

"The soul that sees beauty may sometimes walk alone."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## The Shillong Times

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### IED blast and HNLC

THAT a juvenile would have the temerity to plant an IED at a public place and detonate it tells us that societies and families are losing their grip on the youth. When the youth are criminalised so early in life, society should question its ethical mores. Thanks to CCTV cameras, police were able to arrest the criminal. This is the not the first time that CCTV cameras have come to the aid of the police. It reinforces the need for installing CCTV cameras at crowded, vulnerable spaces. Meanwhile, as expected, the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) has claimed responsibility for the blast as it did on previous occasions. It is learnt that in the last few days, extortion demands had suddenly gone up in the area. This is perhaps to warn the merchants of the area to pay up or face the consequences. This has been the modus operandi of the HNLC.

In the last two years the number of school and college drop-outs has burgeoned and unemployment has reached desperate levels. It is but natural to see a rise in criminal activities. Add to that the spiralling number of drug abusers and the state faces a challenging situation requiring sophisticated levels of policing and intelligence gathering. In the past four years the Home Department under the MDA Government has been pulverized by political patronage in postings and transfers of police personnel. Law enforcers have been used to subvert the law. They facilitated illegal mining and transportation of coal. Key personnel were posted at strategic points to ensure that coal trucks moved without a glitch even while the Government stoutly denied that coal mining was carrying on. But every now and again nature has a way of embarrassing the wrongdoers by making the coal trucks turn turtle in the middle of a busy thoroughfare. Filing of FIRs against coal trucks became more of a joke since these were never followed through. The coal merchants shamelessly revealed they were paying the powers that be Rs 90,000 per truck for seamless passage.

The slap on the face of the already demoralised police force came on August 15, 2021, when firearms were snatched from an elite force - the SF-10 - a force trained at great cost to the state but which have been reduced to amateurs unable to defend their posts. And the criminals who walked away with the firearms were told to surrender them and they would receive a general amnesty - in short no action would be taken against them. After this, the police morale (at least for those that joined with the objective of delivering on their oaths) had sunk to its nadir. It is important for the new DGP to boost up the sagging morale of the team, provided the political masters allow that.

## India bought the Israeli Spyware during Modi's Isreal visit in 2017

# NYT report on Pegasus brings Modi near his 'watergate moment'

By Nitya Chakraborty

The New York Times has finally put the Narendra Modi Government on the dock. India officially bought Israeli spyware Pegasus as a part of the composite defence deal during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel in July 2017. For the last six months since the report about the surveillance by the spyware on Indians including politicians, journalists and human rights workers appeared in the media, the centre consistently denied the involvement of its agencies. The civil society activists including the journalists had to finally seek the intervention of the Supreme Court to probe this highly sensitive issue affecting the rights and privacy of the individuals. The apex court finally agreed to set up an expert committee in its order of October 27 last year.

The observations made by the learned bench of Supreme Court led by the Chief Justice of India NV Ramana prima facie confirmed what the petitioners said in their allegations that the ruling administration at the centre is stonewalling any probe into the allegations which are hitting at the fundamental rights of the citizens including politicians, journalists, human rights activists and even the senior officials of the centre.

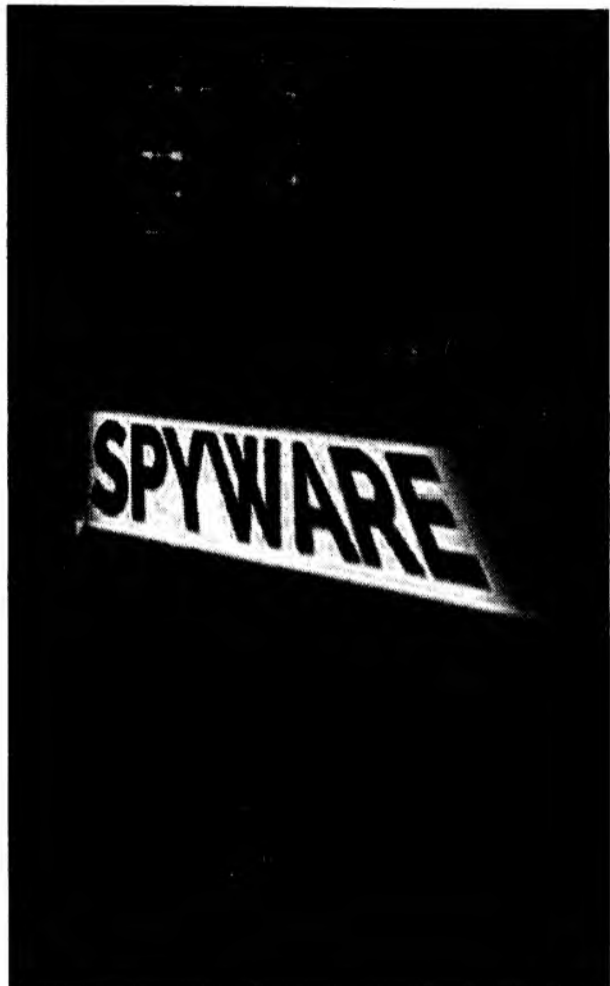
The probe panel set up by the bench is scheduled to submit its report to the Supreme Court after getting the statements of the affected persons. It is likely by March this year and then the hearing will be taking place. The NYT report, which is based on one long year of investigations, will be a major document to be considered by the apex court. The report totally confirmed what the petitioners were alleging that the entire operations of Pegasus was sponsored by the centre.

In 1972, the Watergate scandal led to huge controversy in the United States politics and finally President Nixon had to resign from the Presidency. That also had a relationship with spying on the opposition and tampering with the official documents. The two leading journalists of the US papers pursued the scandal and finally there was

no escape route for the President. If the probe panel after going into the all documents connected to the engagement of Pegasus software can come to the conclusion that there was deliberate attempt

report now shows how the Government continuously told lies to the media and the people.

In July last year, at the peak of this Pegasus controversy in Parliament when



by the top government people to encourage espionage on citizens of the country that had nothing to do with national security, that will be an attack on the fundamental rights of the citizens and the Supreme Court can take action on that.

As regards the Pegasus issue the entire focus is on the Prime Minister, the PMO and the National Security Adviser. It is not so much to do with the BJP as a party but it is to do with the Prime Minister and the agencies on which he has full control. The Supreme Court observations meant that the judges had no belief in what the Government lawyers told them about denying a detailed affidavit to the Court on the plea of national security. The NYT

most of the days, Prime Minister was not present in the house, the union IT Minister said that the report on Pegasus surveillance on Indians at the instance of a government agency was a sensational attempt to malign Indian democracy and its well established institutions. He then made the point that the Israeli company NSO rubbished the reports in the Indian press. But the fact is that NSO officials, even at that time, said that their services are utilised at government levels only.

In 1989, the BJP was the main party which carried a ceaseless campaign against the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi before the Lok Sabha elections at the end of the year on the issue of Bofors pay off which was nothing

compared to the present Pegasus scandal. That was an amount of Rs. 64 crore which could not be proved in court while after 32 years, this Pegasus snoopgate is something which deals with the government bid to trample the provisions of the Constitution regarding personal freedom and fundamental rights.

In the name of national security, the Modi government has arrested a number of rights activists and they are suffering in jail for months and years. The UAPA provisions are being imposed on anyone who challenges the present government. Criticism of the government is being taken as the criticism of the nation. In this milieu, the Supreme Court through this Pegasus order has come out strongly against the Modi Government's continuing stance on privacy issues by citing national security.

The CJI observed on October 27 "The state cannot get a free pass every time by raising national security concerns. No omnibus prohibition can be called against judicial review. Centre should have justified its stand here and not render the court a mute spectator."

In its order at that time, the SC underlined the importance of privacy and technology, saying that while technology can be used to improve the lives of people, it can also be used to invade privacy. It said certain limitations exist when it comes to privacy, but the restrictions have to pass constitutional muster.

The budget session of Parliament is beginning on January 31. It will end in the first week of April. The opposition parties led by the Congress, Left and others have to focus decisively on the Pegasus issue and expose how the bid for curtailing individual privacy of Indian citizens has been made a part of a US\$ 2 billion defence deal with Israel and all these at the whims of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Prime Minister has to be made answerable in the House this time. If the Government has the guts, let it officially deny that there was no such Pegasus inclusion in the defence deal. The country has the right to know about it from Narendra Modi. (IPA Service)

## Budget must focus on jobs

By Shivaji Sarkar

It may be imperative on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to refocus the Union Budget from possible populism, an election-time compulsion, to professionalism, creating jobs everywhere. The trigger should be two different recent incidents, tragic and problematic.

One, a family of four from Gujarat chasing "better" jobs freezes to death in the US. The other is the growing protests over railway jobs in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh for roughly 40,000 vacancies—a grim reminder of the state of India's job market. Let not Bihar and UP emerge as ticking social bombs for the sheer size of the unemployed.

The unemployment rate rose to a four-month high to 7.9 per cent in December 2021. It stood at 7 per cent in November last year and 9.1 per cent in December 2020. But jobs were shrinking even before that in 2019 and earlier. The World Bank says that India has the highest total unemployment rate at 21.01 per cent for the 15-24 year-old population.

The NSSO's 2017-18 data stress that actually the job situation is grimmer. The overall rate of open unemployment (as opposed to under-employment or disguised unemployment) had risen sharply after 2011-12. That has been proven in the NSSO numbers. Former Chief Economic Advisor K Subramanian stresses that it is not employment but "The key aspect is meaningful employment". The 2017-18 unofficially leaked NSSO data revealed that the unemployment rate was never over 2.6% between 1977-78 and 2011-12. But it had jumped to 6.1 per cent in 2017-18. Now it touches 9 plus per cent.

The jobs have to be the priority in a country where the number multiplies every day. The Covid-19 lockdown is the immediate cause. Blaming any government for this criticism is not wise. As a nation somewhere the political parties are found to be clueless. The NITI Aayog, supposedly tasked to recommend like its predecessor Planning Commission, is not apt in hitting the nail.

The situation has been aggravating and the country is resorting to welfarism - one slips into an abyss and he is provided free food for sustenance; instead of development - making the man once rescued self-sufficient in income terms to add to his own and country's economy. The Narendra Modi government has shown enough empathy with free food dole and MGNREGA jobs to keep the people afloat. Now it has to move beyond welfarism so that the country takes a leap to a better life.

The previous budgets came up with entrepreneurship, Skill India, MUDRA and similar other schemes. These did not fulfill the objectives. Partly the concept of unicorn has succeeded. Overall the jobs remain scarce and low paid.

The Gujarat family was apparently well off with a teacher's job and sundry other chores. It could pay \$ 2.5 lakh for their dream travel through agents for illegal entry to the US. What sparked them like many Gujaratis and Punjabis rushing to El Dorado may be the flashy "lifestyle". In 2007, Babubhai Katara, MP was caught trying to smuggle out carrying a Punjabi woman and her son as his own for Rs 30 lakh to the US. His party suspended him.

What triggered the Bihar and UP problem is lack of job. Once private sector jobs were considered well-paid. The Seventh Pay Commission changed that. Now for years the corporate, including the IT, are not creating the required number of jobs.

And jobs fetch lower wages and remain insecure.

Interestingly, during Atal Behari Vajpayee's NDA-I six crore jobs were created. There is a change. Because of the economic slowdown during the past many years manufacturing has suffered. The index for industrial production remains at a low. Educational qualifications have improved causing an aspirational problem. There were 70 million such persons in 2004-05 but increased to 115.6 million by 2017-18. They are growing by about 5 million a year, according to Santosh Mehrotra, Professor of economics, Centre for Labour. He says that is most worrying is that manufacturing jobs actually fell in absolute terms from 58.9 million in 2011-12 to 48.3 million in 2015-16, a whopping 10.6 million over a mere four-year period.

Bihar has about 13 per cent unemployment. The state of UP has 5.41 per cent unemployment in May-August 2021 against 3.75 per cent in March 2017. Rightly UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath says that he would create more jobs.

Indeed, the job strategy has to change. An interesting aspect is that because of the Narendra Modi government's less interference in PSU operations, even in the difficult Covid times 171 PSUs continued to have good profits despite better salary structure. This indicates that proper salaries could be paid even during crisis period and profits could be sustained. It also calls for reviewing the PSU disinvestment policy. The world has seen the failure of the global private sector for unethical practices since 2007-08 Lehman melt-downs.

The Finance Minister may open a new leaf. India has thrived with a mixed economy. The PSUs have the capacity to start a competitive economy that the private sector abhors. No national economy can thrive without competition within. Monopolised private or public sector would cause inbreeding, leading to poor performance. She has to be innovative enough to help create rural farm and non-farm jobs that make the rural economy viable and lifestyle attractive to stem rural migration.

Post lockdown it would be a wait and watch situation for the private sector, says Vikas Chadha, MD, Global Outsourcing. Sitharaman has to observe global practices, particularly sharp Chinese economic policies, European backlash against China and possible escalation of western sanctions against Russia. These would be important to create India-centric policies to increase jobs in different sectors.

Private sector also has a tendency to employ less and pay less. If jobs are to be a priority this policy has to be given up. The PSUs can deliver here creating a situation where the private sector also would have to pay just wages, maybe to their dislike. The Finance Minister has to think in terms of the nation's growth and a promised \$5 trillion economy. In the new scenario, she has to involve and inspire the Indian private sector to create quality jobs and make them capable of competing with their international rivals.

The FM has to have a sharp job-creation strategy to initiate the steps to boost urban, rural, private and public employment. This helps India accelerate its growth pace with larger participation of the population and become a cynosure of the new world economy. ---INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### Offline Classes: Salvaging Our Children's Future

Editor,  
The debate on the mode of conducting classes is a very relevant one and we should all engage with maturity and with the right spirit and concern. We are talking about the lives and futures of our children. After two years of online classes and exams, every parent with a school or college going child is more than aware of the nature of online education. And without a doubt, he/she has a well thought out opinion of it. Further, the situation is also informed by the reaction of companies and institutions who have hinted in one way or the other their distrust of results of exams conducted online. One instance of this is educational institutions calculating marks only of exams conducted offline and steering clear of marks of exams conducted online. But now that some students are attending more online classes and sitting for online exams only, that is not going to be just as convenient anymore.

While a lot has been said so far by many concerned parents and educators through your 'Letters to the Editor,' I feel we need to revisit the matter and consider the following points.

COVID-19 has now been scaled down from a pandemic to an endemic, meaning it is going to be with us for a long time and we need to learn to live with it along

with all the precautions. Covid is not going away any time soon. We need to accept this and prepare maturely to return to normalcy. We also need to accept the fact that lessons taught physically in physical classrooms are way better, more effective and more meaningful than over online platforms that are plagued with technical issues. Our children's mental and physical health is now in jeopardy. They can end up with long-lasting adverse effects that could impair their lives.

Now what is really ironic to consider is that while it is all right for people to eat out in restaurants, in small rooms and shops, hold weddings, even with 50 people only, go to the parks and picnics, resorts and so on, students, however, cannot go to offline classes where the size of the classrooms and number of people sitting in them can be managed and adapted to ensure the protection of their health better than restaurants, shops and wedding halls have been able to do. Such thinking goes only to reveal the kind of mentality that we have as a people.

The more we continue to engage in debates and pontificating as we have been doing for the past many months, we shall continue to push our children deeper into a dark and despondent world where the future is bleak and the condition of life is cruel and raw. Our children need an education that is solid, complete, wholesome, relevant and meaningful which only offline classes can give. And they need degrees that can be trusted which only

offline exams can ensure. Let us be more practical and farsighted and give our children the best that they deserve to get from us.

Yours etc.,  
P. Majaw,  
Shillong-1

#### MPS/DSC Needs Urgent Reforms

Editor,  
Apropos to the letter to the editor, captioned MPS/DSC needs urgent reforms (ST Jan 19, 2022), I would like to add more on this. I appreciate the Computer Section, as well as the Computer/e-committee of the Commission (if it exists) for upgrading the website from time to time and introducing the Online Registration System with all the information regarding Post Application, Online fee payment as well as SMS intimation regarding conduct of exams etc.

The Commission does conduct exams from time to time but the pattern of declaring the results is ambiguous. The Commission neither provides the answer keys for the respective sets of question papers nor any notification to the candidate to file representation/make challenges to the wrong printed questions or answers. The results declared are merely roll numbers with no details of marks scored. On enquiry from the officials regarding marks, the procedure is to write an application to the Controller of Examinations requesting for marks and

apart from application one has to attach the Voter ID. The files processed in this way result in candidates having to wait for months to know their results. This is pathetic. Why are the marks of candidates not declared in the Official Website. What is so confidential with our marks?

Knowing the answers key will really help a candidate like me to know my strengths and weaknesses on the subject. Moreover, there is neither any notification regarding the cut off marks to be eligible for the interview rounds nor any notification on marks allotted for the wrongly printed questions or answers in the official website. I really appreciate the Central Recruitment Board of Meghalaya Police. Their recruitment is very systematic, clear, and justifiable. Recently I appeared for the Physical Fitness Test for the Post of Sub Inspector just to check with their pattern of conducting the Test. We were asked to proceed for documents verification at first, then biometrics, height, physical test and the results are updated on the website with all the details of a candidate like timings, score, height etc.

There were some contractual posts advertised by the Meghalaya Police for the CCTNS Project four or five months ago. Well, I thought since its just a contractual post the proceedings might be just formalities. I found it to be more systematic here as well. The Recruitment Board shortlisted the candidates as mentioned in the advertisement, called for the written

exams, declared the results with the marks secured by all the candidates, shortlisted the candidates for next round of interviews with the cut off marks. This seems to be so unambiguous and justifiable. In fact, in this age of technology, if MPSC/DSC conduct the exams online, the time delay in correcting the answers papers, sorting the marks and declaring the results would have been shortened. Yes, it's high time now that MPSC/DSC reform their systems.

Yours etc.,  
C L Kynshi,  
Via email

#### IED blast in Police Bazar

Editor,  
The suspected IED blast in the heart of Shillong on January 30 last is a matter of serious concern for the citizens of the capital town. This is the second such instance within a span of six months which lends credence to the suspicion that the perpetrators of such crime is capable of pouncing with impunity on the citizenry anywhere any time in our state. After every incident of violence and terror the Chief Minister (CM) and his colleagues issue ritualistic condemnation without any visible, tangible action on the ground to instill a sense of security amongst the general public. Is the role of the CM limited to issuing condemnation statements after any violent incident as one has regularly experienced during his tenure? Or is he constitutionally bound to do more?

Yours etc.,  
D. Bhattacharjee  
Shillong-1

#### Better Late than Never

This is a delayed response to the article by HH Mohrmen dated January 24, 2022, captioned, "Not learning from history." The writer has rightly mentioned that the younger citizens of the state are not familiar with the hill state movement. I and many of my friends that I had talked to are ignorant of this important chapter in the history of our state. Except for a few names, we have never heard the names of most of those involved in the Movement, as mentioned in the article and one by a senior citizen Filtina Lyndem, who herself was involved in the Movement. I am very sure there are many more from both the tribal and non-tribal community whose names should appear in this chapter of history. It has been fifty years and these persons had not been honoured in a befitting manner. There were suggestions that had appeared in this paper that they be rewarded in cash. But I personally will go with HH Mohrmen's suggestions that the best way to honour them is to have their names written in the history book of the state.

Yours etc.,  
Lobi Kurbah  
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.

"The mind that is wise mourns less for what age takes away; than what it leaves behind."  
—William Wordsworth

## The Shillong Times

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### Union Budget: Nothing to crow about

THE Union Budget presented in Parliament on Tuesday is noted mainly for its emphasis on high government spending to boost growth and create more job opportunities -- with less reliance on private enterprise which is not yielding the desired investments. The mantra for the Centre as also for states with a liberalization of rules is to borrow and spend for assets-creation. Other than this, the budget proposals are of a general nature and did not seem to visibly inspire even the assembled members in Parliament. Clearly, the Finance Minister's speech was uninspiring and failed to catch the fancy of the nation about any leap forward. Among the positives, the fiscal deficit has been brought down by 0.5 per cent of the GDP to 6.4 per cent.

While there is a repetitive drone while delivering budget speeches about reserving "lakhs of crores" for agriculture, infrastructure, MSMEs, housing etc, and these formed the centre-piece of the budget speech, the fact remains that any budget is principally about earmarking funds. In the case of the "tranches" announced during the pandemic period, the gains from these for the national economy and the people at large are worth a watch. The PM Development Initiative for North East which will essentially cater to infrastructure development has been earmarked Rs 1500 crore. This is too small a sum for a region with huge developmental backlog. While income tax rules remain more or less unchanged -- to the relief of the salaried middle class -- the ever-increasing GST collection has become the alternative means to fill the government coffers and this comes mostly from 80 per cent of India's poor and middle class. This is an indirect way of boosting government revenues. Incidentally, those who pay through their nose are both unmindful and unconcerned. The plan of the FM that the government did not want to earn a "single paise" more by way of income tax during the pandemic is simply hogwash.

The budget speech this time was shortened by half, over 9,000 words against the 17,000 words when she presented the last budget in an atmosphere of Covid-induced gloom. The change of the chief economic adviser, a key figure with the finance department, a week before the presentation of the budget had raised eyebrows. When the nation is slowly recovering from a long lull in growth, it's time to stand steady, recreate and race ahead. A growth projection of 8 to 8.5 per cent or an estimated 4.8 per cent rise in government expenditure, or a promise about digital currency or 5G rollout alone will not suffice. This run-of-the-mill budget inspires none.

# Twin celebrations - A Half and a Century

By Albert Thyrniang

Meghalaya is 50 years old. The 51st birthday was celebrated on January 21 last. The pandemic sobered the party. As the golden jubilee is a year-long celebration, the grand finale early next year could be a gala fanfare if Omicron is arrested. In the run up to the date of the festivity and post the mellowed down function at the JN Complex, citizens made their reflections on the attainment of statehood in 1972. The remote and immediate causes were detailed. History and reminiscences were recalled. Achievements were enumerated. In the meantime negativity too crept in. A serving MLA preferred to display his brazen "political drama" for political survival.

The sentiments of the importance for a vision for the future was also emphasised. Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma is one among those who believe so. His dream for Meghalaya is to be among the top 10 states in country in 10 years' time. One is not sure as to how many share the Chief Minister's enthusiasm but it looks like promising the moon without knowing how to get there. His present multiple-party coalition, MDA government has almost come to an end without even a Common Minimum Programme. No priorities were set in black and white, no goal was targeted and hence measured; no tools to assess its achievements. Hence the generic self-certification of 'having built roads, provided water supply to households, increased children's immunization, decreased maternal and infant mortality, constructed infrastructure at an unprecedented pace and a large number of new projects in the pipeline'. In the absence of a scale the government can trumpet its 'successes' liberally. Supporters will fully agree with it while the opponents take a completely different view. An independent evaluation is impossible. This kind of vague journey will take Meghalaya nowhere close to the top 10 among the 28 states.

While making known his lofty ambitions the Chief Minister is unaware of indicators contrary to such a direction. NITI Aayog Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Index (2021) ranks Meghalaya in the 23rd position, only five places above the bottom. Among the eight (8) North Eastern states Meghalaya is condemned to the 7th position, higher only to Nagaland. The marginal improvement from 25th to 23rd position and from the score of 54 to

60 from the previous status hardly convinces anyone of a big leap in a period of 10 years. In the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) in 2019 Meghalaya recorded a negative trend in the nutrition of women and scored below the national average in health, nutrition and cognitive growth of children in the 0-6 year age group.

The next firm indicator that we won't be in league with the likes of Kerala in the next decade is the pathetic state of education in our 50 year-old state. As per the Performance Grading Index of last year Meghalaya is one of worst performers in school education. As if our esteem is not yet at the lowest, Meghalaya is at the bottom of the 14 surveyed states in cleanliness by Swachh Survekshan in 2021. The capital city, Shillong, priding itself as the Scotland of the East, has one of the worst garbage collection systems. Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong may differ but live Facebook streams showing Shillong garbage confirm the findings.

Do we have an inkling as to how to get out of the above messes? How do we soar from the bottom to the peak? What is the tangible plan? What are the proposals of the Chief Minister to drastically transform the state? When a government functions so randomly there is no hope for a phenomenal growth. Is the Republic Day statement a mere utterance bereft of any realism? Is it not better to focus on priorities rather than wishing for the skies? When teachers don't get pay, when law and order is in disarray, when juveniles are involved in illegal activities one is critical of the government's noble goals.

Another celebration was initiated last month. The Salesian Society in North East inaugurated its year-long centenary of the arrival of the first batch of missionaries on January 13, 1922. The Salesians have hit a 100 not out. Elaborate plans have been chalked out to commemorate the milestone. Eulogies on the past works are being counted. The non-apologetic acclaims of the past are justified but should we rest on the laurels of the pioneers? Should we only sit on the shoulders of giants?

The Salesians have no doubt contributed to school level education in the entire North East. But is there a plan to go beyond? Will history be kind to the 'Sons' of Don Bosco? Will they be re-

membered as contributors to primary and high school education? The veterans dared to open St. Anthony's College in 1934, the very first in the then entire Salesian world. Has the congregation done enough for higher education in the 'Seven/Eight Sister states'? Besides St. Anthony's College, there is only one other college in Meghalaya. Assam two, Nagaland one, Manipur one and Arunachal one completes the number.

In Meghalaya a Don Bosco University was envisaged in 2006/07 but it was dropped. The then government was unfavourable. Pressure groups might have also opposed. But unresponsive attitude of insiders was also responsible for its ultimate shift to Guwahati. There was another opportunity to undo the mistake. In 2017 during the jubilee celebration of a premier institution in Tura then Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma urged the Don Bosco society to set up a university in Garo Hills. The then Don Bosco leadership showed interest but apathetic attitude later saw the offer abandoned. The excuse could have been lack of finance and personnel. Were resources on offer in 1934 when St. Anthony's College was started? Was the number of students enough? Was infrastructure sufficient? If resources were a defence, Don Bosco would do nothing for youth. Hope we do not live to regret the decision.

Most of Don Bosco schools are situated in rural areas. Over a period of time they have served the poorer sections, no doubt. But are they serving the poorest of the poor now? Are these schools serving children whose parents can't afford fees? Or do orphans get admission in these schools? Are there cases when students have to take drop out of these schools because they can't cope with the fee structure? Generally, who are the beneficiaries of the Don Bosco education services? Are not the middle class and upper classes? Can the poor ever hope of landing in St. Anthony's Higher Secondary School or any of the prestigious institutions? Does not merit mean financial worth?

Salesians are well known for youth work. But this declaration could be misleading. Except Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati and Youth Centre in Shillong and a couple of others, youth services as such are very limited. Are we friends of youth today?

In the recent decades

innovative interventions, dubbed 'new frontiers' have made impacts. Don Bosco Technical India, training in IT domain, social work, collaboration with central and state governments, teacher training, YaR (Youth at Risk) involvements are commendable. But some of these laudable activities have shown signs of slowing down. Don Bosco Technical India is no more the biggest technical organisation in India.

A notable admirable effort was to promote language, media and culture. The credit of developing scripts and pioneering linguistic work goes to the Salesians. Salesians were one of the first to publish literary works (dictionaries and grammars) and religious books in indigenous languages, produce audio-video materials in local languages and promote native cultures. The magnificent Don Bosco Museum in Shillong is a living testimony. But has the contribution reached its zenith? Today, except extraordinary personalities like Fr. UV Jose, writing is uncommon. There are a number of Salesians who are well versed in languages but their knowledge might probably depart with them. The younger generation are not keen in learning another language. It startling to know that in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh the clergy don't learn the languages of the people they serve. Of course, in these states there are hundreds of languages. But should not Salesians learn at least one of these languages in their life time?

Don Bosco was a prolific writer on religion, history, law and other varied subjects. The 19th century saint inspired Salesian authors like Fr. Emmanuel Bars, Fr. Balavoin (Balawan), pioneer in Tiwa language, Fr. Elias Khariang and Fr. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, contributors to Khasi literature and the present rare individuals. But what about the rest of us? Are we unworthy successors of the earlier missionaries? How do we pass on the legacy? Is Don Bosco being kept alive?

The challenges of the state should also be a pressing concern for Don Bosco society and the Church? But is it so? What is the response to Meghalaya's below par performances in all sectors? An indifferent attitude prevails. The other day someone revealed, "I have started losing faith in the Church. There are just too few conscientious priests left." What do we do with the current year-long twin celebrations? Merely rejoice and be glad? Or should we introspect?

## Assam can be a good conduit for expanding trade with Bangladesh

By Ashis Biswas

Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh may have increased steadily in recent times but transactions involving the northern areas of Bangladesh and North-east Indian states have not really taken off. Progress remains slow despite recent official efforts on both sides to increase overall business turnover, by generating more trade between Bangladesh with Tripura and Meghalaya.

Assam, the biggest state in the region has proved a mixed proposition. The traditional wariness in Assam, about Bangladesh in general - an inevitable product of Assam's own historical development - has been hard to shake off. By extension, the term 'Bangladeshi' in Assam often means people who had crossed over from erstwhile East Pakistan or 'Bengalis' in general, in times of passion. Bangladeshis are also well aware of Assamiya reservations about them. Such a situation is hardly conducive towards the healthy growth of closer regional cultural/economic ties.

Currently there are signs that both sides may be more interested in overcoming the present stalemate. Observers have taken note of positive moves made by leaders both in Bangladesh and Assam specifically, to increase cross border trade and economic exchanges. There have been occasional visits to Assam by Bangladesh Ministers and diplomats. Bangladeshis have been participating in fairs and gatherings in Assam where garments and handicraft are sold and the Assamese have reciprocated.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma have both called for closer ties and cultural/economic exchanges, at different official fora. Earlier this year, during summer, Bangladesh sent a special gift of quality mangoes and sweets to India - more specifically to Delhi, Kolkata, Guwahati, among other destinations, to the Indian Prime Minister and Chief Ministers.

But perhaps a stronger indication of the changing times has been recent articles by Bangladesh experts about the need for a closer contact between Assam and Bangladesh, carried in the Guwahati-based media. A few years ago, this would have been unthinkable. More on this later.

However, the unusually long and sustained aggressive campaign of major Assamiya organisations like the Asom Sahitya Sabha, the AASU and the AJYCP against what they describe as an "unceasing illegal infiltration of Bangladeshis" has left a toxic legacy. Harsh words and bitter sentiments about issues relating to Bangladesh expressed from the highest political/official levels as well as in the mainstream Assam-based media have not helped matters.

As stated earlier, Assam's own history during British times and the migratory trends seen post 1947 have been the prime factors for the present situation. In short the comparatively smaller Assamiya population acutely feels the pressure of the larger Bengali population in the region, regarding it as an existential threat.

Rightly or wrongly, Bangladeshis/Bengalis who came over from East Pakistan and later, Bangladesh) settled in Assam are regarded as an already sizable minority that poses a strong challenge culturally/politically to the ruling Assamiya establishment in terms of its sheer weight in numbers. A general sense of unease gets reflected at many levels of Assam/Bangladesh interaction, especially at the official level. Until recently, Bangladesh diplomats/officials hardly interacted with the mainstream media in Assam, let alone going in for any image building exercise. Some years ago, during a brief interface between a Bangladesh diplomat and Assamiya mediapersons, the unbridgeable divergence of views on sensitive issues came to light.

The diplomat was asked whether Dhaka would take more stringent steps to stop the illegal movement of Bangladeshis, a major problem plaguing Assam over the decades. The presence of millions of mostly dirt-poor settlers added to the economic burdens of a relatively smaller Indian state.

Prompt came his reply: Since Bangladesh came into being only in 1971, Dhaka was not in a position to talk about what had happened decades ago. But his Government was prepared to deal with any major issues that might have developed after 1971, no matter how serious.

As for Bangladeshis entering Assam or India illegally, there is now in place a bilaterally accepted procedure. It is for Indian/Assam agencies to round up and present suspected illegal settlers to Dhaka authorities. They in turn would verify/check their alleged Bangladeshis origins before accepting or rejecting them as its citizens!

The element of mutual reserve extends to other levels as well including cultural initiatives. A couple of years ago, at an annual fair, Bangladeshi garment sellers put up a few stalls, with specimens of high quality Tangaal sarees and other items on offer. But sales remained low. Disappointed, the stall owners said they would not participate in such fairs anymore!

Given this background, it has been revealing to see in Assam media special write-ups from Bangladesh arguing the case for closer ties with Assam and the major mutual benefits this would bring to the region as a whole.

Interestingly, the approach of one Bangladeshi writer was not defensive at all. Quite the reverse: Assam, he reasoned, should be grateful to Bangladesh. By throwing out former ULFA militants from its territory and handing over hardened insurgent leaders, Dhaka had already earned high praise from GOI for contributing to the better security of the entire NE region, and of Assam in particular. It had frozen bank accounts run by major Indian insurgent leaders/organisations and seized their assets, to help India and for the sake of lasting regional peace and harmony. Clearly Bangladesh had done Assam a major favour.

Bangladesh, he added, was already an economic powerhouse in the region. It had much to offer to the NE states. By way of connectivity, NE states including Assam could use the waterways and the new ports Mongla and Chalna to carry their exports to ASEAN countries and beyond.

By road too, now that transit rights were operative bilaterally, Assam-based entrepreneurs could access Myanmar/Thailand areas hot to mention the Bay of Bengal. The NE region could overcome the economic limitations of being landlocked, following the example of Nepal. Both Bhutan and Nepal were seriously considering the use of Bangladeshi roads/waterways and its new ports, in addition to special facilities they already enjoy in the Kolkata/Haldia ports.

Bangladesh could learn from Assam in improving its fledgling tea production efforts, while NE entrepreneurs could learn more effective production/other techniques in exporting agri-processed items, developing fishing, rice cultivation etc. As for pending issues/problems, official negotiations and agreements whenever possible, were the only way to go forward. The strong Bangladesh middle class/rich would well be travelling to Nepal and Bhutan through Assam and the NE states. They could be interested in Assam-made garments, the rich variety of different layers of tribal culture and handicrafts of Meghalaya, Manipur or Nagaland. There could be major exchanges in expanding the bilateral food culture. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### In defence of the lone parent

Editor, A letter captioned, 'Defer Offline Exams Please' (ST Jan 26, 2022) was rudely re-torted by three letters of parents and two educationists in Shillong. Looking at the first counter reaction of the world body against Covid, it had created total confusion. When Covid 19 molecule as discovered by scientists was 25 microns, the social distance was calculated on Stokes law of Physics to be 6 feet. A month later the molecule shrunk to 5 microns. The distance was not changed to 30 ft. When the hard hit DGCA had to agree to open up civil aviation, it came up with an inconceivable idea of the middle seat to be left vacant. There was no scientific protest as in wide-bodied aircrafts the middle seat is 3 ft only or less. The distance between the passenger in front and the one behind is not more than 3 feet.

Coming to schools, online classes and exams proved a total flop. Let this be a pointer to many who downplay the role of teachers and honour them only on Teachers' Day, to change their mindsets. St Margaret's in Shillong and schools in Shimla and Punjab tried online classes but had quick reversals. Education Minister Lakhmen Rymbui in

defence of schools reopening last summer said all students of SSLC and HSSLC had received their first jobs. Little does he know that at age 18 many students today are in under-graduate colleges. Why do these anomalies in policy-making crop up? It's because officials in the Secretariat don't discuss matters with school authorities and parents.

The web-based news channel T7 took pains to invite Dr Mylliemngap, a senior doctor, a lady Principal (who was cured of Covid) and a Headmaster to discuss the issue of reopening schools. It was perhaps inspired by NDTV which discusses school reopening with WHO experts. The three put forward their points and finally all amicably concluded that it is best to put on hold the reopening of schools for the time being.

On Sunday last NDTV being concerned with loss of school years invited parents and heads of some schools to a debate. One mother was concerned about the children's vaccine which the Govt has put on hold for reasons unknown. She was confused when the WHO rep said there is no fear from Omicron as it is mild and not as severe as Delta. A senior principal said that RT-PCR tests are done daily, and affected students are quarantined in rooms in far-off buildings. Are we prepared to do that? Who do we trust

with our children's safety?

Let us also not lose sight of the great divide among elite schools and those where the poor study. In the former a child comes to school in an SUV. In the latter, several students/parents crowd in a bus with no mask or even if worn, the nose is not covered. To compare ourselves to the UK and Vietnam is odious.

Let us instead emulate what the European countries and Japan did during World War 2. Those years were declared zero years. In that case there is none to lose or gain. The life of a child is worth more than all the values that education can buy.

Yours etc.,  
W.Passah  
Ex H.O.D  
St Edmund's College.

#### A case of plagiarism!

Editor, Apropos of the article 'Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Shillong' by Wandell Passah (ST Jan 28, 2022) I draw your kind attention to paragraphs 2-9 of the article which have been copied from my published work, 'Shillong Will Never Forget Netaji' duly published in your esteemed daily on January 21, 2018) the copy of which is forwarded for your kind perusal. Moreover, very recently I have published a book named, 'Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose And Shillong' where this topic is also presented. It would have been appreciated if the author had duly acknowledged that he had excerpted the paragraphs from my write-up published four years ago in the same journal. I had to collect the data for the article with great difficulty and I had myself translated many Bengali versions of Netaji from the book of Prof. Shyamadas Bhat-tacharjee, my mentor with due acknowledgement.

I request you to publish this letter so that matters are cleared and the public knows that I had written what appeared in the above article way back in 2018.

Yours etc.,  
Uma Purkayastha,  
Shillong-4

#### IED blast: Failure of political leadership?

Editor, The low intensity IED explosion in the heart of Shillong has once again proved that the Meghalaya Home Department's intelligence gathering mechanism whether HUMINT(Human) and SIGINT(Signals) intelligence still has a long way to catch up. The munition is also becoming the preferred weapon of choice due to the easy availability of raw materials in the mar-

ket. Command-and-control failures, disorganization of tactical response and loss of real-time intelligence support has plagued the Department and the lack of seriousness of political leaders add to the disarray.

Unemployment, a national security issue combined with COVID is a deadly sandwich which is exploding at the seams and the lack of visionary leadership in the top echelons of the state machinery will put Meghalaya in jeopardy. Insurgency is another area of concern if there is a failure to keep tabs on the socio-economic problems of the people. With the porous borders in the North-eastern region, drugs and weapons are a match made in heaven.

Finally it is never too late to mend the mistakes rather than only reorganizing our bureaucracy. Former Navy SEAL, Jason Redman, author of the book 'Overcome' mentioned in a podcast that through accountability and actionable goal-setting the life ambushes which will come either in a minor or major form can be handled effectively.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Shillong-10

#### Away with reservations

Editor, The issue of reservations for employment in govern-

ment and for medical, engineering, agricultural/horticultural studies etc., continues to come up in the public domain even today in Meghalaya. It is not that people in our State are not aware of the flaws in the State's reservations policy introduced since the APHLC Government in 1972-73. This policy has been critiqued for forty years or more and has become the stumbling block for Meghalaya's youth to grow in competence, efficiency and all round competitiveness. Instead, it has reduced our state to mediocrity. After fifty years of Statehood, Meghalaya is placed second last among the small states in the country. Hence, my only suggestion to the present incumbents is to do away completely with the State Reservation Policy which has brought about damaging effects and regression in the state. I do not endorse the demand of Barilang Pyngrope and groups from Garo Hills who demand that the Government should alter the present reservation policy. Altering the policy is not going to do us any good; instead it will aggravate the ills already existing. The only positive action that will add to the strength of Meghalaya is to introduce the policy of merit and competition in government employment, appointments, allotment of seats for studies etc..

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

"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."

—Ernest Hemingway

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.172 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2022

### Meghalaya's IT Park

IN this age of Information Technology (IT) the newly inaugurated park gives hope that several bright young IT professionals from Meghalaya who are otherwise employed outside the state will bring their expertise to bear closer home. The IT Park will also be a place for all manner of technology-led start-ups. Meghalaya has been rather late in setting up this much-needed infrastructure which is a fast growing industry. It will comprise information technology services, consulting and outsourcing. In 2020 the IT industry accounted for 8% of the GDP.

Meghalaya will now join the domestic IT and Business Processing Management (BPM) industry which as of March 2021 was employing 4.5 million people. The US accounts for two-thirds of India's IT services exports. Anyone who has visited HITEC City or Cyberabad in Hyderabad would understand how the IT industry has been responsible for generating employment opportunities for the burgeoning youth population of Telangana and for the youth of other states and countries too. Cyberabad has become a major global IT hub and also the largest bio-informatics hub in India. Hyderabad is today the second largest city for software exports. Some of the leading tech companies such as Accenture, Amazon, Deloitte, Tata Consultancy Services, Microsoft, HCL, Technologies, Oracle Corporation, Google, Qualcomm, Dell, Cognizant among others. As of 2020, the IT exports from Hyderabad was ₹128,807 crore (US\$15 billion). There are about 1500 IT and ITES companies that provide employment to about 582,126 people. A similar situation exists in Bengaluru and Pune.

The IT Park in New Shillong Township has possibilities to expand since there is enough space. Last year a professional representing an IT Company in Bengaluru had come to Shillong with the aim of setting up a branch here. They said they were in talks with the Government and would be able to employ about 3000 young IT professionals within Shillong if they get all the clearances from the Government. This gives hope that many enterprising youth would join the Company and many more would be trained to take up other responsibilities. A lot depends on the Government of the day to open up the space for private investors to use the IT Park to mutual advantage. In fact, the Government should outsource this space and not take on the task of running it lest it become another non-starter. This green industry is what Meghalaya needs. For too long the state has concentrated on polluting industries such as coal mining, cement companies, coke factories and stone quarrying all of which are damaging to the environment and have poisoned our rivers and the air we breathe. The IT Park might be the answer to our twin problems – clean industry and employment. Both are win-win situations.

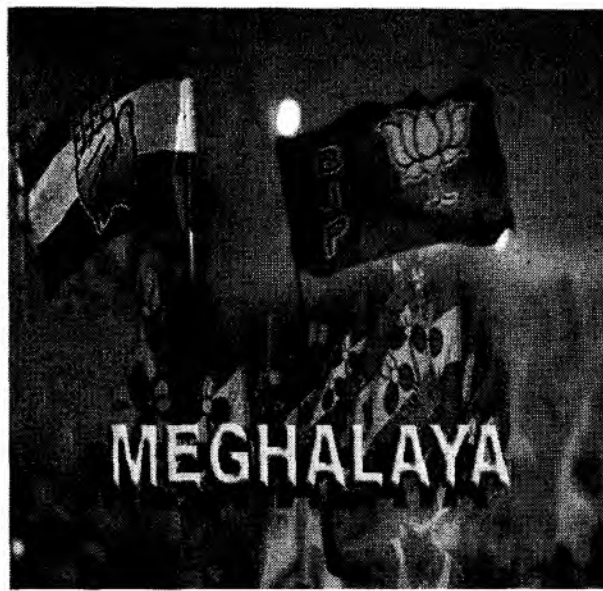
# Meghalaya and its political narratives

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

A narrative is a storyline that depicts and defines oneself in the eyes of others. It comprises of facts and ideas that distinguishes one from the competitors. In politics, a narrative is what portrays a political party in the eyes of the electorate. A political narrative shapes the image of a party in the minds (and if you like, hearts) of the electorate while assessing developmental issues like education, health, employment, business, religion, pluralism, etc. For example, when it comes to pluralism many tend to agree that the Congress is more accommodating and encompassing as compared to the BJP. This is an outcome of a political narrative perceived that the electorate have in their minds (whether consciously or sub-consciously). As Meghalaya draws nearer towards its legislative assembly election of 2023, it makes sense to try and look at the political narratives that we find from the parties at play. In an optimum situation, this is mostly the factor that decides how the people would vote. However, it must be noted that a political narrative is not an election manifesto. That is a different subject-matter altogether and not the brief of this column.

On 24th January 2022, political strategist Prashant Kishor gave an interview to NDTV where amongst many other things he talked about the political narrative of the BJP. This particular interview is significant as Meghalaya (along with Goa and Tripura) was mentioned a number of times. These are small legislative assemblies which at the moment are taken by AITC as a case study with regards to their aspirations for national dominance in 2024. Tripura is considered as generic approach whereby AITC is trying to build from the bottom up, Goa is a chaotic approach of party building just few months into elections; but, Meghalaya is an interesting case of becoming a major political party overnight without having an electoral base. The AITC is using these three states as experiments for framing a nationwide political narrative. However, according to him the most formidable political narrative in India at the moment is that of the

BJP whereby it has been able to capture the attention of the country on the plank of Hindutva, hyper-nationalism and public welfare. On such planks, beating the BJP is going to be a herculean task especially in parliamentary elections. In addition, this writer assesses that the BJP is also very good at image marketing and managing the perception of the masses as far as its acceptability is concerned. For example, take Meghalaya and its demand for ILP; no matter what the



BJP says, it is said in such a manner that the people still have a sense of hope.

