Karbi Anglong, by people who had allegedly entered from the Meghalaya side. This latest incident is part of a series of violent events that are taking place along the Assam-Meghalaya border around the area of Khanduli. Previously, the Khasi Students Union (KSU) had also made allegations that the Karbis had burned down a few huts and prevented residents of Khanduli from accessing their farmland, which is under the jurisdiction of Meghalaya. The Karbis, on the other hand, have maintained that there has been "constant aggression from Meghalaya to Karbi Anglong, thus putting the blame on the Khasis instead. The incident in Tapat, however, highlights the complexity of the issue, where it is not easy to blindly agree on one side even though one may belong to one of the groups.
The houses that were torched in Tapat happened to belong to the relatives of someone I know whose mother came from the village. The person is of mixed Pnar-Karbi heritage, and incidents like these force such people to choose sides against those whom they consider their own. If they don't take sides, then both groups will brand them as traitors and treat them as outcasts. The impact of this conflict, however, will go beyond the personal travails of any one or a few individuals. It will affect the lives of many innocents on both sides.
This is not the first time that the Khasi and Karbis have clashed with each other. In 2003, over 4000 Pnar villagers (another name for the Jaintia, who are a sub-group of the larger Khasi tribe) had to flee from their homes in Hills of Karbi Anglong and Sahntang in the Jaintia hills of Meghalaya when militants suspected to be from the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), a Karbi militant group, killed three people. This led to retaliation against the Karbi in Meghalaya, with a Karbi seminar being set on fire in Shillong.
The KSU also issued quiet notices against the Karbi people residing in the city, resulting in many fleeing the state. Then, on November 25, three labourers working in a coal mine in Pokyindong village in the Jaintia Hills were abducted and killed by unidentified miscreants. In 2012, clashes erupted against the Measakha Lamsyndri locality of the Khanduli area, which falls under the West Jaintia Hills. Several people were injured in the clash, and several houses were burned down. This was at a

"This is not the first time that the Khasi and Karbis have clashed with each other. In 2003, over 4000 Pnar villagers (another name for the Jaintia, who are a sub-group of the larger Khasi tribe) had to flee from their homes in Hills of Karbi Anglong into Sahntang in the Jaintia hills of Meghalaya when militants suspected to be from the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), a Karbi militant group, killed three people. This led to retaliation against the Karbi in Meghalaya, with a Karbi seminar being set on fire in Shillong."

time when I was doing my PhD at NEHU and the police came to our campus inquiring if there were any Karbi students so that they could be given protection against retaliation by the Khasis.
These recent clashes have come on the heels of the ongoing border talks between Assam and Meghalaya. The border disputes of Block 1 and 11 in Karbi Anglong, where thousands of Pnar people are residing, are currently under review. Any rise in tensions will affect them very badly. This was revealed to me in worrying details when a Pnar boy residing in one of the villages in these areas messaged me a few weeks ago. He confided in me that the people in the area have been living in great fear ever since the tensions started to rise. They feared

that they will take matters into their own hands because they believe that the Government cannot protect Khasi lives. Political parties will follow suit, as they have already tried recently to create communal tensions in the state with the demand for a Khasi CM and the reservation issue. The aggressive rhetoric that will follow will further escalate the conflict. More of the Pnars and the Karbis will be affected, further deepening the crisis and putting the lives of more innocents in danger. I don't know the political dynamics on the Karbi side, but there will be those who will look to take advantage of the situation, whether they are from among the Karbi themselves or from outside.
Coming back to Meghalaya, the future of the MDA government might also be at stake here. During the last election, I asked a Garo friend if she would be voting for TMC. She told me that she will never vote for Mukul Sangma (the former Chief Minister of Meghalaya and leader of TMC) because it was during his term that the GNLA (Garo National Liberation Army, a Garo militant group) was most active, and she cannot forget the atrocities committed by them. Imagining the Khasis harbouring the same feeling against this MDA government, which is headed by a Garo, come the next assembly election or the upcoming MIDC elections.
But political machinations aside, it is the duty of the Government of Meghalaya to take all steps to prevent any escalation of tensions. They must insist on the other side to prevent any attempt to create conflict from the Karbi side. For its part, it must also prevent any provocation from our side. At all costs, restraint must be practiced because the cost of not doing so will be very heavy. I don't want to see Karbi torched because I know the Khasis will be harmed in retaliation. And I am sure that many people on the other side also feel the same way. We need to do all we can to maintain peace because if we don't, we are looking at a repeat of what happened in Manipur.
The conflict in Manipur has shown that it will be the innocents who ultimately pay the price. I pray that it is not repeated in Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong as well. If that happens despite all that we know from the past and the present, it will be a travesty of the gravest order.
(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

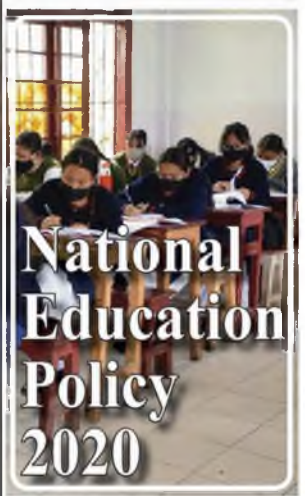
rebut, imagine if something happens to the loved ones of the Pnar boy who messaged me. Will he be satisfied if I told him that the loss he has endured is for the good of the community? The same goes to the Karbi side as well. Will the Karbi NGOs, who threaten a Manipur like situation if the Pnar staying in the disputed areas choose to go with Meghalaya, be willing to sacrifice their own people (staying in Shillong like the student who messaged me) to others along the border, so that they can claim victory? What about the trauma that will be especially hard to forget and that will have long-lasting debilitating effects on people's lives? Is that justified?
Of course, such exhortations will not convince some people, who will label such

questions as taking sides with the enemy and a sign of weakness. For such people, the glory of the community and what they perceive as their rightful claims are more important than the lives of their own people. My question is: how can such people claim to love their people when they don't care what happens to them? Also, most of the time, people who are using aggressive language are not the ones who will be at the forefront. I remember the interview of Meitei Lipan Chief, Pramoi Singh, who has been accused of instigating violence against the Kuki-Zomi, when he was calmly giving interviews while his own people, the Meitei, were getting killed in the fighting on the ground. I can claim with absolute certainty that long after the conflict has died down, he and leaders like him will be safely ensconced in their lair while their own people struggle to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.
If the conflict on the border escalates, there will be rallies in Shillong with firebrand leaders shouting at

Navigating Accusations and Aspirations: NEHU's Roadmap for NEP 2020 Implementation

By Shimon N. Shullai

In the hilly terrain of educational reforms, the North-East Hill University (NEHU) finds itself embroiled in a maelstrom of accusations and counter-accusations surrounding the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). As the echoes of dissent and support reverberate, the future of Meghalaya's academic landscape hangs in the balance.
The year 2023 has borne witness to a tumultuous clash of perspectives within the NEHU community, raising questions about the wisdom of timing and the readiness for change. A cacophony of voices has risen, each offering its own rendition of



conflict often takes on the guise of procedural wrangling. The NEHU Teachers Association (NEHTA) Crisis Unit, urging the Vice-Chancellor to annul the NEP 2020 implementation for the year. Yet, veiled in ambiguity, the transgressions that allegedly transpired within NEHU's hallowed halls remain shrouded. It is here that rhetoric intersects with reality — a clash of interpretations that obscures the path ahead.
The canvas, however, is not devoid of strokes of progress. The Academic Council of NEHU, custodian of scholarly rigour, approved the ordinances and regulations that set the stage

for NEP 2020's integration. The collective endeavor of crafting syllabi and curricula, anchored in subject groupings ranging from skill enhancement to value-added courses, paints a picture of inclusivity and adaptability. These are the brushstrokes of an institution striving to be relevant within an evolving educational landscape.
In the cacophony of opinions and the swirl of politics, the student stands at the heart of the debate. The future leaders, scientists, artists, and thinkers of Meghalaya face the necessity of an unresolved discourse. Delay, one must ponder,

"The Government of Meghalaya stands as a sentinel on this educational voyage, yet its voice remains elusive. The urgency of addressing infrastructural inadequacies and teacher shortages appears to have been overshadowed, leaving educators and students to navigate uncharted waters."

the tale, painting a complex tableau that demands discernment.
For proponents of the NEP 2020, a silver lining pierces through the storm clouds. A majority of students, parents, and educational groups have rallied in its favour, praising the policy's embrace of flexibility as a panacea for the constraints of the traditional educational framework. The introduction of features such as Multiple Entry, Multiple Exit, interdisciplinary subject selection, and the integration of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) into curricula has garnered widespread applause. The allure of a more holistic and adaptable education system has been hard to resist, even among those initially skeptical.
However, amidst this crescendo of support, a dissonant note emerges from the Meghalaya College Teachers Association (MCTA). Their opposition hinges on the lack of infrastructural readiness in several colleges — a legitimate concern that finds resonance with the realities on the ground. The plea for the provision of requisite funds and the appointment of additional faculty members speaks to the heart of the matter: can the ship of progress set sail without a sturdy anchor? "Why the silence?" one might ask.
The Government of Meghalaya stands as a sentinel on this educational voyage, yet its voice remains elusive. The urgency of addressing infrastructural inadequacies and teacher shortages appears to have been overshadowed, leaving educators and students to navigate uncharted waters.
In the realm of academia,