In Meghalaya, the talk of political narratives is in essence 'fuzzy'. This is because we hardly find political parties having any narratives while reaching out to the electorate. In one way, the people are also to be blamed for this. In truth, we do not seek a political narrative from the parties when they approach us. What is their story? How would they benefit the masses? On which planks do they stand? How do they distinguish themselves as compared to others? None of us bothers to analyse this. As a result, it comes down to the very common saying in Meghalaya that 'we vote for a person and not a party'. Well, it is time to change this. A person is nothing without a party when it comes to development of a constituency/state. But, when a party in government has a political narrative; the narrative acts

as a benchmark with regards to its accountability to the people. Using the Congress again as an example, it banks on the pluralism narrative. If the people are appealed by it, then they would vote it into power and this pluralism becomes the yardstick by which it is evaluated. This is how political narratives work. Sadly in Meghalaya, money plays a leading role in elections. This happens right under our noses and all parties do it. This is combined with the populist measures of

PDF/HSPDP, etc portray themselves as the only parties that 'understand the aspirations' of the Khasi-Jaintia community and their welfare. But, the real question is which of the above is the most effective narrative to which the people can relate to? The answer is none of the above. The reason being, as long as the pillars that form a political narrative portrays a dismal picture in the form of poor education and health indices, corruption and nepotism in governance systems, inability to create employment opportunities, inability to create conducive business environment for entrepreneurship, the resurgence of militancy and insecurity, poor law and order, etc nothing will in truth appeal to the people. Hence, it would be best for all the political parties to revisit and brainstorm on their political narratives before extensively reaching out to the people in late 2022/early 2023. On the other side of the same coin, the electorate may exercise wisdom in choosing the right party/parties to govern.

In the end, the party which comes out with a political narrative which tackles the problems of education, health, unemployment, poverty, inequality, etc., head-on will be the most acceptable. This is because the real questions are – What will you do with the feeling of tribalism if you do not have a job/education and a livelihood? What will you do with income doubling from palm oil cultivation if it is unsustainable and unprofitable? Just squabbling about the benefits without assessing the costs does not make any sense. It is time to have a 'precise' political narrative as against just going by pluralism, inclusiveness, tribal aspirations, etc. Hit the nail where it matters. As such, the party which will do well is one which can come up with a common man centric political narrative that touches upon their everyday struggles. If that does happen, then election 2023 will not be a straight-fight between a few parties as people at large are made to believe. This is the lull before the storm!

Although 'fuzzy', it would be good to look at some of the recent narratives of the parties in brief. The NPP uses the story of being a 'problem solver' by highlighting the border settlement initiatives with Assam, shifting of people from Them Meteor, economic help for the poor during the covid-19 pandemic, etc. The Congress is more oriented towards 'pluralism' and involvement of all sections of society. The AITC is pushing as being the only alternative against the BJP added with 'inclusiveness of the poor'. VPP uses the story of 'alternative politics' and clean/transparent governance as compared to the current flock of parties. The UDP/

procrastination, and lack of physical activity. Take the children out for outdoor activities, engage them in physical games, play family games like carroms, scrabble, ludo, monopoly, snakes and ladders, etc. High Fives & Low Fives: At the end of the day, get your children to tell you the High Fives they had during the day and some of the low moments they had and listen to them. They may not have Five lows to share but even one or two would do.

**3. Establishing routines at home**  
Children need structures in their lives – rising time, sleeping time, working time, meals time, recreation time, prayer time, and of course, study time. It is the duty of parents to establish and set up a daily time table for their children. The time table that you set must be practical and realistic and must be followed by everyone at home except the babies! And with the time table one needs to be consistent and ruthless too.

**4. Control of screen time – how?**  
Model healthy electronic use – Parents, Teachers and Care-givers need to be models for our children by setting examples.  
Educate Yourself on Electronics & Technology  
Create Technology-free zones in your homes (like the No-Smoking Zones)  
Set aside times to unplug as a family  
Use parental Controls – to filter and save your children from accessing damaging contents on the net.  
Explain and educate your children as to why you

ask your children about their day – how did they spend the day etc.  
Take interest in their studies – ask them about what they learned that day; ask about their difficult subjects; ask about their friends; ask about what they are struggling with. If they don't answer, it is fine but at least you showed them that they matter to you.  
Check on their work and encourage them to sit with their books daily and consistently. They need to learn to sit still.  
**7. Physical Rest**  
Sleep is so important. Get the children to sleep early. There should be a time when lights are turned off in the house especially when it comes to managing teens. Parents just have to be very strict when it comes to this point about sleep. Children require at least 8 hours of sleep.  
**8. Be firm, be fair and be patient with your children.**  
They need to know that you care for them even if you are strict with them. They like it when you discipline them and especially when you are fair to them. Challenge their behaviour but do not hurt their person.  
Dear Parents, I hope these simple solutions are practical. They are easier said than done, but certainly not impossible to attain. All the best and let us work together to help our children enjoy and embrace their childhood and adolescence.  
(The writer is Principal, St Edmund's School. Email - principaleds@gmail.com)

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

## Solutions are in the problems

By Br Solomon Morris

It isn't that they cannot find the solution. It is that they cannot see the problem.

—G.K. Chesterton

**Dear Principals, Teachers, Parents and Students,**

In response to Mohona Sukumari's request to provide some possible solutions to the problems faced by our children due to the ongoing pandemic, I would like to suggest a few practical solutions.

**1. Have some form of Physical Classes**

Open schools for children ensuring safety protocols, maintaining social distance, using masks wherever needed, encouraging children to wash their hands frequently and teach them to take care of their cleanliness habits. Physical attendance is a must even if it means half the class comes one day and the other half on another day. It calls for meticulous planning by the school management and staff and greater cooperation from the parents and students.

**2. Call on Counsellors & Play Games**

Get the Counsellors to train the Teachers and Parents to read the signs among children which indicate that children are under duress and struggling mentally. Watch out for signs like loss of appetite, disinterestedness in engaging in conversation, lack of sleep, getting irritated quickly, showing aggressive signs of behaviour, lack of communication, spending too much time on the phone,

are controlling their Screen time

Ask your children to share their passwords with you.

Encourage your children to participate in outdoor activities that don't require screens.

Try not to reward your children with extra screen time. Have a fixed time for screen viewing.

Talk to your children daily about things happening around your immediate locality, city, State, Country & the World. There is a lot you can talk about!

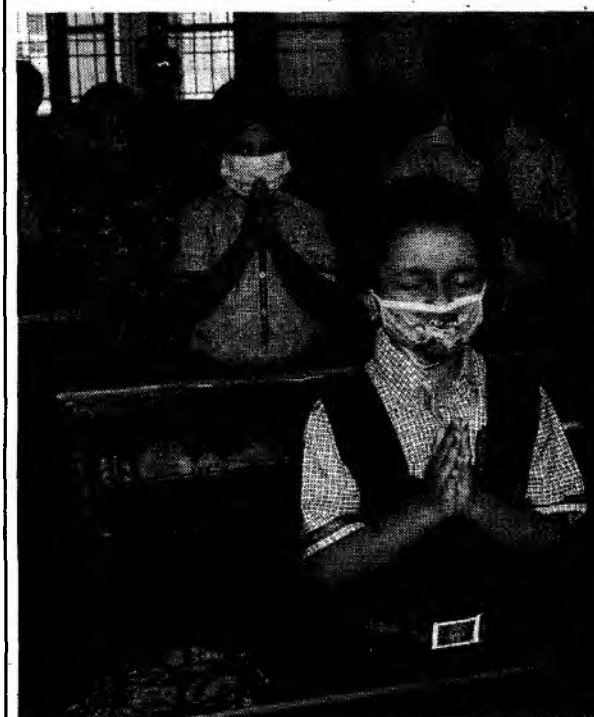
**5. Family Time**  
Have your meals together as a family. Insist that all are present for the meals at least for dinner when everyone is at home.

Pray together at a particular time when all are at home. Insist all are present for this important period. A family that prays together, stays together!

Occasionally, probably twice a month at least, try to get out as a family and recharge your batteries!

Get your children to handle household responsibilities – washing dishes, watering the plants, tidying up the house, helping in the kitchen, laying the table. Make sure the roles are defined for the children and hold them accountable if they dodge or miss their duties.

**6. Talk with your children**  
At the end of the day,



### Letters to the Editor

#### Social tensions and bold claims

Editor,

On two occasions last year until the evening of January 30, this year, we have witnessed and heard of a series of bombings, one at Kliehriat Police Quarters, followed by that hurled at Lummawrie, Laitumkrah market and the recent blast at Police Bazar, Shillong which have created ruckus, fear and inconvenience to the general public. I feel that these acts are nothing more than mechanisms which feed the ethno-centric belief of 'leid Ri' (Nationalism) by a small group of narrow-minded people (of a certain organisation) only confined to their spaces. They believe that by these intimidation tactics they will keep the other communities under their control.

I understand that the notion of 'leid Ri' is essential on an everyday context-to conserve my land and my people so that they are not ostracised or reduced to a feeling of powerlessness in their own land. The indigenous people while being masters of their land must also work diligently and in harmony with others. But what is being seen today, is a radical approach of 'leid Ri', by putting the lives of many innocents both indigenous and non-indigenous at stake. The question therefore is - will these actions bear any fruit? In the course of pursu-

ing a fight for a genuine cause can we use violent means? And with the advancement of learning and the exposure of our young people to the outside world such cowardly acts will not be spared from condemnation. In fact many disagree with such ends and means.

Also, the very fact that a certain organisation always stakes claim to whatever bombing/IED blast has occurred so far, no longer surprises the public. Neither does it bother us too much. It has instead become a standard joke and everyone can attribute an IED blast to that Organisation. These bold claims, whether or not they are true no longer cause alarm nor caution people to be on their toes. What they do instead is to aggravate the social rift and take it to higher levels. It is essential to note, that instigation, in any form with the attempt to disrupt social harmony is no solution to any issue. On the contrary it leads to a cycle of vengeance in an effort to level up. But this only hardens stances and we will forever remain crying foul in our own land at the end.

The 'peace for peace' quid pro quo must be upheld at all times.

Yours etc.,  
Mewan Pariat,  
Shillong-2.

#### Correcting the record on Covid

Editor,

This is a response to NK Kehar's letter, 'Misleading facts on COVID 19', (ST Jan 26, 2022). Kehar claims that my letter of January 22, was "little more than an amalgamation of various disproved unscientific claims," yet the claims I made are supported by epidemiologists and medical professionals. For that reason alone they are hardly 'unscientific'. Chief among these are some of the top scientists in the world, including Dr Martin Kulldorff from Harvard University, Dr Sunetra Gupta from Oxford University and Dr Jay Bhattacharya from Stanford University. Hence to discount what I wrote and calling it unscientific is just hyperbole and exaggeration. A claim does not become unscientific merely because Kehar disagrees with it. Especially when it is put forward by real scientists from the world's best universities.

The fact is that the Infection Fatality Rate of COVID as reported by the UK Government, indicates that 99.99% percent of people across all age groups survive. In short, it is a mild virus with similar lethality as influenza. Did anyone ever advocate lockdowns, mandatory masks or border closures for the flu? No, because to do so would be absurd. It is true that COVID is more transmissible than the flu. However, this increased transmissibility is precisely why lockdowns are totally ineffective. The World Health Organization (another body full of scientists) has ac-

knowledge that one cannot stop a flu-like virus through coercive measures because it is impossible to slow down.

Conveniently, Kehar dismisses the example of Sweden. But Sweden has outperformed the UK in COVID deaths per capita, despite the UK having had one of the harshest lockdowns in the world. So how does Kehar explain this?

The real issue is that lockdowns targeting the entire population have costs. The United Nations in April 2020 warned that hundreds of thousands of additional child deaths would result from the radical interruptions to commerce caused by lockdowns. The UN report warns that 42 million to 66 million children could fall into extreme poverty because of the economic disruptions. Hundreds of Indian migrant workers died because of India's lockdowns in 2020, when they were forced to walk back home to their villages because their livelihoods were shut down. That is just the tip of the iceberg. Poverty causes death; far more deaths than COVID itself, which has killed 5.7 million worldwide if we believe the official statistics.

The manic, obsessive, fixation on a single virus also means that less hospital resources are available for the treatment of other concerns. In the UK, the Daily Mail reports that almost 2.5 million people missed out on cancer screening. Many experts fear that a number of these people will die because of delays

caused by the prioritisation of COVID patients.

Rather than ignoring such concerns, it is time to listen to the scientists who have signed the Great Barrington Declaration and stop this march towards collective suicide. I challenge anyone to name a single peer-reviewed paper published prior to 2019 that advocates mass-scale lockdowns. You won't be able to, since lockdowns are a policy made out of thin air by politicians.

Yours etc.,  
Sukrit Sabhlok  
New South Wales,  
Australia

#### Leprosy cases on the rise

Editor,

It is distressing to know that India accounts for over half of the world's leprosy patients. Data by National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) shows that the country accounts for almost 60% of the world's new leprosy patients. Bihar, Maharashtra, UP, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, MP, West Bengal and Jharkhand contributed 76% of the new leprosy cases. It is a matter of serious concern that despite India being declared "leprosy-free" in 2005, the rise in the number of leprosy cases in the country has been alarming.

In fact, the rise in transmission of leprosy compounds the health crisis faced by the country in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. At a time when the third wave

*"If you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change."*

— Wayne Dyer

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 173 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2022

### Spectacularly Rahul

WITH a powerful speech in Parliament, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has stirred the nation's conscience. He spoke some home-truths and targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the 'omissions and commissions' of the BJP government. He made headlines in a spectacular manner — after long years of being in a state of stupor as far as his parliamentary interventions are concerned. His speech has gone viral on social media and is being praised for its tone, tenor and content. He's known for his one-liners, but never in the past for the eloquence of his speech. In a way, he has come of age; and he bears the symbolic weight of generations. On close scrutiny, some of what he said however lacked credibility. The ghost of the past comes to haunt his utterances. A taunt to the present government was that "there are two Indias today — one of the rich and the other of the poor." His own Congress party ruled India for nearly sixty years and raised the slogan, 'Garibi Hatao' (Banish Poverty) and won national elections on that plank only to ignore the gargantuan task of poverty alleviation.

Modi and the BJP picked up the thread from where the Congress left it in 2014. The Congress cannot escape blame. However, Rahul Gandhi rightly said the small and medium industrial sector is down in the dumps. The manufacturing sector as a whole has progressively lost its verve. This resulted in lack of jobs for crores of youths; meaning also that the nation is sadly and criminally failing to harness their productive energies. The scenario had never been impressive under the Congress rule too. Mouthy socialism, the Congress party promoted elitism; the BJP does it blatantly, seeks to fool the poor and keeps winning their votes by fuelling their religious and communal sentiments. There's merit in Rahul Gandhi's argument that the BJP brass divided India. Unity is not their mantra.

Another of Rahul Gandhi's jibe at Modi is that he acts like a king, while the Congress banished royalty. But Indira Gandhi was more dictatorial than any PM. Modi's famous 56-inch chest boast perhaps has no bearing on his performance which is at low-key. Both on the domestic front and in confronting external rivals, there is a sense of hesitation. The government vacillated often and even bent over backwards as in the case of the farm laws. As for Centre-State relations, there is nothing confrontational yet about Modi's style. States are not supreme. A touch-me-not attitude by regional chief ministers in the name of federalism, as is seen now, and curiously backed by Rahul, is the other extreme. They thrive when the Centre is weak.

The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) by its very nomenclature is meant to devote its energies to students' welfare and hence its releases to the media should be on issues primarily related to education and what ails education in Meghalaya today. There have been several articles and letters in this newspaper from teachers, heads of institutions and parents, all very concerned about the two years lost to the pandemic and even now we are staring at the possible loss of a third year, unless some decisive steps are taken by Government to start offline classes with due precautions. I have not seen a single release or engagement from the KSU, putting forth its views on how to deal with the issue of mass drop-out of school children in the rural outback of Meghalaya where over 80% of children reside. It's actually very rare to see any intellectual inputs from this student body which is expected to add to the intellectual capital of the state. The KSU has always adopted pressure tactics to get its point across. Is this the mandate of a student body?

Why are almost all the issues taken up by the KSU of a political nature? If it had invested the same amount of energy into the education system of Meghalaya that it has into the demand for the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and other political issues, perhaps it would have benefited the children and youth of this state to move towards a more progressive future. I have seen this organisation over the years and its style of functioning and have also collaborated with it in the past. We were joint signatories to demand a ten-year moratorium on tree felling as part of an environmental campaign. We were co-petitioners in the Supreme Court to stop tree-felling for timber, since Meghalaya was losing its forest cover at a rapid pace. The apex court brought a 10-year ban on tree-felling from 1996-2006.

As part of the Peoples' Rally Against Corruption (PRAC) too we have worked together to salvage the Meghalaya House, Russell Street, Kolkata which in 2000-2001 was sought to be given away for a song to a private party for use as a commercial space by the then Government. Our collective campaign with other organisations helped to retain the Meghalaya House as it is today.

What I have never been

# Khasi Students' Union and Education

By Patricia Mukhim

able to understand is why a students' body should have a jail in its office premises. This matter has been pointed out several times in the past too but successive governments have winked at this illegality. It is not the mandate of a students' body to punish anyone. If they find a wrong-doer they should hand him/her over to the law enforcers. The state is the only legitimate authority to decide who is a wrongdoer and under what sections of law the person should be punished. It's unprecedented that any organisation should have a jail to mete out its own

into a discord between one Club member who lost the elections and his antipathy towards the entire Club? What is the locus-standi of the KSU here? Can its leaders explain why and on what grounds they have entered into this dispute? Is it in any way related to educational pursuits or is this a private quarrel? Does this mean that anyone with a grudge against any institution can use the KSU to intimidate the members of that institution/organisation? What does this make the KSU then? An organisation that can be hired to intimidate? Should students

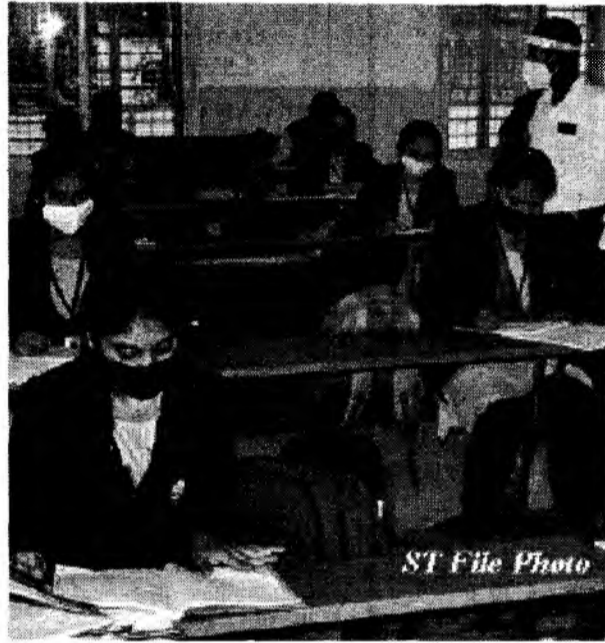
Each butterfly has to now find its food chain and chalk out its own future.

Why should the KSU take on the fight and squabbles of the moneyed class of an elite Club that can fight their own battles? On what grounds has the KSU entered this battle? And who are they threatening to take action against? And for what? How does the functioning of a Club that is run on certain rules become an issue of the KSU? Also how does the student body afford to frequent this elitist space that most of us cannot afford to? Otherwise, why would they get involved in its quarrels?

It is high time now for the Khasi community to move out of the victimhood syndrome and to stop taking all their grouse to a students' body whose prime duty is not to provide jobs but ensure a better standard of education; to groom the youth and empower them with the confidence to stand tall and compete with the best. It is those looking for shortcuts to life that need to rely on sundry organisations to fight their battles. Of course, we have also witnessed that the KSU is a springboard to politics. Do we the people of Meghalaya agree that a students' body should use itself to derive political clout so that its members can fight the next and the next elections and when elected forget what they once promised the people?

It's time for this society to mature and speak its mind. Enough of the studied silence. Many of us have given up hope that churches and religious institutions will produce voices of truth and courage. These institutions have become so insular that they have lost their flavour. They are no longer what Christ said — the salt that gives flavour and the light of the earth. They and their inmates have become flavourless and dark and therefore evil triumphs especially in politics.

Last but not least, we would like to be educated from the KSU leadership if all the members are students. If so, how do they find time to engage in a range of issues unrelated to and divorced from education? Above all, how do they generate revenue to run the organisation? Is the KSU leadership gainfully employed? If not, how do they manage the day-to-day affairs of the Organisation? These are very fair questions which all public organisations have a duty to give honest answers to.



brand of punishment on who it decides is a law breaker and which law has been broken. This has to end because it is overstepping the mandate of a body that claims to oversee students' welfare.

The other problematic point is the KSU jumping into every issue and arm-twisting people and organisations in the typical style of bullies — 'My way or the highway.' It is surprising that a students' body would now enter into the domain of what is considered the private affairs of a Club — a legacy of the British that has for decades now been run by 'Indians' of Meghalaya. The Shillong Club Ltd can by no stretch of imagination be considered to belong to the Khasis only just because it is located in Shillong. If that is the yardstick then would it also be correct to say that every institution located in Shillong should be manned only by Khasis? Up to what point can a state and society allow this ethnocentrism to boil over? What right does a student body have to enter

have time to engage in such activities at the expense of their academic welfare?

Today we should all be asking the KSU if they are using their resources to try and bring kids that have dropped out of the school system back on track. Do they have a strategy they can share with the public so we can all work together towards this noble goal? Has the KSU tried opening an evening school where young people can gain some additional life skills and social skills on how to speak convincingly (not rhetoric) at public platforms; how to question those in authority cogently and with facts and figures; how to face an interview board with confidence; how to debate and not talk down to those that one has differences with; how to respect all humans and grow out of the little cocoon. Let's remember that each cocoon must allow the butterfly to fly out and seek its own food and fortune. The butterfly has to be self-reliant and cannot keep coming back to that dried up cocoon for its food.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Identity crisis!

Editor,  
Of late there have been attempts to malign the Shillong Club Ltd in the media. A certain member is running a disinformation campaign against the members of the Shillong Club Ltd of which I am a very senior member. Now who gives him the right to defame a prestigious family oriented club? He was not elected by the members to the Board in spite of incessant calls made by his mother (in broken Khasi) and by his friends (who do not belong to the Club), to all the members and inducing them to share the OTP from their phones during the recent concluded election by e-voting.

The e-voting was introduced in the club and passed in the AGM and the vendor was by this person's close friend and aide, Rohit Arora and three elections have been conducted in this manner. Shakti Laitphlang never once complained in the last two elections because his friend Rohit was contesting then. Even in the recent elections he was in the AGM and waited for the results but never once showed that there was any manipulation. Now that he has lost the election he cannot accept defeat and is creating problems and

even filed an FIR, thereby destroying the image of the Club and even stooping so low as to threaten the staff.

Shakti is creating communal disharmony and ethnocentrism in the Club where no such incidents have occurred in the past. But let us see how much of a Khasi he is? His mother is half Khasi; his father is a full Punjabi. Now that makes Shakti 12.5% Khasi. He is married to a Sindhi woman. So how does his son avail the Khasi clan name without a 'tang jait' ceremony being conducted to claim the tribal status? Is Shakti having an identity crisis and hence forcefully wants to be a Khasi or is he misusing the Khasi title to evade taxes? One must conduct an investigation or even file an FIR against such opportunists in our society.

Yours etc.,  
Eddie Nongrum  
(Shillong Club Member)  
Shillong - 8

#### Why a Rs 700 crore loan for Tourism?

Editor,  
Last time I wrote briefly about the Rs 700 crore fund that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) gave for promotion and de-

velopment of the tourism sector in the state. JICA is a Japanese governmental agency that handles the bulk of official development assistance (ODA) for the government of Japan. JICA has a three-pronged strategy to aid in the development of developing countries. The first is through technical assistance, second through grants in aid and third is through concessional loans. The Chief Minister did not mention in his press briefing whether the fund was given as a grants-in-aid or a concessional loan. He just said that Japan has sanctioned Rs 700 crore for the promotion and development of the tourism sector in our State.

If the fund is a loan, then some lingering thoughts keep bugging me. Firstly, the money when converted to American dollars amounts to almost 100 million dollars. For a small state like ours with very little resources, it baffles me that our policy makers feel the need to take such a big loan to develop the tourism sector. The tourism sector in our State is almost entirely nature tourism based, so why the need to pump so much money into this sector? Was this a decision that the entire cabinet took or was this a decision taken by a few people only? Secondly did NITI AAYOG and the

Finance Commission of India approve of this loan or are they even aware of it?

I just feel that the Meghalaya government needs to come out with a white paper on such important financial decisions since such decisions will have an impact for good or for bad for the future generations.

Recently Sri Lanka was in the news for all the wrong reasons. It is in a deep financial quagmire partly because of Covid and partly because of the financial burden of repaying the numerous loans it took from China. The whole African continent is also in the same predicament. You can't blame these countries since most of them are short on resources and their infrastructure sector is highly under-developed. Most of the loans that African countries and Sri Lanka took from China were to develop the infrastructure sector: it's either to build roads, airports, dams or railways. Most of these countries are now on the brink of financial collapse because the financial burden of the loans they took from China are too heavy to bear.

God forbid but just imagine our policy makers compounding the financial crisis that already exists in our State because of not being able to bear the financial burden of a humungous concessional

loan that the State government took, to supposedly develop the tourism sector. What would this say about the wisdom of our policy makers?

For a small state like ours with mounting economic problems, financial prudence should always be the guiding force behind every economic decision. I just hope that financial prudence will be the guiding force in the utilisation of this fund.

Yours etc.,  
Gary Marbaniang,  
Via email

#### Flip side of Reservation Policy

Editor,  
Philip Marwein's letter to the editor, "Away with Reservations" (ST Feb 2, 2022) takes the discussion on reservations a notch higher and should be heard in the corridors of power (State Secretariat). Let us face facts. We have now arrived at 50 years of statehood and it is high time that experts on state policy matters (not politicians) carve out a road map on how to empower our young people in capitalizing their talents, skills, knowledge outside of the reservation system.

A time will come when this categorization of people based on reservation will end because as of now when any department comes out with a list of vacancies the number of applicants hugely exceed the number of vacancies. Yet when the results are declared the reservation mandate kicks in and deprives those with no influence to pull strings in their favour. The result is we have a system where categorization matters instead of quality and skill sets. The generation today is afflicted by a weariness coming out of despair knowing very well that they have no opportunities since those are taken over by a section of the tribal community coming from the 'creamy layer', while the economically deprived but deserving lot are left out. This is why the reservation system of our state has created more problems than solutions. The time has come to find workable solutions to the ticking 'unemployment time-bomb'.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin  
Wankhar,  
Via email

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

### World Cancer Day, February 4, 2022

## Fifty years of statehood: Why does Meghalaya top the list?

By Dr Caleb Harris

As Meghalaya celebrates fifty years of statehood, we have been treated to several articles extolling the achievements of the state in the past five decades. Looking back into our past is necessary to ensure that we do not repeat our mistakes and also encourage us to build up on our successes. While a lot has been written about achievements in education, law and order, connectivity; being a doctor, I pondered over the state of healthcare in Meghalaya. As a surgical oncologist (cancer surgeon), I would confine to my area of expertise, cancer care.

When a society invests in good roads, the results may be visible immediately, but investments in health and education would show major returns only after several years. So our current state is the result of efforts put in several years earlier.

World cancer day, observed on February 4th annually, is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). The theme for this year is 'Closing the gap in cancer care'. The UICC says that, 'Half the world's population lacks access to the full range of essential health services. When it comes to cancer, many are denied basic care, despite the fact that we live in a time of awe-inspiring advancements in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment. People who seek cancer care hit barriers at every turn. Income, education, geographical location and discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and lifestyle are just a few of the factors that can negatively affect care.'

Several patients rue the fact that the cancer care facilities in Meghalaya are inadequate. We have only one radiotherapy machine and many patients end up traveling outside the state. But we would soon see two more machines being installed, one in NEIGRIHMS and the other in Civil Hospital, Shillong, both being technologically advanced machines. We also have the necessary technical expertise to operate these machines. Once the 252-bed Regional Cancer Centre at NEIGRIHMS is functional, we would have a comprehensive cancer treatment facility and would sure augment the cancer care being provided.

But is increasing cancer treatment facilities the only answer to cancer? For long we have focused a lot on treating the 'effect' without adequate focus on treating the 'cause'. The National Health Policy has seen a shift in focus toward health promotion, which is the need of the hour.

The National Cancer Registry Program Report released in 2020 is an important document which enables us to understand the burden of cancer in India. The data pertaining to all patients diagnosed with cancer in India are recorded into 'Cancer Registries' and this is analysed at regular intervals to provide us with valuable information which helps shape health policy. One of the important information provided in this report is the number of persons affected by cancer in each district/state. East Khasi Hills is second on this list with 228 males per one lakh population being affected with cancer. It is sad to note that only the states from Northeast India have crossed the 200 mark in this list, with the other states in the country well below the 150 mark. All these are Age Adjusted Rates (AAR), meaning that the differences in demographics are accounted for. To give another perspective, one in four men below the age of 74 in East Khasi Hills is likely to develop cancer.

When I share this information with people, they often quip that probably there is some 'genetic prob-

lem' in Northeast India, due to which people get more cancer than the rest of India. While that needs more research (which is being carried out), one cannot ignore the fact that we know the reason for high cancer rates in Northeast India. This report also gives data pertaining to cancers which are known to be caused by tobacco-Meghalaya tops the list! It is sad to note that 70.4% of cancers in men and 46.5% of cancers in women of East Khasi Hills District are preventable. These are all tobacco-related cancers and by shunning tobacco, we would be left with fewer cancers to treat. As per the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2016-17), 47% of people in Meghalaya use tobacco, as compared to the national average of 28.4%.

Tobacco, in any form, is the most important cause of cancer. The use of kwai (betel nut) can also independently (without the use of tobacco) cause cancers. Meghalaya has among the highest rates of esophageal (food pipe) cancer in the world. Tobacco, betel nut and alcohol are group 1 carcinogens, yet are abused by a majority of the population, including minors.

The UICC adds, 'The most disadvantaged groups are also more likely to have increased exposures to a host of other risk factors, like tobacco, unhealthy diet or environmental hazards'. We were all shocked to hear that a 17 year old is the prime accused in the recent bombing to disturb the peace of Shillong and it is good that the society is awakened by such signs of depravity. I wish the same society wakes up to the fact that 34% of our youngsters (13-15 year old) consume tobacco according to the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS 2019). This is another form of a bomb which these youngsters are handling, and if we do not intervene now, there would be long term ramifications, not only on the health of the individuals, but also on other aspects of the society.

While India has excellent laws to curb the use of tobacco, unfortunately, the implementation is rather poor. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 or COTPA, 2003 provides the legal basis for curbing the use of tobacco. As per this Act, there should not be any smoking activity or sale of tobacco within 100 yards of all educational institutions. The Health and Education Ministries of Meghalaya have implemented the 'Tobacco Free Educational Institution' (ToFEI) program to curb use of Tobacco by school students. But this needs the cooperation from the parents and other members of the society. The civil society and religious organisations can also do their part in curbing tobacco, as this would transform the state over the next decade. The society should share the burden of changing this dubious distinction of Meghalaya topping the list for tobacco-related cancers in India.

Meghalaya has come up with a State Health Policy, which aspires to improve the life expectancy in the state from the current 62.3 years (national average 68.8) to 70 years by the year 2025. This will never be possible by improving healthcare facilities in the state, but can surely be done by curbing tobacco, which is a much cheaper intervention.

Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch. (Surgical Oncology) is Associate Professor, Surgical Oncology, NEIGRIHMS. Views expressed are personal. Email: surgonco@outlook.com

"Simplicity is the glory of expression."  
—Walt Whitman

**The Shillong Times**

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**Youth and militancy**

Its enlightening to hear that the Government will be conducting a study on why youth join militant outfits and that the Social Welfare Department will be spearheading this study. Militancy in Meghalaya started in the early 1990s and peaked between 1996-1999 when potential targets were mercilessly eliminated. Nearly all those killed or kidnapped were victims of extortion. They were punished for not paying up. Between 2000-2001 several youths that joined the outfits (HNLC & GNLA) have surrendered and been provided assistance to start life afresh. Interestingly Meghalaya has a minister in the present MDA cabinet who is a surrendered HNLC member and who has decided to enter politics and serve a difficult constituency as their representative.

Any study would need to include in it an interview with former militants. Sadly, of the two foremost stalwarts of the HNLC - Cheristerfield Thangkiew and Julius Dorphang, one died in an encounter last year and another is serving jail time for raping a minor girl. It would be a good learning curve for those in government to hear from the surrendered militants as to why they chose the path that is fraught with risks. What are the prime factors that pushed the youth to the extreme step of taking up arms against the state? What exactly were they trying to achieve by going underground? Did they not miss their loved ones back home? Who actually convinced them to leave home? Who indoctrinated them? What was their ideology? Did they believe they would be able to take on the Indian state? Who trained them to wield guns? Where did the training happen? How were the arms procured? How long were they underground? What were the reasons for their surrender and for coming overground? What were they promised at the time of recruitment? Were those promises fulfilled? Researchers can add many more searching questions so as to be able to address the issue better.

It might not be an exaggeration to state that most youth are easily indoctrinated because they have no hope of a secure future. Meghalaya is today the fifth poorest state in India. The capacity of the state to generate employment is limited. It's the private sector that can create jobs but there are several disabling factors that prevent good companies from setting up shop here. First, the ease of doing business is poor and riddled with red tape. Then there's extortion by several actors which most branded companies would rather not tackle. Unless this mindset changes and the young themselves stand up to enable businesses to come up, unemployment will only grow and that is one factor that frustrates youth and pushes them to take extreme steps. There are the social factors such as family upbringing and social support systems that are missing. These too are integral to the mental and psychological health of the youth. Hence it's a combination of factors that push youth to join militant outfits.

**Theorizing Pre-Independence  
Meghalayan Histories**

By Zinnia Aurora

The exclusion of certain stories from the mainstream narrative typifies power hierarchies that dominate the psyche of authors of historical records. A push towards creating hegemonic literature is often seen as a medium of subjugation and cannot be simply called an overlook. While it is imperative to understand the mechanics of such subordination of some histories, it is equally important to make an effort to mainstream them for setting fruitful and celebratory discourses around these unsung stories of valour and pain.

The synthesisation of the entirety of the Indian National Movement into a regionalised understanding does great disservice to the freedom fighters who fought the colonial powers. A stark example of such exclusion rests in the land of clouds, Meghalaya. Although the state is a new entity, its three constituent groups - the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes - have made exemplary sacrifices of personal and collective tenor. Innumerable examples of such courage rest in the seven sisters of the North-East, but a selective exclusion of the same in the mainstream narrative has reduced these imperative histories to oral historiographical traditions that now rest in the memories of their descendants.

Theorizing such exclusions, the actors responsible for the same, and the impact and undertones it has sequentially birthed upon the current dynamics is an area that must be explored to remove the inequalities that have historically been meted out to certain groups based on their ethnicity, religion, race, gender etc. Such a factor analysis not only helps in framing policies from a psychologically holistic perspective but also aids in bringing the due recognition to the contributions of these groups in the nation-building process, credits for which are largely given what the historians picks.

A cogent account of the histories of certain unsung leaders who fought the British and brought discussions of freedom and independence to the remotest of regions in the present North-eastern state of Meghalaya is imperative. Apart from giving them due credit it will also ponder upon the basis and granular reasonings behind the said sabotage. From fighting the zamindari system to standing up against the wrongful treatment meted out to people of different origins, the leaders of the Indian National Movement of Meghalaya brought laurels of trust and self-sufficiency to their communities. As custodians of community empowerment in their vicinities, these leaders involved themselves in the service of their society and peoples. From fearlessly standing on

the death rope to saving their people by embracing bullets, their strategic acumen, in addition to their motivations are most definitely a source of inspiration, just like Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt. Thus highlighting these histories is key to weaving a stronger and unbreakable bond with the State and its denizens. Mainstream accounts of pre-independence history undermine the regional contributions in approaching the problem of British domination. Recognising the patriotic tenor of the North-East is as significant as economic integration of the region with the idea of India.

The seeds of colonial expansion to North-East India were laid by the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, post which the consolidation of power became the primary motive of the British East India Company. They ingrained political and economic oppression to extract the rich resources that the region had to offer, stifling the mandate of the local people, ignoring and bashing their futures by uprooting them and playing their divide-and-rule policy. This policy was embedded in the various coercive peace agreements that were signed with different tribal groups. These made them give up their rights on the lush forest lands, shift to newer areas and more. In 1880, a draconian decree-the Frontier Tracts Regulation-was passed. Its provisions were expanded to various states, although it was primarily made for Arunachal Pradesh. Superficially speaking, the interests of the colonisers in the region were primarily encouraged by the vast economic bounties it held in terms of taxes, natural resources, water, plantations and more. They started implanting payment obligations in the North-East Frontier Province first, followed by embellished treaties and agreements to further their interests. Violation of any of the provisions of the agreements resulted in severe punishments and served as a tactic to engulf large tracts of land under itself. Some of the most arbitrary provisions included the 'blockade system' which traumatised the tribal population as they were prohibited from entering the plains to buy even necessary commodities. Entire villages were burnt and vandalised if so-called 'native-offenders' were found to be hiding there.

The British sought to systematically destroy the tribal cottage industries and crafts. The markets were filled with mill-made cloth, and other imported products that slowly killed local enterprise. Such policies are better understood through a keen reflection on the perception the British had

of the tribals. As per Hopkinson's Proposals of 1862, restraining the "savage tribes which infest our frontier" was key and that "reliance cannot be placed on only one policy". He went on to suggest that they "must apply coercion, pure and simple, sometimes blockade" in addition to providing subsidies to "keep the tribes quiet for a long while." A frugal foundation of mutual acceptance, especially from the British, led to a strained relationship between the two. Such troubling impositions were met with increased resistance. Tribal outrage became palpable across the landscape. The British increased military preparedness to meet the same, and favoured coercion over communication and conciliation.

During such outrage, various battles raged in this war of freedom. Additionally, they changed their outlook towards the local population, moving from regarding them as aliens to calling them their subjects. The establishment of cultural, racial, and civilizational superiority created a distorted hierarchical history that penetrated deep into Indian society. Some of the known outrages included the Munda Rebellion of 1899, Phulaguri Dhewa and Jaintia & Garo Rebellion of 1860s. The tremendous difficulties that were imposed upon the Jaintias and Garos could not break their resolve. The Garos and Jaintias, otherwise tolerant peoples, were irked by the expansionist candour of the British, especially their infrastructural incursions into their lands. The legendary U Kiang Nangbah, a freedom fighter for the Jaintias, is a symbol of courage and valour from the Jayantia Rebellion of 1862.

After the first Anglo-Burmese War, the British wanted to construct a road connecting Brahmaputra Valley with Sylhet which encroached upon the lands of these tribes. When they protested, villages the British burnt their villages to break their resistance. Various prominent tribal leaders were hanged publicly or killed at gunpoint before their countrymen to showcase their imperial might. Having subverted such monstrous intrusions of the British, the Khasi peoples fought bravely and stood steadfast upon their resolve. This was supremely exemplified by the Khasi martyr, U Tirot Singh.

U Tirot Singh Syiem (1802 - 1835), was the chief of Nongkhlaw in the Khasi Hills. He was the constitutional head sharing corporate authority with other representatives. An epitome of valour, Tirot Singh fought ferociously against the British in the Anglo-Khasi War. As mentioned previously, the

British were consolidating their political and economic mandate in the region and one of their endeavours to further this was the construction of a road through the Brahmaputra Valley to connect to Sylhet, which encroached upon the territories of the Khasis. This was not taken lying down. When the British Governor General for the Northern Territory found out that Tirot Singh had already begun proceedings in the durbar for seeking permission of the duars or passes through which the road would pass, he panicked. David Scott, the Governor General, tried to impress the King of Bordwar and Tirot Singh. The latter sensed betrayal from the British and the King of Bordwar. Tirot Singh went with his armed men in December, 1828 to attack Bordwar and sired a clarion call with his confidence. The British were hereafter asked to evacuate Nongkhlaw but they disregarded this order. In response the Khasis went ahead and attacked the British Garrison in Nongkhlaw, killing two British officers. This was a clear expression of the outrage of the tribal population. Although the Khasis lacked the requisite armour and used only swords, shields, bows and arrows, they resorted to guerrilla tactics to pursue their ends, dragging the war on for about four years. Though equipped only with native weapons, Tirot Singh managed to destabilise the British forces. Unfortunately, Tirot Singh was shot by a British officer and later captured by the British from a cave.

For this exemplary courage, Tirot Singh is declared an immortal martyr by the Government of Meghalaya. He is widely respected by his people in Meghalaya, but has barely been mentioned in the national podiums. Contributions of the tribal chiefs who put their lives and that of their families on the line deserves equal recognition as others to embed a sense of diversified pursuit of a common freedom that India has enjoyed for the past seventy-five years.

Lack of inclusivity in historical discourse renders such groups excluded. To know the legacy of trust and collective struggles foundationally lays a common foundation of origin, thereby creating a sense of comity and respect for one another. History is not infinitely susceptible to invention and that is what differentiates it from fiction. Arjun Appadurai convincingly argued about the debatability of the past that operates in all societies. Perhaps it's time to ask questions.

*(The writer is an incoming M.Phil candidate, Department of Politics & International Studies, University of Cambridge. Awarded Kaulia Fellowship by Ministry of External Affairs & India Foundation.)*

**Other side to "Twin celebrations - A Half and a Century"**

By Joseph Teron, SDB

"Twin celebrations - A Half and a Century," published in *The Shillong Times* (February 2, 2022) by Albert Thyriang was quite an interesting reading, given the fact that the critic also belongs to the group that he holds out on a platter to decapitate. The article begins with an introductory government-bashing which, of course, is harmless and provides some traction for the key subject that follows, which is a critique of the activities of the Salesians of Don Bosco in the past 100 years as they mark the centenary of their selfless service to the people of Northeast India.

There are always two sides to a coin and the binary adds meaning and significance to its opposite; one can therefore safely say that light has no significance and meaning if there was no darkness, its binary opposite. It is therefore appreciable that the author has taken time and pains to research into the activities of the Salesians of Don Bosco. The author, however trains his critical telescope upon the works left undone rather than look at the works which have been done, thereby being prejudiced, partial and partisan in the approach itself. If the Salesians have opened a hundred schools in northeast, you can always ask why did you not open a hundred and one? Did you not have the money or did you not have the men? He seems to imply that the Salesians were incompetent

a marvelous job nonetheless. The language was not known to them, the climate, as mentioned earlier, was unmerciful, the food, like the language was unfamiliar, any infrastructure was non-existent and men and means were scarce. Malaria and other illnesses followed them like a shadow. To top it all, there was hostility from the government and vested interests. I wonder what marvelous things would have been achieved by the author in these circumstances if he was at the helm of affairs then!

St. Anthony's college was opened in 1934 and it continues its marvelous work to this day. The need of the time obviously was not for colleges and universities and institutions of higher education, but for basic and elementary education. Does the author know what the literacy rate in Assam was in 1922? It was 12% in India at the time of independence in 1947. It was, of course, far less than that in Assam in 1922 and any educated fraction of population was confined to the city of Shillong where a few were educated by the British to do their sundry works.

Today, in India, education is a right. The Union Government passed the Right To Education (RTE) Act in 2009. This implies that it is incumbent upon the government to provide education to all. The author has been accelerating his criticism to

*The second world war came as no respite to these escalating challenges. Today, faced with covid-19 pandemic, we know how much the economy and education have taken a beating in the last two or three years. Imagine the consequences of a world war, where some were compelled to join the war and others sent to detention camps if they belonged to enemy camp.*

or complacent or outright lazy. Let us look at some of their achievements.

There are three provinces for the Salesians of Don Bosco in Northeast India today. Together, they run 95 schools, 10 colleges and one university with Grade A accreditation by NAAC and a museum. In 100 years, one school every year, almost. Besides these, there are numerous professional colleges (Engineering, MSW, B.Ed.), Technical schools, Junior colleges, social service centres, youth animation and skills training centres, health centres etc. It must be borne in mind that the Salesians did not come to do the work of education, they came as missionaries to do the work of evangelization, their aptitude and orientation was all geared towards that one goal. Educational services were only ancillary and not primary. In the course of 100 years, there are 15 Catholic dioceses where there was none when they came and the light of Christian faith has been proclaimed to every nook and corner of this marvelous land notwithstanding the hazardous terrain and the grueling climate.