The mentally ill deserve full rehabilitation

Editor,
I am writing to express my deep appreciation and gratitude for the article, "When Borders are just Imaginary Lines" (TST, Aug 28, 2023). The story of "Salim" was heartbreaking. The mentally ill deserve more than the wonderful rights listed in this article. They deserve full rehabilitation and mental health.
Yours etc.,
Deepa Mjumdur,
Via email

Urgent Plea to Embrace Electric Crematorium Facilities

Editor,
The ongoing decline in forest cover within our state has prompted an increased awareness of the consequential impacts. It is incumbent upon us to address this matter with utmost seriousness. More symbolic gestures, such as planting saplings on World Environment Day, are insufficient in addressing this concern. Given the current scarcity of firewood and the foreseeable exacerbation of this scarcity, it is imperative that we acknowledge the urgency of the situation. The number of firewood suppliers is dwindling every month, resulting in an undue reliance on the monopolistic suppliers who dictate exorbitant rates for wood per truckload. This financial burden is ultimately borne by those adhering to traditional and religious cremation rituals as the conventional cremation ghats cannot sustain continual losses.
Moreover, the traditional practice of cremating bodies using conventional methods not only incurs significant costs but also poses substantial environmental and health hazards. This practice is inherently unsustainable as illustrated by the stark reality that an entire mature tree is needed to construct a single bier. The present era necessitates a shift in our priorities, emphasizing the preserva-

tion and nurturing of the environment over conventional practices. Redirecting our focus towards the well-being of our surroundings is paramount. A crucial facet of this shift involves the conservation of trees, as doing so safeguards the welfare of future generations.
It is crucial to understand that the stockpile of firewood within cremation ghats is to be reserved as a last resort, to be used only when electric cremation facilities are non-operational or undergoing maintenance.
Hence, let us place greater importance on environmental preservation over traditional practices. The time has come for this essential transformation in perspective.
This is a message from the Gorkha Samban Ghat Barpathar (Masohali), Shillong.
Yours etc.,
Krishna Chetri
General Secretary
Gorkha Samban Ghat,
Barpathar,
Shillong

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"Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change"

— Stephen Hawking

The Shillong Times

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Cooking gas and more

A praiseworthy aspect of democracy is that governments cannot but be responsive to public sentiments. So too with the decision by the Union Cabinet on Tuesday to cut the price of cooking gas by Rs 200 per cylinder. With the court-down having begun for fresh parliament elections, the Modi government cannot afford to remain impervious to the rising anger against the steep rise in prices of not just essential commodities but all materials across the board. This tendency was evident since the Covid-19 period and in recent times prices of essentials have sky-rocketed. The failure of the Opposition to take the government to task is only proof of a lack of assertiveness, or even vacillation at its leadership levels. The situation is compounded by the fact that there has been no matching rise in the wages or salaries of the employed. The saga is more pronounced among the 80 per cent of the populace who are not well-heeled. The poor and the middle class are struggling to make ends meet. In this backdrop, the decisions by the Union Cabinet to substantially reduce the price of cooking gas and extend the Ujwala LPG subsidy to 75 lakh women will be well-appreciated. However, a review of the prices across the spectrum is in order.

It must be noted, in this context, that the LPG gas price per cylinder was at Rs 410 when Prime Minister Modi took charge of the nation in 2014. In less than 10 years, it rose to about Rs 1100. The government should have acted early and controlled the price. It acted late also in the case of a steep rise in prices of tomatoes, or onions later, and chose to have imports of the former from Nepal only by the time the new crop was about to flood the market. A responsive government should have a finger on the pulse of the markets so as to enable it to act at the right time. The Indian agricultural market as a whole continues to be ruled by the whims and greed of the middle men. The farmers get too little, while the consumers are dealt a rude shock time after time by the steep rise in commodity prices; the reason cited often being "low production" or natural calamities like floods or weather changes. Fact is, cartels rule the markets, and consumers pay through their noses to buy various items. It is rare that the farmers get a fair share of the prices quoted in the market. The farm reform legislation was left in the lurch as the Modi government could not withstand pressure from various lobbies in the run-up to a set of assembly polls in UP, Punjab etc.

Dire Need To Save Narpuh

By Janet Hujan

and monopolised a communal blessing. The statistics in the film provide grim reading e.g. 80% of community forests have been lost to industries and mining and yet as Rab P S Nongbri the Chief Conservator of Forests informs us, Narpuh is the only Protected Area in the whole of Jaintia Hills. When a everyone going to walk up to the fact that life on earth is a mutually



supporting network? Have we not learnt any lessons from the Lullu or Ka Lukha as she is known to the Phras and the Khas? If we only reflect upon the way our native language expresses the way we look at the living world around us, we would think twice about poisoning her waters.

Ka Lukha is a being, a generous faerie, an ancestral mother deserving our profound respect. It is because she supports life that Ka Lukha has been variously described as a reservoir of fish and the "Sacred River". The word "Sacred" obviously harks back to a time when unacquainted she was free to flow, nurturing river communities who in gratitude crowned her "Sacred River". But as Kimmer points out, a gift can only keep giving if there is that essential ingredient of reciprocity. For nature to prevail, both the giver and the receiver must enter into a relationship of mutual caring. Tragically cement plants have blasted the traditional pact out of the water.

Now think of the Khasi word for wind: Iyer, often shortened to 'T'. The accompanying sensation is light, caressing, almost ethereal... yes, light as air, as noticeable as the breath of life. But the wind blowing from the direction of limestone quarries are dust-laden, lung-choking stinks. Cement dust also blankets surrounding vegetation affecting photosynthesis and with soil becoming more alkaline, acid-loving plants stand little chance of survival. As a consequence the effectiveness of forests as carbon sinks is drastically reduced. By altering the topography and ambience of our hills cement

plants continue to prove toxic to human life. Yet the million-dollar question remains: why is limestone mining in the Jaintia Hills still allowed? The question is of course rhetorical. Everyone knows it is because those who literally sign off the life of our hills just don't care. A handful of scattered villages depending on primal forests and ancient rivers are not worth thinking about - they are but troublesome trees to be cut away. But that is dangerous attitude to maintain because it fails to value the traditional wisdom held by those who keep our forests and waters alive. Thankfully the Forest Department has more sense for they recognise this valuable resource: "... residents of the surrounding areas have been trained into proactive partners in conservation". (Lato) and "... the immense knowledge that the hunters have of the landscape and the animals has been utilised to conserve the forests and monitor the animals" (see film). That, ladies and gentlemen, is empowerment.

By destroying the barrier between the written and the unwritten, the researcher has displayed Wisdom. Consequently Knowledge has been made whole again. There is a strategy that should be more widely deployed, for empowerment encourages co-operation, egalitarianism and mutual respect thereby extending the frontiers of learning for all. No one is left behind. Speaking of the incidental trails of forest trekking and patrolling the Beat Forest Officer Shanberjee Paul caresses, almost ethereal... yes, light as air, as noticeable as the breath of life. But the wind blowing from the direction of limestone quarries are dust-laden, lung-choking stinks. Cement dust also blankets surrounding vegetation affecting photosynthesis and with soil becoming more alkaline, acid-loving plants stand little chance of survival. As a consequence the effectiveness of forests as carbon sinks is drastically reduced. By altering the topography and ambience of our hills cement

success with Chandrayaan-3 has enhanced the credibility of its space sector and opened up opportunities for private participation in the space sector. The Moon mission will open up a number of opportunities in the space tech sector, giving a boost to the country's economy. Let us and ISRO for the work it does on a shoestring budget while it is incumbent upon the Government of India to enhance the budget of Indian Space Research Organisation, the Department of Space Budget allocation of Rs 12,543.91 crore for fiscal year 2023-24 should be enhanced to Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 crore the years ahead if India is to do the science that is transformational and not incremental.

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Political intrusion puts Indian higher education in crisis

University system dogged by Centre -State power tussle

By Nantoo Banerjee

The growing power tussle between the Centre and opposition ruled states over the management control of the University Grants Commission-funded universities is states threatens to ruin the sanctity of the country's higher education system. Chief ministers of a number of opposition states and centrally appointed governors there are at loggerheads with each other over appointment of university vice-chancellors (VChs). Both sides want political appointees of their choice. Recently, Tamil Nadu's state assembly passed two bills seeking to transfer the governor's power in appointing VCs of 13 state universities to the state government.

Last year, West Bengal's state legislative assembly passed a bill to make the chief minister the chancellor of all state-run universities, replacing the governor. The bill is yet to get the governor's consent. The states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Rajasthan have laws that underline the need for concurrence between the state and the governor on the appointment of university VCs.

Lately, the issue has come to a head between West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Governor C. V. Ananda Bose, a former bureaucrat turned Bhartiya Janata Party member in 2019, over the appointment of several senior professors as interim vice-chancellors of state-run universities. West Bengal Education Minister Pradyumn Basu urged the governor to turn down the professor's appointments while the state is seeking legal opinion. The latest appointment of Professor Buddhadeb Saha, a BJP leader, as prestigious Jadavpur University's interim vice-chancellor has taken the rift between the governor and the state government to a new high as Basu accused Ananda Bose of repeatedly flouting the UGC's vice-chancellor appointment guidelines that require a minimum 10-year academic experience as a professor. Reportedly, Prof. Saha also did not fully meet the criteria. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has ordered that an exercise be immediately instituted to appoint permanent VCs in the universities in West Bengal.