The second world war came as no respite to these escalating challenges. Today, faced with covid-19 pandemic, we know how much the economy and education have taken a beating in the last two or three years. Imagine the consequences of a world war, where some were compelled to join the war and others sent to detention camps if they belonged to enemy camp. I'm not offering excuses for complacency or mediocrity, if there was any, but presenting a precarious situation for our understanding and argue that the men on the ground braved all these punishing situations and did

the last couple of decades of the Salesian work. It is here that he may be reminded that the missionaries have educated those now in the government. It is the duty of the central and state governments in Meghalaya as elsewhere to continue to provide quality education as well as other basic amenities of life. Even as the Salesians have happily handed over many parishes and seminaries in Khasi Hills to the diocesan clergy who have nurtured and empowered them, it is time to hand over the reins of education to the government; but continue to participate in the process of education culture and community building and work alongside with the government and like-minded NGOs and others for a better future for all.

The centenary of the arrival of the Salesians to Northeast India is of course a moment of introspection and retrospection for the Salesians and the beneficiaries of their services. So critical appreciation is always welcome. The author is invited to share his vision with responsible members of his congregation and begin to appreciate the faith he received and the language he speaks as a gift of the Salesians themselves. The three provinces of the northeast, involving the entire Salesian family including the past pupils introspected in the last three years how to best celebrate the achievements in the last 100 years through symposia, spiritual retreats and other animation programmes and are resolved to forge ahead to better the second century by being on the side of youth without "slowing down". And finally it is good to know that today our seminaries are filled with candidates opting to follow their religious calling.

**Letters to the Editor**

**NCM - An exercise in futility**

Editor, The recently concluded Non-Cooperation Movement called by a few social organisations against the election of Rakesh A Sangma as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the GHADC is an exercise in sheer futility which has brought economic disaster to thousands of people who live a hand to mouth existence coupled with young students losing out on precious classes.

Meghalaya is the 5th poorest state in the country and any disruption to economic activity brings more Meghalayans into the BPL status.

The imbroglgio regarding the democratically elected CEM will not stand scrutiny in a court of law. The case will be thrown out. And there's nothing to dispute the status of the democratically elected CEM. He is indeed a member of the A'chik tribe belonging to the A'gitok Mahari whether one likes it or not.

The pandemic coupled with total mismanagement in India has made most people poorer and students have

lost almost 24 months of meaningful education. The online education is an unequal learning experience and on a scale 1 to 10, it will at best get a miserly 3. In the entire state of Meghalaya, education in the Garo Hills is not something to gloat about. The fact is most students are playing catch-up with the rest of the student fraternity.

Since we are playing catch-up we shouldn't be shooting ourselves in the foot. It's an outrageous exercise to cripple the entire education and economic sectors in the Garo Hills, to undemocratically unseat a CEM who has been elected democratically. I would advise the agitating organisations to seek justice in a court of law and challenge the election results of the democratically elected CEM of the GHADC.

We, the citizens living in the state of Meghalaya urgently require enlightened servant leadership and not charlatans who look for their 'thirty pieces of silver' in each transaction. Incidentally these 'thirty pieces' of silver are entrenched deeply in this 'Christian state.' No wonder Meghalaya is the 5th poorest state in the country.

The 'loaves and fishes' of the state are being siphoned off with no accountability

whatsoever. We will talk about corruption another time. When our political masters are bereft of grey matter and Christian attitudes there's no light at the end of this Meghalayan tunnel.

It's also clearly observed that new political parties emerging in Meghalaya are just 'Old Wine in New Bottles'. What we Meghalayans need is untainted servant leadership at all levels. Then only there's salvation for us mere mortals living in the Abode of Clouds.

Yours etc.,  
Tyrone D'Brass  
Tura.

**Sincere apologies**

Editor, In response to the letter, "A Case of Plagiarism" by Uma Purkayastha (ST Feb 2, 2022), I sincerely apologise to Ms Purkayastha for those 9 paragraphs in my article. I got the beautiful message on the WhatsApp of our 'Netaji Shillong Connection' and I was so impressed that I had used about 9 paragraphs of the message without intending to plagiarise and therefore I mentioned 'excerpts.' Since the message came over WhatsApp, I was not sure who the original author of the content was. The best thing I could

have done is after 'excerpts' I should have used the excerpts in quotes. Please do accept my apologies. If not for that message we would not have known Netaji's St Edmund's College connection.

Yours etc.,  
W Passah  
Ex H.O.D Electronics  
St Edmund's College

**Kiang Nangbah College: Teachers' unpaid dues**

Editor, In Jowai, the Kiang Nangbah Government College is applauded for being the college that provides admission even for below average students. If one teaches in this college, one can see a bunch of students juggling work and studies day in and day out, especially in the morning section. Recently, the college got accredited with Grade "B" by NAAC and this was a momentous occasion for it was hailed as the only government college in Meghalaya to have received Grade "B". Sadly, apropos to the letter, "Pending lecturers' salary" (ST Jan 20, 2022), when it comes to the payment of the teachers of the morning section, the preferable Grade would be

an "E". A totally disappointing grade which reflects the neglect of the concerned authorities on the lecturers' pending payment as well as the much-needed enhancement of the said payment. Till date, these lecturers would nevertheless show up for classes purely out of concern for the students of the morning shift and a deep sense of responsibility to them even without getting paid.

This is the classic story of the plight of a teacher in this state. As observed over time, teachers can only resolve issues by taking to the streets. This in turn would leave the students to suffer and lead to unnecessary nuisance, all because the shameless concerned authorities will not pay the lecturers their hard-earned dues.

Yours etc.,  
E. Pohsnem,  
Via email

**Odd-Even Predicament**

Editor, Through your esteemed daily I would like to bring to the notice of the State administration about the prevailing odd-even registration number for private vehicles belonging to the state. This becomes

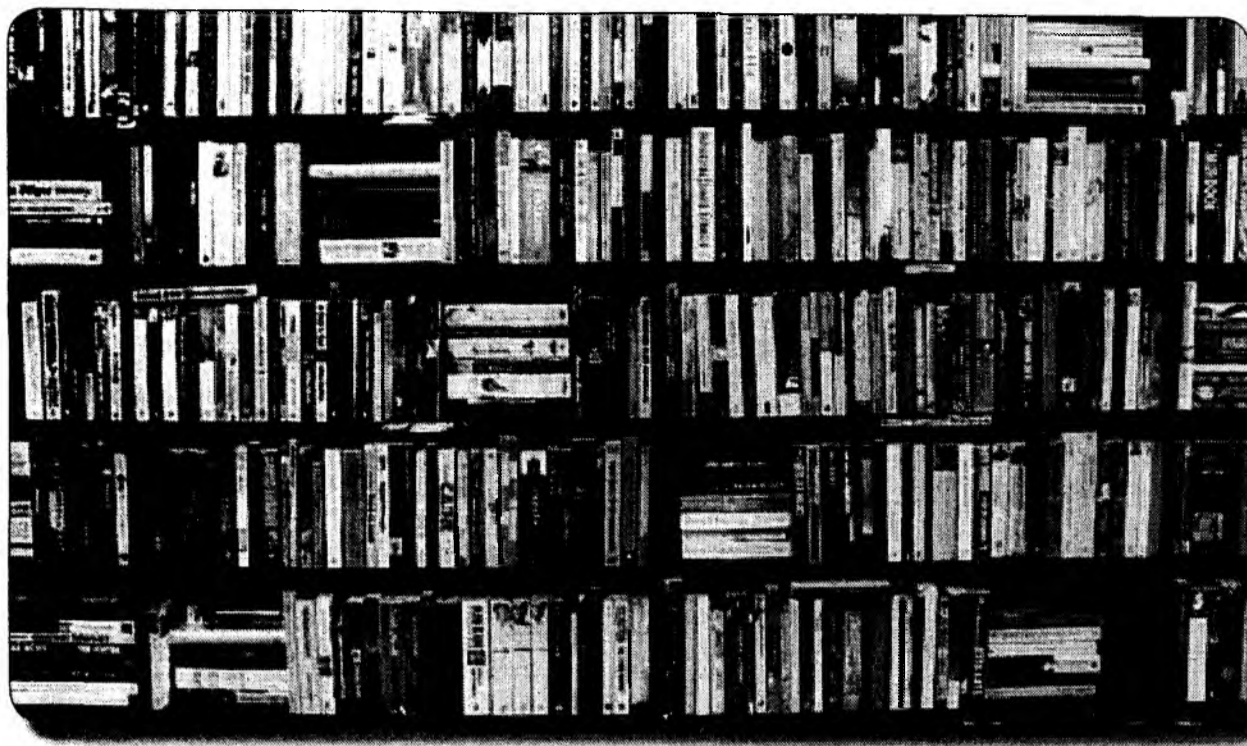
a nightmare for vehicles coming from outside the state. They are caught completely unawares when they are told that their vehicles cannot ply on a particular day because it either has an odd or even number. Such vehicles are told to go back from where they came from or to shell out a fine for violating the odd/even directives. How will a vehicle coming from outside the state know as to what a particular number is prevalent on that day.

I would therefore request the state administration to give it a serious thought and allow the vehicles coming from other states particularly Assam and to instruct the officials at the entry point accordingly. Vehicles coming from outside and with permission to visit Shillong or its adjoining areas should not have to be fined for violation of the odd/even rules for no fault of theirs.

Yours etc.,  
S.L. Singhania,  
President,  
Police Bazar Welfare Society

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.

# NOVELS REFLECT REALISM



By Vikas Datta

There can be endless arguments on whether a novel is literature, literary fiction, or genre fiction, but its ability to portray the experience of a historic place and time, at the level of the individual, cannot be gainsaid by memoirs, which may not be impartial, or academic histories, which usually focus on a larger picture.

What can give a better insight into the horrors and lingering effects of war than Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), or the dehumanising – and often fatal – consequences of racial prejudice and the 'lynch mob' mentality than Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), or the ramifications of colonialism on indigenous cultures than Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), to take a few examples.

Indian novels, in English and other languages, do not lag in any respect to their global counterparts, since the form emerged across the country in the late 19th century. While Devaki Nandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* (Hindi, 1888) was fantasy, drawing on the Persian-Urdu 'dastangoi' oral storytelling tradition, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* (Bengali, 1882), and Nandshankar Mehta's *Karan Ghelo* (Gujarati, 1866), among others, had historical themes,

many were rooted in the contemporary world and its problems.

Some did serve as an impetus for social progress, with a story getting the message across better than a tract, most did offer a sparkling and insightful description of the society they were set in, its mores and norms, and the state of the language, its idioms, slang, and more.

The depictions of Tsarist Russia and Ottoman Turkey in *Fasana-e-Azad* (Urdu, 1881) by Ratan Nath Dhar *Sarshar* may be imaginary, but the description of the manners and customs of the late 19th-century Lucknow, which account for most of the massive tome (four volumes), is spot-on.

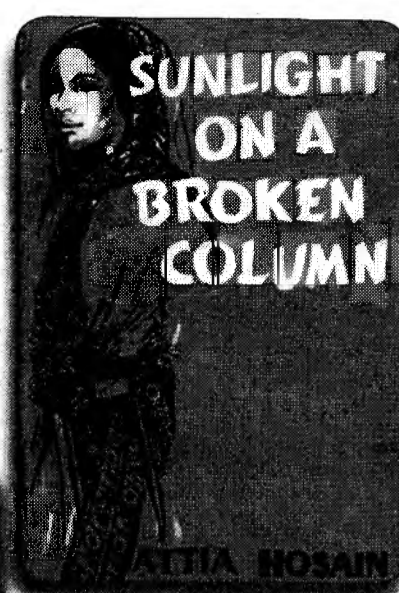
Peary Chand Mitra did the same for the then Calcutta in *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (Bengali, 1857) and Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai for Madras in *Prathapa Mudaliar Charithram* (Tamil, written in 1857 and published in 1879).

Sharda Ram Phillauri's *Bhagyawati* (Hindi, 1877) had a more prescriptive tone, frowning on child marriage and favouring widow remarriage, and Hari Narayan Apte's *Pan Lakshat Kon Ghetto* (Marathi, 1890) was the sobering "autobiography" of a young woman buffeted by a mostly adverse society. And in the 20th century and onwards, there is an abundance of plenty.

Indian literature, especially in English, both as an original source

and in translations, can offer a novel for any mood and purpose the reader may seek, be it pure diversion or a more instructive purpose. For the latter, let's take up five-odd works – once famous but now forgotten and some even out of print – from the recent past, which may have some bearing on our present times.

Amid the debate over heritage, colonial and otherwise, in the country and in its institutions, especially in the Army, Manohar Malgonkar's *Distant Drum* (1960) is instructive.



On a wider perspective, it is about the British-Indian relationship in the colonial army and the Indians and Pakistanis in the armies after Independence as well as Indian civil-military relationships with some of both not coming off too well.

The underlying lesson is that there is good and bad in people as well as things, we cannot be selective about the pasts we want to adopt, and, according to scholar Usha Bande, Malgonkar's belief that "everything British need not be condemned in our enthusiasm to celebrate 'nationalism'."

Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is a coming-of-age story of an orphaned Muslim girl from a landed family in Lucknow growing up in the 1930s, and the series of choices she has to make in her life, both personal and political, rising in complexity and consequences, to the biggest one in 1947.

Laila, whose story in a way echoes that of the author herself, is raised at her grandfather's house after her parents' passing. After his death, she becomes the ward of her uncle, who is both authoritarian and liberal, allowing her to pursue modern education but seeks to retain control of her life otherwise – a feature we have come to see as scarcely dated and is much around today as it was then – and her rebellion is inevitable.

These may be seen as the account or outlook of an 'Anglicised' section, but let us look at the other side of the spectrum.

Shrilal Shukla's satirical *Raag Darbari* (Hindi, 1967) shows that life in the 'Bharat' beyond the metros is neither straightforward, nor simple, and the pursuit or perpetuation of "tradition" is not always desirable. Set in the village of 'Shivpalganj' somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, it is a collection of vignettes without a defined protagonist, and the characters are rather eccentric and devious.

The narrator is Ranganath, who comes to the village to recuperate after completing his post-graduate education. He observes the jostling

for power and position that constitutes local politics, from his uncle Vaidyaji, the manager of the local school and centrepoint of all village politics, and his younger son Ruppan, who stays on in Class 10 for 10 years to be able to carry on in student politics.

The elder son, Badri Pehelwan, eschews politics and concentrates on bodybuilding. The other characters include the principal with a penchant for rustic dialect, the drunk goon who invents a new 'language', the hapless common man, and more.

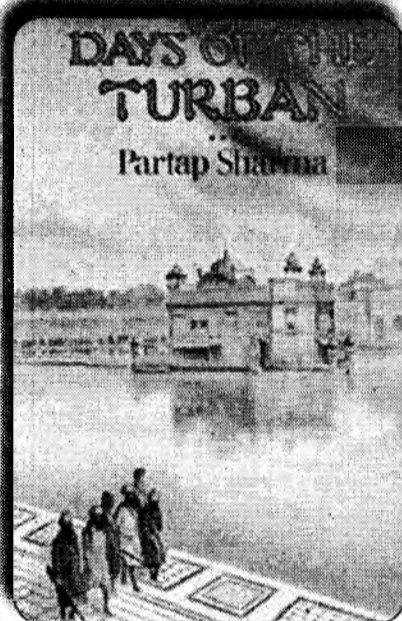
A more ominous tone can be found in Partap Sharma's *The Days of the Turban* (1986), set in Punjab, where the spectre of terrorism is slowly spreading, and a syncretic way of life is fast disappearing.

Balbir, the youngest of a land-owning Mohyal family in a village, is chafing against his rustic life and dreams of moving to Europe like his

plans and the family patriarch, Lokraj, carries out an audacious plan to rescue his grandson from right under the extremists' eyes, and then deals with the man who got him embroiled.

Nalinaksha Bhattacharya's *A Fistful of Desire* (1997) is about power, love and social responsibility – in a rather unique manifestations – in a pre-social media age.

At its centre are the shenanigans of a powerful bureaucrat in the PMO who becomes rather too enamoured of a British woman, who seeks his help to locate her husband, who went missing while on a scientific survey in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. As he makes increasingly elaborate plans to seduce her, the woman, sensing his intentions, summons her younger boyfriend from London to help. A search is ultimately mounted but with results scarcely expected.



Beginning with career army officer Kiran Garud's life commanding his regiment ('The Satpurus') in a cantonment somewhere in Central India soon after Independence, it sees him move to a staff job at the Army HQ in New Delhi, where a romantic tangle – worthy of a Bollywood potboiler – sends him opting for active service in Jammu and Kashmir, where he gets into another career-disrupting incident, before redemption, on the personal and professional front. Interspersed are digressions into the beginning of his career, and his experiences of World War II, and the Partition.

**MANOHAR MALGONKAR**  
**DISTANT DRUM**

**"Appealing directness and sincerity...compelling reading."**

TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

elder brother and cousin.

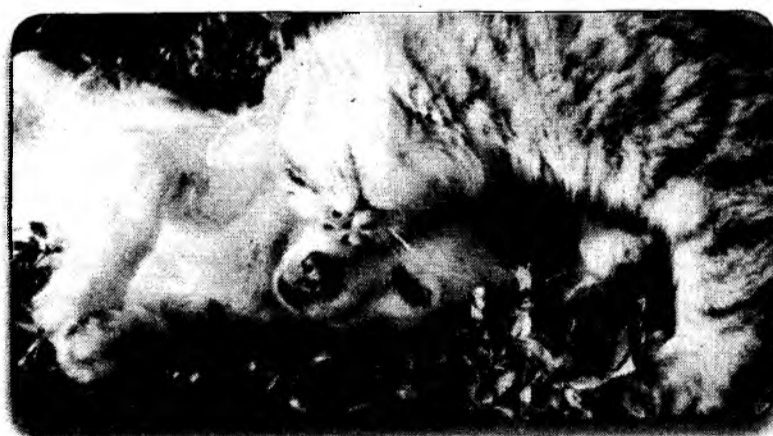
This leads him to get involved with a local gun-runner, and then get trapped in the Golden Temple as Bhindrawale's men cement control and make him a hostage to force his cousin, an arms supplier, to make deals with them.

The cousin ties up with intelligence to frustrate the terrorists'

Eventually, it ends happily – though a bit unexpectedly also – and even our bureaucrat displays a soft side, but doesn't forget his amorous intentions.

Some of these books, unfortunately, are unavailable or out of print. Time for publishers to step in and resurrect these writers for a new generation?

## VACAY WITH PETS



Pets perfectly encapsulate the notion of unconditional love. They provide us affection, instill a sense of responsibility in us, and are the most powerful stress buster. Nothing could ever match their pure sensation of sincerity.

They are an intrinsic part of our life. Even the thought of leaving our most vulnerable family member at home is unsettling. Then why leave your pets at home?

So, think about bringing your furry companion wherever you go. Even if it may appear to be a difficult task, having a great vacation with your four-legged companion is still manageable if you follow a few guidelines shared by Faisal Islam, Co-founder, Carry My Pet.

### Consult with the vet before planning a trip

As a pet owner, it is your responsibility to speak with your veterinarian before taking your pet on a trip. Whether it's a veterinarian for a health and medical check-up or an international pet relocation expert for the documentation process, it is a good idea to consult them before you start planning

your trip. Based on their examination, they can tell you whether your pet is fit for travel or should be left at home.

Depending on your location, even a healthy pet may need additional vaccines or a health certificate before you go.

### Don't forget to carry your pet's medical documents

Every airline has its own pet-travel policies, and each country has its own pet-health regulations. So make sure you get your pet's medical records from the vet before embarking on a journey with your pet. You'll need copies of an animal's medical documents and certificates, as well as proof of vaccinations (particularly rabies) if you're moving it to another state.

### Prepare the pet for the journey

The pets experience anxiety in the same way that humans do. It is vital to acclimate your pet to the voyage before beginning a journey to avoid putting your pet in an unpleasant scenario.

You can quickly assist your pets in overcoming their concerns by gradually exposing them to new situations. Take him on a short drive once or twice a week to help him with this. This will assist you in understanding their behaviour and keeping track of what causes them to fidget so you can work around it.

### Don't forget to update the pet's microchip

If we look from the safety point of our litter critters, they must have a microchip on them when travelling abroad. If you're going on a trip with your pet, make sure you don't forget to get your pet microchipped. Pet microchip comes with a unique code and has pet's basic information like breed, age, colour, owners details. It helps government authorities confirm with the microchip number mentioned in the microchip certificate whether it is the same pet for whom the documents were filed or not.

### Choose a comfortable carrier

Each airline has its own set of regulations for transporting a pet. However, as a pet parent, it is your responsibility to select the suitable crate size for your pet and ensure that the cage is provided with proper food and water arrangements, an absorbing carpet, and a few toys to keep your pets entertained. There are some airlines that allow small dogs and cats to travel in soft carriers in the cabin, while others insist that all pets be transported in the cargo hold. It is your responsibility to check the rules and regulations in advance to avoid causing any discomfort to your pets.

### Avoid feeding your pet right before travelling

Flying can sometimes make your pets feel uncomfortable. So make sure you don't feed your pet any solid food a few hours before your trip, or try to keep them lightly fed. If you're travelling, make sure to arrange ahead of time for your pet's meals to avoid any unpleasant surprises along the way.

Just like you, your pets are entitled to a break. Travelling with a pet, on the other hand, necessitates considerable forethought. However, if you have all of your cards in order, you and your furry companion can have a lovely vacation. (IANS/ife)

## How India can get its act right

An optimistic Naushad Forbes writes, "What is India's future? I deeply believe in India's promise, in our potential for great achievement. I am also old enough to appreciate our ability to snatch failure from the jaws of success," in *The Struggle and The Promise: Restoring India's Potential* (HarperCollins) as he presents a blueprint for the way ahead.

The Promise is our diverse culture that has something for everyone. Our young population is thirsty for education and achievement. And a strong private sector is our engine of growth. We can lead the world in the future.

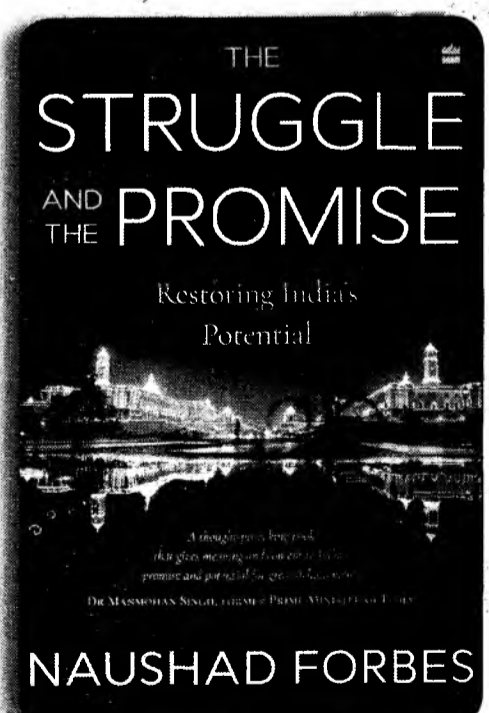
The Struggle is to create a business-friendly environment, even as education, public health and quality of jobs demand attention.

How can the government, citizens and firms turn our struggle into promise and enable India to lead? How can we fix things by learning from best practices elsewhere? How can we ensure openness, inclusivity and innovation? How can independent institutions make up for low state capacity? How can our culture deliver leadership?

Forbes answers these and other critical questions concerning India's progress. He provides a logical, actionable blueprint for getting the balance right between industry, institutions and policy. Backed by rigorous research and copious data, here's a book that shows how to fulfil India's potential.

"I hope you will find some of these answers to be convincing. But I hope, even more, that this will prompt wide discussion as you seek your own answers to these vital questions. We can then jointly craft India's future," says Forbes.

"A thought-provoking book that gives meaning and context to India's promise and potential for great achievement," says



former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"Naushad Forbes is not only a successful business leader but an exceptional intellectual...He is objective in his analysis of where we lag when he talks about our nation's struggles and then takes a focused, incisive approach to highlight the immense promise of India. The result is a book with thought-provoking, practical ideas to restore India's true potential," says Sachin Sharma, Executive Editor, HarperCollins India.

Born in 1960, Naushad Forbes is Co-Chairman of Forbes Marshall, India's leading process and energy efficiency company, and was the president of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in 2016-17. (IANS)

**T**ime management is a subject that is extremely important for us to understand. It's all about putting in the effort which very few people do. An important aspect of time management is energy management.

Managing your energy levels is just as important as your time for fruitful work and outcomes. At times, we may have the time but no motivation or will to make things happen. Understanding your body and the importance of rest and rejuvenation is crucial.

While it needs the commitment to develop healthy habits as an adult, for young students and children, starting early can also mean transitioning into adults who are aware. Irrespective, there are a few tips that have been foolproof and have benefited everyone alike. For those who are looking at building a healthier tomorrow, you are already on the right path. Put them into action and watch how you set yourself on the path of self-improvement.

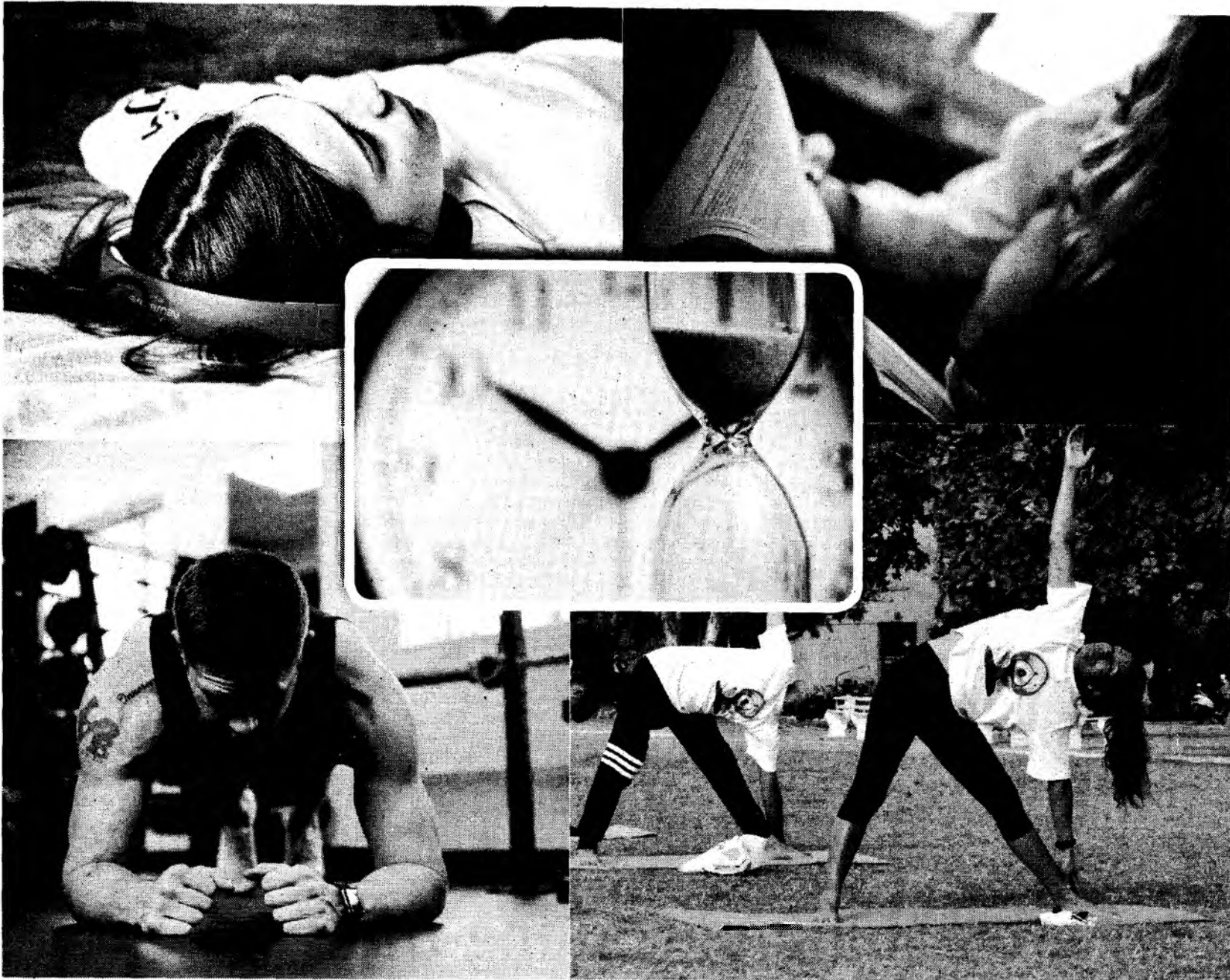
**Time Management – Prioritising your work to manage time effectively:** One way to keep a tab on how one keeps a watch on time is first identifying the priority tasks. One must prioritise goals that revolve around personal leadership and necessity and these could encompass:

- Personal Leadership**
- \* Health
- \* Relationships
- \* Skill building
- \* Identifying new opportunities
- Necessity**
- \* Project Deadlines
- \* Addressing issues of an angry client
- \* Resolving a machine breakdown
- \* or Other emergencies

While most of these must be on our top to-do list, people are easily distracted by social media, excessive TV viewing, and aimless Internet surfing besides workplace chatter, spending too much time on emails or phone calls. The distractions pretty much sum up the waste of time and deception into doing one's task less efficiently.

**Time Management Tools**  
**Single Handling:** It involves

# KEY TO SELF-IMPROVEMENT



sticking to one task until it is 100 per cent complete without switching tasks in between. One must first make a list of things one needs to do, then apply the popular Covey's matrix to understand its priority before embarking on the task with single-minded devotion. Always deal with the toughest task first. If you are suddenly reminded of a task that you think needs to be done for

the same time, put it down on paper at once. But get back to it only once you complete what you already began working on. Don't let yourself slip in between.

**The Pomodoro Technique:** One of the most popular techniques to manage time and work efficiently is the Pomodoro technique. All one needs to do is create chunks of the tasks one intends to do while

allotting a fixed time limit e.g. 25 minutes for a task. Get rid of any distractions from your surroundings and work honestly through a fixed schedule. Repeat the cycle to hop on to the next task or to complete the existing task.

**Deep Work:** It is a rare skill today to be deeply focused on anything. To work with total dedication and attention requires that

you concentrate on your tasks like a zen master or a monk! While it is true that deep concentration helps navigate time efficiently, it is also highly rewarding when you can wind up your tasks within the given timelines productively.

**Energy Management Tools**  
**Understanding one's energy level patterns:** Different people

have different energy levels during the day. Some are early risers and feel motivated to work as soon as they are up and about. Others are late starters.

Irrespective of what time one starts the day, it is certain that time progresses, one slows down hour by hour, picking up a little post-lunch and diminishing the energy levels again by the closing hours. One needs to identify the times of the day one is most productive and tap those hours effectively. It may also be a good idea to little breaks to recharge one's batteries.

**The Four Aspects of Energy Management:** Energy must be managed at four planes

**Physical energy:** Physical depletion of energy can be taken care of by tiny breaks every 90 minutes – light exercise such as walking or going a floor up through stairs and taking plenty of water. One can also get rid of drowsiness through little activities as these. Remember to avoid smoking and junk food and keep heavy exercise for non-working hours routine.

**Emotional energy:** Positivity is the key. Thinking about bad memories only makes energy levels shallow. But talking to well-wishers and loved ones, planning for the weekend, and keeping a track of your goals chart for the coming week can keep your motivation and emotional levels high.

**Mental energy:** Positive affirmations, unwinding with favourite music, and taking short naps can help you keep your mental energies up. Stay away from watching movies or a match as it is time-taking and must be reserved for your free time.

**Spiritual energy:** Yoga leads to holistic well-being. Tap into your energies through the practice of yoga, read a good book, above all take a few minutes to pray. All these help in keeping your spiritual energies high.

Successful people are known to plan things ahead of time and that also includes watching their time, schedule and energy levels. Certain things might not remain within the given agenda, yet one can stay on top of the game by following these little tips for time and energy management. (IASNlife)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, FEB 6, 2022

**Moon sextile Sun** on your solar return chart and will give favorable results. You will live life with excitement. You will enjoy love ties leading to marriage. Your health will be good. You will make plans with your family to travel somewhere. New job/business offer will come. Income will be good and on a higher side. You will be interested in meeting influential persons. You will be busy in family matters. In terms of professional life you will make some important decisions. You will definitely receive rewards in time to come. Your siblings will support you. A baby may be born in the family. Your enemies and opponents will be active and they may form an evil and secretive plan against you. But will not get success. You will make progress in your life. You will take part in some social activities.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
 It is going to be a week full of happiness and bliss. Your dreams will get fulfilled. Your work will be got done with the help of officials and colleagues. You need to remain away from risky works as there is no need for those. But you have to remain careful too. Your worries will get over. Your superiors will be happy with your work and performance. You will also have monetary gains. You will get your work finished in time. Your family member will guide you and your task will become easier. You will also plan to visit your relatives. You will also enjoy a feast at someone's house. Your time will be spent peacefully with your family members. You will also develop a liking for a person known to you. Travels abroad are indicated. You will feel a lot better as your burdens get lightened.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
 Time is right for you and will be again favorable for you. You will cooperate with your colleagues and superiors to achieve your team goals. It is important to work together and also exchange your ideas with them. There will be a lot of goodwill and happy feelings that members will have for themselves. There will be affection and love too. You will prosper in your life. Your financial condition will keep getting better. Your elders too will bless you besides that you will get guidance of an important person. Life will look a lot better now. You will also enjoy good equations with your family members and partner. You will witness improvement in your business. Your married life will be wonderful. You will also travel for your work in the later part of the week. You will have a lot of success but it will depend on how you make the travel suitable for yourself. You will also value your relations.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
 You will look forward to an amazing time period in front of you this week. People will be curious to know about you and will also come closer to you. You will also take part in social activities. You will help those who are dependent on you. You will have to deal with funds and there will be no shortage of money. You will be successful in whatever you do and will move forward in life. You will also develop contacts with those who are superior to you and will be treated on an equal footing. Students will study hard to get success in exams. You will also complete work on time but will have to work hard for that. You will take part in social activities too. Husband and wife will share good understanding. There will be improvement in married life too.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
 Time will gently pass this week. You will witness change of fortunes in your life. You will also enjoy the weather change and will also look forward to going on a travel trip with your family for fun and entertainment. It will bring lot of relief for you from your hectic work schedule. You will feel recharged and fresh in the company of your family members. Some people will try to pull your legs at your workplace. They will work against your interest. You will be under some stress but will not allow it to overpower you. Where there is the will there is a way. Your creative level will be high. And you could be given additional responsibility too. You will be having some responsibility towards your family and work. But will have high self confidence and courage. Your financial condition is going to be great.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
 You will work hard to get results. Your bosses will be happy with your performance and also appreciate you a lot. You will enjoy all the attention that you get. You will also mediate in someone's affair and will get the matter sorted out. You will also experience some tension at your workplace. Your enemies and opponents will be active. You will take to yoga and meditation to lessen your stress. It will be a good idea to go on a short trip with your family for peace and relaxation. Students will get admission in school and colleges of their choice. Contacts with high officials will be established. People will value your guidance and advice. Your business will hold the day for you. You will make a wise decision and strike a good bargain. An untoward incident can happen if your loved one does not receive proper treatment and you will feel remorse for it.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
 There will be a rise in your income. You will have mental peace and lot of satisfaction as money will flow in. Your hard work has finally begun to pay dividends. You will also meet lot of new people and will be able to get your work done. You will also meet an important personality. A

new work might begin. Placement of planets will bring peace and happiness. You will also make contact with a business tycoon or a political bigwig who will be of great help to you. You will focus on your work and energy. You will also get success in government work. Health will be perfect. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You can also get a job of your liking and choice. A new arrival is expected in your house. You will get good news from your child.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**  
 The time is great from all perspectives. You will get full support of your peers and bosses. You will get success in whatever you do. Your list of contacts will also rise. You will do a favor for your colleagues too. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will be caught in a very happy situation that will please you a lot. But do not trust unknown persons in public dealings. Your job/business conditions will be in your favor. You will have lot of expectations from your life partner. He/she will come up to your expectations. Your earnings too will increase and you will make new investments. Working women will get full support. They will be able to establish a balance between work and home. You will also make others happy with your behavior.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**  
 A person known to you for long may betray you. This will hurt you a lot but you need to start taking things in your stride. And be more practical in dealings with people in particular and situations in general. You could also get criticism from your bosses but you will take lessons and learn from your mistakes. Keep control over your anger and speech. There will be an improvement in relations with partners. You will be busy in your work and business. Some important decision regarding your child may take place, although there may be some dilemma in the beginning, later on matter will clear up. You will also get a good news. Matters regarding property might get resolved with mutual talks. You will also fall in new love relations leading to marriage.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**  
 It is going to be an amazing week for you. Money will never be a problem for you. And you will be able to buy things you need and desire most. You will be serious towards your work, business and home affairs too. Your children will make good progress in their line of work and you will also get a good news from your child. These are prestige enhancing days. A new arrival is expected in your house. Money that was given on loan will be repaid. You will need to take care of new things. The time is superlative. And you will begin a new chapter in your life. You need not feel bad about anything. Your siblings will support you. Your differences with parents will also end. You will make progress in general. And even your enemies will extend a hand of friendship towards you.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**  
 It will be a wonderful week. You will make progress in your work and business. You will adopt a flexible attitude in your work. You will also enjoy confidence and support of your bosses. Entertainment, fun, love and romance will keep you busy. You will be able to inspire others too. You will have new thoughts. You will be able to inspire others too. You will be in a good mood and full of self confidence. You will also feel relaxed and secured. You will think of doing everything with your mind, but leave some things in your heart. Be careful of your diet. You will introspect and the thought will occur to you that you have to live for yourself too. You need to protect your interests too.

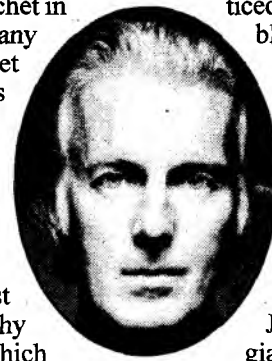
**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**  
 You will spend lot of time on thinking about your future plans. It may involve lot of expenditure which you may not be able to afford. You will not allow your money to get wasted. But gradually you will have victory days and things will start improving. You will feel relaxed and easy. There will be increase in your confidence. You will also finish your work very speedily. You will have an internal energy and you will accomplish some big tasks. Family will also be your priority. You will bring about important changes in your daily routine and lifestyle. A long standing dispute will also get resolved. You will work very hard and will be in a better financial position. You will also receive the blessings of parents and elders. You will also develop interest in meditation and prayers.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**  
 You will be involved with your work. There will be positive changes in your behavior and habits. You will also enjoy good understanding with your life partner. You will also receive some good news from somewhere. Your mind will be focused on praying, religion, meditation etc. You will also share your happiness with your family members. You will also plan to go out to some beautiful place. You will also make best use of Whatsapp, face book or other social networking sites to improve your work and business. Your entire focus will be on improving your personality. You will also bring into effect some necessary changes to your daily routine. You will also be hopeful of receiving money from some sources. A meeting with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you.

## Givenchy's decorative arts collection at Christie's

Christie's announced the sale of the exceptional fine and decorative arts collection of legendary fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy, featuring more than 1,200 lots of French and European Furniture and works of art, including sculpture and paintings from Old Masters to Modern and Contemporary works.

Each object was chosen with Givenchy's meticulous eye and reflect his exquisite taste. Drawn from two of Givenchy's most iconic and elegant homes – the Hotel d'Orrouer in Paris and the Chateau du Jonchet in the Loire Valley – the collection includes many exceptional objects unseen on the market for decades as well as more recent works acquired towards the end of his collecting journey. Christie's will offer this extraordinary collection at auction in Paris from 14 to 17 June (live sales) and from 8 to 23 June 2022 in a dedicated online sale. The timing of the announcement of the sale coincides with the 70th anniversary of the first haute couture collection Hubert de Givenchy presented in Paris on February 2, 1952, which was a resounding international success.



### Ambassador of French taste

A major figure in the world of haute couture and fashion, Givenchy's name embodies the quintessence of elegance and the Grand Gout francais. Over the course of his life, he assembled an exceptional collection of furniture and classical and modern art, which he arranged in his homes according to the same exacting standards, exquisitely refined sensibility and passionate creativity that he applied to his work as a couturier.

On June 8, the auction house invites the public to enter Givenchy's world through a curated pre-sale exhibition at Christie's Paris, just prior to the start of the auctions. Highlights from the collection will be announced this spring and exhibited as part of a worldwide tour to key cities, including Palm Beach, New York and Hong Kong, before arriving back in Paris.

### Timeless classic: Hubert de Givenchy

Born in Beauvais in 1927 into an aristocratic family of Venetian origin, Hubert Taffin de Givenchy moved to Paris at the age of 17 to study at the Beaux-Arts. He rigorously assembled his collection with great care and a demand for excellence throughout his life. His eye was refined from an early age, growing up with a great-grandfather who designed stage sets for the Paris Opera and a grandfather who was the administrator of the Beauvais tapestry factory, as well as a great collector in his own right. Givenchy's family and cultural heritage nourished his creativity, taste for materials, colours, and decor.

He was passionate about artists and craftsmanship, and the interiors he created were imbued with a purified classicism that celebrated his passion for the 18th

century. He once remarked, "Fashion changes, but the 18th century style will endure, as it is of exceptional quality. [Such style will endure] on the condition that it is not restrained within a fully period atmosphere - that it is given a breath of fresh air by Delaunay, Arp, and Giacometti, and above all, that it is not weighed down by pompoms and trimmings."

In 1952, Givenchy opened his own fashion house on rue Alfred de Vigny in Paris. He was immediately noticed for his innovative style, creating the "Bettina blouse," a simple white cotton blouse named after model Bettina Graziani. He went on to dress the most elegant and iconic women of the late 20th century, including Jacqueline "Jackie" Kennedy Onassis and Audrey Hepburn, the Countess Mona Bismarck, the Duchess of Windsor, the Duchess of Devonshire, and Marella Agnelli. Interior design as an extension of his work as a fashion designer Loire Valley, Chateau du Jonchet and an interior view by Pierre Bergian L'atelier au Jonchet, 2021 (not part of the auction).

A tireless worker, constantly energized and inspired by new projects, Givenchy always considered his passion for art, decoration and gardens as an extension of his work as a fashion designer: "I try to achieve harmony between architecture, decoration, and colour." Using his favourite palette: green, gold, white and black, he designed his interiors in a very structured style, assigning each object a well-defined place.

Givenchy's family added, "Through this sale, we are very pleased to be able to celebrate the exceptional taste of Hubert de Givenchy and his lifelong companion Philippe Venet. We wish to share the elegance and aesthetic heritage that they have passed

The contents of Givenchy's Parisian Hotel Particulier, the Hotel d'Orrouer on the rue de Grenelle in the 7eme arrondissement of Paris and his country residence le chateau du Jonchet will be offered for sale. The Collection is comprised of Modern Art, mainly French and European Furniture, Works of Art, Design, 17th and 18th-century sculpture, Old Master Drawings and Paintings as well as 19th Century Paintings of approximately 1300 lots. The collection is estimated to realize in excess of 50 million euros with more than 1200 lots.

Previously, in Paris The auction sold the YSL & Berge collection comprised 691 lots in February 2009 and the final part in November 2009 comprised of 1,200 works of art. The second-largest collection Christie's handled globally in the past decade was the Peggy and David Rockefeller collection comprised 1550 lots in 2018.

The auction will be a 4-day live auction with a simultaneous online sale and will be held in Paris on June 14-17. The public viewing will open on June 8. (IANS)

"Blessed are the hearts that can bend;  
they shall never be broken."  
—Albert Camus

## The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXIV No.176 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2022

### End of a Legend

IN a fitting tribute, a tearful nation paid its last respects to singing sensation, the Nightingale of Bollywood Lata Mangeshkar. Her demise at the advanced age of 92 was peaceful though complicated by the scourge of the times, the Covid pandemic. As the funeral pyre was lit at Mumbai's Shivaji Park on Sunday evening, the immortal flame that's Lata will live in the minds of music lovers for all times to come. Through seven decades of perusal of music, melody and its tunes -- a mix of romance, devotion, pathos and patriotic spirit -- she left behind a gift of immense value to be cherished for ever. Those like Pyar Kiya to Darna Darna Kya, Prabhu Tero Naam, Meri Ankho Ke Siva, and Aye Mere Watan Ke Logo that famously brought tears to the eyes of Jawaharlal Nehru, would live in our collective memories. Some of these had shades of her own troubled past, she having lost both her parents at an early age.

Yet, by sheer dint of hard work and strenuous conditioning, she (and her sister Asha Bhosle) rose to the heights of music followed by boundless public adulation over the years. That's the unique strength of entertainers par excellence. Lata was more lovable because she, unlike several other entertainers of our times, kept herself aloof from politics and controversies -- and yet the powers that be went after her, rather, to bask under her glory. Even when she was nominated as a member of Rajya Sabha, representing gifted artists of the time, she kept off the Parliament and its aura for most part and avoided taking a salary, a free residence or other benefits. That was the strength of her character.