The Jadavpur University has been running headless since June 1 after the term of Prof. Suranjan Das, an eminent historian, ended. The state's higher education department is yet to form a search committee for his successor. Notably, the university is listed among the world's top institutions. Jadavpur University ranked 70-750 by the QS World University Rankings in 2023, and 182 in Asia. In normal circumstances, few could blame Governor Ananda Bose for appointing an interim VC at the university provided that it was in consultation with the state government and the selected candidate met the UGC criteria.

Last year, in November, a Supreme Court judgement said that university VCs must have served 10 years as university professor and his or her name should be recommended by a search-committee. The apex court said VCh appointment has to be made from the names recommended by the search-committee. The bench of Justices M.R. Shah and M.M. Sundresh referred to Section 10(3) of the University Act, 2019 which provided that the committee should prepare a list of three persons for appointment as VC based on their qualification and eligibility. The judgement dealt with a challenge by Professor Narendra Singh

Bhandari, whose appointment as VC of Sobhan Singh Jena University was earlier set aside by the Uttarakhand High Court. The contention against Bhandari's appointment was that he did not have the requisite 10-year teaching experience as professor of the variety. It had only 8.5 years' experience as professor and he was appointed as member of the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission in 2017. However, he made the case that while serving the Commission he was appointed as professor of the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission in 2017. However, he made the case that while serving the Commission he was appointed as professor of the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission in 2017. However, he made the case that while serving the Commission he was appointed as professor of the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission in 2017.

Political intrusion in universities is nothing new in India. It began in the 1960s when Left parties and their student unions started vigilance campaigns to control educational institutions at all levels - from schools to universities. At that time, the fight was mostly between the Left and the national Congress party affiliated student bodies. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

NEP 2020: A call for collaboration

Editor, I write to express my concerns regarding the recent and ongoing discord between the Meghalaya College Teachers' Association (MCTA) and North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) regarding the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). While it is vital to embrace progress and reforms in the education sector it is equally crucial that stakeholders work together to ensure the best interests of our students and educators.

the challenges of the 21st century. However, the recent disagreements between MCTA and NEHU highlight the challenges of implementing this policy effectively at the grassroots level. These disagreements should serve as a reminder that the success of any educational reform depends on the collaboration and active participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, universities, policymakers, and local communities. It is imperative that MCTA and NEHU, along with other educational institutions in Meghalaya, engage in a constructive dialogue with the government and among themselves to address their concerns and provide valuable insights for the successful implementation of NEP 2020. This collaboration will help tailor the policy to the unique needs and challenges of our region while maintaining its core principles.

One of the significant points of contention revolves around the flexibility and autonomy of educational institutions. NEP 2020 advocates for greater autonomy, which can empower institutions to innovate and adapt their curriculum to local needs. However, it is crucial that this autonomy is balanced with accountability and transparency to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised. NEP 2020 has the potential to be a transformative force in Indian education, but its success hinges on the willingness of all stakeholders to collaborate and address concerns constructively. I urge MCTA, NEHU, and the government to engage in open and inclusive discussions to find common ground and shape the policy to serve the best interests of our students and educators.

advancement of education in Meghalaya. Yours etc, Chinsan R Sangma Shillong-4

More investment needed for space science Editor, The editorial "Science, Religion" (ST August 29, 2023) makes an interesting reading. The controversy over the naming of the lunar landing site reflects the changing political landscape in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is currently in power, is a Hindu nationalist party. The Congress Party, which was in power when Chandrayaan-1 crashed in 2008, is a secular party. The naming of the lunar landing sites is a symbolic gesture that reflects the different visions of India held by the BJP and the Congress Party. Let us keep the controversy

aside but take note of a report by the Indian Space Association (ISA) and Ernst & Young that India's space economy is expected to grow to \$45 billion in the next 10 years. The report also states that the satellite launch services segment is expected to witness the fastest growth due to increasing private participation. The space economy is a rapidly growing sector, with a global worth of at least \$469 billion according to the report of the World Economic Forum. The term 'space economy' refers to the goods and services produced in space for use in space, such as mining the moon or asteroids for material. The space sector is not only a growth sector in itself but also a key enabler of growth in other sectors. The deployment of new space infrastructure has brought benefits to industries including meteorology, energy, telecommunications, insurance, transport, maritime, aviation, and urban development. India's recent

success with Chandrayaan-3 has enhanced the credibility of its space sector and opened up opportunities for private participation in the space sector. The Moon mission will open up a number of opportunities in the space tech sector, giving a boost to the country's economy. Let us and ISRO for the work it does on a shoestring budget while it is incumbent upon the Government of India to enhance the budget of Indian Space Research Organisation, the Department of Space Budget allocation of Rs 12,543.91 crore for fiscal year 2023-24 should be enhanced to Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 crore the years ahead if India is to do the science that is transformational and not incremental.

"For greed all nature is too little."