Having lived all her life in a promenade in South Mumbai, what's often noted about her was the offer that came from a Pakistani prime minister, long past, that he would settle more for a sensation like Lata than for the sensitive Kashmir as a gift to Pakistan. The high and mighty bowed before her talent, which she inherited from her father, her skills having been honed over time by great singers of the past. Lata's life and times would remain an inspiration to generations of musicians and others, mainly to novices as she had brilliantly overcome odds and rose to the top. And, all these for someone who was, at an early stage in her career, dismissed by some producers as "no good," one with "too thin" a voice and of imperfect accent. That's life

# Meghalaya's immediate journey after turning 50

By HH Mohrmen

The beginning of the state's next 50 years journey to reach its centennial milestone does not look good at all. The experience in first few weeks after Meghalaya celebrated its golden jubilee year with pomp and gaiety, have been unparalleled. The incidents had unfortunately showed the state and particularly the law and order situation in a bad light. If the first few weeks are indications of what will happen in the next fifty years, then the future of the state is not as rosy as it has been painted.

### Protest against atrocities on a section of the population

Immediately after the state celebrated a half century of its existence, two senior citizens of the state had to hit the street to voice their concerns against the attacks on a section of the population. The attacks which happened on a regular basis are a cause of concern for all right-minded people in the state. The atrocities on these people are serious crimes, but the failure of the police to apprehend the criminals involved in the many crimes is a matter of shame for the law enforcing machinery in the state. The attacks are not new; in fact even the Deputy Chief Minister of the present government has testified in a video which is available online that he too used to indulge in this kind of illegal activities during his college days. Though the minister later expressed regret about his unsavoury past but the question whether we are learning any lessons from the protest?

### Enough is enough

The protest was an expression to call a spade a spade and to stop remaining bystanders as the attacks on the community continues unabated. The courage of the elderly couple to assert their right to protest against the atrocities is history in the making for the minority community in the state. It is their way of saying that this cannot be tolerated anymore and they are compelled to use their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution to voice their concern about the deteriorating law and order situation in the state. The state government should first and foremost accept that the law and order machinery in the state has failed. Otherwise

how else would criminals be able to attack and intimidate people and at the same time roam freely without the police being able to apprehend them?

### Bomb blast in the heart of the city

The bomb blast in the heart of the city has only proven how weak and ineffective the police system in the state is. The government may claim that the force has done a good job and they have been able to immediately arrest the perpetrators of the crime, but the fact remains that the crime has already been committed. The expectation of the people is for the police to be able to prevent such incidents from happening anywhere in the state. Thank goodness that the blast happened on Sunday evening where there were not many shoppers in the market. Imagine the casualty that it would have caused if the blast was triggered on a week day.

### Morale of the police in the state

It is very unfortunate that the police force has never been able to earn that much respect from the public anyway. This sorry state of affairs deteriorates when police are used by the state government to collect money from trucks transporting coal from the state. There are not less than 10 police stations, and outposts, (supposedly) dacoity camps or temporary posts on this less than 200 kilometers stretch of highway from Umiam to Malidor where police are on 24x7 duty. Anyone who thinks that this illegal collection can happen without the knowledge of the government is living in a fool's paradise. In fact one does not need to travel far to see what the police are doing on the highway. A trip from Umiam on the Shillong bypass to Khliehriat (preferably during the night) will help confirm that the government is responsible for engaging the police in this illegal activity. This government and the government before it are responsible for downgrading the morale of the police force in the state, and it is also fair to say that the MDA government has climbed one bar higher than its predecessor. When armed police were easily over-powered by unarmoured youth

The image that will remain in the public psyche for many years to come is that of the youth in Mawlai on the day of the funeral of the former militant, Cherister Thangkiew. The short video clips of young men who had masked themselves, driving a black SUV they hijacked and brandishing AK 47 they had stolen from the Police which went viral should at least give the Head of the Police Force (DGP) many sleepless nights. That was the day when it was clear that the police have failed the people of the state. This particular day should be considered as a Black Day for the Meghalaya Police because their weakness and inefficiency has been exposed in broad daylight. That the armed police was over-powered by a bunch of unarmed young kids is a matter of shame for the police in the state. The Head of the Police Force and the top rung in the police leadership should bow their heads in shame because incidents like this can happen in the State capital when the law and order situation is already very volatile.

**Half-hearted Home Minister**  
The unfavourable law and order situation in the state is also because the Home Minister is functioning half-heartedly. It may be reminded that after the killing of the former HNLC chairman Chesterfield Khongvir, the home minister had tendered his resignation as the minister in charge of Home Department to the Chief Minister. Lakhmen Rymbui has not withdrawn his resignation letter hence the situation we have in the state now is of a Home Minister who has one foot in and the other out of this very important department. And because of this one sporadic case of a juvenile who went astray, the Home Minister instead of accepting responsibility is busy lecturing parenting techniques to the parents in the entire State.

### Enough Police on the highway but not on the streets

If one would ask why there is no police patrol in cities or towns in the State, the response will be that the Department does not have enough man power. The police failed because they don't see policing the streets as important anymore. The question is - when did we last see the police patrolling the streets in our neighbourhood? Except for traffic police who man the traffic in town and cities, there are no police on the streets to provide the much needed security to the people. The question is how come we have enough police to man the many locations along the highway, whereas we are told that there is not enough police to do the real policing work?

### Law and order is the way to peace

If the State is to develop the important steps that need to be taken in its next fifty years journey is to ensure that peace prevails. Hence the Police and the Home Department in general have a vital role to play in ensuring that the State remains peaceful in the future.

Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

## US administration faces problems with its Ukraine strategy

# Russia and China's joint statement against NATO expansion significant

By John Wojcik

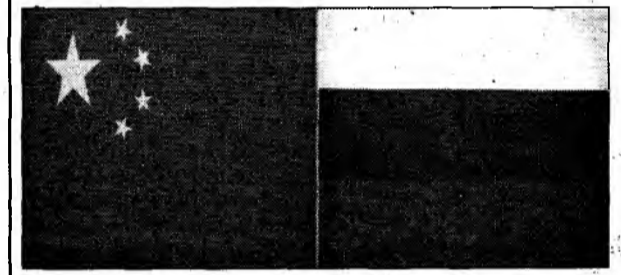
Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, issued a joint demand Thursday that NATO halt its plans for further expansion and end their continued push to whip up a "Cold War mentality."

The joint call in the wake of NATO's preparations for intervening in Ukraine, has imparted a new dimension to the crisis involving the three super powers.

As the two nations issued their statement, the U.S. ignored the call for peace and sent a seventh planeload of offensive weapons, including missiles and anti-tank rockets, into Ukraine. NATO, via member state Turkey, sent more drones to the Ukrainian military. Turkish drones have been used by Ukraine in the past to kill Russian-speaking separatists in the People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

The Ukrainian government refuses to recognize those regions as autonomous, even though it agreed to so in 2014 in the Minsk Declaration. Right-wing and outright fascist entities, with the approval of the government in Kiev, continue to kill civilians in the Russian-speaking areas of eastern Ukraine.

The parties oppose the further expansion of NATO and call for the North Atlan-



tic Alliance to refrain from ideological approaches from the time of the Cold War," the joint Russian-Chinese statement reads. It also urges NATO "to respect the sovereignty, security, and interests of other countries," and, referring to Russia, "the diversity of their civilizational and cultural-historical ways; and to deal with the peaceful development of other governments objectively and fairly."

The two countries also emphasized the need for cooperation between governments around the world, given the challenges of a fast-moving global economic situation, political upheavals, and a pandemic that continues to threaten millions and affect international security.

The joint statement backs Moscow on what it has been saying for months now—that it needs security guarantees limiting the expansion of NATO into Ukraine and Georgia, effectively barring the two former Soviet republics from membership.

Documents leaked to the Spanish newspaper El Pais this week show that the U.S. had formally rejected any such agreement. Instead of seeking a compromise to end the crisis, the U.S. and NATO have followed up with another round of new weapon and troop deployments to eastern Europe.

Some U.S. lawmakers did their part to raise tensions Thursday and Friday rather than to work for peace. They continued to try to rush through Congress powerful sanctions against Russia that could be levied immediately, not waiting for any Russian troops to actually cross the border into Ukraine. Some are resisting, however, saying sanctions should be levied only after an invasion actually occurs.

Beijing has committed to working with Moscow to develop financial systems that are resistant to sanctions and minimize dependency on the U.S. dollar.

While Russia would certainly welcome such help, it has already taken measures to protect against U.S. sanctions. Russia's economy is largely prepared already to resist sanctions, having drastically reduced its dependence upon U.S. dollars over the last sev-

eral years. The country has piled up enormous currency reserves of almost \$700 billion, mostly denominated in euros, which can shield the ruble from collapsing under U.S. pressure.

The national debt in Russia is far lower than the amount in the currency reserves, which further strengthens their ability to ride out sanctions.

Another hitch in the U.S. economic warfare plan is Europe, which is heavily dependent upon natural gas and oil from Russia and has been reluctant to go along with the harshest possible sanctions. That means Russia can likely count on continued income from those countries, especially Germany, which has a joint pipeline with Russia under the Baltic Sea.

The improved condition of the Russian economy, however, works both ways. It is actually another reason why war hawks in the U.S. and NATO want to strike out against the country sooner rather than later before it becomes even more costly for the West to do so.

In order to steer attention away from the huge infusion of new weapons and drones into Ukraine Thursday, the U.S. put out additional alleged intelligence reports

that the Russians were planning another false flag attack on either themselves or Russian-speaking civilians in eastern Ukraine. It involved a fabricated video that would supposedly be used by Moscow to make the case for invading Ukraine. The U.S. claimed the video involved the use of actors playing mourners and piles of corpses.

On Friday morning, U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser John Finer backed off a bit from this after members of the press objected that the U.S. government had provided no proof of the production of any such video.

"We don't know definitively that this is what they (the Russians) did, but we do know that they have a history of doing this type of thing," Finer told the media. Members of the press have noted that it was their job to be skeptical, reminding U.S. government spokespeople of the false reports about weapons of mass destruction that were used to justify the U.S. attack on Iraq years ago only to discover later that there were no such weapons.

The Russians said the reports about a video, like previous reports of false flag attacks allegedly being mounted by them, were false and designed, in fact, to lay the ground for military action against Russia by the West. Another problematic issue for the war hawks in the U.S. and NATO is the steady flow of reports of how the Ukrainian people on the streets are going about their business as usual, not particularly worried about an impending Russian "invasion."

To counter the disconnect between what Washington says is happening and the apparent reality on the ground in Ukraine, MSNBC on Friday sent a camera crew to a pizza shop in Kiev. There were no customers at all visible, but the network's reporters talked to the owner who, they said, has offered free pizza to anyone who goes out and buys a gun to shoot Russians when they invade. The pizza proprietor assured MSNBC that the Russians will indeed invade and that the guns will be needed. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Kudos to BB Lyngdoh Centenary celebration

Editor,  
On the occasion of that red-letter day, I cannot but express my fond memories of the time when I used to be in occasional contact with (L) B B Lyngdoh, a versatile politician and a visionary who shaped the destiny of our state (Meghalaya) for about half a century until the beginning of the 21st century. In my estimation he was one of the tallest leaders of our Hill State Movement and a political catalyst who had set the best example which the coming generation of politicians are bound to follow; an example of principles and steadfastness. Long live BB Lyngdoh!  
Yours etc.,  
Lambourne Kharlukhi,  
Mawlai Nongkwar

#### False claims repeated!

Editor,  
Apropos the letter, "Correcting the record on Covid" by Sukrit Sabhlok (ST February 3, 2022), I was quite surprised to see him reiterating many of the same false claims he had earlier put forth in his rant against the pandemic. Foremost among them, yet again, was the Great Barrington Declaration (which just so happens to be originally authored by the three scientists Sabhlok swears by). Since Sabhlok

seems to have missed my earlier demonstration of the lack of worth of this "declaration", I repeat: the GBD is nothing more than a fraudulent initiative that lacks any credible verification. After it, it initially contained names such as "Dr Person Fakenam" and "Dr Johnny Bananas" among its "expert signatories". I urge anyone in need of a laugh to google this declaration and observe the fake names associated with it, for it is nothing more than a highly amusing practical prank.

The rest of Sabhlok's letter is unfortunately yet another demonstration of him putting forth cherry-picked statements and even false data to back his peculiar views. Case in point: Sabhlok claims the WHO and the UN have argued against and dismissed the effectiveness of lockdowns, but the truth is quite different. The WHO for instance has repeatedly urged governments to take the virus seriously, and it continues to urge caution even today, with the WHO chief stating a couple of weeks ago, "the narrative of Covid being a mild disease is misleading, and it hurts the overall response and costs more lives". The UN in 2021 warned that hundreds of thousands of child deaths were potentially caused in South Asia alone, not because of "radical interruptions to commerce" as Sabhlok claims, but due to health services being overwhelmed due to Covid.

Further, Sabhlok yet again

tries to put forth Sweden's Covid response as an immaculate strategy, while worldwide Covid trackers paint a very different story. Among 225 recognized territories, Sweden ranks a dismal 188th in keeping cases per capita low, and it ranks 169th in keeping deaths per capita low. Hardly something worth emulating in my humble opinion. For some perspective, New Zealand, which took the virus seriously, ranks 20th in keeping deaths low.

Sadly, each of Sabhlok's "arguments" is similarly based on incomplete or false information. After all, he seems to perceive absolutely no distinction between the pre-pandemic world and the time we currently live in, as demonstrated by his bewildering fixation on why lockdowns were not a topic of research before they actually became prevalent post-2019. I am not certain if "commerce" or some other consideration is driving his strange views, and while he fully reserves the right to believe what he desires, I would advise him to not take offence if health bodies, Governments and other citizens don't share his trust in disproven sources of information like the Great Barrington Declaration.

Coming back to reality though, I hope that through careful planning based on actual data, we will soon suppress this pandemic enough and restore normalcy in our lives.

Yours etc.,  
N.K. Kehar  
Shillong-3

#### Why youth gravitate towards militancy

Editor,  
I am amused to learn that the Social Welfare Department will be conducting a study to find out why our youth are heading towards militancy. I think the truth is as self-evident as the fact that if you throw anything up it will come down. Newton might have discovered the law of gravity but things falling back to earth after being thrown up is an observation that cannot escape even a layman even if he has not heard of Newton. Hence every/any reason discovered by such a study is likely to be merely an exercise in semantics. Of wrapping up the truth in political jargon.

Why are our youth joining militants? Why do youth gravitate towards pressure groups? Because unfortunately that is where the society's role models are. We have no real role models in business or in sports. Businessmen unfortunately are looked down upon in our so called egalitarian society. But without business, large scale job creation is not possible. Although routinely abused (and extorted from) they also add to the state's coffers in the form of revenue.

Music and sports where the natural talent of our youth lies have not been encouraged by the government. It is a different thing to get bands from outside to play at vari-

ous festivals and to take part in the premier League. Why can't we have scholarships and training camps for these two categories beginning at the school level itself?

You will find that youth from other NE states effected by militancy have moved out of their states looking for jobs. But in Meghalaya one finds that a bogey has been created about the country outside the state's borders. It is, as if people are being lynched routinely. I know of retired civil servants that routinely spew out venom and thus fear. Such expressions of over-blown fear make everyone hesitate to even take a step outside, far less, seek a job there.

So what does a young man do? He knows that no jobs are available to him. His attempt at business is going to end at best in a dreary hand to mouth existence. How does he then expend his natural energy? Well either in alcohol or sex (we have seen the effects of both already) or in fighting. Being a rebel for a cause which he feels he has but can't define. So militancy seems to provide an answer.

There is a continuous demand for more constitutional protection for the people of the state. This is bound to be counterproductive. Having too much protection is like wearing a bullet proof vest and then putting on rusty metal full-body antiquated armour (such as the ILP) and then running. It is a fast-changing world and in this world one has to learn to

be nimble. Over-protection just slows one down. We are already far behind other states in spite of having attained statehood five decades ago.

We have a good thing going in tourism but have lost the advantage in health care and education to Guwahati. Government needs to protect this sector from agitations and extortion. This is a big money spinner, employment and revenue generating sector. Of course, corruption is another big factor. Corruption also encourages extortion as we have seen. A laissez faire attitude of filling one's pockets unfairly and then not having the moral courage to stop others from doing so. The CM of Assam had, a couple of days ago, proposed a law against forced donations extracted from business people. Will Meghalaya also make an attempt to clean out its stables?

It is said that we all operate out of two polarities - love or fear. I think it will greatly help to abandon fear and trust the world. An open fearless society I dare say will do much better than the one in which one is routinely asked to hide one's head in the sand of fear.

Yours etc.,  
Paramjit Bakhshi,  
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.

"A man's worth is no greater than his ambitions."

— MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

The Shillong Times

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CMIE's Unemployment Data

THE Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) a leading business intelligence company which uses specialised statistical methods to produce economic and business data. A recent research released its latest reports on April 5 last. The figures show Meghalaya's unemployment ratio to be the third lowest making all 28 states at 1.5%.

During the Covid-19 crisis of 2020 there was a significant job and income loss. Hence researchers and policymakers turned to unemployment data compiled by the CMIE to understand the extent of job losses especially in the informal sector.

John Dreze's argument is that there is a bias towards higher income groups whereas during the pandemic, it was the lowest income earners that were worst affected. If during the sampling, the worst impacted are left out and these figures are then extrapolated for the country then there is a bias and policy-making will be impacted adversely.

Are We Still Stuck in Distributional Politics and Party Hopping?

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

In general elections in Meghalaya just a year away, the citizens will have to elect a new set of public servants or MLAs, whose primary constitutional duty is to legislate laws, formulate policies and also to debate on issues that matter to the people of the State.

The parliamentary system and the Constitution have not only given us the democratic space but also given people the liberty to create their own spaces for debates and dissent which can be capitalised to the maximum before deciding to elect public servants.

Prospective candidates need not only show their faces in "paid functions" which are organized on their behalf, but also be ready to debate and expound in public fora their core beliefs and principles or ideology and ideas which they have for rebuilding the State.

tribal elites and big corporates from outside the State? What solutions do they have to offer, to bring about communal co-existence and not allowing lumpen elements to rule the roost, sans double speaking?

Health and education are the primary indicators for development but sadly in Meghalaya they are the most ignored sectors and therefore what policies do they wish to offer in this aspect? The people of the State need to know and through this process the electorate will be able to make an informed choice.

At 50 what does Meghalaya need? The State has to

State. The discourse on these vital economic issues needs to be tagged along with the debate on the economy of the State. What should be the economic policy, rather economic production? How to channelize the entrepreneurial spirit of our youths and not waste them by cheap politicking.

Recently, there was the demand to review the State's Reservation Policy. I respect the youth for questioning the State's policy, but I disagree with idea and proposition that reservation for the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo should be based on population of these tribes.

Meghalaya largely depends on Central funding and this has also given rise to misconception that the State should be ruled by the same party or partners of the Central government.

progress and for the State to grow and progress one must challenge and confront the distributional and divisive politics head on. The State and people must prioritise issues and act accordingly - the plight of unorganized workers, small and medium business enterprises, teachers, students, health workers, cultivators, farmers and employment generation have to be addressed concretely and immediately with a pro-workers approach.

The economic rights and entitlements of the people are never in the forefront of any political discourse in the

State should not deviate from the established principle that reservation is primarily meant for the economically unsound and politically backward sections of society. Thus, in the case of Meghalaya one has to come out with a formula where landless tribals and economically unsound sections of society should be given preference in both government and private sectors and also in educational institutions.

Meghalaya largely depends on Central funding and this has also given rise to misconception that the State should be ruled by the same party or partners of the Central government. This is totally wrong and has to be challenged on the basis that India is a Union of States.

For democracy to survive we need to adhere to the core values and principles. And those core values which emanate from movements for social, economic and political justice need to be expounded in the public sphere. We should not allow our polity to be guided by the politics of distribution and by political turncoats for the next 50 years.

politics and economics, but also to culture and beliefs.

It is the constitutional duty of the State to provide basic amenities like road, footpath, drainage, electricity, water, sanitation, waste bins, public health and education etc., to every village or shnong. Therefore, the Village Administration law comes into play here and grassroots governance is vital in implementing these essential rights.

Alas the polity is being reduced to drainage or "nala" politics whereby a prospective candidate would energetically inspect incomplete drains and accuse the other for not being a good public servant. However, the solution to this is simple, the democratically elected body of the shnong or village should be solely responsible for providing and managing basic amenities and MLAs as public servants should be barred by law from interfering in such matters.

Party hopping and political turncoats are legendary in Meghalaya's politics. The electorates have already been greeted by this in the recent past and more are expected in the coming days. Again, very early we are seeing signs and movements of distributional politics. Unlike in the past where only common materials like blankets, cooking utensils, school and medical bills, funeral, cultural and sports tournament expenses would be distributed; now a new list has been added with the new found technology like CCTVs, Laptops, Android phones etc.

For democracy to survive we need to adhere to the core values and principles. And those core values which emanate from movements for social, economic and political justice need to be expounded in the public sphere. We should not allow our polity to be guided by the politics of distribution and by political turncoats for the next 50 years.

(Reach me at kyrsoi73@gmail.com)

A Futuristic Budget

By GN Bajpai

The budget proposals for 2022-2023 tabled in Parliament and the preceding speech of the Union Finance Minister are in many ways futuristic and growth-oriented. Yet, judicial, administrative and police reforms remain in the shadows.

As the headlines settle, the four themes of the budget are becoming manifest: Futuristic: The budget seeks to address the issues of current sectors of the economy with equal, if not sharper focus on the sunrise sectors like Information Technology, Drones, AI, Blockchain, Digital Currency and even DiFi (Distributed Finance).

The proposed investments in e-governance and bridging the digital divide will improve productivity and ease of living. The idea of extending the benefit of technology from communication, manufacturing, trade, distribution and entertainment to defence and agriculture provides a futuristic approach across the spectrum.

Holistic: The sharp focus on 'Gati Shakti' will benefit the economy as a whole by enhancing the demand for products and services, reducing supply chain cost and improving inventory management. The facilitation of startups, venture capital and private equity will hopefully lead to a spurt in innovation and co-creation of globally competitive product and services.

Growth: The proposed increase of 35% in public capital expenditure to Rs. 7.5 lac crore further boosted by Rs. 1 lac crore of interest-free loans to State governments for CAPEX will help sustain growth impulses and pave the way for crowding in of the private capex. High GDP growth warrants a high level of investment. Twin-engine firing - private and public sector investment alone can enable sustained investment of over 30% to build a potential GDP growth of 7-8% trajectory.

Employment: The three biggest employment generators of India next to agriculture are construction, infrastructure and manufacturing. The budget proposals deepen the revival of the construction sector by greater allocation to affordable housing and low cost of financing. The 'Gati Shakti' mission alone has the potential to open up a storehouse of employment opportunities.

Is the KHADC not supposed to think seriously and engage in issues of unemployment and lack of development? Isn't the KHADC supposed to suggest solutions for all this? If not then what is the KHADC really doing? If it does not understand its mandate and address these burning public issues then it had better stop playing regional politics and the politics of propaganda.

The direct and indirect tax proposals did not temper with the current rates demonstrating an environment of stability. In fact, the budget seeks to eliminate inconsistencies in capital gains tax and some areas of customs. The critics credit the consistency to tax buoyancy rather than any effort of

the government.

Inflation: Both WPI & CPI have emerged as a major risk to GDP growth. Inflation also threatens to snatch away the gains of economic growth from the larger sections of society. Hence, the Finance Minister has reaffirmed the commitment of the government to a fiscal deficit glide path and maintaining prudence by lowering revenue expenditure and enhancing capital expenditure.

The journey of simplifying and creating an environment of trust amongst tax payers has been continued. The proposal to allow to correct the numbers, file revised returns and pay revised tax liabilities within two years is to say, "I trust you". The digital filing, faceless assessment and appeals, digitisation across the economy and integration and aggregation of data and above all the confidence and trust-building have been strong levers of tax buoyancy; complemented of course by GDP growth.

The criticism not to dole out moneys to poorer sections of society even in an environment of revenue gale to spur demand and mitigate their misery is only partly justified. The current global environment is beset with the pandemic and its effects, there is also the revival of nationalism and geopolitical tensions. All part of the melting pot.

First generation reforms on building efficient allocation of factors of production - land, labour and capital are done. Whatever is not done is difficult to accomplish in a vibrant democracy like that of India. Marginal tweaking will continue along the road of development. The optimisation of value creation - economists call it Total Factor Productivity (TFP) is achieved by institutional reforms, which the Economic Survey has described as process reforms.

Implementation of policy decisions for the expected outcomes necessitate authorisations and delegations in an institutional framework. It also opens up avenues for rent seekers who identify kinks in the highway of process management and delay, derail and even frustrate the objective of that policy. Exit policy is one of the signature reforms of the Modi Government and the objectives were sought to be achieved with the vehicle of one of finest legislations, 'IBC'. Unfortunately, it has delivered sub-optimal results, notwithstanding numerous amendments and adequate jurisprudence built up in the last five years.

India ranks 168th amongst 180 plus nations in the matter of enforcement of the contract. It takes on an average over 1200+ days and entails a cost of over 25% of the value of the contract. There are several other areas of concern where delays, cost and deprivation of justice have been voiced. Judicial system, bureaucracy, and the police are overdue for a resurrection. Minor tweaking or even reforms will not work. The edifice of these institutions will have to be rebuilt in consonance with constitutional guarantees.

Unless this is done, the ease of doing business and in particular, ease of living will remain distant dreams. On the whole, the key to delivering in a futuristic budget will be execution in a mission mode. Speed has to be stepped up significantly. The global environment and India's demography offer probably the last opportunity to take the nation on a new trajectory. The focus must therefore shift to execution.

(The writer is a former Chairman of SEBI and LIC. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@the-billionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

NEET exam discriminatory

By now we are aware of what the NEET is all about. The UPA-2 government, wanting to do away with the huge capitation fees to get admission for deserving students into medical colleges introduced the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET). But it took just a year for NEET to show its true colours and for the Supreme Court to immediately quash

It's eligibility and for states to resort to old methods of selection by the respective Health Departments of state governments based on the marks scored in Physics, Chemistry and Biology and English (PCBE). The aspirants scoring higher marks were allowed to opt for the colleges of their choice. Doctors serving in different health institutions in Meghalaya today were selected as per the merit list in their Class 12 exams.

India which were making money, suffered losses in crores of rupees. The NEET lobby approached the SC once again in 2016 and surprisingly won a verdict from 2019 onwards our first son who had been selected by NEET never got to attend the State reservation quota. For all the talk of NEET being a level playing field, it was clearly biased towards the rich and the powerful. The NEET exam was introduced in 2019 by a government which had just been elected on a promise to do away with capitation fees. The NEET exam was introduced in 2019 by a government which had just been elected on a promise to do away with capitation fees.

ridiculous. On scrutinising the 2020 & 2021 Physics questions in spite of four wrong answers one NEET examinee scored 720/720 with 240 full marks in PCB. The boy went on to testify on YouTube about his coaching centre. The video went viral and had to be deleted in few days.

The Tamil Nadu assembly has decided to convene a special session of the House seeking exemption of the NEET and the Governor was requested to take it to the President Ram Nath Kovind for his assent. In light of the above, I request the teachers of Physics (MBOSE) to look at the multiple choice question (MCQs) to discover how impossible it is to qualify for NEET. From Jaintia Hills those who failed to qualify are now in coaching centres in Guwahati and some in Shillong with fees ranging from Rs 50,000. I call upon the Education Minister of our State to follow in the footsteps of Tamil Nadu so that our students would be free of NEET. A retired Judge of Tamil Nadu AK Rajan has filed a petition in the Supreme Court on grounds of education being in the concurrent list and the Centre cannot take arbitrary decisions without consulting the states. Think of our poor but meritorious students who do not have lakhs to pay for coaching. Time is not far off when life becomes the stuff money can buy and only the

rich can live while the poor and marginalised die. Yours etc., W Passah, Via email

Hollow arguments from CEM, KHADC Editor, The news that the KHADC has yet again rejected the idea of the railhead coming up by Bynihat spread like wildfire. Ri Bhoi is considered the gateway to the Khasi and Jaintia hills. The irony about the KHADC is that the Executive Committee is led by an alliance partner of the MDA Government, namely the UDP. More significantly the UDP is also part of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA). Now perhaps the CEM should understand that his party being part of the NEDA cannot feign ignorance that infrastructure development has been the mantra of the BJP and that connecting the country by railways is one part of this venture. To say that the railhead would lead

to influx is a vacuous argument. Has the KHADC done a cost-benefit analysis by an independent agency? Is his argument against railways based on proper research? If the Railways are a so-called threat then why have airports and roadways? In the regressive worldview of the UDP-led EC it appears that they want us to go back to the stone age while the rest of Meghalaya and India prosper.

Is the KHADC not supposed to think seriously and engage in issues of unemployment and lack of development? Isn't the KHADC supposed to suggest solutions for all this? If not then what is the KHADC really doing? If it does not understand its mandate and address these burning public issues then it had better stop playing regional politics and the politics of propaganda.

Yours etc., Dominic Stadlin Wankhar Via email

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

"It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend."

—William Blake

## The Shillong Times

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### Opposition as target

PRIME Minister Modi's address in the motion of thanks to the President's address on Tuesday was marked by a show of vehemence against the principal Opposition, the Congress party. The speech dwelt less on the achievements of the nearly three-years of his present term of governance or of the development aspirations or push thereof. A PM's speech in Parliament is meant to be a virtual address to the nation. It is a report card presented by the Government of the day to the nation, listing its achievements and aspirations. Mr Modi did not rise to the occasion.

In sum, the PM's speech was a reply, point-by-point, to what Congress leader Rahul Gandhi stated in Parliament at the start of the current round of discussions. While Rahul had said Modi acted like a "King", Modi's reply was predictable - that the Congress foisted dynasty politics on the nation, which was "the biggest danger the nation is facing today." When Modi campaigned for power in 2014, he had stated the same - that he sought to end dynastic politics. In the nearly eight years, of the NDA rule, the scenario of dynastic politics has grown manifold. State after state is now under its grip and Modi as elected leader of the nation could do nothing about it. Rather, dynastic politics grew directly under his watch. The PM also refuted Rahul Gandhi's allegation that he and the BJP are dividing the nation and undercutting the importance of states. "Rashtra is not an arrangement of rule or government, it is a living soul for us." Unity means much more. His government must do more to forge unity between regions, religions, communities and races. Electoral politics is increasingly turning into vicious communal and sectarian fights as the central authority is failing to inspire the masses through assertive action and visionary steps for economic growth.

Among the few positives that the PM listed about his governance was the one on tackling the Covid situation, in which too he targeted the Congress for non-cooperation in handling the epic crisis. He says the government checked the pandemic's spread to rural India and as a result farmers raised the agricultural production during this worst phase of a national health crisis. "When other nations starved, India raised its food production." The Modi Government can claim that it had positive achievements only if it is in denial about the tragedy that befell lakhs of migrant workers that died on their journey home. In the second wave many died due to non-availability of hospital beds and oxygen. The PM's claims that his government helped in the growth of the MSME sector must be taken with a pinch of salt. In fine, the PM's speech was vacuous.

# The "Other side" – More of an obsequious piece

By Albert Thyrniang

It is encouraging to see Joseph Teron's "Other side to 'Twin celebrations - A Half and a Century'" on February 5, in response to my article three days earlier. Since the rejoinder has joined issues on this very forum it is legitimate that a public platform is the right place to debate issues on. The argument that a newspaper is not a suitable stage to discuss 'internal' matters now falls flat on its face. At the outset I reproduce here the words (not verbatim) of a bishop of one of the dioceses in the North East in a talk to priests and nuns a few months back, "Earlier people say 'don't criticise the Church. We must keep the good name of the Church'. Now that age is over. Many things about the Church, pleasant and unpleasant have come out. So, if something has to be said it must be said, even publicly."

The Church is not a private body. The Salesian society and other religious groups in the Church are not private organisations. They are public entities. They perform public works and their members are public figures. Their activities are open to scrutiny. Should an insider be a faultfinder? It is debatable. But if an 'outsider' does the job we could turn around and say, "What does he or she know about us? His or her knowledge is superficial." Does someone then need to do the dirty job?

It is not the intention of the writer to engage in a spat with Joseph Teron but a few observations are in order. At the very outset Joseph alleges that in my introduction I resorted to government-bashing. The initial paragraphs he refers to were neither an introduction nor an anti-government tirade. It was very much the body of the composition but there was absolutely no diatribe of the slightest degree. The article only raised certain questions to the Chief Minister vis-a-vis his pledge that Meghalaya will be one of the first 10 states in the country in the next 10 years. They are very legitimate queries by a voter on to how the head of the present government plans to take the state to such heights. On the Salesian history and works too basically questions were placed before the readers.

The writer says that criticism is welcome. But one could sense that he is upset

and has even taken recourse to personal remarks like, "I wonder what marvellous things would have been achieved by the author in these circumstances if he was at the helm of affairs then!" The 'then' is referred to Second World War when North East missionaries faced grave challenges, including being expelled from the Assam to Europe. Well, the responder is right to wonder because it is a hypothesis, that too of the past. The intended message, however, is obvious, "The critic would have done nothing then because even today he is incapable of anything." That's fine by me. But who knows if one is able to anticipate one's existence in another historical setting one might have done marvellous things too! We will see more about the 'marvellous things' in a bit!

Joseph Teron gives a public advice saying this critic 'should' "begin to appreciate the faith he received." He has taken the liberty to presume that this writer has not even begun the 'appreciation' journey. This is objectionable. It is against prudence and common sense. In matters of faith there is a much higher Being who knows the heart and judges. No humans can pass such verdicts, especially in a public space.

The other accusations are that I am prejudiced, biased, partial and partisan. Prejudiced and biased against whom and against what? The published essay was a general critique and not directed at any individual or individuals. Most curious is the use of the word 'partisan'. It is quite emphatically stated here that this writer is not in any sort of party or group, indoors or outdoors. Another statement reads "...he holds out on a platter to decapitate." I fail to understand its meaning. Hold out what on a platter? And to 'decapitate' what? The meaning of 'decapitate' is to behead, to execute, to guillotine, to amputate, to truncate and to kill. Was my article capable of all these?

Very rightly the responder reminds us that every story always has two sides. Perhaps, my column bears a little more semblance of a two-sided coin than the 'complementary.' What follows was but the usual obsequious positioning, the

triumphalism and the credit taking tendency where it is not exclusively deserved. The word 'marvellous' was used at least four times in the article published on the right column of this page. Therefore, he flashes back that the literacy rate in India in the independent year, 1947 was 12% but today the jump is multiple times. This is quite bizarre because by no means should the entire credit go to the Salesians. We can claim an insignificant part of it. That's it! He then assumes that the literacy rate in Assam in 1922 was much lower than the national record. The unstated conclusion is that the Assam literacy rate is much higher now, after 100 years, thanks to the Salesians. Here too the tribute does not belong solely to the Salesians. Is that not a more balanced outlook?

The next figure is that today there are 15 dioceses in the region as opposed to none in 1922. This too is not the achievement of the Salesians alone. The contribution is there for all to see but to claim the whole basket is a blatant disregard for other contributors, to say the least.

Then the fact that today India has the legislation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act was strongly noted. Education is now a right. The government has to provide education for all. There you are! All the responsibility is passed to the government. All of us can sit back and watch. We, the Salesians have nothing more to do. We have educated the educated in the past. It is their job now to pass on the baton. Even as we debate there is a section which asserts that we have done great things. We are doing enough. We run universities, colleges, schools, social work institutions, etc. Let others also do these and more. If this is not complacency then its definition has to be altered. The Salesians in the Guwahati region are currently on a 5-day marathon deliberation called "Provincial Chapter". If there is not 'slowing down', if the society is 'marching on' with all the 'marvellous things' which the writer listed then there is no point in waiting nearly a week to validate on the 'wonderful' works. There is also a realisation that Salesians

have little presence on social media, the new playground of *Areopagus* of young people today. So should not more be done in this crucial virtual territory?

John Teron launches a broadside that this writer considers "the Salesians incompetent and outright lazy." Nowhere did I explicitly or implicitly say so. My story was an appreciation for the good work done; an observation that more could have been done and flagging that more can be done. What is wrong with that? My 'slowing down' remark was not aimed at this challenging pandemic time. What is feared is that the present generation might not be of the calibre anywhere near the first batches of missionaries and their successors. The decline, if there is, has been taking place over time. There are still some who are equally great and whose efforts are unmatched. This is readily noted.

Strangely my detractor diagnoses, "The author has been accelerating his criticism to the last couple of decades of the Salesian work." Perhaps what he means to say is, "The author has been accelerating his criticism in the last couple of decades against the Salesian work." I flatly deny this charge. I have never done it so consistently to be labelled as such. My last article was the first critique on the subject, that too because this year happens to be the centenary year. I started writing regularly only from 2012 or so. The writer of the rejoinder is a Mathematics and Science graduate. Certainly these years do not add up to a couple of decades. Secondly, this writer is not a four/five gear engine that he can accelerate at high speed.

Prior to summing up, the contribution of Salesians in the growth of indigenous languages is incalculable. Joseph Teron speaks many languages fluently. He also brought up text books in the Karbi language. He is a firm believer that education in the primary level should be in one's mother tongue. He is a promoter of this scientifically proven principle. If Karbi becomes a medium of instruction in Karbi Anglong all credit (pun intended), goes to him for his commendable textbook pioneering works. Hats off to him! Wish him greater heights in the next few years.

Email: [albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com](mailto:albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com)

# A dress code that does disservice to education

By Jagdish Rattanani

The "row" in Karnataka over wearing the hijab or head scarf by some Muslim girl students in Udupi district is a whipped-up controversy that need not be. Most colleges do not usually have a dress code except rules against skimpy wear, and many Muslim girls have been going to college with their heads covered. To suddenly stop them from entering institutions that they should consider their own, having enrolled and begun their college life there, is unwarranted and detrimental not only to the students in question but also the State and its goal to educate more girl children, treat them with respect and enable them find their place in a complex and changing world.

The sudden decision to lock gates on these students harms congenial relations on campus, force-creates a religious divide and sends exactly the wrong message to the other students, who are all at an impressionable age and may well begin to buy into narrower approaches rather than an appreciation and celebration of the ethos of democracy, plurality and diversity - the bedrock on which education curricula ought to be built. This is exactly what has happened with the throwback coming from those who want to wear saffron scarfs and shawls, an ugly manifestation of communalism in a place where minds should open, love can

Sophia College is the place of choice for a lot of girls from Muslim-dominated areas of South Mumbai, and in fact opens opportunities for young women to break free and experience college life in all its facets, including being on a campus that is famous because many Bollywood movies have been shot there. Consider that many of these young girls might not have been sent to college if it was not for institutions like this being only for women. Also consider that many of the Muslim students used to then come covered in a black robe, following what was either required or regarded as customary in the families and the areas that they came from. The College had several coat hangers in the foyers and the hallways. Girls would quickly discard the hijab on these and get about their studies, mixing seamlessly with the rest of the class. The College further spoke with parents and students to highlight issues and concerns so that girls continued to stay enrolled and graduated in the face of common family pressures for marriage.

Despite these efforts by the South Mumbai college for women, in a city considered the financial capital of India, many girls would drop out. Some years ago, the then college principal Dr. Anila Verghese spoke at a meeting convened by the State minorities department



blossom and friends are created for life. It diminishes for the entire college eco system the important task of chiseling and sending out "women of substance, personality, mettle, caliber, confidence and reputation" - to quote the high aspirations listed by the Maharani's Arts, Commerce and Management College for Women in Bengaluru. These should be the watchwords for all institutions. Instead of stretching to make it easy

to make the point that the drop-out rate among Muslim girls was alarming at her college. There is clearly a lot of work remaining to be done in the area of higher education for the girl child. Karnataka as a State has told the nation that they appear not particularly concerned about this, and in that sense, have in effect offered a writing down of a key ingredient of development - the education of girls.

It is alarming to hear the Karnataka education minister BC Nagesh compare rules in a military institution to the way a college ought to function. The military is an institution driven by high ideals but they are anchored in the idea of compliance to authority and discipline. They must execute, often with no questions asked. Hierarchy is important. The education system on the other hand must encourage students to ask, question, challenge and stand up. The minister is also wrong in presuming that the hijab is a sign of oppression or fundamentalism. Attitudes towards wearing the hijab will have to be studied more closely. Given what is happening in Karnataka, the hijab becomes a tool to stand up and rebel against a dictatorial system that does not respect the individual's right to dress. Girls who can and might wish to discard the hijab may well choose to wear it with a vengeance. The hijab can go on to become a symbol of protest against an overbearing, dictatorial and unfair education order. It moves from becoming a dress to a political statement. In all this, the time and opportunity to learn and grow are lost. The girls at the centre of the protest have lost in the near term but their classmates have also lost and the longer-term loser is the State of Karnataka and India as a plural society and nation.

This is a case that may well be decided by the courts but the clarifications obtained in judicial orders can do little to repair a deep damage that is being caused to students enrolled now and in the midst of catching up after the disruptions caused by the pandemic. It tells us that colleges that are meant to be beacons of leadership and must guide society have themselves fallen victim to an agenda that is about anything but learning and growth.

Contrast what is happening in Karnataka with the case of the Sophia College for Women in South Mumbai, where this writer has taught final year students studying journalism, many of whom are now working journalists and have made their mark in their own way.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Start offline classes soon!

Editor,  
My son aged 9 is in class 4 in a city school. We got a message from the school saying classes 1-5 will revert to online classes from Feb 14 as per Govt order dated Feb 2, 2020. I hope there are plans to open up schools soon. The adverse effects of such a prolonged period of online classes far outweighs any benefits of keeping children out of school. Unlike the elder children, my son and others of his age have missed out on basic classroom teaching and discipline, and peer interaction, which has stunted their normal development. Even the WHO now says children should get back to school. They have already lost 2 precious years of their school life. Neighbouring Assam is doing away with all restrictions from Feb 15. I hope the Govt realises the importance of offline classes more so as Covid cases are now receding. Parents/wards having reservations can keep their children at home, but going by the response in the limited period classes were held last year, the majority of parents will send their wards to school. Unfortunately, we don't have parents' associations in schools here to press for our case. This has been a frustrating two years us for us parents! Hope to see some positive decisions soon.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Atomized Autonomy: An Adjunct

Editor,  
The article "Are We Still Stuck in Distributional Politics and Party Hopping?" by Kyrsoior Pyrtuh (ST Feb 8, 2022) has eloquently highlighted the ailments in our polity. We can still safely assume that the bedrock of our political economy is based on a "begging bowl" policy. It's a policy of appeasement of states ruled by the same dispensation. 50 years of Statehood and we have not yet fully realised and fully tapped the potentials and identified our weaknesses. Nearly all that we adopt and adapt are 'knee-jerk' reactions within an electoral frame of 5 years. To surmise we truly are on a 5-year rent, exchange and distribution political economy of superficial paraphernalia and a subliminal colonization and parochial politicization of the mind of voters comprising the vocal, the silent, the indifferent and the ignorant (we have more of the latter three than the vocal). We are in such a situation, that to collectively describe our fate we need to use the metaphor of a pressure cooker that boils with a mixture of all kinds of eatables that none of us can delineate the taste of each ingredient. Hence we are in a state of perennial agitation, competing for our existence.

Right now, there are more pressure groups that we can

accommodate, digest and even remember their abbreviations. This is not an indicator of good democracy but worse it is also an indicator of lack of good policies, governance and efficient administration. This is also a major failure of the opposition party. If the opposition is strong, dynamic and cohesive, there's no need for pressure groups to come forward and spell out their needs, angst and desires.

The entrails of our politics are sore with ulcer that grows into a cancer which will ultimately engulf the entire system. To understand this, we need to look at the basic fundamentals of our economy, ecology and public amenities also the rural-urban disparities. We are also seeing more polarization of identity (class, religion), ideas and opinion. We are seeing the increasing craze of rampant land accumulation by the well-endowed in power and cash. We are seeing the increasing numbers in relative poverty, the landless, the powerless. If democracy is still at play, and if our State has still some ounces of egalitarian principles (Ri raid, Ri bam lang), these will not arise at increasing rate (within 50 years of Statehood).

Our politics is not mature enough. It is neither conscientious, ideological, rational, ethical or methodical. Our politics is emotional, it is still about rhetoric, appeasement and individualistic political drama and political somnambulism.

Like K. Pyrtuh said "... CCTVs, Laptops, Android phones etc., and JCB ma-

chines are the new metaphors in the electoral narrative of the State". Are we on the right track or into the path of eternal state of penury?

Yours etc.,  
U.D.Tmar  
Shillong-6

#### What's behind GHADC, CEM's removal?

Editor,  
The recent happenings in Garo Hills vis-a-vis GHADC is only the tip of the iceberg. The murky goings-on have been taking place for a long time. Right now the issue may be about the CEM but behind it is the hand of a non-tribal businessman from Tura who has been working in close nexus with politicians and officers for a long time and who has his hands in every pie in every department such as huge building contracts of GHADC, wholesale dealership, DRDA, petrol and diesel retail outlets, PMGSY, contracts of different departments, etc.

This benami contractor was also the blue-eyed boy of the previous government but he shifted allegiance to the present government after the election of 2018. Many of the buildings he constructed are incomplete and of poor quality but little action was taken then and the same is happening now. The building contract of the controversial Rongjeng Model College which was given to Rakesh Newar/Sangma was constructed by

him and many other useless buildings under the GHADC which have disappeared or are incomplete are his handiwork for which money has been drawn with the help of officers and politicians. The previous CEM Benedict Marak was removed because this person was not given indulgence and his MDC/MLA partners could not draw money through him.

This same person has been given wholesale dealership under different Garo names and is now monopolizing supply of grains all over Garo Hills and this has been possible because he is a business partner of top-level Garo politicians and officers. He is also running petrol pumps in many parts of Garo Hills and C-forms are being issued even on non-payment of taxes by the Taxation department as a special favour.

Many buildings constructed by him under DRDA are incomplete and of poor quality. The PMGSY road being undertaken by him is yet to be completed till date. His boldness in evading taxes and blatant benami transactions by directly flouting the Meghalaya Benami Transactions Prohibition Act, 1985, in which all benami transactions between a tribal and a non-tribal is illegal. His actions in collusion with our very own Garo politicians and officers have incurred loss of revenue to the Government and opportunities to other genuine Garo businessmen, and have deprived Garos of many developmental schemes which would have benefited society. In fact, he has amassed a

lot of wealth and has made investments outside the State with the profits of his benami activities from Garo Hills and people of Garo Hills are silent spectators.

Now the question is, why is this person given so much importance that his advice has led to removal of Benedict Marak who was working well and smoothly running the GHADC? Why is he so powerful that he can choose Rakesh Sangma or Newar to be CEM? Why is the opposition quiet about his role in depriving Garo Hills of development? Why is he given special favours by officers of Taxation Department while others are harassed? Why is he monopolizing the Food and Civil Supplies Department in Garo Hills? And why are NGOs who have made a hue and cry many years ago about benami business silently watching this businessman dictate what is happening to Garo Hills? Why is the Government which says it is promoting small and local entrepreneurs letting this man monopolise all business opportunities belonging to locals and carry big bucks to other States?

The hypocrisy and greed of politicians and officers is at the cost of the development of Garo Hills. Wake up!

Yours etc.,  
Mikhel D Sangma,  
Tura

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

“Man needs his difficulties because they are necessary to enjoy success.”

—A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's convoluted politics

THE Congress Party in Meghalaya defies all norms and principles propounded by the parent party. The Congress is ideologically opposed to the BJP. The recent speeches of AICC President, Rahul Gandhi in Parliament was a direct attack on the Modi Government and the narrow idea of nation and nationalism propounded by the BJP and its ideological mentor the RSS. It is surprising therefore that the Congress party MLAs in Meghalaya would choose to align themselves with the NPP-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance which has within its fold two MLAs of the BJP. The MDA is also part of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) chaired by Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma. The NPP National President Conrad Sangma has close ties with Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. This cannot be downplayed. The Congress knows of this political affinity, so what political compulsions are pushing the Congress MLAs to the MDA?

A simple reading of the February 8 episode where the five Congress MLAs gave a written letter offering to work with the MDA, shows a desperation to be part of the ruling dispensation. The five MLAs fool no one. They might as well have joined the NPP instead of waiting to do so closer to the Assembly election which is exactly a year away. The strange alliance in Meghalaya has made national news. Political observers cannot reconcile to the fact that the Congress is offering to work with a Government of which the BJP is a coalition partner. The fact of the matter as has been repeatedly stated is that in Meghalaya people don't vote for any ideology. The choice of candidate by a voter is a very personal one. What is playing out today in Meghalaya is the politics of personal survival.

The Congress MLAs in the opposition have not been able to get adequate development funds that those in the ruling party have. Congress MLAs know that the Party is in shambles in the North Eastern states and is unlikely to recover its losses any time soon. Elections in Meghalaya are not fought on issues but on the personal appeal of the candidate and how much he/she is able to service the voters at the personal level. Development of the state is no one's agenda. Everything is reduced to the constituency and to individual voters and how much a candidate can do for them. In such a situation fighting elections without money is fraught with uncertainties especially when the rivals have the cash. These are the issues that weigh heavily on the minds of Congress legislators. They also know they cannot afford to be in the Opposition for the next five years beginning 2023.

# COVID-19 restrictions never had slightest basis in the sciences

By Sanjeev Sabhlok

The COVID pandemic has perhaps been the biggest tragedy of errors in human history. I call it the Great Hysteria in the title of a book that I wrote in 2020 to reflect the unimaginable loss of the most basic elements of civilization.

Grown up men and women in positions of power forgot during this hysteria the elements of arithmetic that they had learnt in school. Proportionately, adjusting for population growth, had COVID-19 been as deadly as the Spanish flu, it would need to have killed 220 million people worldwide. Instead, COVID has so far killed about 6 million. That brings it well within the range of the Hong Kong or Asian flu - for which the world never shut down.

As early as February-April 2020, analyses by epidemiologists like John Ioannidis suggested that COVID is not very severe. On 10 March 2020 in its official pandemic plan for COVID, the Victorian government in Australia wrote: "COVID-19 is assessed as being of moderate clinical severity".

The overall Infection Fatality Rate (IFR) for COVID according to the UK government's statement in its Parliament on 27 August 2021 is 0.096% [1], which is exactly the same as that for seasonal flu. In an interview I took of Prof. Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford University on 20 January 2022, he said that the IFR for COVID could be slightly higher: maybe 0.2%, but it is nowhere close to that of the Spanish flu. So let's for a moment even assume that COVID has been twice as deadly as the flu. Would that justify the hysteria we have seen across India - hysteria that continues even today?

The other amazing thing that the hysteria has done is to cause almost all epidemiologists to forget the repeated warnings of the greatest epidemiologist of the 20th century, Donald Henderson, against taking any drastic measures to stop a respiratory virus - for such measures only cause harm and cannot stop the virus. He said in a 2010 conference that "this idea that in this day and age one is going to intercept people coming across the border and you're going to stop the spread of the disease is a concept that was antiquated a very long time ago".

Moreover, Dr Sunetra Gupta of Oxford University has demonstrated how international travel and intermingling across nations is hugely beneficial because it strengthens the immunity of people against severe dis-

ease. International travel is the panacea for dealing with pandemics, not a cause.

At the beginning of the Wuhan lockdowns, Gauden Galea, the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) representative in China made it clear on 24 January 2020: "trying to contain a city of 11 million people is new to science. The lockdown of 11 million people is unprecedented in public health history, so it is certainly not a recommendation the WHO has made". On 24 June 2020 Sweden's State Epidemiologist Anders Tegnell exclaimed, "it was as if the world had gone mad, and everything we had discussed was forgotten". Tegnell also said, consistent with the science: "[c]losing borders, in



my opinion, is ridiculous, because COVID-19 is in every European country now". Stefan Baral, Professor at John Hopkins School of Public Health tweeted on 16 August 2020: "I spent a decade in public health training and do not remember the lockdown lecture".

On 20 January 2022 Prof. Jay Bhattacharya said to me in an interview: "The kind of lockdowns we have imposed on the world for the past two years is unprecedented in history. I do not know of any pandemic plan that proposed anything like the policy that we followed. It is improvisation as public health policy". The WHO's comprehensive and well-researched pandemic guidelines of October 2019 rejected quarantines, let alone recommend society-wide lockdowns.

Not many people are aware that there is sinister underbelly to these policies: the role of China that is hiding in plain sight. In January 2021 I co-signed along with nine others including a senior US General an Open Letter to the world's major intelligence agencies providing them with unambiguous evidence about China's orchestration of the Great Hysteria through fake videos and fake computer models, and by getting the WHO to change its October 2019 warnings against lock-

downs. China's propaganda and stealth warfare skills exceed those of Goebbels.

In the midst of the Great Hysteria, only one nation followed the science: Sweden. It did not lockdown. It did not close borders or have any quarantine. It did not close down the lower classes in schools - high schools and universities were encouraged to switch to online classes for part of the duration of the pandemic. It recommended voluntary social distancing but not masks (in fact, parts of Sweden banned masks). A few large events and gatherings were stopped. But no hysteria: the entire focus of Anders Tegnell was to calm down the people and encourage them to carry on their normal life.

I wrote many articles for my Times of India blog to warn India against lockdowns. It was known from February 2020 onwards that the risk of death from COVID is disproportionately high for the elderly, so I wrote a piece on 6 March 2020: "Age-based risk management of coronavirus". That idea also underpins the 4 October 2020 Great Barrington Declaration by some of the most eminent epidemiologists. The idea is for the elderly to take extra precautions but for the young to carry on their normal life. Coincidentally, on the morning of the day that Prime Minister Modi declared India's lockdowns (24 March 2020) I wrote the piece: "Lockdowns won't defeat the virus but will definitely destroy us all". I sent all my pieces and much other information to Rajiv Gauba, India's Cabinet Secretary and my batchmate in the IAS. To no avail. Everyone had shut their minds - and their minds remain shut till today.

Like with everything else in life, there are never any "solutions", only trade-offs. With lockdowns the trade-offs were clear: that children and the young would suffer hugely even as we would inevitably fail to prevent most of the elderly from catching the virus.

Over the past few months I

have been supporting Professor Gigi Foster of Australia on a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of Australia's COVID policies. The draft CBA confirms that Australia's policies have caused havoc. A recent study from John Hopkins University has found that globally, lockdowns have prevented only 0.2% of COVID deaths, but their harms are so great it will take decades just to account for them.

No one has prepared a CBA for India as far as I'm aware, but estimates of harm for India are so huge, probably no country was harmed more than India. I don't think a single COVID death was prevented in India by lockdowns, not even 0.2%. Instead, more COVID deaths must have occurred in India since people were forced indoors, thereby reducing their Vitamin D levels, making them more vulnerable.

In economics we value the life of a child around 80 times (roughly speaking) that of an elderly person who is in their last year of life. If such a calculation is applied to India, the harms caused by lockdowns will exceed any benefits by an order of tens of thousands, if not more. The damage to children continues: schools remain closed in most parts of India. Mask mandates continue.

To calculate the damage from lockdowns we need to count many other things, as well: e.g. the loss of happiness and mental illness due to loneliness from social isolation, the crowding-out of healthcare for problems other than COVID, the long-term costs to the earning capacity of our children and university students from disrupted education, the economic losses of millions of small businesses, the starvation of the families of daily wage labourers who only eat if they earn on a given day; the early deaths from causes other than COVID since people did not get their cancer or heart issues diagnosed in time; increased inequality in society; the damage to the government's revenues which means there will be less money to spend on everything from roads to hospitals for years to come.

Sweden managed its pandemic with aplomb. As Reuters reports, Sweden "emerged from 2020 with a smaller increase in its overall mortality rate than most European countries". No harms to children, no harms to the youth. On 9 February 2022, Sweden will return to complete and total normalcy. The people of Sweden are blessed.

(Sanjeev Sabhlok (PhD, Economics) is an advisor to Swatantra Bharat Party and former Commissioner to the Meghalaya Government).

## Strategic pacifism, defiance and image makeover

By Dr. Nsungbemo Ezung

Pakistan, under a civilian government, started the year 2022 by projecting a positive light to the world in the form of unveiling its first-ever National Security Policy (hereafter NSP). The NSP's document, released in January 2022 by the National Security Division, Government of Pakistan, is a 48-page document containing a comprehensive national policy framework that would define the country's domestic as well as foreign policy for the next four years (2022-2026). With this first of its kind "well-defined" national policy in the nation's more than seven decades' history, the NSP is expected to present Pakistan to the world as a nation transformed from the decades of domestic turmoil and instability and constant political and military conflicts with its neighbors to a new era of peace, stability and rule of law.

Among the significant features of the NSP is the new and unique approach of extending an olive branch to one of its closest and ideologically and strategically most crucial neighbor - India. Pakistan, through NSP, declared its "wishes to improve its relationship with India" which, according to the NSP, was in accord with the country's policy of "peace at home and abroad". And to achieve that end, the country on its part declared a cessation of all forms of hostilities with India for the next period of one hundred years. This "no hostility [with India] for the next 100 years" policy is a concession on the part of the government of Pakistan on the devastating

impacting the United Nations Security Council Resolution of August 1948 calling for a plebiscite for the resolution of the Kashmir disputes. This 1948 UNSC Resolution had given political impetus to Pakistan to convert Kashmir disputes as a bilateral issue to be resolved between India and Pakistan, and reject India's assertion of disturbances in Kashmir as an internal problem within India. By acknowledging disturbances in Kashmir as part of bilateral disputes over the Kashmir issue between the two countries, Pakistan toed in line with the open and plain assertion of Gen. Pervez Musharraf who on many occasions called elements considered "terrorists" by Indian authority as Kashmir freedom fighters. Through the NSP, the Pakistani authority reaffirmed its commitment to extend its "moral, diplomatic, political, and legal support to the people of Kashmir" in their quest for "self-determination". From the two-nation theory that led to the partition of India in 1947 to the fall of East Pakistan in 1971 and the present unresolved Kashmir disputes, the relation and conflict between India and Pakistan remain a story of one nation and sharing the same history only to be torn apart by deep ideological and communal divide and historical tragedy leaving entire South Asia permanently wounded. India would need a new strategic outlook to "confront" this Pakistan's strategic gesture of peace coupled with defiance over its position on the status of Kashmir.

**Pakistan's "no war policy with India for the next 100 years" however did not alter its position of defiance in rejecting India's assertion of Kashmir as an integral part of the latter.**

impact on the country as a result of an unending cycle of conflicts with India during the last seven decades. The two South Asian neighbors had fought already four regular wars since their bloody and bitter parting in 1947 apart from the endless proxy wars that the two nations have been engaging in the form of combating terrorism which itself has emerged from the ashes of the very conflict that had plagued the two nations during the last seven decades costing countless human lives belonging to both the countries. It is an acknowledgment that constant conflicts with India will not going to do anything good for Pakistan, nay for India, and that a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan is inextricably linked with peaceful co-existence with India and the need for peaceful means and dialogue for resolving all outstanding issues with India.

Pakistan's "no war policy with India for the next 100 years" however did not alter its position of defiance in rejecting India's assertion of Kashmir as an integral part of the latter. The NSP declared that "a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) dispute remains at the core of our bilateral relationship". This should mean that if India at all desires to have a peaceful and normal relationship with Pakistan in the future, then it is incumbent on the part of India to renounce its claim over the disputed territory of Kashmir in its entirety. After a disastrous and humiliating defeat at the hand of India in the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence, Kashmir became an issue/dispute for Pakistan to exploit and helped them to remain in defiance while seeking to settle a score with its neighbor by openly aiding the Bengal uprising against the Pakistani authority in the then East Pakistan in 1971. Pakistan's position on Kashmir had already attained its due share of legitimacy fol-

The unique aspect of Pakistan's NSP is that it is the policy doctrine of the civilian government released at the time when the country is going through its longest phase of civilian rule in its history. This August, the country will complete an unprecedented 14 years of uninterrupted civilian rule since the ouster of the last military ruler/dictatorship Gen. Pervez Musharraf in August 2008. Although the military influence and presence in the country's politics remain paramount, this current longevity of civilian rule is rare of its kind by Pakistani standards. Three army coups with the military ruling the country for 33 years, non-continuous but at regular intervals, had defined the past 75 years of history of Pakistan marked by a period of instability, internal crisis and the power struggle between civilian and military leadership. The NSP's is expected to mend this dubious image of the country of being a military state, with democracy just in form, and transform Pakistan into an "Islamic welfare state" and "aligned with universal principles of justice, equality, and tolerance".

If peace with India remains a vital aspect towards creating a peaceful and stable Pakistan, then stability in Pakistan is an equally important aspect for overall peace and stability in South Asia. It remains to be seen how far Pakistan's NSP would live up to its promise of providing "safety, security, dignity, and prosperity" to its citizens and help Pakistan assume a new role as an ambassador of peace in South Asia in conformity with the slogan of "seeking a peaceful neighbourhood" which was perhaps the most distinctive feature of its NSP.

(The writer is the author of the book *Indo-Naga Political Conflict: Rewriting the Post-Colonial Idea of Nation*, Whetstone Publication 2021. Email: ezung\_n@yahoo.com)

Letters to the Editor

The Church is Not Infallible

Editor, The article "The Other Side" by Albert Thyrmiang (ST Feb 9, 2022) is a balanced analysis of the organised church. I have been following the exchange of views on this topic. Though the congregation in question is the Salesians, the debate is applicable to any Christian denomination, or indeed to almost any religious group.

There is no doubt that the church in India and in the Northeast in particular, has contributed immensely to education and health and to other social work like orphanages and homes for the elderly. Volumes have been written about these monumentally good works and rightly so.

refuse to be silenced are soon hounded out or leave of their own volition.

Any organisation that works in the public space must accept transparency. It is a law of democracy and guards against social injustice. Because of the demands of openness, it has been possible to shine a torch on grievous sins in the church such as paedophilia, gender injustice and violence, racism and discrimination, and pervasive corruption. Apart from these sins of commission, there are stark omissions. In Meghalaya, the church is deafeningly silent about coal mining deaths, violence against non-tribals, poverty of single mothers, malnutrition in children and degradation of the environment. The victims are all God's creations and children.

I am from a family of pastors, church leaders and theologians, all wonderful people, and I have had my entire education in great Christian institutions. Yet I have seen more defensiveness than openness, and a tendency to cover up rather than cleanse.

he has aired his views in the public media.

Yours etc., Glenn C. Kharkongor, Via email

An article that challenges

Editor, At the outset let me congratulate Albert Thyrmiang for his article "The Other Side" (ST Feb, 9, 2022). It is always a pleasure to read a no-holds barred article than one which tends to obfuscate and not come to the point. Thyrmiang's last article was an analysis of 50 years of Meghalaya's statehood and 100 years of the Salesians in the North East. It was a brilliant analysis on both counts. He has done much homework to be able to come up with those facts and figures. The Salesian congregation should not be overly sensitive to these criticisms because it is only then that there's scope for reforms. Institutions tend to decay with time and those who run institutions too tend to slacken and take it as business as usual if there is no one to point out the flaws. Since the church is a highly stratified and hierarchical structure it is near impossible to point out anything to superiors or even to colleagues and peers.

It's time as Albert Thyrmiang says to see if the schools set up in the spirit of Don Bosco

are now serving the elite of society and only those that can pay the exorbitant fees that such institutions charge.

The other day I met a young man who had a great desire to take up Mass Communication in one of the Salesian colleges for undergraduate studies but the fees for this course was so prohibitive that he had to settle for honours in a subject like Khasi which he didn't really fancy. This young man could have been asked why he didn't take admission in the Mass Communication Department and why he opted for something else. Such subject change could have been monitored by a committee overseeing admissions. But there is no soul in the whole process. Education has become a business that must be necessarily run on a business model. Where is the spirit of Don Bosco who continues to look down on the institutions created after his memory?

All these failings happen because there is not real introspection by those running these institutions. Perhaps they are too busy to introspect. But any institution, above all a Christian institution that caters only to those with good marks and paying capacity will not be different from any other private institution.

I wish more people in the

church had the courage and conviction of Albert Thyrmiang to write and admonish wrongdoing whether in politics or governance. As a Christian I am ashamed to see corruption being perpetrated by Christian politicians and the church remaining a silent spectator. Where do we go from here?

Yours etc., Lydia Kharkongor, Via email

India boycotts Winter Olympics

Editor, India decided to boycott the Winter Olympics hosted by China diplomatically when it was reported that a PLA soldier involved in the clashes with Indian troops in the Galwan Valley would participate in the opening ceremony. When India did not send any diplomats to participate in the Winter Olympics opening ceremony, China responded that New Delhi should not make a "politicised interpretation" of the participation of a Chinese soldier involved in the clashes with Indian troops at the Galwan Valley as a torch bearer.

India had announced that its top diplomat in China would participate neither in the opening nor the closing

ceremonies of the Winter Olympics. India took the decision in the wake of Chinese state media reports that a PLA regiment commander who was injured in the clashes in the Galwan Valley was part of the Winter Olympics torch relay. India strongly criticised the decision taken by China and pointed out that it was an attempt by China to politicise an event like the Olympics. However, in China's view, the torchbearers of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics are broadly representative and meet the selection standards. A Chinese official said that India should not misinterpret the situation.

It must be remembered that India had lost 20 soldiers in the clashes in the Galwan Valley in the standoff between the two militaries at Eastern Ladakh. China had lost 40 soldiers in the clashes but it has not admitted it yet. In spite of disengagement at a few points, the standoff continues in many areas along the LAC in Ladakh. Despite several rounds of military and diplomatic talks, the conflicts between the two armies continue.

Yours etc., Venu GS, Kollam

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

*"Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns it all clean."*

—Maya Angelou

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 180 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2022

### Voting time in UP

VOTES began registering into EVMs on Thursday in the first of the seven-phase assembly election in Uttar Pradesh – in what would also signal the start of mood-evolution for the 2024 General Elections. India's largest state in terms of population size of 20 crore, Uttar Pradesh with its sweep of 80 Lok Sabha seats would principally decide who should rule India after every general election. Assembly results are unpredictable. What's predictable is that the ruling BJP is facing a stiff fight from the Samajwadi Party – Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance, with anti-incumbency factor subtly at work. Notably, the BJP could not introduce new dynamics to effectively counter this trend. The Election Commission diktat against holding of huge rallies and street shows, in view of the Covid spread, has a positive effect on the campaign scene. It reduced the money power, the bane of every election and principal excuse for corruption by politicians.

Predictably, attempts are on from the BJP for a polarization of Hindu votes in the face of a likely consolidation of BC and Muslim support in favour of the SP-led alliance. To this is the additional heft being provided to the alliance by farmers, largely the Jats, under the banner of the RLD. The western UP areas where the first phase polling was held for 58 seats was where the agitation against the farm reforms was massive. The BJP is seeking to counter this huge consolidation with a slogan of Hindu unity against the "machinations of Pakistan" that chief minister Yogi Adityanath raised on Thursday. The stray firing on AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi after his meeting in Meerut was perhaps part of an attempt at accentuating religious polarization to reap a harvest of votes and seats for the BJP. The time-tested RSS attempt to use (Ram) Mandir to neutralize the Mandal (BC consolidation) effect is seeing a replay now.

Prime Minister Modi does not attach much importance to the SP-RLD alliance and has dismissed it as a play of "two boys" (Akhilesh Yadav and Jayant Chaudhary, both dynasts). What would be on test would be how powerful the aura of Modi and Yogi would be to counter the charge by Akhilesh. The Congress bandwagon led by Priyanka Gandhi has not made much headway. It does not have a strong organisational structure in UP to effectively take on the titans while the voice of old warhorse Mayawati with her strong Dalit support in the past appears to have been lost in the din raised by the SP and BJP.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Foundation stone to bury the hatchet

Editor,  
The year for laying foundation stones has begun. On Feb 9, Sniawhalang Dhar the Urban Affairs Minister laid the foundation stone for the Rs 28.84 crore Laitumkhrah Municipal market in the presence of the Laitumkhrah MLA, Ampareen Lyngdoh of the Congress. The deadline for the project is 24 months. These foundation stones would multiply during the course of 2022. But is the Urban Affairs Department worried about the stench of Marten in Mawlai and the woes of the Jaintia people with the dumping site at Krem Mynkjai and recently the attempted dumping at Nartiang which was luckily thwarted by vigilantes.

The River Myntdu ignored by successive governments might, with heavy flow of funds, from Delhi, bounce back but only if it is not left orphaned like the poor Wah Umkhrah over which our rich politicians have built cemented pillars right from the office of the Military Engineering Services to Polo bazar. They have built right on the middle of

the river with no sales deed to brandish.  
We hope to soon see grandiose roads all over Meghalaya connecting villages and the district headquarters. My wish and hope is that anything attempted during this one year should not go the way of the Crowborough Hotel with bricks as red as that of Red Fort in Chandni Chowk, from where on August 15, loudspeakers in all four directions give billions of Indians hope of better health care with cards, better road services and religious harmony among all, better education and more funds to the MGNREGA to lift billions of poor Indians.

Yours etc.,  
J.Kharmih  
Via email

#### Whither Christian state?

Editor,  
Apropos of the letter, 'The Church is not infallible' by Glenn C Kharkongor, (ST 10 Feb, 2022) I fully agree with the writer in all respects. There is a saying, 'The man of God need not necessarily be the man of the church.' I am reminded of the poem by F.R Powell - 'They are slaves

Public confidence in politicians is at an all-time low. Hence we recall past politicians with a certain deja-vu and forget some of the things they had done during their time which we had then thought was abominable. I recall how in 1988, (Late) PA Sangma came to state politics, was elected and became Chief Minister. He desired to transform Meghalaya and tried to effect change through galvanising the bureaucracy which he felt then was the engine of progress that could deliver governance to the last mile. Hence he held a sort of monitoring and evaluation of different departments every Friday and expected to get a brief from officers about the work taken up in each district. One of the things that PA Sangma did which I recall was to bring the Oriental Company for road construction. This Company constructed roads and also repaired the old ones. The road from Riblong bridge right up to Upper Shillong and beyond and from Nongthymai to Laitkor were some of the best made roads. They lasted several years. But that irked the local contractors who had formed a clique of their own and wanted to oust PA Sangma.

The contractor lobby also had a veritable network inside the government that informed them of any future road construction project so they could go and buy land along the area at dirt cheap rates and then sell that land to the government at four times the cost. PA Sangma was a hyper-intelligent politician and soon realised that this modus-operandi was proving to be very costly for the state. Government was spending more on land compensation than on road construction. At one time Sangma announced publicly that those villages that wanted roads should donate land because after all Meghalaya claims that land belongs to the community and if a road or roads were to benefit communities what was the problem in donating that community land!

By then the contractor mafia had begun to collect ammunition to topple the PA Sangma government which was a coalition of Congress-HPU-HSPDP and Independents. PA Sangma's government lost majority when the HPU, HSPDP and Independents withdrew their support. I believe that was a strong signal that in Meghalaya a Chief Minister who wishes to bring any reforms and upset the status quo had better drop the idea. To that extent, Conrad Sangma is a fast learner and a street-smart politician. He is not too bothered about ethics and morality. His credo is to survive the rough and tumble of the most excruciating and also the most demanding profession in a very extractive milieu where everyone is out to get their pound of flesh; everyone in the government and outside is asking – "what's in it for me?" Conrad is like a performer in a circus who has to keep several balls in the air at a time.

It is easy to blame the MDA Government when one is a spectator from outside the boxing ring. Those inside must be feeling the heat. Inside that ring the people don't feature at all. It's the ministers and other MLAs of the ruling party that must be kept in good humour lest they decide to do a Judas. The government is but a conglomerate of avaricious individuals each wanting a larger share of the pie, to the point of sucking the lifeblood out of the state and its despairingly poor citizens. And in this melee comes the Congress with five MLAs who are peddling themselves, ostensibly because they want to better serve their people; their constituents (its sad how the constituents have to take the blame for all the shenanigans of our MLAs and the decisions they take in our name, as if they even care for us). Media persons outside Meghalaya are trying to figure out how the Congress can join a government that also has the BJP in it. That does need some figuring-out but not if they know the gerrymandered (aka Eastern-West Khasi Hills) politics of Meghalaya.

But we cannot really blame the Congress MLAs for feeling left out of the fun and frolic of being in the charmed circle. They have been in that circle for so long that they have forgotten what it means to be in the dog-house. I recall the noted columnist Swapan Dasgupta writing about the Congress at one time in these stinging phrases, "A Congress polluted with money, drunk with power and crazed with lust was picked up and shaken upside down like an old piggy bank." This says it all. The

of forced conversion, our CM did not speak a word. Fr Stan Swami was in jail for almost a year after being charged under UAPA. The Catholic Church hoped that the people of Meghalaya would at least express solidarity. But there was only silence. There was no condemnation from the leaders of the Christian states for the 9-month long detention of Fr Stan without trial. Fr Stan died without bail and was not even given a sipper to be able to drink water and juice as he suffered from Parkinson's disease.

The church has a role in policy making too. When Prime Minister Modi pushed his CAB agenda, no leader could read between the lines as to why Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, Jains, Buddhists and Christians were included in the list. No one saw that the ploy for including Christians in the list was to win the avalanche of support from the Christian – majority states. We were duped heavily.  
On Aadhar, there was a suspicion among few faithful that it represents the number of the beast (666). But that aside, no one realised that the Supreme Court slammed Modi and Amit Shah for pushing Aadhar to be linked to bank accounts and mobile phones. The duo had

# We get the Government we deserve

By Patricia Mukhim

Congress – out of power in the Centre for over seven years finds it difficult to drive the party vehicle. It costs money to run a political party. Ask the BJP how and why they need to patronise Adani and Ambani, the two wealthiest billionaires in India. The Meghalaya Congress is well aware that the Congress at the Centre will find it tough to return to power at the Centre, what with all the regional satraps ganging up to rule Delhi. Besides, Rahul Gandhi in his speech in Parliament had recently called India a union of states where the Centre cannot call the shots. The Meghalaya Congress did not need to read tea leaves to understand that was a call for the Congress in the states too to call the shots; the AICC be damned.

So elections 2023 will be fun to watch if only it does kick back the decadent and rapacious five-year political artists back to the State Assembly. In all of this the NPP seems to be gaining ground since there is a beeline to join the Party. But the NPP also has an opportunity to get in some political crackerjacks who can change the political contours of Meghalaya in 2023 before the state dips to a dangerous low in all its socio-economic rankings. This will create a disparate constituency of youth with nothing to lose. That is a dangerous nadir because that is where revolutions are born.

The other day NDTV had a panel discussion around the issue of unemployment and the latest CMIE (Centre for Monitoring of the Indian Economy) data released on February 5. Several panelists aver that the data is unreliable because it does not capture unemployment statistics in the informal sector. Meghalaya's unemployment ratio was shown as 1.5% only. This surely cannot be correct data by any yardstick. There is a burgeoning youth population that is listless and frustrated because they have a certificate from a college but no job openings. The private sector is looking for employees which educational institutions are not turning out. There is a huge mismatch between what colleges and universities churn out year after year and what the market actually can absorb. This should have been the burden of the

lected representatives but such issues are never discussed in the Assembly.

However, there are times I believe we deserve the MLAs we elect because as one of the panelists on the NDTV debate – Mr Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda says, "In India people don't protest on things critical to them; they protest on frivolous issues." Just look at how disempowered we are as voters. The candidates are thrust upon us by political parties. We just have to elect those because we couldn't care less or because we think we have no power to protest or because we are too afraid to speak up. US President Gerald Ford, once famously said, "We have an election in which candidates without ideas hire consultants without conviction, to carry out campaigns without content." Here in Meghalaya the consultants are camp followers who assert that they can bring votes but must be duly compensated once elections are done and dusted and the MLA is elected.

John Adams the remarkable political philosopher once cautioned Americans that the problem with democracy is that you get the leaders you deserve. This implies that if we throw up an undeserving leader it is because during the electioneering we never did our duties as citizens and ask questions from the candidates that need to be asked. We instead attend these meetings, listen in silence and clap; go to the candidate to shake hands as if to get him/her to register our faces in his/her memory just in case we need a favour sometime in the future.

So yes we deserve the decrepit, profligate governments we have had since 1990; governments that torpedo the very idea of democracy. Each time an election arrives we believe we have reached the tipping point when Pandora's box would be opened but we are defeated by the world of nods and winks that make up so much of government business these days.

Why am I even writing this? Does it make a difference to anyone anywhere? No it doesn't but to write is better than to paddle closer to the deadly shores of cynicism and despondency. Am not here to save the world but to plant myself at the gate of hope!

to remove both. Hence in future any view on any new policy can never be hurriedly and randomly sold. Justice Chandrachud who dissented that Aadhar should be linked to bank accounts for targeted delivery of services, said, "One right cannot be taken away at the behest of the other. The State has failed to satisfy this Court that the targeted delivery of subsidies which animate the right to life entails a necessary sacrifice of the right to individual autonomy, data protection and dignity when both these rights are protected by the Constitution."  
Let the write-up awaken all of us to speak out and act and let us pray that Meghalaya as tainted as it is right now will gather enough courage to repent and there is no better time than now as 2023 is drawing nigh.

Yours etc.,  
F.Lyngdoh  
Via email

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin  
Wankhar,  
Via email

#### Party versus individuals

Editor,  
Shall we call it a "change of heart" or "change of priorities" that five Congress legislators suddenly decided to declare their 'allegiance'

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 hypocrisy of it all

By MM Nangrum

The recent political situation in Meghalaya has been characterized by a long-standing series of issues including rampant corruption, defection, egoism, mendaciousness, and obfuscations to name a few. Sure, politicians are notorious for their hypocrisy but when does it stop if that is not a pipe-dream?

People hate hypocrites not because their beliefs and actions are inconsistent, but because their moral proclamations imply falsely that they are more virtuous than they really are. People are more likely to believe that someone does not waste energy if he or she says, "It is wrong to waste energy" than if he or she says "I do not waste energy." We believe the moral assertions of hypocrites and we feel more let down when those assertions prove to be fallacious. And, perhaps expectedly, we're harder on hypocrites when they belong to the opposite group.

Look at hypocrites from your own tribe, and the al-

People underestimate how much they'll be condemned for being a hypocrite. The condemnation is painful, and if it's painful enough, people might try to resolve the inconsistency by walking the talk, either by, say such as the case of recycling actually starting to recycle or by dropping the moralizing about separating plastics from cans. Is it different for politicians, though, whose psychological makeup often seems to have more in common with that of convicted felons than with educated members of society such as college students? Leadership positions make it more difficult to practice what you preach, because you may have to balance competing moral values.

Ultimately, an individual's personality determines how much they are bothered by their own hypocrisy. One especially important factor is self-complexity, a psychological measure of the number of different "roles" that make up a person. Are

*Ultimately, an individual's personality determines how much they are bothered by their own hypocrisy. One especially important factor is self-complexity, a psychological measure of the number of different "roles" that make up a person. Are you a spouse, mother, sister, and employee? Or just an employee? People who are lower in self-complexity have fewer self-perceived roles, and their defining qualities in those roles are pretty similar.*

ternate explanations begin to creep in: "He/She is still new to this!" In fact, when the leader of a group gets caught behaving hypocritically, members of that group will rally behind the hypocritical leader, rather than abandon him/her. This might be one reason why we see some members of a political party continue to bolster their support for a leading politician from the party who is perceived as hypocritical, noting that's the case for both sides of the same coin. They must support the politician because the group is such an important reflection of who they are and what they believe in.

Of course, the people of the society know hypocrisy when they see it, but do the hypocrites themselves? Do politicians or regular people realize when they're contradicting themselves? First, it's worth noting there are reasons for going back on a statement other than hypocrisy, like having a weak will, changing one's mind, or realizing a lofty idea is just not practical. Hypocrisy's tell-tale sign, meanwhile, is that holier-than-thou attitude, the haughty ts-ktsing from the gutter. You can't attack people personally; people don't typically realize when they're being hypocrites, and they usually don't stop after they're called out for it, either. Instead, they might deny the accusation so they can "stay in a state of hypocrisy." Less commonly, hypocrites might acknowledge the inconsistency and either undo it or vow to do better. A certain politician could argue his/her comments away by saying this is just his job, or by saying everyone in his/her business says contradictory things sometimes, or by distorting perceptions of her own behaviour. "I'm not actually being hypocritical, this is different."

Politicians always recount their past and that of their families as being small-business owners or stewards of the community. In other words, they portray a lot of self-complexity. So maybe when they're called out for a contradiction in public, they can easily brush it off: After all, it's only their public face that's speaking.

*"Nothing is more despicable than respect based on fear."*

—Albert Camus

## The Shillong Times

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### Time for normalcy to return

ALL schools and colleges in Meghalaya have opened up and others are opening soon albeit with all precautions in place. As always there will be two or more views about this. It's the typical Hamlet dilemma — to be or not to be. But with growing scientific evidence the world over that lockdowns have only caused more misery than saving lives and this being the third year of the pandemic, more studies have shown that a complete lockdown of schools and resorting to the much-touted online classes and more so the online examinations have set back the clock for many a child. In fact the Education Department of Meghalaya and perhaps even the Social Welfare Department have a bounden duty to conduct a quick survey to see how many children, especially in the rural areas of the state have had zero learning since March 2020 till date. The results would help the State to reconfigure how to go about providing remedial classes to bring up to scratch and to stem the tide of school dropouts which is already quite high in the State.

Besides the normal learning environment, what school students have missed more than they can explain is the social bonding with peers and the physical presence of teachers. In most schools in rural Meghalaya, parents were visiting the schools to collect homework for their children. Most parents are illiterate so how are they expected to help their kids with the homework? Teachers don't seem to have considered this vital aspect. Actually teachers were directed by the Education Department to visit homes and check on the children's progress with their studies but very few teachers did that. And they cannot be blamed for failing in their duties since all were afflicted by the fear psychosis of moving around when social distancing was the norm.

The much talked about online classes were as good as non-existent in rural areas where internet connectivity is very unstable. But even in urban areas online classes were a new phenomenon for teachers not trained to use technology to teach students virtually. In the earlier stages of the pandemic it was trial and error for teachers every day as they tried to learn the ropes. It was not possible for students to ask questions or to interact with teachers and with one another. That was like the snapping of a social umbilical cord that makes life worth living for humans. Parents unused to spending so much time with their kids found it fatiguing to deal with them and to become teacher, mentor, parent and friend all at once. However, precious lessons were learnt and losses have been counted. Now teachers have become more empathetic and parents more understanding of how much it takes to teach a child. A new beginning is being made in the teaching-learning journey and also the realization that 'education' is much more than book knowledge.

# Food safety and standards: Backdoor entry of GMO

By **Bhagtoram Mawroh, Janakpreet Singh and Stefan W Lyngdoh**

As the prospect of the repeal of the infamous three farm laws was getting closer to reality (the laws were finally repealed on November 19, 2021), on November 15, 2021 the Union Government announced the Food Safety and Standards (Genetically Modified or Engineered Foods) Regulations, 2021. The purported aim of the initiative is to regulate the market of food or processed food containing or produced from GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms), GEO (Genetically Engineered Organisms) or LMO (Living Modified Organisms). In reality this is a sly attempt to circumvent the debate which is ongoing over the need for GM (Genetically Modified) crops in India for both production and consumption. This is consistent with the Draft Seeds Bill, 2019 brought by the Union Government which by including GM seeds under the bill tries to do the same. This is despite the fact that the issue of GM crops is still quite contested in the country with only brinjal and Bt cotton having got the approval till date. The debate is still very much alive.

GMO is any organism whose genetic material has been modified using genetic engineering techniques. It is the result of a laboratory process where genes from the DNA of one species (may come from bacteria, viruses, insects, animals or even humans) are extracted and artificially forced into the genes of an unrelated plant or animal. Some of the benefits that have been cited of introducing GMO in agriculture are increased crop yields, reduced costs for food or drug production, increased resistance towards pests and insects, reduced need for pesticides, enhanced nutrient composition and food quality, resistance to pests and disease, greater food security to the world's growing population. Genetically modified crops also grow faster than food that are grown traditionally and are a boon in places which experience frequent droughts, or where the soil is incompetent for agriculture. They are also reported to be high in nutrients and contain more minerals and vitamins than those found in traditionally grown foods. However there are some major concerns as well.

One of the most important arguments against GMO is the lack of data concerning 100% safety. Consumption of genetically engineered foods can cause development of disease immune to antibiotics. There are also unknown future effects with cross-pollination with the wild species having the potential to cause damage to other organisms that thrive in the natural environment. Culturally many people are not comfortable with the idea of transferring animal genes into plants and vice-versa. Kavitha Kuruganti, a well known social activist known

for her work related to sustainable farm livelihoods and farmers' rights, has prepared a compilation of scientific references with abstracts on the adverse impacts of transgenic crops/foods. The list contains abstracts of 339 scientific papers and 39 reports/magazine articles/webpage on different themes, for e.g., imprecision & unpredictability of science & technology of Genetic Engineering, health impacts, environmental impacts, horizontal gene transfer, gene flow, contamination and field trial risk, yield myths with GM crops and other related issues. But maybe the most negative implication for a country like India is the fact that it would start depending more on industrial countries because it is likely that the food production would be controlled by them in the time

**One of the most important arguments against GMO is the lack of data concerning 100% safety. Consumption of genetically engineered foods can cause development of disease immune to antibiotics. There are also unknown future effects with cross-pollination with the wild species having the potential to cause damage to other organisms that thrive in the natural environment. Culturally many people are not comfortable with the idea of transferring animal genes into plants and vice-versa.**

to come which would benefit industries and not small scale non-GMO farmers. Over half of the world's seed market is controlled by only four companies, viz., Monsanto (US), DuPont (US), Syngenta (Switzerland) and Group Limagrain (France) with the India figure being more than 60% in India. These will be the same companies who will control the GMO trade threatening India's seed sovereignty and the small and marginal farmers. The technology therefore also has its drawbacks.

In a situation when there is a lot of uncertainty over the possible implications of accepting GMO into the food system an important principle which can help in coming to a decision as to the adoption of GMO is the recourse to the Precautionary Principle. In the 2004 book 'Ecological Medicine: Healing the Earth, Healing Ourselves' Carolyn Raffensperger has discussed this principle in great detail in the chapter 'The Precautionary Principle: Golden Rule for the New Millennium'.

According to Carolyn Raffensperger the words 'precautionary principle' has been translated from the German Vorsorgeprinzip whose literal translation is of "forecaring" — to care into the future. The principle is found in the preamble of the 1992 environmental treaty known as the Rio Declara-

tion: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation." In 1998, the Wingspread Conference on Precautionary Principle was held in Wisconsin (USA) which was attended by scientists, lawyers, policy makers and environmentalists from the United States, Canada and Europe. A definition of the Precautionary Principle was agreed upon which goes on as follows: When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. Put crudely, the definition

means that we should not wait until the dead bodies of trees, children and salmon are piled in the streets (concrete evidence) before we take action, i.e., prevention is better than cure. Carolyn Raffensperger specifically mentions agriculture as an important sector where the precautionary principle has a crucial role to play. According to her "if we can't apply the precautionary principle to agriculture and find a way to feed ourselves without destroying the planet, then the principle is worthless. It also means we are probably not educable as a species." Rather than fitting agriculture into nature the principle encourages the opposite. Agroecology is one such alternative to industrial farming (which includes GMO). However, there are those who contest this claim arguing a turn to such systems can spell danger to global food security.

A 2019 report titled 'Agroecological and other innovative approaches: A report by The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems that enhance Food Security and Nutrition' reviews the argument as to whether agroecology can feed the world. The document agrees that the global population is on the rise and there will be a need to feed

it. There are those who argue that agricultural production needs to increase by 50% but not all agree to it. However, according to some estimates already enough food is produced for an extra 2 billion population. There is also a concurrent trend which shows that despite high levels of production, various forms of food insecurity and malnutrition still persist. Around 820 million people are still going hungry and an estimated 2 billion people are obese with another 2 billion suffering from malnutrition deficiencies or hidden hunger. According to the report increasing production alone might not suffice for achieving the four dimensions of Food Security, i.e., availability, access, utilization and stability. Since agroecology does not focus on productivity alone but also issues of social inequalities and power asymmetries, including gender and ethnic minority, it is better placed than conventional food systems to tackle the problem of food insecurity. Furthermore, meeting calorie requirements does not automatically translate to nutritional security. The industrial agricultural model, of which GMO is also a part of, has resulted in increased productivity but at the cost of biodiversity loss, land degradation, loss of soil fertility and chemical pollution putting the entire planetary health at risk. At the same time, several studies have challenged the notion that agroecological systems are less productive than the industrial models. Some of those are referred to in the report.

In light of the uncertainty surrounding adoption of GMO and the need to adhere to the precautionary principle, Participatory Guarantee Systems Organic Council (PG-SOC), which is a network of 21 civil society organisations, farmers and consumer groups promoting organic farming and practicing participatory development of agroecological transformations for more than 15 years, has demanded that the Food Safety and Standards (Genetically Modified or Engineered Foods) Regulations, 2021 should be withdrawn. It has submitted its concerns to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) with NESFAS being one of the contributing members. For the sake of the farming community and the public of India at large, it is hoped that the Union Government of India will listen to the concerns.

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them don't they have the right to elect a new leader who will take the Party forward? The BJP's status today is pathetic. There is no political stalwart or even a new face that wants to contest the next election joining the BJP. In Meghalaya the BJP has no roots and is unlikely to spread its roots. It will hopefully be stuck with two MLAs. As far as the UDP is concerned it is always second best. For the moment the NPP is on a very strong footing. Instead of facing anti-incumbency for four years of misrule and corruption it is emerging stronger. Jai ho Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,  
Armena Marak,  
Via email

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

### Bengal civic polls nominations expose faultlines in party organisation

## Mamata facing first real challenge from Abhishek on ideological lines

By **Ashis Biswas**

Never before in Bengal's recent history have state-wide civic elections become politically as consequential as the present round of polls now being held on February 12 and 27. Intriguingly, the probable outcome of these elections, a clean sweep for the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), could well be no more than a minor footnote in the post-poll scenario. The contours of present political alignments in Bengal are changing and the new emerging trends do not bring cheer for the TMC.