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Shillong Times

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Sustainable Mining - An Oxymoron

It is evident that the half a score cement companies located in Jaintia Hills alone would need to expand their area of limestone mining to sustain their business in which the companies are heavily invested. It is also a travesty that most of the limestone is located in and around the Narpuh Wildlife Sanctuary in East Jaintia Hills. Public hearings are the sine qua non for expanding the mining areas and these at best are conducted in the breach by the State Pollution Control Board. These hearings are meant to tick the boxes in government documents. As always, a public hearing on the expansion of mines is fraught. There are members of the surrounding communities that have foresight and are genuinely concerned about the environmental impacts of cement production. The fact that effluents from cement companies is what has virtually killed the Lukhra river making it unsafe for riverine life should have made the communities revisit their priorities. After all, it's a difficult choice between an environment that can sustain life and an industry that requires constant onslaught and erosion of this life sustaining environment.

It is a fact that large-scale mining operations, especially those using open-pit mining techniques, can result in significant deforestation through forest clearing and the construction of roads which open remote forest areas to transient settlers, land speculators, and miners owners. These settlers and miners are probably a greater threat to the biodiversity that exemplifies the north eastern region as a whole and Meghalaya in particular. The Narpuh Wildlife Sanctuary is known to be the home of the hoolock gibbons and whatever is left of them. This should have been the single most compelling reason to stop further alienation of forest land for mining purposes. But it appears that even those in charge of protecting the environment are mostly engaged in giving out environmental impact assessment (EIA) clearances to mining industries because they are also acting at the behest of the mining companies or are under pressure from central government authorities.

What is also of concern is the division within the community. While a section is against allowing further expansion of mining areas by cement companies, others are ready and willing to be part of the consensus group that is ready to part with community land and hence in direct confrontation with the dissenting group. This is what created the ruckus recently in East Jaintia Hills and led to a confrontation between these two groups. Whether the division is based on ignorance alone or the pursuit of wealth by one group and the futuristic vision of the other group is difficult to assess. Perhaps the time is not far off when the impact of encroachment into forest areas by people with mining interests will be felt. By then it might be too late as is the case with the several dozens of coke plants in the same district which have now been brought down courtesy the Meghalaya High Court.

Letters to the Editor

Chandrayaan-3 ignites debate over India's secular values

In a surprising turn of events, the Chandrayaan 3 mission, India's ambitious lunar exploration project, has come under scrutiny for what some critics are calling an overbearing Hindu influence, sparking a debate over the country's commitment to its secular principles. The unveiling of the Chandrayaan 3 mission emblem, featuring the iconic imagery of the moon goddess Chandrama and the symbolic representation of Shri Shakti, has sparked a heated national debate over the balance between cultural heritage and India's secular principles. While many view this as a celebration of India's cultural heritage, others are voicing concerns that such overt religious symbolism goes against the principles of a secular state.

Critics argue that the use of a Hindu deity as a nationally funded and significant scientific endeavour blurs the lines between religion and state. They fear that this could alienate India's diverse population, which includes a multitude of religions, faiths, and beliefs. The mission emblem's Hindu symbolism, they say, sends a message

that the government may be favouring one religion over others, thereby diluting the secular fabric of the nation. Supporters of the mission, however, contend that the use of Chandrama's image is a reflection of India's rich cultural tapestry and its historical connection to space exploration. They point out that space missions often draw inspiration from various sources, including art, literature, and mythology, to symbolize human curiosity and aspiration. The Indian government has responded to the controversy by emphasizing that the use of Chandrama's image is not meant to promote any particular religion but is intended to be a representation of India's cultural heritage. They maintain that the country's secular values remain intact, and the mission is a testament to India's scientific and technological prowess. Scholars and experts are divided on the issue. Some argue that a nation's cultural symbols can coexist with its secular ideals, while others caution against mixing religious and scientific endeavours on such a public platform.

The Chandrayaan 3 mission itself remains a crucial endeavour for India, aiming to build upon the successes of its predecessors and further the nation's space exploration capabilities. As the debate over the mission's emblem symbolises an

Dear members of the 'National Liberation Council of Nongkyidong' (NLCN). I am writing to you to share some of my thoughts which may resonate with you. I do not know your background. I do not know the reasons why you decided to form the NLCN. The nature and intentions of your organisation are not known. But as the name suggests you want to liberate the 'Nongkyidong' or rural Meghalaya. But what do you desire to set the rural villages free from? The police say you want to promote your ideals through the violent methods.

One assumption for the reason for NLCN is unemployment. Everyone agrees that unemployment is a huge problem and a genuine concern. Last year in October this issue echoed in a rally organised by the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGAP) in the heart of Shillong. The fact that hundreds of youths participated in the march tells the sad state of joblessness in the state. This year towards the end of May and beginning of June almost half of the state was in protest mode showing solidarity with the fast of the VPP's top leader who demanded the review of the state's job reservation policy. The masses somehow believe that if the policy is changed it will banish unemployment.

Unemployment can't be solved by the gun. For employment you need education. But even education alone may not be enough to secure a job. Skills are needed. Paul Lyngdoh drew that for criticizing the VPP accusing them of galvanising crowds for political gains and for injecting into the society the notion that a relook of the job reservation policy will greatly benefit the Khasi and Jaintia youths. Besides his doubts, the minister points to the bigger problem, unemployment. Unemployment is precisely the lack of skills. Lack of skills make one unfit for jobs. Our youths may be degree holders. But do they possess the necessary skills? Do they have sufficient language (speaking, writing and reading), and arithmetic skills? Are they trained for specific skills like communication, computer competency, welding, mechanics, beautician, cooking, electrical, mobile repairing, farming and so on? It is skills that fetch employment. By employment, I don't mean government jobs. Unfortunately employment has been wrongly equated with government job. This

it highlights broader questions about how a country can celebrate its cultural heritage while upholding the principles of secularism. In a nation as diverse as India, where people from different backgrounds come together to form a unified whole, striking the right balance between cultural expression and secularism remains an ongoing challenge. As Chandrayaan-3 propels India's space exploration journey forward, the nation grapples with the implications of its cultural past on its path to a scientifically advanced future. Yours etc., Maven Nongnum, Via email

A global political village in the horizon

It was interesting to listen to the Prime Minister's speech after the Chandrayaan-3 historic landing on the moon. This is India's biggest achievement in space yet the Prime Minister also chose to laud India's achievement as an achievement of the world and he also said that India's achievements should inspire the Global South to follow in India's footsteps. He also said he would replicate such feats

An Open Letter to the NLCN

By Albert Thyrning

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now. This may be one of the reasons for you to form the NLCN. As responsible youths we should see that mining does not damage the environment. We can see that the ecology in the coal rich areas in Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills are irreversibly impaired. We see protests against TOPECM and other cement plants because they choke human life. Coke plants are also being demolished in your home districts. Jobs and unsustainable development can never compensate for clean air, clean water and clean soil.

One of the methods to change rural Meghalaya is to change the way elections and electioneering are conducted here. More than in the cities, elections in rural areas are not conducted in a fair manner. They are joyrides, dancing, singing, eating, drinking and making merry out of generous cash doled out by candidates. This is not a healthy sign. You could help to reverse this trend. The educated can also become enterprising farmers. The government is offering help to individuals who want to take up farming.

You may not want 'how to get education' and 'how to acquire skills. True there are no schools and colleges in the villages. Even if there are, they don't function properly. They are a dilapidated state. Teachers are irregular. All the good institutions are in urban areas. You are right. But I don't understand how AK47 can change the scenario. It will worsen the situation. If you are in villages, even the remotest of them, you can make a difference by being over-ground activists. You can lead the way by taking ownership of the LP schools in the villages. Ask the managing committee to follow up on the teachers. Inform the authorities if teachers neglect their duties. Make sure the funds for the schools are utilized properly. Inspector of schools and the education minister may not reach the village schools, but if villages themselves assume responsibility they can transform the present hopelessness. Your role in this regard is a better option than being 'Robin Hood'.

It is claimed you are from Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills. Some of you may be young, but other might have worked in coal mines. Now you can do it only clandestinely. You may complain that you have no work

governance that exists in the world today. Yours etc., Gary Marhaning, Via email

Supreme Court on RTI

The Supreme Court has directed the Central Information Commission (CIC) and the State Information Commissions (SICs) to ensure proper implementation of the mandate of Section 4 of the RTI Act under which the public authorities are statutorily obliged to maintain all public records and to disseminate information for easy accessibility to the public. The order came from a three-judge bench of Chief Justice of India, Justice D. Y. Chandrachud, Justice PS Narasimha, and Justice JB Parivallu on a petition filed by Kishan Chaud Jain seeking effective implementation of the mandate of Section 4 of the RTI Act under which the public authorities are statutorily obliged to maintain all public records and to disseminate information for easy accessibility to the public.

Repeated interventions by various courts to enforce the provisions of the RTI Act highlight a concerning trend. The increasing number of lawsuits at both the CIC and SICs indicates that the public is being denied access to information following RTI guidelines. The Department of Personnel and

Training had issued an Office Memorandum mandating third-party audits, but participation in these audits is had been lacking. This situation is especially troubling since it necessitates the highest court in the country to step in to safeguard the RTI Act. The RTI Act was enacted to bring transparency and accountability to the system, and any denial of information runs counter to the very essence of the system. The right approach will be to ensure that the public has access to essential information without the need for formal requests, promoting a more open and informed society.