No wonder there are worried faces among senior TMC leaders, even if some are already crowing over their success well ahead of the expected outcome. After a decade of unchallenged TMC rule in Bengal, there are first signs that party supremo Mamata Banerjee faces the danger of a split within the ranks. There are strong indications that already, her wishes no longer count as her royal command among her followers. As of now, there are two broad divisions within the TMC: Originally there was -- and is -- the incumbent loyalist camp of Mamata Banerjee followers like Partha Chatterjee, Firhad Hakim, Arup Biswas, Subrata Baxi and others. But now, there are new pro-change followers of Mr Abhishek Banerjee, Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha MP and General secretary of the TMC, the nephew of Ms Banerjee. Among them are Saugata Ray, Madan Mitra, Anubrata Mondal, young Debanshu Bhattacharya and others. However Mitra and Mondal are also known fence sitters who bend as the blowing winds dictate.

They are in effect the new challengers to the throne. In hiring the expensive poll-winning expertise offered by psephologist/poll consultant Mr Prashant Kishor aka PK and his IPAC team for the TMC, Mr Banerjee had played the decisive role. The move succeeded beyond expectations. The TMC using valuable IPAC inputs not only beat back the strong BJP challenge to its supremacy in the 2021 assembly polls, it also decimated the BJP state unit's political base. It is not surprising that following the TMC's resounding victory in the Assembly elections in 2021, Mr Banerjee's stock rose higher than ever. Naturally services of the IPAC were retained by the TMC for the Kolkata Corporation polls and the state civic elections as well.

The IPAC, as hinted by veteran TMC MP Mr Saugata Ray, preferred to project new, better educated youths as party candidate for the polls for Kolkata Corporation and the remaining 108 civic bodies (excluding Howrah) in the state. The reason: there would be no allegations of corruption or criminal activities against the newcomers. The anti-incumbency factor would be marginalised in the process. But this approach upset the calculations of the deep-rooted local TMC leadership and hierarchies in most places. Some of his other proposals only added to their gloom.

Mr Banerjee spoke of the need for (a) practising politicians to retire after a certain age; (b) to introduce the one-man-in-one-post formula; and (c) to pave the way for a new generation of younger untainted educated political activists to serve the TMC in the future. He also pressed for civic elections to be fought as normally as possible, unlike what had happened during the scandalous 2018 Panchayat polls. Interestingly, even hardliners like Mr Anubrata Mondal and Mr Debanshu Bhattacharya supported him. They reasoned that the TMC had won 34% of the Panchayat seats in 2018 unopposed, as its lower level leaders and supporters launched a massive terror campaign. But such malprac-

tices also paved the way for the BJP's major electoral success in Bengal during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls!

Sound as such proposals were, they scared the old loyalists of Mamata Banerjee. As political commentator Biswanath Chakravarty explained at a recent TV chat show, old veterans of civic level politics felt insecure. Worse, there was a widespread practice, thanks to the notorious 'cut-money' (bribery) culture propagated by the TMC in Bengal where any aspirant for a government job, for a party nomination or for the admission to a prestigious educational institution, simply had to pay the local TMC boss a few lakhs of rupees before getting the party's support!

The IPAC/Banerjee formula to present as many new faces as possible in the civic elections was rejected by Mamata Banerjee herself prior to the Kolkata Corporation elections, where older incumbent people were retained as candidates. This naturally rankled with the IPAC/Banerjee team, which retaliated by putting up more promising newcomers for the next round 108 civic body elections. In the process many old names proposed by established local leaders were rejected.

It also led to the reported resignation of Mr. PK himself along with the IPAC in a recent letter to Ms Banerjee, who promptly released him. Since many aspirants had already paid 'cut-money' to the incumbent local leadership, they were desperate to (a) either win official nomination or (b) to recover their money.

This was the major reason for recent the state-wide unrest and agitations conducted mainly by established TMC leaders and followers against the new set of party leaders!

Alarmingly for the old pro-Mamata leadership, inner party support for the new IPAC/Banerjee group is not confined only to the senior levels of decision-making. Even within the lower level TMC organisation, its word is law in some areas.

For instance, the TMC has already emerged as unofficial winners of civic bodies at Dinhatra, Budge Budge and Sainthia, as opposition candidates could not file their nominations in time. The reason: TMC's terror tactics -- never mind the formal announcements made by the state Government or the Election Commission.

There is a strong possibility, feel observers that what has happened at Budge Budge might have happened at Sainthia as well because Mr Mondal calls the tune in the area.

As one observer put it, 'The TMC will certainly sweep the municipal polls in the 108 places, but the main question is which TMC faction will really win? Mamata Banerjee's candidates have been sidelined in many areas and were not allowed to file nominations or carry out campaigning by TMC's Abhishek Banerjee loyalists. They have fared no better than candidates put by the Left parties, the Congress or the BJP!'

Does this mean that a split within the TMC is only a question of time?

No. In case the IPAC/Banerjee faction emerge as the bigger group in the ruling TMC -- against the challenger-TMC inner contest, its members would be accommodated seamlessly within the party. The new entrants would be won over by the lure of new posts/power or lucrative assignments. There is little doubt that the old formula would be applied to maintain the inner unity and cohesion within the TMC. But the message has reached Mamata that after ten years of her rule as the supreme, she is being ideologically attacked by her own nephew aided by PK who are opting for a new Trinamool. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Meghalaya's 50-year journey

Editor,  
Apropos of the special article "COVID-19 restrictions never had slightest basis in the Sciences" by Sanjeev Sabhlok, Adviser Swatantra Bharat Party and the editorial "Meghalaya's convoluted politics" (ST February 10, 2022), Sabhlok has done a commendable service to humanity with a thorough research which is full of facts. The article is very informative and excellent. Senseless people gripped by FEAR (false expectation appearing real) fell prey to propaganda and stealth warfare of those who want Total Control of the world and in the process fools died? For me Covid-19 meant Total Control and Great Rest. People who do

not discern die after all the numbers of pathogens are more than the number of stars and creation did not tamper with them and placed them where they are supposed to be but poor mortal human loves to fiddle. Information from various sources lend credence to the notion that Covid-19 is a result of Gain of Function Research.

Coming to the editorial which is very apt and timely, I am fully in sync with the editor that "Meghalaya people do not vote for any ideology. The choice of candidate by a voter is a very personal one". There may be no permanent friends or enemies in politics but politics in Meghalaya is full of mumbo jumbo. Garo Chief Ministers led Meghalaya for more than 28 years and the Khasi Chief Ministers for 22 years. Everything seems disastrous at a glance but in absence of any study on political, economic and social

conditions in Meghalaya during the Chief Ministership of these two community leaders it will not be proper to draw any conclusion whether their role was positive or negative. At a time when Newspeak is overtaking old speak the Government of Meghalaya could commission a study to find out who performed well in leading the State in the last 50 years, so that the people of Meghalaya know the facts if not the truth of the last fifty years.

Yours etc.,  
V.K. Lyngdoh,  
Via email

#### NPP emerging stronger

Editor,  
Politics in Meghalaya is like a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. No eyebrows are raised when the 5

Congress MLAs decided to actually sell their goodwill to the government of the day. Why? Because that was expected considering the MPCC President whose one leg is in Delhi and another in Shillong hardly did anything to repair the psyche of the 5 MLAs who perhaps felt the jolt more than Pala did when 12 of their colleagues decided to abandon the Party that they had embraced for decades. Gauging the politics of Meghalaya today it would appear that the biggest gainer from the present political churning is Conrad Sangma's NPP. It looks like the only stable party that every discontent is joining or will join sooner than later.

I was amused to read about the HSPDP chief saying that NPP will always need the regional parties. I want to ask this man what his Party has done for this State in the last 20 years.

Has it made any dent in the politics of this state? What is the worth of two MLAs? And is the HSPDP even sure if it will win any seat in 2023? These regional party chiefs had better do a reality check rather than flex their muscles. But the voters of Meghalaya might predictably vote the same old opportunists. Who knows?

And when we look at the BJP it looks so spineless in Meghalaya. The BJP Chief was appointed advisor to Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and he seems happy with that role. It doesn't look as if he cares about winning more seats for the Party in 2023. When so many members of the BJP in Meghalaya are unhappy with their President why does the person in charge of the Meghalaya affairs continue to pretend that all is well here? If the majority of BJP members here feel that their President has failed

# How to stay motivated to keep exercising all year long

February. The month of shattered dreams and ambitions. The trainers are gathering dust and chocolate bars have replaced protein bars. The gusto with which we attacked our new year resolutions is a vague memory.

If your motivation to stick to your resolution to exercise more this year is waning, you're not alone. It's suggested around 80% of people will have given up on their new year resolutions by February.

But the reason your motivation wanes might be because you chose the wrong motives and goals to begin with. And research shows us that choosing the right type of goal is the key to keeping us motivated over the long term.

## Lower the effort

Many of us believe that we need to grimace, contort, sweat and pant our way to a healthier life. So at the beginning of January, we put in a load of effort to help us reach our goals.

Unfortunately, our brain encourages us to avoid physical effort. This is why the excessive effort we use when exercising will work against us in the long run – leading us to feel less motivated to exercise by the end of January. Our brain is constantly monitoring our body for any changes from our resting state, which could mean danger to our health. The more physical effort we use, the more a signal is activated and our brain tells us that the activity just isn't worth the effort and potential risk.

This is why minimising the effort we need to put into exercise may actually better help us stick to our resolutions in the long term. For example, if you're dreading even a fifteen-minute jog, do five minutes instead. Or if you hate running but enjoy Zumba, do that instead. The golden rule is that the activity you're trying to motivate



yourself to do needs to be pleasurable. And research shows we're much more likely to do something if it requires less effort – especially when we're starting new exercise regimes.

The same principle applies to reducing the psychological effort required to exercise, as our brains also encourage us to avoid it – to such an extent that, when given the choice, we often prefer physical pain instead. It does this because it wants to save psychological effort for times of emergency.

When it comes to starting a new exercise regime in the new year, things like fitting workouts into our schedule or getting out of bed an hour earlier all require psychological effort.

To reduce psychological effort, it may help to minimise needless decision-making. When it's time to exercise, remove decisions like whether to walk or drive to exercise class, or put your trainers in

the same place so you don't have to look for them.

Although these sound like small decisions to make, they can all add up to us feeling less motivated to exercise when we're required to make them. Research even shows that when we think our goals require little effort to achieve, we're more likely to achieve them.

## Choose short-term goals

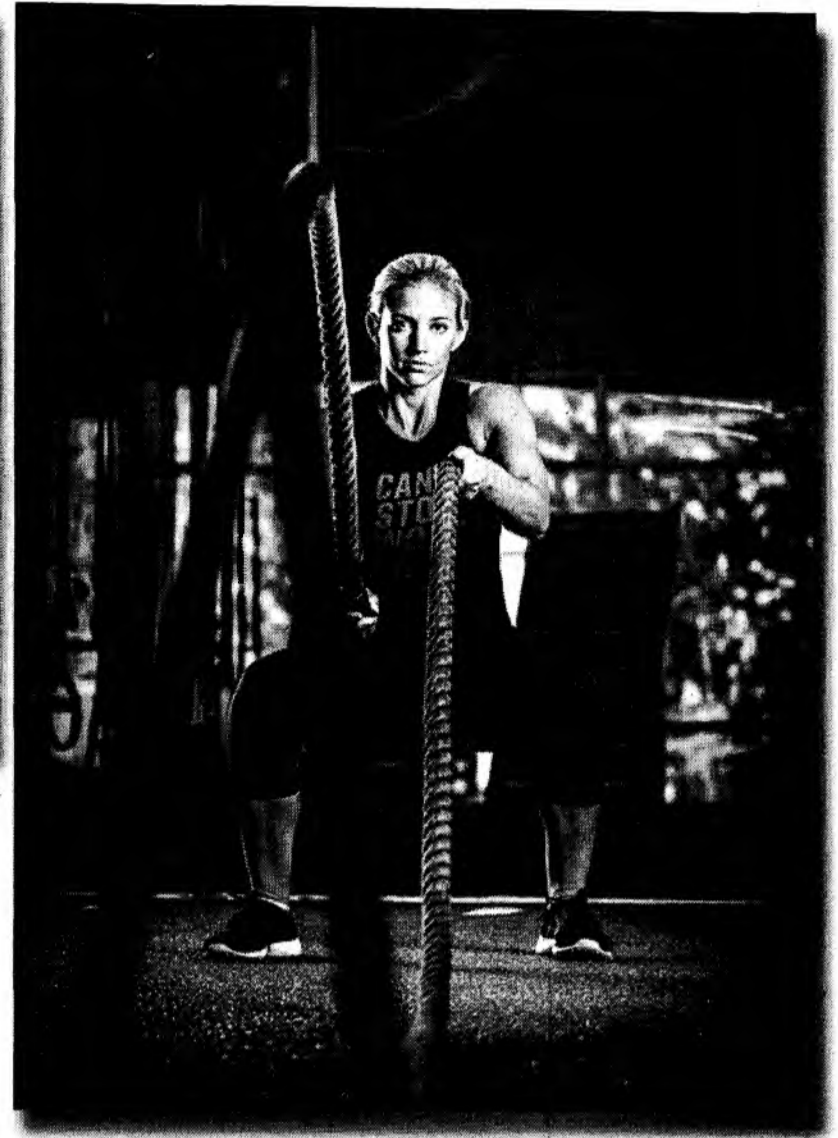
Another basic motivational mistake many of us made in January was to set our goals too far in the future. Many people start exercising to lose a few pounds – perhaps to fit into their favourite jeans again. But when the outcome is far in the future, our brains don't associate the motivation (fitting into our jeans) with exercising – so we're less inclined to exercise.

By choosing a goal that has a more immediate outcome, our brains will associate the outcome positively with exercise because

they occur simultaneously. For example, the mood-boosting benefits of exercise occur more quickly than physical health changes so this may be a better motivator for you to keep exercising well past January. In short, make the reason for exercise an immediate one you can achieve – and the long-term benefits will follow.

## Focus on 'being' instead of 'having'

The final motivational fix is switching the type of goal you have. So-called "have" goals serve little purpose for our motivational brain, which focuses on more important things – such as being effective at what we do and making social bonds. An example of a "have" goal would be exercising so that you can have a better body. This type of goal is viewed as less important by our brain because it does not help us meet essential goals that help us thrive.



On the other hand, the types of goals that are more likely to keep us motivated are "be" goals. An example of a be goal would be exercising to be healthy or to be more athletic. Be goals are superior because humans tend to want to bond with other like-minded people based on our identities.

This motivation is thought to have developed in our ancestral past, as forming bonds helped us to survive. So someone may find exercise easier to stick with if they're

doing it as a way to demonstrate their athleticism, for example. As a result, people do a better job of sticking to be goals, compared to other types of goals.

Even if you have fallen off the wagon slightly by the end of January, that doesn't mean you have to give up on your goals entirely. But making some tweaks to them – and your approach to exercise – may help you better stick to your goals for the rest of the year. (*The Conversation*)

## Colour Therapy: A tool to improve overall health



of the newness and urban freshness that they bring into our lives.

Colours also have negative associations and very subconsciously we decide to block these colours from being in our homes or wardrobes. To get rid of such negative triggers, an emotional cleanse or release as a combination can help to disassociate from such memories and emotions, and this could eventually help to open up one's colour palettes.

### How does colour therapy improve overall health?

**Nakshi:** Colours have a deep effect on our lives and including the right ones in our diet, homes, and wardrobes can really help to positively impact our overall health. We must constantly work on incorporating colour palettes that are associated with positive feelings into our food, homes and wardrobes.

The healing quality of colours through rainbow eating also has an impact on overall health. Also, I strongly advise including colours that are based on the elements of nature i.e. earth, water, fire,

In terms of colour therapy and how each colour has a significant meaning, there has been a standardisation of colours. It can have its own impact and associative memories in the new-age approach, and they can either elevate your mood or simply become a trigger.

Colour therapy has been used for health and wellness since ancient Egyptian times. Furthermore, light can be processed and perceived as colours by the eyes and brain. Nakshi Satra, Founder, In:ha Wellness explains further how colour therapy act as a mood booster and how colour therapy could help improve overall health.

### How does colour therapy act as a mood booster?

**Nakshi:** Based on my experiences with over 3000+ clients, the human eyes and brain trigger memories, perceptions, and emotions about experiences of memories for each individual differently. As these triggers travel backwards in our minds, they cross the critical filter into our subconscious mind where the deepest of memories are all stored.

This defines our perception towards colours which can be subjective and personal. Some colours have an associative memory of safety and precaution; some might have a bitter memory associated with them. Below are a few examples to understand this well.

□ A lot of clients prefer black and white tones and associate these colours



with their personality. Black and white can exude feelings of power, freedom, safety and protection etc.

□ Colours like red make strong statements and stand out, while blue has a calming and soothing effect and can help to increase focus.

□ Green and pastel shades are often associated with nature, flora & fauna.

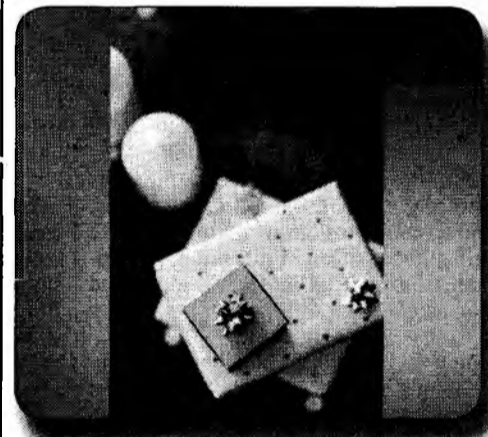
□ Teals, greys, oranges, whites and other English pastel colours are recent trends because they break the monotony of conservative environments and regular way of life. They are appreciated because

air, space for your surroundings.

Colour therapy infused with mindful eating, living and clothing contributes to overall health improvements as it changes energies and vibrations for the same. The more you open up your colour palette, the more you can do with your life while progressing in your overall moods and health.

The freedom to express yourself through colours creates opportunities for better health, better relationships, a stable mind and a better version of yourself. (*IANSLife*)

## 5 budget-friendly gifts for Valentine's Day



a smartwatch. Brands including Apple, Samsung, Fitbit, Xiaomi offer affordable options that monitor their sleep, steps, and heart rate.

So for this Valentine's Day, surprise your partner by gifting them a fitness wearable that can help keep an eye out for the activities they do throughout the day.

### 3. Instant Camera

When you are with the one you adore, every moment is special and every moment counts. There's no better way to capture those memories to remember than through a polaroid camera. The instant cameras bring that raw feel of photography and those prints are so compact and amazing.

Pose, click, flip and voila, there's your printed moment. You can easily paste it up on the wall or add it to your photobook and cherish those memories for years to come.

### 4. Planters

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic absolutely reshaped our lives, and though it took us a lot of struggle, pain and time to adjust to the new normal, it also kind of made us more aware of our surroundings and nature.

Hence, this V-Day, gift your partner planters that will add an extra element of life to their house and transform the energy in the space.

### 5. Books

A good book is a better gift than candy and flowers combined, though books go great with chocolate and wine. Even if you are not able to determine the perfect book for your partner, think about the books that excite you the most. Or maybe even find one that the two of you can read together.

In totality, it's the personal touch that makes giving a book so fantastically special and even the Cupid would surely agree.

While celebrating Valentine's Day, it's important to understand that there are no rules. Ultimately, spending time with each other is what it's all about and if giving a gift is in your plans, we've got you covered with these options.

All in all, whatever you might do, if you have a romantic partner, just make sure you're on the same page to avoid any disappointments. Happy Valentine's Day! (*ANI*)

Valentine's Day, which is celebrated by sweethearts of all ages on February 14, is just around the corner.

One of the things about Valentine's Day is that there are myriad ways to celebrate it, and different cultures have developed their own traditions around it. In some parts of the world, it's also observed as an occasion for expressing love between family members and friends, rather than just for romantic couples.

Although it can be hard to find something that truly sums up your feelings for your special one, showering them with gifts is still a great way to say 'I love you'. However, most people often go for flowers and chocolates, but they are not enough.

So, to save you from all the stress of choosing the perfect gift and let you enjoy this celebration of love, we've rounded up a list of V-Day presents that balance thoughtfulness and budget.

### 1. Love Journal

The best Valentine's Day gifts aren't necessarily the most expensive ones. A little book of love notes isn't going to break the bank, but it will certainly leave a mark on his/her heart. Buy a journal and fill in the pages to create a personalised gift book that your loved one will want to read again and again.

You can fill each page with lines that describe something you love about them. You can be as cheesy or as romantic as you like but it's guaranteed to be one of the memorable presents your partner will ever receive.

### 2. Fitness Wearable

Whether or not your partner is into fitness, this Valentine's Day, gift them your care in the form of a fitness wearable or

# AAPKO KAISA LAGA?



By Bedika

Cinema journalists get to interview celebrities every now and then but not too many care to ask about what we think.

“Aapko kaisa laga?” That was Lata Mangeshkar actually asking me for my opinion on her last released song! And here was the singing legend herself, one of India’s biggest names ever, asking my opinion.

This was in October 2021, four months before Mangeshkar’s death in a Mumbai hospital on February 6 and days after the release of her last song.

“Namaskar,” the famous voice greeted me over the phone when I joined the call, perhaps a little too enthusiastically, with a “Hello Ma’am. I am a huge fan”.

After all, one does not get to

speak to Lata Mangeshkar every day, especially when she has semi-retired from public life after almost eight decades and 25,000 songs in 36 Indian languages.

But there wasn’t even a hint of arrogance as she responded to my over-enthusiasm, nervous fan greeting. “Arre nahin, thank you, thank you,” she said.

The occasion was the release of *Theek Nah Lagta*, a Vishal Bhardwaj-Gulzar composition found after two decades and released on her 92nd birthday on September 28, 2021.

I was initially asked to just send in five questions and was promised voice notes in return. I submitted the questions, convinced the interview may not happen at all.

After almost 10 days, I got a call saying I could speak to her directly. My first reaction was an imaginary kick to myself for

not putting more thought into the questionnaire I had prepared.

The interview lasted just 10 minutes. But for me, the journalist and the fan, it was enough.

Mangeshkar spoke slowly, emphasising each phrase, recalling stories of working with Gulzar and Bhardwaj in great detail.

Mangeshkar, who sang *Mora Gora Ang Layle* from 1963’s *Bandini*, Gulzar’s first as a songwriter, praised the lyricist.

The ‘melody queen’, who first collaborated with Bhardwaj during Gulzar’s 1996 directorial *Maachis*, said she was initially not sure about working with the composer when he was just starting out. But Bhardwaj eventually won her over with music.

“Gulzar sahab writes well and the whole country knows it... When I met Vishal, I was a little scared as I did not know his music



but I liked his very first song,” Mangeshkar recounted in Hindi.

Many of her songs could not see the light of day, she said without any regret, going on to explain that any track was subject to the mercy of the vagaries of the film world.

Sometimes the song did not fit the situation, or had to be cut because of the length, she said. If the film did not release, there were issues with the rights, Mangeshkar pointed out.

When she wanted to explain a particular point to me, she would begin with a gentle, “Nahin kya hota hai ki (No, what happens is)” or “Dekhiye baat ye hai (What happens is...)”.

I asked whether the lines “*Meri awaaz hi pehchan hai*” from the song *Naam Gum Jaayega* in the film *Kinaara*, directed by Gulzar, had any connection with her own towering career. Mangeshkar went on to narrate the story of the day she recorded the song.

“Gulzar also speaks beautifully. When I was singing (this song), he came to me and gently said, ‘*Meri*

*awaaz hi pehchan hai aur ye hai pehchan*’. He said something like this. But later, I also started saying that ‘my voice is my identity’,” she recounted.

Asked what were the songs or musicians she liked listening to, her playful reply was, “*Dekhiye agar main aapko ye bataungi to gadbad ho jayegi* (It will cause trouble, if I tell you).”

In the next moment, however, she went on to talk about her fondness for compositions by Sajjad Hussain and Khayyam.

Mangeshkar worked with Hussain on a number of films, including *Hulchul* (1951) that featured *Aaj mere naseeb ne mujhko rula rula diya*, *Sangdil* (1952) – *Woh to chale gaye aye dil and Dil mein sama gaye sajan*, and *Rustom Sohrab* (1963) – *Aye dil ruba nazarein mila*.

Her memory was razor sharp, the passage of decades doing little to dull the remembrances of the songs and their details.

With Khayyam, her collaboration through many decades in-

cluded *Heer Ranjha*, *Kabhi Kabhie and Trishul*.

The call then got disconnected and was patched again for one last question: Before I could ask anything, she listed her other favourite composers.

“Now that we are talking about music, I want to say this,” she began and named Shankar-Jaikishan, Madan Mohan, Jaidevi, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, SD Burman, RD Burman, and Naushad. “*Ye log ne na, main aapko bataati hoon, inhone raaj kiya hai* (These composers have ruled the hearts of many, I tell you).”

She also named AR Rahman while observing that he was not composing as frequently as he used to.

“I like his music style,” she said.

Mangeshkar mentioned *laiyaraaja*, among her favourites.

She ended her reply with, “I don’t know the new music directors but I pray that they excel but I told you about the ones that I worked with and liked.”

Then she remembered I had to ask that one remaining question. “*Aapka kya prashn hai aakhiri?* (What’s your last question?)”

My question was whether she still remembered the little girl she was when she started her musical journey at the age of 13 now that she had travelled so far in life.

“I remember the long journey and that little girl is still with me and she is still that young,” was her reply.

As far as people equating her to goddess Saraswati was concerned, Mangeshkar credited her fame to God, her parents, Sai baba and her family deity Mangesh.

“It is their blessing that people like whatever I sing. Otherwise who am I? I am nothing. There have been better singers than me and some of them are not even with us. I am grateful to god and to my parents for whatever I have today.”

The conversation ended with an exchange of thank yous on both sides. The memory of this interview, my first and last with her, will stay with me forever. Like her songs.

## ‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, FEB 13, 2022

Moon opposite Mars on your solar return chart and it will give good results. It is going to be an especially favorable year for you. You will get success in many fields. You will be happy and positivity will ooze out from you. Your problems will get solved. Students will study hard and get good results. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. New job/business offers will come. Destiny will favor you. You will be able to strike a balance between your personal life and professional life. Those who are single will get suitable marriage proposals. The time is good for fame, name and popularity. Peace and harmony will prevail in family relations. Your difficulties will get solved. It is a perfect time for entertainment and fun. You will care for your work also. You will reap financial benefits from investments you have made.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a great week for you. Job opportunities will knock your door and you will grab it with both hands. Your business will also start growing and will give you profits. Your earnings too will increase. You will do your work in a happy frame of mind and co-workers will give you full support. You will also take out some time for your family. You will also spend a lot of time in entertainment and leisure activities. Your wishes will also get fulfilled. You may strike a secret deal too. Students will get success in exams/interviews. Relationships with associates will be revamped and strengthened. You will remain in an advantageous position. Money you expect to receive may get stuck due to some reason or other. But it will not bother you much.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is a period to enjoy this week. You will spend time in welcoming guests and make them feel special. You will take up a new project and experience significant boost in self-confidence. Office work will not bother you much. You will finish off all set target. This is a good time for students. They will get success in exams/interviews. Your domestic life is going to be wonderful. Spouse will extend love and support. Time will be favorable for matters related to family. Achieving goals may seem tougher but you will ultimately be able to achieve it with your skills and wit. You will be able to carry a niche for yourself in your target field and will prove your mettle before others. Your health will remain perfect.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will get mixed results this week. Happiness and sorrow will go hand in hand. You need to drive your vehicle carefully. You should also deal with caution in financial matters. People you trust may betray you. Avoid lending money to other people. You will be busy in day-to-day activities in financial matters, insurance and business transactions. Keep an eye on activities of partner in business. Evaluate your actions and taken appropriate decisions at work and while dealing with people. You need to stay away from legal matters and issues. Purchase of new items is indicated. Your reputation and dignity, fame graph in the society will grow up. A new partnership or collaboration is also indicated. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate and will spend some quality time together.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will remain busy in your own work. Even domestic matter will require your attention and improving your financial prospects. You will also meet an important person and will be busy in day-to-day activities. You will also extend a hand to help a needy friend. Your dominance in work related matters will continue. Your enemies will be unable to hurt you even if they try their best. You will receive a pleasant news and obstacles in your work will get removed. You will rectify a mistake you made in the past for which you will receive praise from your colleagues. You will also take care of smallest requirement of your family. You will also complete your work with enthusiasm and energy. Some auspicious function will take place at your home.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A court verdict will come in your favor. You will get success even in adverse circumstances. You will also want to enjoy life to the fullest. You will even improve your life style. You will have monetary gains. And will spend a lot on books, jewellery and other luxurious items. You will be enjoying this whole process. You will also be determined to achieve your plans. You will earn lot of money through your efforts. You will spend quality time with your mate. Talking with youngsters will give you lot of energy. You will be full of self-confidence and courage and hope will flow. You will also attend a party but give time to family and friends. Time is to take some rest too.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Avoid quarrel with your boss. You need not crumble under work pressure. Your domestic responsibilities will increase. You will get full support of your family members and friends. You will feel secured, self-confidence will increase and your impression on others will be good. You will face problems because of wasteful expenditure but you will manage everything. You will also learn a new skill. Bank officials

should beware, otherwise people might level false allegation against you. Health of family members will not be good. You will not run away from family responsibilities. You will be able to enhance your prestige and reputation. You will get success in exams/interview.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is going to be a week which will bring you lot of happiness and prosperity. You will have financial gains. You will also get work orders from abroad. You will also make plans to travel abroad. People will pay attention to what you say. Your peers and bosses will be happy with your performance. You will be given added responsibility in your job. The graph of your fame and prestige will rise day by day. Matters in court cases will be decided in your favor. Husband and wife will have good understanding. House-wives will remain busy in their work and also will have time for recreation. New plans regarding the future will be made. You will focus on the renovation/ decoration of your house. Monetary situations will be strong and favorable.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will be getting lot of help from colleagues and bosses. Even your family members and friends will support you a lot. You will get lot of success in your work. Victory is written for you in whatever task you undertake and perform. Clearly, you seem to be on a role. You will also spend a lot of time with your family members. There will be love and bonding in family ties. You will miss a close and special person and get emotional about him/her. You will also get interested in occult sciences and want to know the truth of life. The life seems to be a big puzzle for you with its twists and turns. But you enjoy this fascinating journey which throws new challenges daily. You will make progress in your work with your own efforts. Do not take decision by being emotional. Your superiors will appreciate you for some great achievement.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is going to be a week which will give wonderful results. You will come closer to your partner. The misunderstanding of past will get removed. But keep away from controversy otherwise it will create a lot of tension in the family. But you will show a lot of intelligence and maturity. You will also enjoy wonderful relationship with your parents. You will look after them well. Focus on your work, otherwise it will not be finished in time. There will be a change in your daily routine and habits. You will defeat your enemies. New job/business offers will come. You will also undertake business/work related trips which will prove to be very beneficial. You will meet official and somehow get your work done. Situations will be favorable for working women.

Capricorn: (December 24 - January 20)

You will take lot of interest in constructive work. Your colleagues and family members will help you a lot. Your influence and fame will also increase. You will also undertake new projects. You could also fall in love with an unknown person whom you meet by chance. You will have no financial worries. You will keep yourself limited to your own affairs and won't meddle in the affairs of others. Your parents will be happy with you. Your differences with brothers will also get resolved. Matters in courts will come in your favor. People will pay attention to what you say. The graph of your fame and prestige will rise up day by day. You will also focus on the decoration of your home. The results of exams will be in your favor.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It is high time to look after your needs now. You will set new goals and will be conscious about your career. You will have no financial problems. Money will keep coming. Those who are unemployed will get new job opportunities. Unmarried persons are expected to get engaged. There will be a good news from somewhere. There will be a happy and joyous atmosphere at home. You will enjoy the cooperation of people around you. You will also fulfill your hobbies. You will solve your finance related problems. You will not keep any work pending. You will also make profits. Your health will be at its peak. You will also manage to keep your relatives happy. You will be successful in competitive exams. It is a great week for you.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It is high time to look after your needs now. You will set new goals and will be conscious about your career. You will have no financial problems. Money will keep coming. Those who are unemployed will get new job opportunities. Unmarried persons are expected to get engaged. There will be a good news from somewhere. There will be a happy and joyous atmosphere at home. You will enjoy the cooperation of people around you. You will also fulfill your hobbies. You will solve your finance related problems. You will not keep any work pending. You will also make profits. Your health will be at its peak. You will also manage to keep your relatives happy. You will be successful in competitive exams. It is a great week for you.

## Confidence Culture – Encouraging women whilst snubbing real problems



With Valentine’s Day around the corner, advice about confidence is proliferating. British Vogue enjoins women to boost their sexual confidence with slogans like “feel good in your body” and say goodbye to negative talk. Meanwhile Selfridges promises shoppers a sex and relationship “MOT”, in which “confidence coaching” for women comes as part of the package.

But (like dogs and Christmas), confidence is not just for Valentine’s Day. It is now a 24/7 obligation for women.

Inequality in the workplace? Women need to lean in and become more confident. Eating disorders and poor body image? Programmes promoting girls’ confidence and body positivity are the solution. Parenting problems? Let’s help make mums feel more confident so they can raise confident kids. Post-pandemic relationship sour? Well, confidence is, after all, “the new sexy”. Even the British Army now targets potential female recruits with the promise that joining the military will give young women confidence that “lasts a lifetime”.

The need for self-confidence has become so much a part of our common sense that it is presented as beyond debate. Cast as a feminist intervention, and aimed at the obvious good of empowering women, who could possibly be against it?

But the problem with these imperatives, programmes and interventions – Confidence Culture – is that they encourage women to undertake extensive work on the self and direct them away from calling out structural inequalities that are the real source of the problems women face.

### A personal deficit?

Self-confidence is presented as the solution to a wide range of issues across many spheres of life: from the welfare system to consumer culture, body image, the workplace, parenting, education and sex and relationship advice. Rather than identifying the root causes of structural inequality, confidence culture reframes social injustices in terms of internal obstacles and personal deficits through, for example,

familiar phrases such as “Your lack of confidence is holding you back,” or “We do this to ourselves.”

Take the pandemic’s devastating and disproportionate economic impact on women —including increased unemployment, the scaling back of paid work, and the widening gender pay gap. In response, workplace schemes have offered “confidence training” courses and advice for women, while organisations, life coaches and lifestyle media implore women to believe in themselves, “fill your own cup first” and “remember that confidence is a work in progress”.

Thus, instead of holding government, workplaces, corporations and the education system to account, confidence culture — even if well-meaning — calls on women to work on themselves in order to tackle their impostor syndrome, change the way they think, feel, communicate, hold their bodies and occupy space.

### Changing the world, not the woman

Confidence culture directs women ever more inward, shifting the responsibility and the blame for social ills onto the shoulders of individual women.

Moreover, with the exponential rise in stress and mental health issues — all profoundly exacerbated by years of austerity and now the pandemic — confidence and self-care apps, targeting women, have boomed. Several reports identified the growth of self-care apps as one of the biggest health and consumer trends of the pandemic, driven largely by women and millennials.

In the area of body image, most experts agree that pressures on women are intensifying. Yet rather than critically addressing these punitive and unrealistic ideals, beauty brands are hiring “confidence ambassadors” and female celebrities are advocating body positivity and self-love. From “woke advertising” to hashtags across social media and more, inspirational mantras and positive affirmations addressing girls and women relentlessly promote self-belief and positivity.

Women urgently need to shift this emphasis and tackle the structural inequalities that the pandemic has so clearly spotlighted and that the cost-of-living crisis is now highlighting so brutally. We need to challenge the endless encouragement of women and girls to work on and care for themselves (because no one else will). Rather than an individualised and psychologised confidence culture, we need to invest in building and sustaining social structures and policies that support, ensure and reinforce women’s safety, well-being and power.

We don’t need more emphasis on blaming and changing women, we need to change the world. (*The Conversation*)

"Anything you're good at contributes to happiness."

—Bertrand Russell

## The Shillong Times

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### Hijab & Religious Freedom

A controversy over students wearing hijab, starting from Karnataka, is raging now. Broadly, Muslims stress their "right" to do so and most others are not convinced whether such religious practices should be encouraged in educational institutions. The BJP government in Karnataka is obviously against this while Kerala governor Arif Mohammad Khan has taken a saner view by saying it's up to a school to decide on the dress code inside its precincts. He has also stressed that Islam does not make such an insistence and such campaigns would only lead to Muslim women losing opportunities for jobs. AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, on the other hand says a day will come when someone wearing hijab would be the PM of India.

In sum, the social atmosphere is getting vitiated by sectarian pursuits. India gives full freedom to various faiths to practise their religion and a secular mindset is prominent outside the realm of the BJP-RSS networks. Notably, RSS too has stressed that it considers all those who live in 'Bharat' as Hindus. Hinduism is not a rigid religious doctrine either. At the same time, the off-springs of the RSS and those who lead them have often undercut the fabric of social harmony by their sectarian, aggressive pro-Hindutva approaches. Christians demonstrate a spirit of co-existence. Muslims feel alienated from the time of Partition; more so in the Hindi belt and also in areas encompassing the western belt that bore the brunt of Partition-linked bloodletting.

The Kashmir-linked terrorism promoted by Pakistan with an evil eye as also the Wahabist pursuits further alienated Muslims from the mainstream. Pakistan cannot hope to take Kashmir Valley from India; India has as much muscle power, diplomatic strength and military clout. Indian Muslims would do well to see the positive side of the Indian systems and rise above rigid religious stances. In India citizens must learn to co-exist. The way the Indian government went about drafting the CAA and implementing it too deserved condemnation. In the process, India lost some goodwill it enjoyed in the Muslim world outside. So too with the hijab controversy now. There is no deficit for religious freedom in India, though there are aberrations which will need to be corrected. The matter should end there. The BJP, running the nation now, has a larger responsibility to maintain social harmony and mutual trust between religions, races, regions and castes. Ensuring everyone their due and not allowing indulgences by any side -- is what good governance is all about. Petty-minded politicians do not often see the larger picture.

# Meghalaya and the Politics of Convenience

By H H Mohrmen

The recent political developments in the state are surprising though not unexpected. The question to ponder upon is: how can the same people who blamed their twelve former colleagues for deserting the party would themselves do the same just two months later. The decision of the last five Congress MLAs to support the MDA government is an illustration of how low politicians can stoop in order to achieve their hidden interest. Earlier the same MLA blamed their former colleague for their merger with the AITMC, but in just a few months their own allegiance to the same

knowledge of the party high command, but they had even dared the MPCC or the AICC to punish them for their decision to support the NPP-led government. This is a clear indication of the steps that the five MLAs will take before the 2023 election. It is obvious that the MLAs are going to leave the Congress party for good and they are only waiting for the appropriate time to make their final move.

Of the two stalwarts that still remain for all intents and purposes with the Con-

gress party is on fire.

It was what can be called as the great betrayal because while he was busy attending the budget session in Parliament, Vincent H. Pala the Shillong MP was backstabbed by his own MLA. A former MLA who had shifted allegiance with Dr Mukul Sangma to AITMC said to me many months before he joined the new party, that the Congress in Meghalaya is so strong that only an insider can destroy it. The BJP 'oust Congress campaign' in Meghalaya is becoming a reality

to the state Assembly. The party and the president of the MPCC will have to move mountains and seas to prove that the state is still the stronghold of the Congress.

#### Congress is the spring-board for politicians

Except for a few politicians who are diehard regionalists, it is interesting to note that most of the politicians in the state had launched their political careers in the Congress party. The Congress seems to be a very good training ground for budding politicians although most of them betray the party when it is convenient for them to do so. It is also ironic that in the



party is uncertain. It is now obvious that the politicians' allegiance to any party is not because of the ideology that the party has but it is for their own interest and expediency.

#### A Marriage of Convenience

The decision of the remaining Congress MLA in the state Assembly to support the NPP-led MDA government is nothing but greed and fear of losing the elections in 2023. But what change can they bring to their constituents in 12 or 11 months time which they could not do in the last four years? The most pertinent question is whether the MLA has to be in power to be able to best serve their constituents? It is obvious that they don't have any principles and they are all there for power and money. Of course for the NPP the more the merrier and they don't have any obligation towards the Congress MLAs since the latter had themselves offered to support the government. Conrad Sangma has no responsibility towards the legislators because it is not even an alliance. But wise readers of this paper would be able to easily decipher what this move means. It would be wrong to conclude that this is not an indication of something big to happen before the 2023 election.

#### The Congress MLAs' next move

It is not rocket science to see which direction the wind is blowing. The MLAs have not only made the move without the consent and the

political scenario of the state there is at least one Congress-turmoil in every party in the state. KHNAM is perhaps the only party that does not have a former Congress in its fold. It is also not surprising then that the party will now have to contest against its own legislators in almost all the constituencies in the next election.

#### Thank goodness for the AITMC

The change in the political landscape of the state is so striking that the AITMC which did not even contest the last election is now a force to reckon with. The party which was only a few months old in the state of Meghalaya is now becoming the lone opposition party here. With AITMC becoming the only Opposition in the state, the next budget session and the summer sitting of the house will be interesting to watch.

#### When it is only about the politician's interest only

The politics in the state is becoming all about self-interest only. The sole goal of the MLAs is to win the elections at any cost even if it means betraying the party and the people that elected them. There is no circumstance that best illustrates this reality other than when the BJP and the Congress can be on the same boat. In the state of Meghalaya the political development in the last few months has clearly lent credence to the saying that politics is the art of the possible. In politics even arch enemies can work together.

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## To Sir with love: A tribute to Prof A.K. Nongkynrih

By Marylynne Lartang & the Students and Research Scholars, (Department of Sociology, NEHU)

"You must eat, drink, breathe and sleep Sociology....."

— (A.K. Nongkynrih)

These words still echo in the minds of his students. A year has passed since he silently left us and this earthly home to be away forever. A teacher who not just loved his profession but had a passion for it. Amongst many exciting things that a fresher like me would look forward to at the University on the first day of class would be the face of a friendly and approachable teacher. Little did we know that our expectations would soon run dry. For what we experienced was completely different. We sat in class with eager hearts and minds waiting for the 1st period. He entered the classroom at 9.30 am sharp and closed the door behind him. There was pin-drop silence, as he stood

he would surprisingly treat us to a coffee or tea break in the midst of a class when sleepy faces and yawns distracted him. But mind you! These were meaningful coffee breaks where we would end up in academic arguments over many issues plaguing our society such as gender issues, problems of development, politics of survival, tribal ethnicity, unemployment and youth empowerment - issues that he was deeply concerned about.

His academic duties and responsibilities never hindered his quest for exploring the rural and rustic life of villagers. Weekends saw him travelling to far-flung villages, often unmotorable areas where he would meet the community and discuss issues. "Bah Kyrham" as he was lovingly called, seemed



there glancing at each one of us with a cynical smile as if to say, "Here is a bunch of new recruits - I have a tough job to deal with them!"... The whole class stared at him from head to toe - This tall, dark and handsome teacher does mean business! They

to have a huge fan-following from the youngest to the oldest. He had a sense of accountability to his village, Pdenghshong in Sohra where he grew up. Visiting his village meant spending time with the church elders, the members of the

*A lover of nature he was for he would often take us for long walks around the campus introducing us to the indigenous trees he had planted but little was he aware, that we already plucked the pears and the plums from those trees. What fun we had when he would surprisingly treat us to a coffee or tea break in the midst of a class when sleepy faces and yawns distracted him.*

say 'The first impression is the last' and Lo and Behold! That moment the class saw him for the first time even before he uttered a word, he certainly created a lasting impression.

Time management and punctuality was one thing he always taught us for he would be the first to arrive and the last to leave work. A strict disciplinarian he was, for he would go to the extent of letting late comers learn a lesson by turning a deaf ear to the knocks on the door during a class. A health freak he was, for he would often give us advice about the dangers of fast food and how we should nurture nature and go for organic food. The 'Kong' at our canteen learnt not to use plastic cups for tea and the Chowkidar at our Department was more careful about checking on the taps that leaked and doors that banged on windy days.

A lover of nature he was for he would often take us for long walks around the campus introducing us to the indigenous trees he had planted but little was he aware, that we already plucked the pears and the plums from those trees. What fun we had when

darbar, and even checking on the school children and their education. He was well aware of his role as an academician as well as a public intellectual. Connecting to the community at the grass-roots level and his interest in uplifting them led him to become involved in a number of NGOs and Boards that fetched useful advice and wisdom from him.

The large crowd that gathered at his funeral bore witness to the fact that he had truly lost an amazing human being. The academia has lost a promising intellectual, a practical Sociologist down to the core, students have lost a mentor, guide and confidante, the Community has lost a friend, the corridors of our Department will forever miss his footsteps so swift and soft and yet so commanding....we could go on and on telling tales of what we miss. But as a true Sociologist we all believe in his famous adage that we often made fun of but today they seem so meaningful.... "There is Sociology in everything you see, feel, touch, eat, drink or sleep"... Goodbye Sir - We salute you!

### Letters to the Editor

#### India the next superpower

Editor,  
For thousands of years, India has been the centre of human civilization - a hub for trade, religion, history, and culture. It has hosted the largest empire in history, Great Britain. India's share of the world economy when Britain arrived on its shores was 23% and by the time they left it was down to below 4%. The British had plundered and looted \$45 trillion of our resources. Ironically as of 2020, India's footprint expands in the UK despite the COVID crisis, with a number of Indian companies operating in the UK; the total turnover of these companies added up to GBP 50.8 billion from GBP 41.2 billion. Britain's dependence on India does not end

there. Indians comprise about 1.4 million people in the UK, making up 6.6% of their population. The majority of the Indian population are blue-collared workers that the country depends on.

When Hillary Clinton visited India in 2009, the US Secretary of State's verdict was unequivocal: "I consider India not just a regional power, but a global superpower." What led America's strongest woman to say that? Well, because it's actually true. In 2015, India became the world's fastest-growing economy with a 5% estimated GDP rate. India with a GDP of almost \$3 trillion, occupies the 13th spot on the list of countries with massive GDP, international and military alliance, political and economic influence, and leadership skills. India's purchasing power parity (PPP) is expected to reach \$43 tril-

lion and will surpass the US by 2050. By 2040, India is expected to surpass the USA (in PPP terms) and become the second-largest economy. Alongside this Indian emergence, the international order is undergoing significant changes as well, with power increasingly diffused among states. These developments have the potential to put India as the world's most influential democracy, in the second half of the 21st century.

Since 1960, India's population soared by 209% from 450 million to 1.39 billion people in 2021. Over the coming decades, population growth will continue. By 2027, India's population is projected to surpass China, making it the most populous country in the world, and by 2050, its population is projected to reach 1.64 billion people. This growth will keep India young and its labour

force large. While China, the USA, and Europe's workforce decline, India's will grow to provide a major economic advantage.

However, India's economic growth is not guaranteed, our country's infrastructure which is key to attracting investments and fuelling further development is largely inadequate. To improve India's infrastructure to foster economic growth, it is pursuing mega large-scale projects such as the \$30 billion, Mumbai-Delhi Industrial Corridor which will have rail lines, airports, highways, smart cities, power projects, etc. India hopes to develop several more corridors between major cities. These corridors along with other projects will form a golden quadrilateral of infrastructure.

India is also pursuing a \$75 billion national highways program called "Bharatmala"

to upgrade and boost expressways. Along with this, it has also created "Sagarmala" a \$116 billion program to build and upgrade mega ports and establish 14 Coastal Economic Zones. India is constructing new cities to attract investments such as Dholera in Gujarat, a GIFT city, and two brand new greenfield smart cities. India is also developing a \$2.2 billion airport project in Mumbai.

Despite all these optimistic trends and predictions, India still has some major problems to overcome. First of all, climate change presents a huge threat. India has the largest social cost of carbon in the world, emitting 1 ton of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere, India's is \$86 per ton. In India, climate change has caused heat waves and sea levels to rise causing devast-

ation. Lastly, air pollution is causing serious health issues. In the 2021 report, 3 of India's major cities were listed in the Top 10. Lastly in terms of social division, India is still fighting to remove the legacy of its age-old caste system. Many of the so-called low-class individuals lack education, proper healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Despite all these issues, India is developing quickly in the realm of economic, military, cultural, and political influences are expanding every day, setting it up for Global Superpower status.

Yours etc.,  
Lyzander Edgar Sohkhlet  
St Edmund's School,  
Shillong

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

*"The act of dying is one of the acts of life."*

—Marcus Aurelius

## The Shillong Times

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### Meghalaya's sinecure appointments

DOES Meghalaya need a retired DGP to be reappointed as security advisor to the Government with pay and perks? What then is the role of the incoming DGP if not the safety and security of the state and its people? There are many reasons why people retire from their positions. It gives the new incumbent enough elbow room to improve the performance of his team by redesigning the whole system, of course, within the ambit of the Indian Police manual. In the past four years, the appointment of police personnel left much to be desired and was rife with political influence. Not that this is new to Meghalaya. Postings and transfers purely on merit are rare. This insidious political influence in the appointment especially of mid-career personnel is debilitating for the force. The question is why do politicians have to interfere in each and every posting and transfer. Is the bureaucracy a slave to politics? Isn't that why most officers, especially those that wish to serve the people in right earnest, move out of Meghalaya to serve elsewhere?

The Meghalaya Government has yet again violated Supreme Court orders dated July 3, 2018 which said that a state government cannot appoint an acting Director General of Police (DGP). The states are supposed to approach the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) at least 3 months before the retirement of the sitting DGP. The Supreme Court had categorically directed all the states to send names of senior police officers to the UPSC for being considered as probable candidates to be appointed as DGPs or Police Commissioners as the case may be. The UPSC, in turn, will prepare a list of three most suitable officers after giving due weightage to merit and seniority and the states will then appoint one of them as police chief. The bench had further stated that endeavour should be made to appoint a person as DGP who has a reasonable period of service left. The apex court also observed that any rule made by states or any state law on the subject of appointment of police officers "will be kept in abeyance".

In Meghalaya's case the Government only started the selection process on Dec 16, 2021 just 15 days before the DGP was to retire. According to the 2018 ruling, the Supreme Court had cautioned state governments not to appoint DGPs without first consulting the UPSC. Meanwhile the Supreme Court taking cognizance of Mr Prakash Singh's application for modification of its order of 2006 on Reforms and Transparency in State Police Force has allowed an officer with 6 months service left to be appointed DGP, since Mr Singh contended that states were using that clause to deprive deserving police officers from being appointed DGP. Will Meghalaya ever do anything right?

Racism has many expressions and dimensions. As a form of hatred it expresses the will-to-power. Premised on a racialized notion of physical beauty, it also implicates a highly subjective aesthetic judgment. Because race is a physical moniker, racism has a corporeal dimension — with an unavoidable aesthetic aspect. Mankind's tendency to sectarianism, which exacerbates the will-to-power, becomes aesthetic, when beauty aligns itself with power, severing itself from goodness.

Thus, colonialism left the colonized feeling inferior before white people — not only morally and mentally, but also aesthetically. Caucasian phenotypes, of which, color is but one, were deemed aesthetically superior to those of the black or brown person. Of these phenotypes, blond hair and blue eyes, became iconic in the colonial consciousness as symbols of true beauty, thereby defining their opposites as ugly. For, as one among the pairs of opposites, beauty and ugliness define and limit one another.

To understand this type of evil aesthetics and the power it wields, we must first understand external beauty. What is beauty and why does it matter? Aesthetic judgment is one among many types of human judgment. The human eye constantly seeks beauty, relishing the beautiful and revolted by the ugly. Like beauty, aesthetic judgment comes at myriad levels — ranging from the exterior to the interior, from the subjective to the objective, and from the material to the moral and the supra-moral. The more we descend into the body, through heightened body-consciousness, the more we seek power (rather than goodness). As a result, the more we decline towards subjective aesthetics. Thus it is not easy to define beauty or why it matters. Material beauty is, at best, a hint at true spiritual beauty, and at worst, an apparition that beguiles us despite being unreal. If physical beauty matters, this is only because at its highest, it points the way to divine beauty. Restless with thirst for beauty, our eyes are yet always discontented with material beauty, because it lacks the power to satiate. At best, it hints at the splendor of true spiritual beauty, which alone has the power to slake our thirst for beauty.

What are the different levels of beauty? At its lowest, beauty is material. This includes not only beauty of the human body, but of all

# On Racism and Beauty

By Deepa Majumdar

material objects, whether sentient or not. This therefore includes beauty of objects in the world of nature. Thus the waterfall is beautiful, as is the emerald forest. This also includes those aspects of beauty — like symmetry and proportionality — that draw unanimous exclamations. Material beauty brims with multiplicity because it is a compound of different bits of beauty — a conglomeration of aesthetic expressions, each pertaining to a different physical aspect, such as shape, color, symmetry, proportionality, etc.

Clearly this lower material aesthetic judgment lies in the eye of the beholder, so that it varies from person to person. Material beauty can also lie simultaneously, in the eyes of multiple unrelated beholders, who reach a unanimous aesthetic judgment without ever consulting one another. But unanimity does not make material beauty true or objective. Even when unanimous, our material aesthetic judgment remains subjective. It is therefore important to distinguish unanimity from objectivity. Just because everyone agrees with a judgment, need not mean it is true or objective. Thus, symmetry and proportionality need not be truly beautiful, despite the unanimous exclamations they draw. Inasmuch as this lower material beauty lies in the eyes of multiple unanimous beholders, it is entirely subjective. For, the human eye can be mob-like, especially when impassioned. Mobs, as we know, are unanimous, without thought, debate, or discussion. Collective and unanimous aesthetic judgments, in their raw subjectivity, can also be amoral and utilitarian. Thus there is nothing moral about symmetry or proportionality.

In modern man, this subjective notion of material beauty, which pursues power, thus severing itself from ethics, is tyrannical in its constant demand of beauty and revulsion of that which it deems ugly. To want everything to always be physically beautiful is not only tiresome, but unrealistic. A turbulent dance of the pairs of opposites, life sometimes highlights one, and sometimes its opposite. Objectifying the object of beauty, the modern eye contorts it to its own aesthetic demands, causing suffering to this object. Thus, modern man's tyrannical addiction to beauty contorts the natural object to become

what he wants it to be. In its insatiable thirst for physical beauty, the human self degrades the not-self in the natural object. This search for power-driven beauty brings suffering, not only upon those deemed ugly, but also upon the subject and object of material beauty. Aesthetically it degrades those it deems "ugly." Morally, it degrades to the carnal level, the subject seeking material beauty, but also the object it deems beautiful. For, the carnal eye objectifies and reifies those it deems beautiful — especially women — bringing untold suffering upon them. Thus Princess Diana had to suffer the indignity of a cult-prone Diana-mania.

The problem therefore lies with a carnal definition of beauty, which lies in the eye of the beholder, who worships and wields power through his aesthetic judgment, which he severs from ethics. That which is materially beautiful need not be morally beautiful. When racist, this carnal eye divides humanity into the beautiful and the ugly — deeming those wielding power beautiful, and those disempowered, ugly. As a subjective judgment, this type of evil aesthetics signifies descent into the body, or heightened body-consciousness. It therefore also signifies descent into the pairs of opposites, which make us "love" the beautiful, and loathe its opposite — swinging from extreme to extreme. The racist's definition of physical beauty is therefore a prime culprit in racism.

By contrast, a higher, more inward sense of beauty, has more to do with moral character. Overcoming the carnal and shunning power, this chaste eye alone is capable of being truly color-blind, because it transcends body-consciousness, so that it can appraise beauty in accordance with virtue alone. By finding beauty in moral character, this chaste glance is egalitarian before all monikers that divide humanity — whether, race, culture, class, or anything else. Unifying humanity, it sees people as good (hence morally beautiful), evil (hence morally ugly), or something in between. Because it is chaste, this eye first loves the beloved and only thereafter, as a consequence, finds the beloved beautiful — as opposed to the unchaste eye, which objectifies and hence hates its object of beauty. Overcoming the material sphere, this

chaste eye no longer relies on unanimity for truth, but on a higher moral objectivity. Far more objective than the unchaste, the moral aesthete yokes aesthetics with ethics, unlike the carnal aesthete, who severs aesthetics from ethics. Unlike the carnal eye, which objectifies its object of beauty, the chaste eye uses its greater integrity to bestow holism upon its object, thus revealing its hidden inner beauty.

When Dr. M. L. King said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," he was referring to the chaste eye that does not abdicate the reality of color or our corporeal phenotypes, but transcends body-consciousness to see inner beauty. This penetrating gaze means an all-holy aesthetic indifference to the corporeal, which is what true color-blindness should be about. Transcending power and the carnal sphere, thus detaching itself from physical appearance, the chaste eye, which draws aesthetics from ethics, focuses exclusively on inner beauty of moral character. By contrast, sectarianism pursues power, dividing humanity into those it deems beautiful and ugly and using material beauty as the ornate face of lust.

Beauty, therefore, comes in at least two categories — the material (or carnal), and the moral. Moreover, the material sphere has three types of beauty — that which lies in the eyes of the beholder, aspects of beauty (like symmetry, or proportionality) that lie in the eyes of multiple unanimous beholders, and divine beauty that shines through the material world. Like the first, the second too is subjective and severed from ethics, notwithstanding its unanimity. But raw divine beauty inspires something more than mere unanimity. Transcending ethics, it uses the material sphere as its conduit. Thus, a glorious sunrise, although physical, inspires in us a sense of awe, so that our aesthetic response far exceeds unanimity. The same may be said of a sunset, or a star-studded sky or an erupting volcano. As conduits of divine beauty they soothe us, but also make us awe-struck. For raw divine beauty expresses itself in myriad ways. Of this last level of material-beauty-as-divine-conduit, therefore, we may say that even if it is not primarily moral to being with, it gains moral and supra-moral status by serving as a Eucharist of divine beauty.

## It's all yours... after 25 years

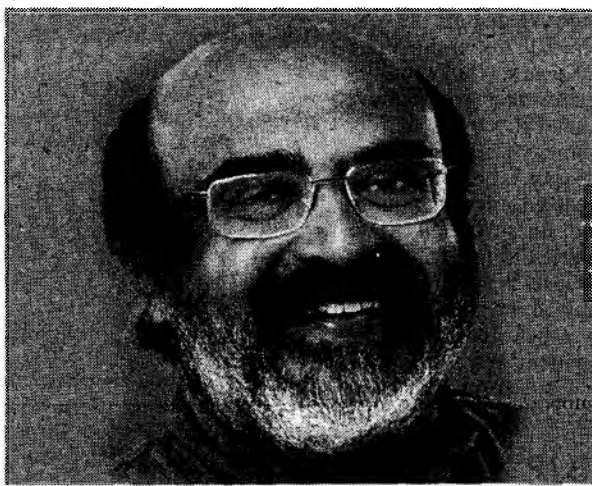
By Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac

India's economic performance has been among the worst in the world. According to the IMF in 2020, India's growth was (-)7.96, placing the country at the 150th rank, nearly at the bottom of the line-up of countries. This position reflects the mismanagement of Covid — India's stimulus package was the weakest among developed and similarly placed countries. Further, even before Covid, the economy was sliding down from around 8.2% growth in 2016-17 to 4% in 2019-20, on the eve of Covid. And even before that in 2016, demonetisation was akin to shooting at the tyres of a speeding car.

The Covid crash was so severe that the recovery in 2020 may appear one of the highest in the world. Data shows that the economy would be barely climbing back to the pre-Covid level of 2019-20. Even this achievement would depend upon the severity of the economic impact of the Omicron wave. Therefore, undoubtedly, the key macro-economic feature is that of stagnation. Of the key variables of aggregate demand exports and domestic investments seem to have climbed back to the 2019-20 level but this does not include private consumption demand. Many who expected the Union Budget would at

long gestation projects and would take time before their beneficial impact is felt. Nevertheless, the effort to increase capital expenditure is a welcome turn. China has been a forerunner in infrastructure creation, sustaining higher than 5% investment to GDP ratio for nearly three decades. This has been the main contributor to its international competitive strength.

But the key question is how this capital investment is being financed? In the 2022-23 budget, it has been achieved by squeezing social expenditure. With the overall expenditure remaining virtually the same and escalation in non-developmental revenue expenditure, the development revenue expenditure had to be cut. This total neglect of the poor and ordinary people is best exemplified by the reduction in the outlay of MGNREGS from the actual expenditure exceeding Rs 1 lakh crores in the past two years to Rs 73,000 crores. For core schemes for the poor, allocation has been reduced to Rs 99,000 crores from the previous year's revised estimate of Rs 1.21 lakh crores. This includes the allocations for SC/ST. The finance minister talked about Narishakti upgrading 2 lakh anganwadis but the allocation is frozen



at the revised estimates at Rs 20,000 crores.

least try to fill this demand gap have been deeply disappointed. The budget estimate of overall expenditure is Rs 39.45 lakh crores, which is only 4.6% higher than the revised estimate for the previous year. If one were to consider inflation, there would be a real drop in the government expenditure. The economy is expected to grow 8% - 8.5% in real terms during 2022-23, which implies that government expenditure - GDP ratio would take a dip during the current year. This is a perverse response to the current economic stagnation and would weaken recovery.

An explanation is that the government has been forced to be prudent because of inflation considerations. This is totally misplaced reasoning as the simple fact is that the present inflation is not because of high demand but on account of cost-push factors. The biggest culprit in pushing up the cost and prices is the increase in prices of petroleum products. A key premise of the budget calculations is that the international price of crude oil would remain at \$70-75 per barrel. But it has already breached \$93 per barrel. The increase in retail prices in India is held in check because of the upcoming State elections. The budget should have rolled back in entirety the additional taxes and cess imposed on petrol and diesel since 2014, when international crude oil prices saw a sharp fall and the argument was that the new taxes would therefore not get reflected in domestic retail prices. The union finance minister does not want to adhere to the same logic when the crude oil price trend has reversed and has now moved up sharply. Therefore, the budget is a recipe for stagnation.

The great expectations of the budget are on capital expenditure and the focus on digital technology. The 'Effective Capital Expenditure' is Rs 10.68 lakh crore in 2022-23 or about 4.1% of GDP and 27% more than the revised estimate of Rs 8.4 lakh crore for the current year, which in turn is nearly 28% higher than 2020-21 allocations. But these are

at the revised estimates at Rs 20,000 crores. The allocation for agriculture and allied sectors has increased by merely 2%. The related major schemes for farmers have seen a budget cut. Allocation of funds for fertilizer subsidy has been reduced by 25%. The allocation for procurement to FCI and the decentralised procurement scheme has been reduced by about 28% at a time when farmers are struggling for a legally guaranteed MSP.

The transfers to the States have come down from 6.91% of GDP in Revised Estimates 2021-22 to 6.25% in 2022-23. Plans are afoot to bypass the States in the implementation of 100% Center Schemes by directly transferring money to the beneficiaries.

The budget which has made no attempt to tax the super-rich and has squeezed the poor on the expenditure side and this is surely going to further widen the obscene level to which inequality has widened during the neoliberal years. In 1991, the share of top 1% of the households in the national wealth was 16%. By 2020, it had increased to 42.5%. In sharp contrast, the share of the bottom 50% of the households in the national wealth declined from 8.8% to 2.8% during the same period. Similarly, there has been a dramatic widening of inequality in the distribution of national income also. Given the 'K' shaped recovery from the pandemic, inequality has widened to an unbearable level. The recent Oxfam Report has sharply highlighted the differential impact of Covid on the rich and poor. The budget has added to the increasing gap between the rich and poor by ignoring inequality and poverty. The budget has been described as a vision for the next 25 years. A cartoon captured the tragicomic situation. The FM and the PM are holding a picture of sweets and goodies before a poor family sitting down to dine. The PM says "It's all yours... after 25 years."

(Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac is the former Finance Minister of Kerala) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress)

### Letters to the Editor

#### University's desire for convenience impacts adversely

Editor, It has become obvious now that NEHU is deliberately tending towards online mode of exams as the default system of conducting the external university examinations in colleges. Having being compelled to adopt this method by the pandemic and after having realised the convenience and immense benefits that such a method provides to it, the university now imposes this system on all colleges at the drop of a hat even when the pandemic has been downgraded to an endemic by the WHO.

There appear to be several factors that have encouraged this rather dubious approach to conducting exams in such a manner. And mind you we are talking about that level of exams that would redefine the lives and futures of thousands of students of the state of Meghalaya. Those who have graduated from our colleges in Meghalaya through online exams are already in danger of being sidelined by reputed educational institutions and public sector undertakings that are expressing doubts over the validity of the degrees earned through online exams and the integrity of students who have graduated through such exams. They are now stained with a mark that could have a detrimental impact on their lives.

The first factor that could be highlighted here is the convenience of conducting exams whereby the university places all the burden and

responsibility of conducting the exams on colleges leaving them to decide on the platform and the manner in which the exams are to be conducted while it takes no responsibility to introduce a platform that it has designed in response to the need of the hour. Secondly, it no longer needs to print question papers at all, except one copy for its file, as it can simply send the PDF file of the question papers to the colleges which are then to be sent to the students through whatever means the colleges adopts to conduct the exams. Thirdly, there appears to be no need to pay teachers and staff for invigilation duties as they are thought to be conducting the exams from the comforts of their homes. Fourthly, by throwing the responsibility of deciding on who and how to correct the exam scripts on the colleges, the University does not have to trouble itself with the usual coding of scripts, recording of scripts, selecting of examiners, transporting of scripts to colleges and so on. And in the process, the university ends up profiting greatly in terms of money, time, energy and personnel. But more importantly, it no longer bears the responsibility of ensuring a smooth and fair exam while having the temerity to hold every college accountable if the exam does go wrong, in spite of the fact that the University has done nothing to ensure the validity and integrity of the exams. What is the use of such a university then?

There could be a hidden agenda behind all this. It is very much possible that the University would like to slowly cut all

colleges loose and free itself from all the administrative hassle of managing so many colleges. And these pandemic induced strategies are but its clever and self-seeking ways of achieving this.

The sad fact remains that in the midst of all such machinations and orchestration it is the students who end up becoming unwitting victims, maimed and marred for life by such thoughtless acts.

We can only hope for better sense and wisdom to prevail and for normalcy to return. We cannot and should not stand on the side-lines and watch our children being made scapegoats at the altar of convenience.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request  
(A concerned Parent)

Via email

#### Hijab for piety, not enmity!

Editor, It is not surprising that some women still favour wearing heavy veils though that may hinder her from becoming her best self. Everyone has his/her own kind of choices and preferences in life; we have no right to ridicule them. Her or him. But, what is disgusting is that the group of schoolgirls involved in the hijab row of Karnataka have been incited by top leaders and celebrities. Are they not the same people who have clamoured to free women from the shackles of repressive subjugation? Then why the double standards? Not just that but women who have not worn any covering over their heads also came

forward and provoked the gullible crowd to jump into the pit of servitude. Sadly this case has been given so much coverage by the international media. They seemingly shifted their pitch from the "notion of liberation" to bondage! This is uncalled for.

While I do not subscribe to misleading opinions in favour of burka or against it, a few comments by the level-headed people caught my attention. A scholar from Lahore - Khalid Umar, who now lives in London, laments with frank earnestness by saying --- "Staying in a beautiful country like India you are still fighting to wear what Muslim women in Islamic nations are trying to get rid of! How much more political can you get? When living abnormal & imposed life is conditioned as a normal one, a normal one surely seems like a terror! True is the saying that it is all about a perspective. For Islam, their perspective has become a talk & laughter of the world." A similar concern is also shared by another outspoken lawyer from New Delhi -- Ms. Subuhi Khan who is well-versed in the Holy Scripture of Islam. In her lecture a couple of days ago Ms. Khan remarks: "The first wife of Prophet Muhammad - Khadijah al-Kubra was a very pious businesswoman who freely interacted with both males and females; she never confined herself within the four walls of a household. There are several undesirable practices in our society that have brought a bad name to our culture. This has ultimately misled our impressionable youths as we have witnessed in the hijab

controversy now."

The above comments deeply touched my heart. They are a genuine voice concerning how women have been subjected to inhuman oppression and exploitation for ages which is itself against all holy books. Well, I will not go further but the sense of "rationality" and "piety" should go hand in hand in the 21st century. "Purity" of heart and feeling of "equality" alone help create a conducive environment to broaden our outlook. Of course, one should not stand against those who prefer to wear burkas or practice their sacred customs in their personal life --- that is an individual choice. But, in the public and academic spheres, each of us should be "accommodative" and considerate. Nothing should stand in one's way of personality development. God will shower his blessings upon us if we learn to live and also let others live in peace and harmony. Hijabs are for piety, not for enmity!

Yours etc.,  
Saili Gwalji,  
Shillong

#### Need to protect our bio-resources

Editor, The Environment Ministry's proposed amendments to the Biological Diversity Act 2002 may lead to commercialisation of natural resources instead of their conservation and deprive people who depend on these resources of their rights. The Union Ministry of Environment had proposed amendments to the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 through the Biological Diversity Act

(Amendment) Bill 2021. Diluting the original Act for exploiting natural resources has far reaching consequences.

The Act laid emphasis on conservation of biodiversity and recognition of rights of communities who are protectors of biodiversity. The amendment Bill, on the other hand, does not seem to give importance to these. As per the original Act, prior approval from the National Biodiversity Authority was required for accessing biological resources for certain categories of people and corporate bodies but as per the amendment, no company which is incorporated or registered in India does not need to take the approval of the National Biodiversity Authority. When organisations or researchers use indigenous biological resources for commercial purposes without permission, it leads to exploitation of bioresources. Attempts by foreign firms to obtain patents on indigenous products in India are examples for this.

Environmentalists point out that the amendment was cleared without adequate consultation and without seeking the public comments. Such hasty decisions taken without consulting people and experts will have far reaching consequences. The 2002 Act considers all offences against the environment criminal offences. The new Bill, on the other hand, proposes to reduce such offences against the environment to only civil offences. Considering the ill effects of the new Bill, the government must make appropriate changes in it so that our bio-resources are not damaged and people are not deprived of their rights.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G.S.,  
Kollam

*"The responsibility of carrying and bringing a new life into this world is one that cannot be taken lightly."*

— Gloria Estefan

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 185 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022

### India up for loot

INDIAN banks have been exposed to scams and loot in frequent iterations in recent years. Business establishments are now seeing an opportunity to loot banks and escape into thin air or park their funds abroad and shift their bases to tax havens. What is also known is that the political establishment that runs the country is sitting back and playing the fiddle or is shifting the blame on others. The latest episode is of the "biggest loot" of banks -- by the ABG group of shipbuilders and repairers based in Surat. It took away loans of nearly Rs 23,000 crore from a consortium of 28 banks including SBI, ICICI etc and is claiming their business collapsed after the 2008 global financial meltdown.

The loans were sanctioned between years 2005 and 2010 without due diligence from the consortium of banks. This is exactly the reason for most of the bank frauds involving business sharks. Once the company's going is "not good," those who ran it acted in a frenzy to collect funds from as many banks as possible and mischievously diverted the cash to other entities like the ABG Singapore that they ran. Funds were diverted also to six tax havens. All fraud could not have happened without the quiet backing from responsible governments and banking agencies. The finance ministry was caught napping. Chances are that these men intentionally acted slow. The company's accounts were marked NPAs (bad loans) in end-2013. A restructuring of the accounts followed in the next four months. In another two months' time, the UPA went out of power and the NDA took charge of India's governance. The restructuring failed and the account was declared NPA again in 2016. The SBI that got wind of what was going wrong could not file a complaint for years. It did so only in 2019. It made the matter public only a few days ago.

The finance ministers of the UPA and NDA governments, who should have taken quick remedial or preventive steps, are bound to go scot-free. As would the RBI brass. Nirmala Sitharaman says "determining the elements of a fraud" takes more than four years. India's systems, even the judiciary, have not been of any help to check or rectify such situations. The name of the game is to drag matters on for years. When public sector banks suffer such huge losses, the nation's wealth is being defrauded. The people who pay taxes through their noses are the ultimate losers. Archaic systems and rules would ensure that the guilty ultimately escapes retribution. India is today up for open loot.

# Vanua: The Fijian Concept of Land

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

To every indigenous community (Adivasi/Tribal) land is equivalent to a temple and land is intrinsic to the life of the community. This relation is expressed in their folklores, songs and manifested through their cultures and dances. From West Papua to Chattisgarh to Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills in Meghalaya the indigenous people have a shared belief and strong bonding with land and the entire eco-system. A comparative study will enable us to derive a convergence on the concept of land and ecology- its preservation and management by various indigenous communities across the Universe.

Fiji is an independent Island Nation in the South Pacific Ocean and it is formed by a group of about 520 Islands and islets. The total land area of 18, 343 square kilometres is scattered over 650,000 square kilometres. Like other British colonies, Fiji is also one of the nations where the British rulers brought indentured labourers from India etc., between 1897 and 1916 and the Indo-Fijian community had for a very long period constituted the majority of the population and played a major role in economic activities. However, there are also poor Indo-Fijian farmers in the Island and Fiji has had to deal with the insider-outsider conflict which also resulted in social unrest and political instability. Historically, the indentured labourers from India were slaves and were forced to work in sugar cane farms. Their descendants are now living in the Islands for over a hundred years. When Fiji attained independence in 1970, those Indo-Fijians whose ancestors had been uprooted from their country of origin had nowhere to go, but only the Islands and Islets in Fiji which they called home. This has given rise to greater conflict between the Indo-Fijians and the indigenous people of the Islands which is causing ethnic division.

The major flashpoint in the conflict is centred around land, but beyond the conflict there are also people to people interface to resolve it. For example, in the village of Vatuadova, about 100 Indo-Fijian families and 3 Fijian families live and thrive in the 2000 acres of farmland owned by the Fijian village clan called Nadogo mataqali and which was headed by a chief named Laisenia. Approximately 1,850 acres of land was leased to Indo-

Fijian tenant farmers and the military coup in Fiji in 1987 had made the lives and future of Indo-Fijians very insecure. The Indo-Fijian farmers who feared that they would be evicted from their farmlands went to meet Laisenia and shared their fears with him. Perhaps, they expected to be advised to leave the village but Laisenia the village head responded thus, "If they (Fijians) try to send you away, they will have to send me first. I will defend you".

Although, Vanua literally means land, it is an inclusive language as it encompasses flora and fauna, rivers and mountains, sea and its fishing grounds, reefs, crops, fruits etc. The study about the concept of land in this region is interesting as one has to relate it with sea life. In the Pacific context, land comprises not only the earth's surface but the surrounding ocean as far as one could traverse. This land-sea combination is unique and life in the region is not only about land or coconut trees, but includes the sea, fishes, reefs and all that are in it. In the Fijian's worldview, people, land, sea and the sky are interconnected. Vanua also refers to the people or Lewi ni Vanua which means that people are the inner part of Vanua. Without the people, Vanua is like a body without a soul. In the South Pacific region those terminologies which speak about land in relation to life are identical to the word for womb or placenta. Vanua is like a mother who feeds, cares and protects her children. Vanua has been created to help humans in difficult times, to care for humans in times of trouble and to protect them in times of danger. According to I.S Tuwere, "to cast out from one's Vanua is to cut off from one's source of life or one's mother...and to take away land from the people means taking away life..." In Fiji land is identity and it is the basis of their ethnicity. Moreover, land in the Fijian context is not a saleable commodity.

The Fijian way of life is belongingness to the land and sea. There is a deep sense of belonging and the concept of *cauviti* or naming reflects this idea. A clan is named after a tree or fish and this gives them a sense of belonging. A Fijian does not belong to a region or frontier but he or she sees oneself as originating from the land or sea

where his/her ancestors had founded or landed and after whom the land was named. A Fijian belongs to Vanua or is owned by it. In other words, a Fijian derives his or her name from the Vanua.

The major threat to any indigenous community is the alienation of land and numerous indigenous communities are facing extinction. The Fijian community has been built on the profound concept of Vanua. As against this concept the Fijian community is being threatened by wanton greed and rapid industrialization which has alienated the indigenous community from their own land. Since 1946, the undersea nuclear test and dumping of nuclear wastes into the ocean had adversely impacted sea life. In the South Pacific region, whenua, fenua, fonua, enua, aba and vanua (these are terminologies and concepts which pertain to land/ecology used by diverse indigenous groups in South Pacific) is under grave threat. The region is also facing the problem of rising sea levels affected by global warming and soil erosion due to large-scale deforestation.

The onslaught of globalization and profit-centred economy has resulted in large scale exploitation against the Vanua. Today economic value means market value and a product or activity with no market value is useless. Thus, a profit-driven economy revolves around a self-centred attitude to plunder, loot and exploit for one's own interest. This is the biggest challenge that indigenous communities all over the world are facing in this era of economic liberalization. Not just Fiji, but in India indigenous communities from North East to Central India who are inhabiting the mineral-rich regions are facing similar threats and their survival is at stake.

Meghalaya, a tribal State is also rich in mineral deposits, but the State should never push for large scale industrialization or allow construction of big dams for the reason that these will destroy the whole eco-system and render the majority of tribal population landless. For 50 years, we had witnessed how extractive mining is polluting rivers and damaging the bio-diversity which are beyond recovery. It has also impoverished people. Meghalaya with its unique

land holding system which the tribals have inherited since time immemorial is also under threat in this neo-liberal era. The rising numbers of landless tribals should be a matter of great concern and generate public debate. Let me give you a concrete example as to how a Khasi tribal family can become landless? As the cost of living, (in terms of spending in education and health care), is exponentially high, hundreds of Khasi tribal families are selling away their paddy fields, lands etc to a few rich tribals in order to meet the basic needs in life. Five years ago, when I was undergoing Cancer treatment, I encountered a family that was confronted with this dilemma: if the doctor can assure the recovery of a family member from terminal illness, they were ready to sell off their paddy fields to meet the medical expenses!

Land in Meghalaya is a speculative economy and there are reports that certain categories of community lands or commons or "Ri-raji" have been unscrupulously transformed into private property. The tribals in Meghalaya need a serious rethinking on the idea of "icid jaitbynriew" or love for Khasi land and people. There is a correlation between poverty, migration, landlessness and cost of living and one has to address them holistically.

In the light of these threats there is a need to rediscover the wisdom of the past in order to arrest and respond to these threats adequately. Thus, the concept of Vanua is one of the wisdoms that has to be rediscovered for the salvation of the whole creation. One more important thing that I learnt from the Fijian culture is the idea of interdependence. Leslie Baseto rightly termed it, the theology of interdependence. In human relationships there is reciprocity and striking interdependence among the whole creation. The Vanua is relational and is inclusive of land, people, sea and sky. The negation of one means the negation of others. The concept of interdependence gives people a god-like character such as love, compassion, co-operation, sharing and solidarity. Every member of the Vanua has the freedom to enjoy it. The sea is open to everyone who could navigate his/her way through.

*(This is an extract from the Paper presented in the Interface program held in Pacific Theological College Suva, Fiji, 2004)*

## Chief ministers meeting to save federalism is significant

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stand for a strong Centre is well known by now, and also how these are undermining and weakening the very provision of federalism in the Constitution of India, both in letter and spirit. We also have examples when the Modi government was not able to legally undermine the elected opposition led state government, it changed the very definition of the "government" against the spirit of the Constitution of India. The proposed Chief Ministers meet by the Chief Minister of Bengal Mamata Banerjee to be held in Delhi soon is thus significant.

Modi's attacks on federalism and usurping the powers of the state for a stronger Centre means many things and most important among them is systematically weakening the autonomy of the states in fulfilling their obligations as per the state list of the Constitution of India, and also those obligations that are to be shared with the Centre as per the concurrent list. Apart from the blatant misuse of power, Modi government at the Centre has been interfering in the governance of the other two tiers -- the State and the Panchayati Raj -- through various schemes that are not on the Central list of the Constitution of India, but on the state or concurrent list, for the sole purpose of doing politics there directly from New Delhi highhandedly. While doing so the Modi government has even placed nominated bodies/persons over the elected bodies/persons thereby violating the fundamental principle of democracy. Modi has been doing all these perhaps due to his fear psychosis and misunderstanding of federalism of India as envisaged in the Constitution. Stronger federal structure does not mean a weak Centre. To understand this one just needs to simply go through Constitutional debates. Modi's ideas simply do not stand the test of reason and the Constitution of the country, hence most of them are unreasonable and unconstitutional.

To have a clearer understanding only one example should be sufficient here to know that these are not merely allegations by some opposition leaders for the sake of opposition. Let us take the case of Delhi where there is an opposition-led elected government. When Modi government started interfering through its appointee Lieutenant Governor the case went to the Supreme Court of India which in 2018 had to rule that the Lieutenant Governor does not have independent decision-making powers and the real power must lie with the elected government. Not only that the SC ruled that "a balanced federal structure mandates that the union does not usurp all powers and the states enjoy freedom without any unsolicited interference from the centre..." there is no room for absolutism and there is no room for anarchism also." Against this SC ruling Modi government brought a law last year and changed the definition for the "government" in Delhi to mean "Lieutenant Governor," thereby making a nominated or appointed person exercise power over the elected body by violating the very principles of democracy. There are many such examples of anti-democratic acts in the Modi Raj in which nominated or appointed persons and bodies are lording over elected bodies through central schemes for States and Panchayati Raj.

The immediate provocation for the proposed meet of opposition chief ministers is due to the rifts between the Governors and Chief Ministers of opposition ruled states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Delhi apart from grievances sounded by the Telangana and Maharashtra. Governors are appointees of the Centre while chief

ministers are elected by the people of the state. It is a grave misunderstanding of the Constitution of India by the Modi government that their constitutional mandate permits them to lord over the opposition ruled states through their appointee Governors over democratically elected state governments led by opposition. This is simply an extension of this gross misunderstanding or anti-democratic approach of the Modi government. While as per the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India, Governors are simply to assist both the states and the centre in good governance to prevent, warn, inform, or act against any Constitutional breakdown. The institution of Governors was not meant for doing petty politics and lording over democratically elected state governments. The proposed meet of the chief ministers would discuss the "Constitutional overstepping and blatant misuse of power by the Governors," M K Stalin, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu has said after the chief minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee suggested the meeting. Stalin reiterated DMK's commitment to uphold State autonomy in his tweet that came soon after a heated exchange with West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar who had prorogued the state Assembly. Though this particular act of the Governor was defended on the grounds that it was done following the recommendation of the cabinet, TMC's declaration to bring a resolution against the Governor in the current budget session accusing him of transgressing constitutional limits says a lot about the rift between the Governor and the Chief Minister.

It should also be noted that Governor Dhankhar had recently said in a tweet that the state had become "a gas chamber for democracy" upon which CM Mamata had blocked him. Mamata has also said that she had requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi in writing several times, requesting for his removal, but no action has been taken.

As for Tamil Nadu, it is worth recalling that the Governor R N Ravi has been accused of blocking anti-NEET bill passed by the assembly that is against the Modi government's national medical entrance examination. The Central law it is feared interferes with the interests of the state and it is believed that the Modi government has brought it for playing politics of reservation in the country, though health and education both are state subjects. Chief Minister Stalin and several other political parties have decided to send the bill again to the governor demanding that it be forwarded to President of India for his assent.

Chief Minister of Telangana K Chandrashekhar Rao has said that he would be meeting Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai, and Mamata Banerjee is to meet him in Hyderabad soon. He is also in touch with several opposition parties in an attempt to forge a greater alliance in the fight to save federalism from Modi's attack. Congress ruled states such as Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have also been undergoing troublesome time due to the Centre's interference. Chief Minister of Delhi, Kejriwal has been fighting for state's autonomy in governance for a long time. Mamata Banerjee has already declared her wish for all regional parties to unite, fight, and defeat Modi in 2024. The only weakness of this move for such a grand opposition alliance against Modi's attack on federalism and all the pillars of the Constitution of India is exclusion of the Congress, but still the move is significant. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Blatant attempt at exploitation

Editor,  
We know that the church and several of its institutions have not exactly covered themselves in glory in recent times and much has been written about this. But, an advertisement from a reputed missionary educational institution for a post of peon which appeared in the classified column of your newspaper on February 15, 2022 perhaps takes the cake in its brazen attempt to exploit the present desperate unemployment situation.

As per the above advertisement, the concerned institution wants applicants to have a minimum qualification of class 12 ( 2nd division) with knowledge of computer and 5 years experience in Hardware and Network Administrator and Smart Class Coordinator. Is this not a big ask for the post of Peon? Is it not true that a peon's job does not require any particular skills? My understanding is that seeing how even the highly skilled unemployed youth are desperate for any kind of job, the concerned missionary institution is adopting a mercenary approach to get highly skilled services by paying a pittance. To call it unfair is an understatement. Since it is done by a mission-

ary institution, I call it a case of moral degradation.  
In conclusion, I would like to say that I have lived long enough to see that the church is not changing the world anymore. Instead, the church is now being moulded by the world in its own image.

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swett,  
Shillong- 2

#### Online examinations a farce

Editor,  
Apropos 'University's desire for convenience impacts adversely' (ST Feb 15m 2022) I would like to throw in my weight in support of the latter. Covid had impacted education the worst. NEHU is yet to learn from the recently concluded examination that online exams had devastated those students who take examinations as sacrosanct with full conscience without allowing any prompting in spite of the absence of invigilators. On the contrary, online exams have lifted the scores of undeserving students to 100% by professors who in order to advertise their colleges have lost all conscience and blindly gave inconceivable scores.

Two pre-Covid toppers failed to get admission into NEHU as they lost to the

final two semesters from the same college during Covid when it was simply madness and free for all. The worst impact of online exams is that it pushes unimpaired students to hope against hope very much like those who pass with 20% grace marks in SSLC. Hence even those who are weak in Mathematics begin to aim for Medicine and Engineering etc.

Let the NEHU VC realise that those marks allotted for online exams with no approved paper setter or board of moderators who should be tight-lipped after leaving the examination centre with no printing press expert to elude cyber crime in this era is fraught. In these exams the poorly paid evaluator who has to spend sleepless nights to do justice to the answer scripts has been done away with.

And how would underserving students who passed the online exams face the 2-year post graduate course? It would be a never-ending chain reaction and ultimately education suffers. And last but not least, let the concerned parents be courageous enough to write their full names and also include other parents with similar concerns so that the VC pays heed to their concerns and arguments, and failing which, the parents may be compelled to seek legal justice if need be.

Yours etc.,  
W Passah,  
Via email

#### Unwarranted criticism against the church

Editor  
It is unfortunate to read some letters to the editor in your esteemed daily written by Glenn C. Kharkongor - 'The Church is not infallible' and Lydia Kharkongor - 'An article that challenges' (both dated February 10, 2022). Being associated with missionaries in the mission stations (rural areas), I totally disagree with their general view about missionaries and missionary-led institutions. I humbly request them to do a thorough research of these institutions and missionary works before putting up their views in a public space. Definitely, there may be one or two who are not in line with what the service ought to be but to generalize and blame the whole mission of the Church is totally wrong. The Church is trying its best for a better society but I believe that it cannot be done within a short time. Issues like poverty of single mothers, malnutrition of children and degradation of environment are often the main concerns of the Church in Meghalaya. Personally, I have attended several seminars on these issues and at the same time had immediately responded

by taking necessary action. But can the Church alone reach each corner of the State to solve these issues immediately? I believe not. There are many who do not agree with some of the Church's activities as well. In that case, can the Church be blamed for not doing anything?

To deal with environment conservation, Pope Francis had written an encyclical letter in 2015 named "Laudato Si". In this letter the Pope exhorts the entire Church to care for the environment and in particular late Archbishop Dominic Jala had often encouraged the faithful to care for the home environment. Therefore, it is wrong to say that the Church in Meghalaya is silent on issues of environmental degradation. On the other hand, to say that Don Bosco's institutions are now serving the elite or are commercialized is totally wrong and unacceptable. Perhaps the individuals had an unfortunate experience with one or two institutions but that cannot be taken as a general conclusion in the public space. With due respect to the individuals, I totally disagree with their views vis-a-vis the institutions.

As a teacher and a warden to some hostels of Don Bosco in the mission places I found another story contradictory to what is being pointed out by those re-

spected individuals. In fact, I was given an opportunity to collect the hostel and school fees when the missionary was not at home. To my surprise I found minimum fees being paid by many, yet no noise was heard from those missionaries. Instead they are working hard for the well-being of the children. Is this not a charitable and a helping hand to the poor students from villages? Thus, to draw conclusions from an unfortunate incident of one or two institutions is not just fair to the hard work of many missionaries of Don Bosco in the rural areas/parishes. To my knowledge there are Don Bosco institutions in collaboration with the past pupils that run evening schools and evening colleges in the city for the poor students. Is this not a charitable act for the poor? Therefore, I humbly request the individuals to refrain from generalising stray incidents and forget the vast majority that selflessly serve the poor and needy in the mission stations.

Yours etc.,  
Aiborlang Nongsiej,  
South West Khasi Hills  
District

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

"The more you sweat in peace,  
the less you bleed in war."