This ruling is a significant boost for RTI activists, who tirelessly work to promote transparency and accountability within the system. Their efforts are crucial in upholding the principles on which the RTI Act was founded, and this directive from the Supreme Court reinforces the importance of its implementation. It serves as a reminder that the RTI Act is a vital tool for ensuring Government accountability and that it must be upheld and enforced diligently. Yours etc., Yash Pal Rathan, Via email

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Protesting the Strong. This morning I received a video from Grissa of a church group who were stopped from worshipping by a police group. I watched as the church service was snatched by the police and the priest dragged to the police station. He was let off later, because the only reason he was taken was to harass him and cause fear among the parishioners.

But I want to move away from that scene as it is becoming increasingly common. I want to move across to why a majority community is boobyed by minorities? Do the majority community realise they are just being hoodwinked, that fear is being imposed into their minds about issues which there is nothing to fear about? Let's take the 'anti-corruption' law that we hear so much about. Very often I go out of station and stay with a close friend of mine in his home. He does the same when he comes to my city. At his home, I open my Bible and pray in the bedroom he always throws open for me even as I know from the incense smells that waft to my room that either he or his wife are doing their pooja.

Many times in our discussions I bring references to the Bible, and he does the same from Hindu scriptures. Not once has he felt threatened by this or I by him. Now comes an imaginary scene, the doorbell rings and a policeman at the door says to him, "Sir we have come to arrest your friend! He was trying to convert you!" I can imagine my friend saying, "Do I look like a weak man?" "No sir, it is not about you. It is about him!" "No it is about me," says my friend, "When you come to give me protection, you make me appear weak!"

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In other words what the policeman is actually saying is, "We don't feel you are strong enough to protect yourself." This is exactly what the laws are actually saying. "We feel you are weak, so we want to spend taxpayers money in defending you!" "Very kind really weak?" On the contrary I feel that most Hindus in our country are strong in their faith, as well as with Christians and Muslims ruling our nation for nearly five centuries and before that with Buddhism also being practiced by rulers, the impact was hardly felt!

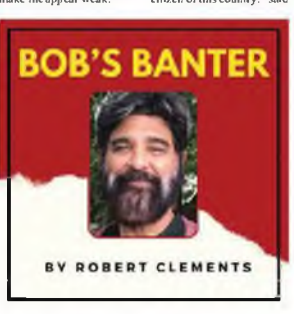
And so, with Love Jihad. What this law tells our women is, "You can't control your hearts! Really? Is that how your daughter or mine is? Do our women realise they are being called weak?" We are not weak but strong people! Strong enough to send a spacecraft to the moon. Learn to be discerning and realise that to disrespect from real issues that we need to vote on, we are being made to fear shadows, from which we need no protection!

But there are also those that get concerned over their own feet will take those who marry out of love, well here's another imaginary story for them: The poor man who had converted from the religion

of his forefathers to that of a so-called foreign god, stood in front of a judge in a courtroom somewhere in India wearing a loin cloth and a bit of a discarded shawl. "Did you change your religion out of your own free will?" asked the judge. "Yes, your honour." "Was there any allurements or inducement that made you do so?" "Yes your honour!" said the poor man and the courtroom buzzed with excitement.

"What was the inducement offered?" asked the judge, peering at the poor (tribal and getting ready to leave the case. "The promise of an attractive spiritual life and of a God who listens to me!" "Was there no other inducement?" "No your honour, I was not offered any money to change my God, as I was offered by all the candidates in the last elections to change my vote! And your honour?" "Yes!" said the judge. "When political parties offer free TVs, free electricity, cheap rice and free housing..." "Yes, yes I know!" said the judge.

"Isn't that allurements and inducement?" "I am the one asking the questions!" said the judge. "I am sorry your honor. And your honour?" "I told you I am the one." "I am a poor man..." "Yes I know," said the judge. "Poor and uneducated?" "I know that!" "Starting and bungry?" "What are you leading up to?" asked the impatient judge. "But you have still given me the freedom to vote!" "That is the right of every citizen of this country!" said



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

the judge proudly, "and it is my duty to see that no one stops you from exercising this right!" "Thank you your honour!" said the poor man and there was a hush in the courtroom as he drew himself to his full height and said, "If I, your honour, am good enough with the right to vote, government out of power, then why your honour can't I the same poor man be trusted to change my religion and my God when I want to, without having to give an explanation to your any officer in this country? Let me test another god as much as I test a new government! If I am good enough to vote then your honour I am good enough to choose my faith!" There was silence in the courtroom as the poor man sat down. So, be prudent and discerning dear reader. Don't be fooled by the loud noise of savage drum beats, caused by the laws of hate and division, even as the beautiful conversation of peace given by the capacity of a diverse yet united nation is slowly but surely removed from beneath us, under the guise of 'protection'! The Author continues an Online Writers and Speakers Course. For more details send a thumbs up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883. Email: bobsbanter@gmail.com