-- Norman Schwarzkopf

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.186 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2022

### Illegal Coal Mining Saga

**FORMER** Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma has repeatedly called out the illegal coal mining and transportation that is a daily occurrence and is witnessed by all those who travel along the routes through which the coal trucks are passing. Interestingly there are police checkpoints right from the coal mining areas to the highways where it is being transported. The duty of police is to check whether coal is being illegally mined and transported out. If coal is still leaving the state what are the police personnel doing? What is the order given to them? Is it to ensure smooth passage upon payment of certain sums of money or to stop the coal trucks and register FIRs against them? If the police were carrying out their duties there would have been thousands of FIRs at each of the districts and the courts would have been overwhelmed with these cases.

The question is how such grave illegalities can happen over years without detection. Is there a single policeman who has been hauled over the coals for failing to do his duty? Is the law and order machinery so decadent that it allows itself to be used as a political tool? The reason why former DGP, Prakash Singh approached the Supreme Court for police reforms was to check the complete politicisation of the police force, especially the appointment of DGPs. A conscientious policeman, Mr Prakash Singh was also deeply perturbed by the quality of policemen recruited at the level of the states where corruption is at its height.

However, policing is only one part of the illegal coal mining saga; the entire government machinery from the Mining to the Transport Department are all involved. It is a well-oiled nexus which works according to the diktat of the respective ministers in charge of the Departments. The bureaucracy in Meghalaya is not known to stand up to politicians. Every official adopts the path of least resistance. Since challans are forged to show that coal is being transported from Assam and is crossing Meghalaya en-route to Bangladesh, it is obvious that this is happening at the behest of the Government. Neighbouring Assam is more vigilant in detecting the fraud because it is losing income tax worth crores of rupees when papers clearly show that coal trucks have passed through Assam on their way to Meghalaya. This has been the modus operandi adopted by the MDA Government since it ruled Meghalaya in 2018 and no power on earth seems able to dismantle this game of thrones. Meghalaya is turning into a rogue state and even the Opposition is unable to stem the tide either than making a repeated media spectacle about illegal coal mining. As long as the voters are not afflicted by this venality, nothing will change.

# Racist Aesthetics and Plato

By Deepa Majumdar

Genuine colour-blindness, which enables greater objectivity, refuses prejudice based on colour, yet, for the sake of justice, recognizes colour where it matters – in situations of colour-based oppression. But when we sublimate the unchaste eye to reach the all-holy aesthetic indifference (in the material sphere) that characterizes the chaste eye, we reach still higher, to a greater objectivity through a noble body-blindness. This transcendence means a refusal to subject physical phenotypes to aesthetic judgments. Seeing a person for who he is, rather than how he looks, begins the hallowed state of true respect. But until we attain this high moral altitude, we cannot help but engage in lethal body-based subjective aesthetic judgments that divide people into the beautiful, the ugly, and shades in between.

Racism deploys the two lower levels of subjective material beauty – that which lies in the eyes of the single beholder and that in the unanimous eyes of multiple beholders who agree without necessarily consulting one another. By worshipping racialized beauty, while demeaning those he deems ugly, the racist worships power (not goodness), thus harming his aesthetic object with the full force of his worldliness, but also himself, morally. Since the twin halves of power are sadism and masochism, pursuit of racialized beauty engenders a sado-masochistic aesthetics that pollutes the relationship between the racist and those he deems ugly. Drawing his dubious aesthetics and worldliness from a sense of moral, mental, cultural, and economic superiority to his object of racism, the racist traps himself in a narcissistic bubble. Imbued with sadism, his worldliness weighs heavy, burdening the rabbit with a jaundiced eye and a toxic worldview. When we regard the same phenotypes beautiful in some races and ugly in others, we become unethical and hence irrational in our aesthetic judgments. Rejoinders like, "Black is beautiful" or "Brown is beautiful" cannot remove racism or resolve this breach in morality, rationality, human rights, and justice. Although relatively ethical (because they do not deem anybody ugly), these counter judgments fall short of true body-blindness, which transcends the carnal sphere of pleasure and pain by favouring essence over appearance. To overcome racism, the race-conscious carnal eye must sublimate itself, overcoming its sense of corporeal beauty, and ascending to the all-holy aesthetic indifference of the chaste eye. If we are to conquer racialized beauty standards, sexist objectification of the female

body, and corporeal prejudice against the differently abled, we must become aesthetically indifferent to physical beauty. Thus refreshed, the chaste eye pierces through bodily appearance to see the light of pure essence within the human person. How do we ascend from corporeal to moral and supra-moral beauty? By transcending worldliness and carnal awareness, through a self-willed sublimation of our ordinary aesthetic awareness that converts the will-to-power to a will-to-service. Although challenging, this ideal should serve as our birthright. For, as human persons, we alone (not animals) possess this universal potential for transcending body-consciousness. Yet the human body is aesthetically challenging because it defies all neat categorizations of beauty. Thus, the human face – so often subjected to racist diatribes – although material, is yet capable of expressing divine beauty. Moreover, inasmuch as mind rules over matter, so that the body is its faithful echo, the mind etches the body with every thought it thinks, leaving indelible marks. As a result, physiognomy becomes a mirror of moral character. When it comes to the human person, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish material from spiritual beauty.

Furthermore, not all can reach the chaste eye (a lofty ideal) in one lifetime. Man therefore often succumbs to the lower liniment of eros. By falling in love, we not only sublimate the raw sexual impulse, but overcome the hatred in racial prejudice. Racists, therefore, often experience a hidden erotic impulse towards the very objects of their racism. Not always ethical or uplifting, this racialized eros, when lust-laden, explodes in hatred, manifesting itself through rape. When white men raped African American slave women, they expressed this morally repugnant face of eros. But in its positive form, eros can sublimate racist aesthetics, through romantic love. For, the racist escapes the intolerable toxicity of his own racism by falling in love with the very object he deems ugly and inferior. His newfound love and friendship sublimate his dubious aesthetics, which, otherwise, would have made him rule his aesthetic object sadistically.

Notwithstanding our search for romantic love, the sexual revolution, and greater globalism, racism continues to prevail world-wide. The human body continues to be assaulted by racist aesthetic judgments, which run across multiple color categories. While white-on-black racism

has a special place in western history (especially American), it isn't as if racism does not happen elsewhere. Racism can be brown-on-black, black-on-brown, or between different shades within each color category, thus adding further complexities to racialized aesthetics. This includes prejudice against other phenotypes (besides color) – like the shape of the eye, or the nose, etc. Although physical phenotypes are purely corporeal and biological with no inherent political or moral meaning, they become politicized in the hands of the racist, who, being deeply carnal in his worldview, is therefore blind to the common humanity beneath trivial surface bodily differences that have no real meaning.

It is this kind of sado-masochistic racism that we see in the Han Chinese towards Tibetans, in Latin Americans towards non-white persons, and in the complex race relations in the Indian subcontinent. If people from northeast India are racist towards mainland Indians, so are the latter towards north-easterners – often without the self-reflection or compunction of Meghalayans. Moreover, north Indians are racist towards darker south and east Indians. Finally, Indians are lethally racist towards visitors of African descent. Also deplorable is the Indian adoration of white physical appearance, despite decades of independence from Britain. Without necessarily objectifying white bodies, Indians still find white people "beautiful."

Racist aesthetics becomes secondary (but culpable) when borrowed from the primary racist and perpetrated by his victims (black and brown people) towards those perceived as still lower on the totem pole of racism. But I have no name for the non-masochistic adoration of whites by direct victims of white racism, like the former colonized – except to call it "opportunistic racism." Hardly a helpless masochistic surrender before white power, this type of worship of whiteness by the non-white has to be the most shameless, cynical, naked worship of power ever, wrapped in aesthetic coverings. To counter this, however, there is growing awareness of racism in India. Thus, in 2020 Hindustan Unilever Ltd. sought greater inclusivity, by changing its skin-lightening brand name from "Fair & Lovely" to "Glow & Lovely."

What is inner beauty? Beginning with the beauty of the moral virtues, inner beauty, which comes in a gradient, is always incorporeal.

In some religious traditions, the highest beauty belongs to God. Thus, for Tagore, God is, "the Beautiful." In his Symposium, Plato does things a little differently. He places Beauty-in-itself (the pure transcendental quality of true beauty and source of objective beauty) below the Good (his God). He divides beauty into two categories, with "perishing beauties" (subjective) below Beauty-in-itself, which is objective by being harmonious with all that is divine. Ugliness, too is objective, by being inharmonious with all that is divine. For Plato, love always pursue beauty. He therefore constructs a ladder of love, which begins, at the lowest, with pursuing carnal beauty. But as love evolves morally, it pursues beauty that is more inward and abstract, culminating ultimately in a wondrous vision of Beauty-in-itself, which, Plato says, imparts itself to the lower "perishing beauties."

How would Plato respond to contemporary racism? By including racist definitions of beauty, which lie in the eyes of the beholder, among his subjective "perishing beauties." By deeming racism objectively ugly (or, inharmonious with the Divine), but the racist's definition of "ugliness," subjective and fictitious. By exhorting us to use his ladder of love to reach the aesthetically indifferent chaste eye that can see Beauty-in-itself. Finally, by urging us to appreciate more inward and abstract forms of universal beauty, as we ascend his ladder, to reach growing body-blindness. Moreover, for Plato, the truest test of the chaste eye would be its capacity to detect the sublime presence of incorporeal Beauty-in-itself in all "perishing beauties." Plato, the arch-idealist, would declare this vision of the immanence of divine Beauty as the ultimate solution to the problem of appearance-based racism. For lower solutions, he would advocate Platonic love and more inward and abstract forms of beauty.

Above all, Plato would perhaps be astonished at the folly of modern man, who can fly to outer space and plumb the depths of the ocean – yet remains blind to the all-shining immanent presence of Beauty-in-itself. Having eclipsed the Divine, he thirsts for material beauty and power. Through his tragic descent into the body and worship of power, he succumbs to ethically primitive, racially prejudiced aesthetic norms of beauty. Plato would perhaps conclude that modern racism is historically unprecedented, while acknowledging that racism has always existed in one form or another.

(The author teaches Philosophy at Purdue University, USA)

## Ukraine in ripples: Turkey, Israel eye extended cooperation in Central Asia

By James M Dorsey

Proceedings at a recent dinner in Washington suggested that a forthcoming visit to Turkey by Israeli President Isaac Herzog could be about more than putting an end to strained relations between the two erstwhile allies. Engineered by an influential American Jewish leader, Malcolm Hoenlein, vice-chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the dinner was attended by the Washington ambassadors of Israel, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan and hosted by the envoy of Azerbaijan.

It was designed to find a pathway to closer economic and security cooperation between Israel and the Turkic countries, which have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state. The significance of the dinner lies not only in the fact that it occurred in advance of Herzog's visit. The ambassadors met as the Ukraine crisis threatened to force Turkey to choose between NATO and Russia. Moreover, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Central Asian states attempted three months earlier to blow new life into their Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States.

A NATO member with close ties to Russia that has bought a Russian anti-missile system, Turkey has backed Ukraine, tightened military cooperation with the embattled East European state, and condemned Russia's occupation in 2014 of Crimea. Erdogan visited

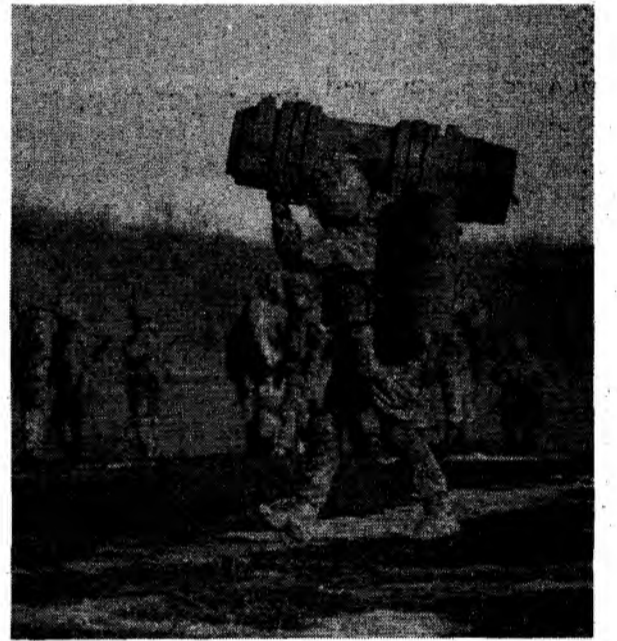
between Yair Lapid and Mevlut Cavusoglu was the first confirmed conversation between the two countries' foreign ministers in 13 years.

The arrest in November on espionage charges and the subsequent release of an Israeli tourist couple for taking pictures of Istanbul's Dolmabahce Palace, one of the city's major tourism attractions, prompted the call and paved the way for an Israeli-Turkish rapprochement.

The palace on the shores of the Bosphorus served as the administrative headquarters of Ottoman sultans in the 19th century and the place of death in 1938 of Kemal Mustafa Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

The couple's release also triggered the first phone call between Erdogan and top Israeli leaders in nine years, with Herzog and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett phoning the Turkish president separately to thank him.

The release of the Israeli couple and Erdogan's outreach served multiple purposes. The Turkish leader did not want the incident to scare off badly needed tourists at a time of severe economic crisis. The incident also provided Erdogan an opportunity to break through to Israel and reduce the United Arab Emirates' geopolitical advantage in maintaining close ties to the Jewish state. From Erdogan's perspective, the Ukraine crisis has only increased the utility of improved relations with Israel.



Keiv earlier this month but saw his offer to mediate Ukraine's conflict with Russia rebuffed by Moscow.

The Turkish president has since said he would like to resume talks with Israel on transporting Israeli gas to Europe. Europe's gas supply could be in jeopardy if the West sanctions Russia in response to a potential Russian military operation in Ukraine. The sanctions could halt Russian gas sales to Europe. Sanctions could also affect Turk Stream, a gas pipeline that bypasses Ukraine by running from Russia under the Black Sea to Turkey, from where gas is pumped to Europe.

Turkish-Israeli gas cooperation would strengthen Erdogan's bid to position Turkey as an alternative energy hub for Europe. Azerbaijan has said it was ready to supply Europe with emergency gas that would flow through Turkey should the Ukraine crisis disrupt Russian shipments. Although Israel has yet to confirm the trip, Herzog appears set to become the first Israeli head of state to visit Turkey in 15 years. Herzog's brother, Michael, is the Israeli ambassador in Washington who attended the dinner.

Relations between Israel and Turkey broke down after the killing in 2010 by Israeli commandos of 10 Turkish activists onboard a ship that was part of an aid flotilla attempting to breach the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza.

Last month, a phone call

Erdogan this week arrived in the UAE for a two-day visit as part of a regional balancing act in which various Middle Eastern states are trying to ensure that their differences and multiple regional conflicts do not spin out of control.

UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed heralded the visit, Erdogan's first in almost a decade, as the start of a "prosperous new phase" of cooperation with Turkey. The UAE is Turkey's foremost trading partner in the Gulf.

Meanwhile, Sabah, a flagship pro-government Turkish daily, reported in recent days that Turkish intelligence had last autumn foiled an attempt to assassinate Turkish-Israeli businessman Yair Geller. Some analysts suspect that the timing of the disclosure was intended to counter Israeli calls on Turkey to halt its support for Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, as part of a rapprochement with Israel.

For Erdogan, repairing relations with Israel and forging a potential partnership in the Caucasus and Central Asia means walking a tightrope. He has to balance improving relations with countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE perceived by their critics as having abandoned the defence of Muslim causes, including the plight of the Palestinians, with projecting himself as the Muslim leader who cares about his co-religionists. (IPA Service)

By arrangement with the Arabian Post

### Letters to the Editor

#### Urgent need for land reforms in Meghalaya

**Editor,**  
Land forms an intrinsic part of every community and also of individuals within the community for whom land is an important investment in one's lifetime. However, if we were to take a closer look into the developments in the functioning of the District Councils, in particular the KHADC and JHADC we will notice that not one MDC has ever considered to revisit the land holding system whereby community lands that have been passed over by our ancestors have been privatised and sold out to private parties. The land holding pattern in the entire Khasi and Jaintia hills varies but the 'Ri Raid' (Community land) 'Ri Shnong' (Village land) and 'Ri Kur' (Clan Land) continue to be the practice. The missing factor here is the loosely managed land governing system that has allowed gradual 'bartering', illegal selling of community land i.e. Ri Raid to certain groups and individuals. This where the Councils need to do a thorough ground research and codify the land laws and land rights of the indigenous

tribals. In all of this there should be a wide public debate after which a set of governance mechanisms governing the land holding system should be adopted by the Councils and the Dorbar Shnong should be tasked to implement such laws in letter and spirit.

Without a robust land holding system that is codified in place we will continue to see loss of more such community lands which will pass in to the hands of the land hungry tribal gentry.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Via email

#### Is North East outside India?

**Editor,**  
In a recent tweet, senior Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi defined the Geography of India as stretching from Kashmir to Kerala and from Gujarat to Bengal. Rahul Gandhi quite clearly forgot that there is a region beyond Bengal which includes seven states. The resultant political upheavals it has created must be mentioned here. Regardless of the political connotations such statements have serious undertones of neglect and ignorance of mainland Indians, including senior political leaders, about their own country.

When one visits any of the states outside the Northeast one finds that people have either very little or false assumptions regarding India's Northeast and its people. While many think that Assam is still a 'jungle' where Rhinos roam everywhere, others live in the illusion that the tribes of Northeast are Chinese and are so uncivilized that they wear garlands of human skulls. Women from the Northeast that study and work in any of the metros are often humiliated with the slang 'Chinki' (Chinese).

The blame for all these misconstructions go to the successive regimes at the Centre that failed miserably in developing Northeast India and bringing it at par with the rest of India. It's a different matter that the state governments of the seven states have indulged in rampant corruption and misgovernance and swindled off most of the development funds. The onus for improving the image of Northeast India lies both with the government and people. We must do whatever we can to improve tourism, literacy, and infrastructure of Northeast India and showcase the same to rest of India so that the Northeast literally becomes 'The Paradise Unexplored'.

by many.

Yours etc.  
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,  
Guwahati

#### Forgotten Constitutional Values?

**Editor,**  
Absence of religion in public affairs or organisations of society or government is what Secularism actually stands for. But secularism in the Indian context also means respecting all religions and taking all of them together equally and without partiality. Religion is important to Indians which is why secularism was beautifully given different meanings to suit the Indian context and was finally added in the Constitution of India through 42nd amendment in 1976. Now what is important is to uphold the values of the Constitution.

The anti-hijab row which is in the news these days represents nothing but a complete failure to uphold the values of secularism and religious freedom in the premises of institutions. Institutions are supposed to teach and inculcate the values of secularism for which the present tug of war has arisen. Students being divided into saffron group

and hijab group represents only hatred and intolerance. It is also a big failure of that specific college in Karnataka. Upholding religious values is also an aspect of secularism. A Sikh can wear his turban, Christians can wear the cross. Nothing would or should disturb the public order or rules and regulations of any institution. India belongs to everyone. There should be no room for intolerance.

Jai Hind  
Yours etc.,  
Joseph Lalchuanawma  
Rokhum,  
Via email

#### Laitumkhrah: A disaster waiting to happen

**Editor,**  
Recently Laitumkhrah Market was inaugurated and it has been a long time coming this market. It is clean and has ample space for stalls and movement of people. However, what most of us do not understand is why are vendors still being allowed to sell stuff on the pavements? The people who have rented these stalls inside the market are frustrated because these vendors are undercutting their businesses. The kind of jostling and manoeuvring

one has to engage in while walking is exhausting. So why bother with the market or a pavement at all? Now that schools have reopened where do the students walk? Not to forget the constant traffic jams because the Laitumkhrah main road which used to be a two-lane road has now been reduced to a single one.

It is also amazing that a private vehicle gets clamped and pays a fine for parking but these vendors are parked all day long without so much as even a parking fee. Even a simple activity like buying a sack of rice has become complicated and requires some serious planning because of the congestion.

In spite of the many appeals made to the District Administration by Persons with Disabilities, elderly people and residents of Laitumkhrah because their mobility has been very much compromised, these appeals have fallen on deaf ears.

Laitumkhrah is a disaster waiting to happen.

Yours etc.,  
Christine Tina,  
Via email

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

*"The political machine triumphs because it is a united minority acting against a divided majority."*

--- Will Durant

## The Shillong Times

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### Undercutting nationalism

THE Supreme Court has, for now, set aside an interim Haryana high court order that had stayed a state government decision to reserve 75 per cent of the jobs in the private sector – apart from governmental jobs – to locals or Haryanvis. The apex court did so based on the "flaws" in the HC order and it asked the lower court to revisit the case and pass appropriate orders. It also made clear it is willing to call in all similar cases in some other high courts too and take a comprehensive view. As the apex court noted, the 'jobs for locals' endeavour is prima facie, not a wrong step. But there is more to it – and more so for a state like Haryana.

Haryana is located close to the national capital and Haryanvis are having a free go in the large crop of private enterprises not just in Delhi but those that thrive around it, say, in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. There are no similar quotas for jobs in these states, or in adjoining Punjab. Haryana is a state that is largely benefited by its proximity to Delhi. The national capital region reaches out to the major industrial hub of Gurugram or Gurgaon in Haryana. Haryana's economy is powered majorly by the revenue it gets from this huge industrial hub. It was essentially a spill-over of Delhi's amazing growth in the past four decades. The new law is targeted mainly to grab jobs in Gurugram. Notably, the government in Haryana is run by the BJP alongside a regional party. The BJP never tires of wearing nationalism on its sleeves even as its leadership is often in the forefront to display parochial, communal and sectarian mindsets. The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 must be seen in this context.

When the Supreme Court took up the matter for consideration, it was told that four states have similar laws. India is a Union of states and as per Constitution, states have been given extensive powers to make laws through their legislatures. It is incumbent on states to keep national interests in mind. The Supreme Court has powers to adjudicate on matters if a state exceeds its rights. India as an entity, united into a nation by merger of erstwhile princely states after Independence, must keep striving to forge unity within, rather than allowing states to act in isolation. A large number of states today are run by regional satraps. To which is added the sectarian mindset of the BJP leaders. This violates the idea of India.

# In 50 years Meghalayans divided by affluence and poverty

By Patricia Mukhim

It would be wrong to imagine that Meghalaya is populated by people having similar hopes and aspirations and who are afflicted by the same set of problems. No, Meghalaya is today a divided society. Those who keep repeating the word 'jaitynriew' ad nauseum and carry out all kinds of subversive activities in our name had better take notice because when they take up a cause they have to define which group they represent. Jaitynriew is no longer a homogenous, monochromatic term where all are equal and have the same needs and aspirations. Meghalaya is a heterogeneous society, divided into the haves, the have-nots and the have-some. The 'haves' control the politics and economy of the state. The have-nots struggle to eke out a daily existence and the have-some (middle class) are on a frenetic journey to reach the status of the 'haves'.

It is in this situation that Meghalaya has always headed for elections. The have-nots form the largest chunk of voters and are therefore cleverly identified and extended help at the beginning of the school year when Rs 5000 would go a long way in paying for the school books and initial fees just so kids can enter the sanctum sanctorum of a school. After that initial admission parents will then scrape and scrounge and perhaps approach the MLA they elected so they can pay the second installment of school fees. And this goes on until the end of term when the school fees have to be cleared for the child to get his/her report card. The MLA who extends such help has a record of those names and during elections he/she holds that beneficiary of his/her patronage to account. The beneficiary is expected to vote for his/her patron, for who knows what the new person will be like.

The money for such patronage is siphoned off from the MLA scheme. Hence no MLA will want to give an account of how the MLA scheme is utilised. I recall how one MLA in a semi-urban constituency showed that he paid money for cowdung to his constituents and this was just a few weeks before the polling date. When it comes to such ingenuity none can beat our politicians. They are a class apart.

Now coming to some of

the issues that have surfaced this week one heaves a sigh of relief that the High Court of Meghalaya has directed the State Government to clean up the Umkhrah and Umshyri rivers: As expected the State Government is quick to point to the District Council for reneging on its duty to keep the rivers clean since these rivers ostensibly are within their jurisdiction. At one time, the Khasi Hills District Council had got an amount of Rs 50 lakhs to clean the Wah Umkhrah. That money was disbursed to the MDCs

with cleaning the rivers then pray what is the brief of the State Water Resources Department? It is obvious that cleaning up the two rivers right from their source requires a water-tight action plan, robust monitoring and accountability and fining of the polluters. The Councils don't have the resources to take up this responsibility. To ensure that the Dorbar Shmongs too don't pass the buck there have to be mechanisms to ensure that garbage emanating from one shmong (locality) does not flow on



through whose constituencies the river flows. Some moving and shaking happened and then everything was forgotten. The Umkhrah continues to be the repository of solid waste flowing in from feeder rivulets upstream. The Wah Umkhrah which the group – Operation Clean-up – of which this writer is a member, has been cleaning since 2019, regularly belches up huge amounts of garbage comprising clothes, nappies with the gel oozing out, sanitary napkins et al. One has to visit the Umkhrah upstream towards Umpling to see how both sides of the river are littered with garbage. This garbage in turn comes from Nongrah, Lalapang, and Rynjah through Umpling, Nongmynsong to the Umkhrah and thence to the Wah Umkhrah. The District Council in Meghalaya is all about politics as the Councillors bid their time to enter the State Assembly. None of them take their election as MDCs seriously. Not once have we seen a policy developed by the District Councils that are in larger public interest. Other than constructing footpaths we see no evidence of their work.

This passing of the buck between the District Councils and the State Government as far as cleaning up of rivers is concerned needs to be resolved by the High Court. If the Councils are to be tasked

to the next shmong. It is precisely to discuss this issue that the Operation Clean-up group had requested the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills to convene a meeting of the headmen from the localities through which the feeder streams to the Wah Umkhrah and Umshyri flow so that they can take individual responsibility.

It would also be in the larger public interest for the High Court of Meghalaya to take cognisance of other rivers within Greater Shillong area that were once sources of drinking water but have now become garbage dumps and sewers. I am referring to the River Umkhen. On a recent visit to Umphyrna village I took the short cut down through Jyntah village and had to cross the Umkhen River to Umpling. It was a shocking sight. The whole stretch of the river was loaded with garbage. And right next to the river is a crematorium. How is this even allowed? And then at Umphyrna one sees a huge stone quarry belonging to none other than a minister of the MDA Government. There is the River Umkhen below which is obviously nourished by the forests upstream. If those forests are denuded to allow quarrying then it is a wonder why the Umkhen is now a poor shadow of itself...almost forcing itself to flow its course?

In all of this you begin to wonder what the State Pollution Control Board is actually doing and whether they even visit these places. What are they drawing their salaries for? Is it just to give clearance to cement plants and other industries or do their terms of reference also include the prevention of pollution of rivers, streams and the entire physical environment in the state? If they think this is beyond their jurisdiction then let them state that upfront so that citizens can petition the Court for an alternative oversight body to clean up the environment.

In Meghalaya, Climate Change is a word bandied around by those manning the Department of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. It is not for nothing that the words Environment and Climates Change have been added to the word 'Forest' in the nomenclature of the Department/Ministry. But how serious are the people in charge of this Department? Don't they only look at forests as a potential source of revenue? Otherwise why have a commercial wing called the Forest Development Corporation whose brief is to dispose of fallen trees? But we also know that the bulk of trees from reserved forests are humanly engineered to 'fall' so they can be smuggled off.

Meghalaya must be the one state where forests are redefined to allow forest land to be effortlessly alienated for the purpose of coal extraction. The nexus is such that big business is in league with politicians and the bureaucracy to rob this state of an environment where future citizens can live and breathe.

While the poor struggle to make ends meet in an ecosystem that is increasingly turning into a threat to their existence, the rich (politicians, the business cartel and a section of the bureaucracy) are laughing their way to the bank. There is no system of checks and balances. At this rate Meghalaya is on a rapid downhill slide. The State had initiated the setting up of two medical colleges ten years ago. These are still in the realm of pipe dreams even while neighbouring Assam has just inaugurated its 8th medical college and is set to have 14 more medical colleges by 2025. Does Meghalaya ever set such ambitious goals for itself? No, that's asking for too much. But like I said, perhaps we deserve the government we connived to elect.

Yogi Adityanath has lost it by putting UP model above Kerala

## Kerala far ahead in major human development indices

By Binoy Viswam

Ever since the battle for Uttar Pradesh has begun, the RSS - BJP big shots are anxious about their political fortunes. Though states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur and Goa also are scheduled for the polls, the chieftains of the Sangh Parivar are more nervous about UP. They believe that the verdict of UP would have a direct impact on the great battle of 2024. Hence, the lion's share of their resources, time and energy are devoted for the largest state in the north.

Initially the Modi-Yogi-Amit Shah combination thought that it is going to be an easy business that would give them a gigantic victory. When they found that the opposition is not united, the confidence level in the Parivar camp heightened and they began to talk about the continuation of the Yogi era. But the popular mood in UP has been moving in a different direction. It has been contrary to the wishes of the Modi camp. In such a situation, Yogi Adityanath who nurtures bigger political designs even beyond the borders of UP, has ample reasons to become frantic.

Adityanath's repeated references to Kerala in his campaign is not accidental. His venomous speech accusing Kerala was a calculated move. Sangh Parivar wants

That feeling of insecurity makes them fearful and more aggressive.

BJP attempts to launch ruthless attacks against Kerala is the essential part of their ideological and political stance. Together with that Yogi Adityanath dropped in Maharashtra and Bengal to give some additional flavour to the tirade against Kerala. Naturally it boomeranged on them in several ways. People of UP were urged by their incumbent chief minister to look deep into the socio-political realities of life in Kerala. It gave an opportunity to the left and democratic forces to explain the difference between the styles of governance that exist in these two states. Kerala, depicted by the crusaders of hatred trained by the RSS propaganda wing, stood devoid of facts. For the Yogi school of politics all forms of lies are sacred, as long as it serves their purpose. Essentially, such propaganda items have to keep 'safe' distance from truth. In Yogi's UP, where the doctrines of post truth guide the government, that distance was kept with utmost sharpness. There Kerala was introduced as a most undeveloped landmass where primitive people live! That is why, Yogi Adityanath chose to threaten his voters say-



to shift the focus of the campaign from people's issues to something else. The masterminds in Yogi's war room thought that Kerala bashing would help them to divert the trend in their favour. In 2017 they unleashed communal riots in various parts of UP in order to capture political power. In 2022 they have come up with new arms and ammunitions. In fact, they have been at it all along their tenure of five years. The Yogi government has been sowing the seeds of hatred since long.

Following the footprints of Ayodhya where Babri Masjid was demolished, they intensified their campaign around temples in Varanasi and Mathura. The war cry was highly communal and against the Muslim places of worship. It was with a blind, irrational way of politics with the sole purpose of 'divide and rule'. Though they tried to unleash the campaign at a massive scale, the realization was slowly dawning that Mandir-Masjid controversy alone would not come to their rescue this time. The think-tanks of Sangh Parivar were asked to work overtime to find methods to swim over the tide.

People's wrath in UP against the BJP government is the natural outcome of their misrule. The promises to the farmers at the end of the one year long struggle remain unfulfilled. Workers are thrown to unprecedented hardships. Dalits and Adivasis are always denied their basic human rights. Their 'jal, jungle, jameen' are all taken away by the corporates with the connivance of BJP rulers. The plight of women has become miserable. Unemployment keeps staring at the youth. Prices are shooting up. The divide between the rich and the poor is rapidly growing through their deliberated highways of development. No doubt, Yogi government has every reason to believe that the soil beneath their feet is eroding.

Kerala, if he is removed from Power.

What is the reality of life in Kerala and UP? Let the development indices of Kerala speak and let the people compare it with that of UP. NITI Aayog itself has come out with its multi-dimensional poverty index report (2021). In that report 37.79 percent of UP population have been identified as poor whereas Kerala has the poverty rate of only 0.71 percent! The multi-dimensional poverty index indicates matters related to health, education, and standard of living. While nutrition, child mortality and maternal health are the indicators for health, years of schooling and school attendance are referred for education. Access to cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, ownership of assets and bank accounts are counted to determine Standard of Living. Despite UP being the top producer of food stuffs, the MPI reveals that Nutrition level stands at the lowest. Kerala, the state that Yogi wanted to degrade stands at the top in NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goal index 2020-21 of the country. The world has taken notice of Kerala's meticulous development in areas like health, education, and social welfare.

If the people of UP are allowed to cast their votes free and fair, they would vote only the Kerala way. Perhaps because of that, on second thoughts Yogi Adityanath tried to bring in the question of law and order to this debate. But here also the truth is not on his side. According to the National Crime Records Bureau report (2020), UP stands first in kidnapping and murder with 12,913 cases and 3779 cases respectively. Kerala can be nowhere near these numbers. Let the people take note of that difference. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Entertaining value of verbal orders

Editor,

If the truth be told, as a citizen of "the abode of the clouds" one has almost given up on expecting positive and effective governance from the political class, especially elected representatives endowed with ministerial responsibilities. Life however never ceases to surprise and if our ministers and MLAs are mentally challenged in the domain of governance and public management, they are increasingly displaying their natural talent to entertain. (I looked up the meaning of entertainer on the thesaurus and it explains that clowns too are defined as entertainers and as the author of this letter I put up a clear disclaimer that this is a thesaurus definition. Not mine.) This newspaper's front page headlines "Home Minister declines to comment on verbal orders" (ST Feb 17, 2022) is the latest MDA Ministerial goof-up to justify my views. I believe this calls for further clarification as the intention here is not to disparage or belittle anyone

but to simply get to the truth on an activity everyone knows exist but where everyone then pretends is just the figment of the imagination. I am of course referring to the stout denials from Government of any illegal mining of coal in the state of Meghalaya and an accompanying silence of conspiracy on the daily movement of hundreds of coal bearing trucks all along the National Highway. Mystery is another topic that entertains and the authors of such ambiguity be they an Agatha Christie or an Alfred Hitchcock must be acknowledged. I see no reason why our own local mystery creators be not given their due.

Our very own Home Minister (here again I would like to digress from the prefixing any Govt Minister as the "Honourable so and so" as I personally have yet to come across anything resembling honour in their actions, and so I beg forgiveness for my inability to conform with emerging socio-political sycophantic practices) Mr Lakmen Rymbui has declined to comment on yet another mystery of the so called "verbal orders" emanating from some powerful source from within the Government

that instructed the Department of Mining and Geology from frisking coal laden trucks or even questioning where they originated from. He claims it is simply just another allegation that is not substantiated. It is not a new allegation. It resurfaced because of pro-active Assam Police action in apprehending the illegal movement of coal from Meghalaya. Why Meghalaya police have not been able to take suitable action throughout the last four years no longer makes this sad episode a mystery. It has now turned into a serious dereliction of duty and heads, whether police or political, must roll. The term ministerial responsibility, however seems to have disappeared from the State Assembly dictionary. Holy Moses mysteries keep tumbling out of the closet

The news report continues with yet another quote from Rymbui where he states in the same breath that allegation made by a former CM of money from the illegal coal trade being used to fund militancy in the state, cannot be taken as an allegation. Then pray what is it? The truth? Lies? Opposition verbosity? So now we the public are being entertained once again

with a play of words. It's like listening to Tina Turner crooning "What's love got to do with it" when actually the lyrics used were all about love. A real oxymoron so I rang up an ex-colleague, one who has worked closely with politicians as to what does he make of this latest political double-speak on the "verbal orders" controversy. He snapped back, "All of them now read the Bible every day and strictly adhere with their perverse understanding of Matthew 6:3. Nii Ktha khlieh. Thank God I'm finally out of that nut house".

By now I too was beginning to develop a headache. So I folded my paper and picked up Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist for some light reading. Believe it or not here too the Artful Dodger, a fictional character of that novel, was set up by Dickens to entertain with his nimble pick-pocketing fingers. Meghalaya's artful dodgers are made of sterner stuff. Even when caught with their hands in the candy jar, they will stoutly deny the existence of either candy, jars nor sticky fingers. After all of what value are verbal orders if their existence cannot be denied.

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

#### Ban on Chinese mobile apps

Editor,

With the recent ban of 54 Chinese mobile applications by the Indian government, the total number of banned apps over the past two years has risen to 300. It must be noted that some of the apps banned are rebranded ones of the previously banned apps. The government banned these apps in order to protect personal data of citizens. On the other hand, the means it has devised may not yield the best results. The digital platforms we use transact in our personal data. In fact, India's "digital strike" does not provide a solution to the problem.

In fact, India's "digital strikes" are confined to only China. By limiting its digital strikes to China, India is actually helping other countries invade the virtual field. While Chinese applications pose a real threat, there are also other applications that cause threat. It is not possible

to ban all such apps. Furthermore, India cannot impose ban every year as new versions of banned apps arrive and invade a substantial amount of personal data.

Against the backdrop of the Ladakh standoff, India's attempts to hurt Chinese economy seem to be weak and futile. It is ironic that, despite the Galwan clashes and all the fruitless diplomatic and military negotiations, India is heavily dependent on imports from China. India must realise that a mere ban of Chinese apps will never slow down the Chinese march. Considering that Atmanirbharta is yet to become a reality, India needs to devise long-term plans and choose viable options to reduce its overdependence on China. Likewise, the government must take action to stop China from making India a dumping ground for goods of inferior quality.

Yours etc.,  
GS Venu,  
Kollam

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

*"The essential element of successful strategy is that it derives its success from the differences between competitors with a consequent difference in their behavior."*

-- Bruce Henderson

## The Shillong Times

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### Political quid pro quo

THE Congress MLAs that have decided to support the MDA Government have been or will be amply rewarded. Two of them have been given political appointments with perks obviously. It's better than being in the dog-house. In the meanwhile, all manner of illegalities will continue quietly as the Opposition collapses. Right now only the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) MLAs are raking up issues on a daily basis. But the MDA Government is unconcerned, comfortable in the thought that the NPP – the political party leading the Government – is growing from strength to strength. What is pathetic is to watch the regional parties being reduced to non-entities. The folding up of the United Democratic Party in Ri Bhoi district is just the beginning of the end. What is ironic is that the regional party's loss is the NPP's gain. Perhaps those in the regional parties feel it is better to be with the Party that drives the Government than side players as coalition partners. The regional parties have all failed to rise to the occasion. They have had to support the Government despite knowing fully well the corruption that is going on in broad daylight.

The regional parties have played their deceitful games once too often. Prior to the elections they trumpet regional party unity. But they also know that unity is fraught because political egos win over public service. The need to lead overtakes the need for a unified front to take on the so-called national parties. The regional parties have repeatedly failed to take a stand on any issue. In short they have abandoned the cause of the people and what's in the larger public interest. The regional parties have all remained silent over the blatant disregard of the present government for the rule of law – the most visible one being the transportation of illegally mined coal. Reams have been written on this venality but to no avail.

Coal trucks continue to move out of Meghalaya even while the Directorate of Mineral Resources is being used as the platform for re-routing coal from Jaintia Hills to Dawki by showing on paper that the coal comes from Assam, Nagaland or Bhutan. The modus-operandi seamless with one Government Department completely compromised to evade the prying eyes of the Opposition AITC which has been the only one blowing the whistle so far. That the Home Minister is a UDP man also means that this regional party is hands in glove with the NPP and is simply doing its bidding. Come election time they will try to whitewash their acts of omission and commission. Will the voters still allow themselves to be fooled yet again?

### Inordinate delay in SC's hearing of FCRA & electoral bonds cases

## Learned judges must know its impact on rights and democracy

By Md Tasnimul Hassan

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 [FCRA], originally enacted in 1976, mandates for all NGOs, associations or groups which intend to receive foreign funding, to obtain a certificate of registration under FCRA. Recently, it was reported that nearly 6,000 organisations including Jamia Millia Islamia, Indian Institute of Technology – Delhi and Oxfam India lost their FCRA licence. It was either because they did not apply for the licence renewal, or their application was rejected by the Union Home Affairs Ministry [MHA]. In the case of Missionaries of Charity, which made the news recently for MHA's refusal to renew its registration, the uproar it led to has apparently forced a rethink, as the MHA eventually renewed the same till 2026. As of January 7, there are 16,908 active or alive FCRA organisations in the country, according to the MHA.

Global Peace Initiative, a US-based organization, approached the Supreme Court seeking continuation of FCRA licences that were valid until 30 September, 2021. It was argued by the petitioners that humanitarian organisations should be exempted from FCRA licensing at least until the COVID pandemic, which continues to be a "notified disaster". However, vide an order dated January 25, the Supreme Court turned down the plea, and left it up to the parties to make a representation to the concerned authorities, who may take appropriate action as per the law.

In the past, there have been several instances where the government has employed FCRA to potentially shut down the functioning of prominent organisations. Here, I intend to elaborate how FCRA has developed as a program to satisfy the Union Government's zeal to curtail foreign contributions to social sector organisations and extinguish anti-government/pro-rights narratives.

On 28 March 2014, in a case filed by Association for Democratic Reforms [ADR], the Delhi High Court held the Indian National Congress [INC] and Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] guilty of flouting FCRA to receive foreign funding, and directed the union government and the Election Commission of India to take necessary action. To circumvent this judgement, FCRA was amended via the Finance Act of 2016, putting beyond scrutiny the donations received by political parties from foreign sources since 2010. Later, the government made another amendment via the Finance Act of 2018, which retroactively changed the year from 2010 to 1976. Now, the INC and BJP, held guilty by the Delhi High Court of violating FCRA, would be beyond scrutiny for foreign funds received since 1976. Notably, both these Acts were passed as Money Bills,

without the Rajya Sabha approving these.

In 2015, the government issued new rules requiring NGOs to certify that accepting foreign funding will inter alia not jeopardise India's sovereignty and integrity. It further provided that all such organisations would be required to maintain accounts in either nationalised or private banks, allowing government agencies real-time access to it. Later, the government enacted the Foreign Contribution Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020, that was termed a "surgical strike" on the not-for-profit sector. This amendment drastically changed the FCRA framework by bringing along inter alia the following changes: no sub-grants from the donations, cap on expenditure, inquiry before renewal of registration, FCRA bank account with the State Bank of India.

As it stands today, Section 3(1)(f) read with Section 5(1) of the FCRA prohibits organisations of "political nature" from gaining an FCRA certificate. Section 11 of FCRA mandates obtaining a certificate of registration renewable after every five years, before accepting foreign contributions. Further, Section 12 inter alia provides that the FCRA certificate may be granted only if the foreign contribution is not likely to prejudicially affect sovereignty/integrity of India, security/strategic/scientific/economic interests, public interests, freedom/fairness of elections, and social harmony. These terms are either undefined or vaguely defined, though.

The government resorts to Sections 13 and 14 of FCRA to suspend the certificate for a period of 180 days, and cancel the certificate for a period of three years, respectively. Section 14(d) of the FCRA states that the certificate should be cancelled for violating any provision of FCRA or "any" rule or order made under the Act. Although there is ambiguity on what will happen to the foreign funds already collected by organisations whose licence has been cancelled, the government seems fully determined to not let them utilise these funds. Thus, the funds and assets of an organisation with a cancelled FCRA licence would vest with the government.

As per a report, foreign funding to NGOs in India witnessed a decline of 40 percent between 2015 and 2018. Since 2014, the government has cancelled the FCRA licences of more than 20,000 NGOs, including several prominent organisations such as Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Amnesty International, The Lawyers Collective, Greenpeace India, The Ford Foundation and Missionary of Charity, often by arbitrarily resorting to section 13 of FCRA.

In September 2020, Amnesty International halted its work in India, accusing the Indian government of running an "incessant witch hunt" campaign over "unfounded and motivated" allegations. The government rejected Amnesty's allegations and argued that the law of the land cannot be defied with human rights as an excuse. Amnesty India's bank accounts were frozen by the government, alleging that it received foreign funds by unlawful means. It was partly if not entirely in response to Amnesty's report on the Delhi Riots of 2020, which held Delhi Police to be complicit in the cruel violence; and the advocacy on human rights abuses in Kashmir.

Aakar Patel, the erstwhile chair of Amnesty India, has elaborated on how the Indian government harassed several organisations in the post-2014 years.

The plight of the organisations can be defined as being potentially non-existent, when their funding is cut and the accounts are frozen, resulting in the total collapse of the organisation, which is the aim of the government in the first place. The long-term goal of the government to control the social narrative, and reduce ideas and opinions flowing in the air gains success.

The 2016 and 2018 retrospective amendments have been challenged (vide W.P. (C) No. 434/2018) before the Supreme Court by ADR, on five main grounds viz., a) misuse of the legislative powers b) breach of the basic structure of Constitution c) attempting to nullify a judgement passed by any court, d) legitimising financial contributions received from foreign sources, e) free flow of illegal, unlimited and anonymous political donations by foreign companies and international lobbyists.

On July 2, 2018, notice was issued and it was tagged with another case filed by ADR already pending since 2015 (W.P.(C) No. 333/2015), which seeks applicability of the Right to Information Act on political parties.

Notably, the 2016 amendment has already been challenged (W.P. (C) No. 880/2017), wherein notice was issued on October 3, 2017. The last order in these matters is dated March 26, 2021 (refusing to stay the electoral bond scheme), whereas an order dated April 12, 2019 had directed all political parties who had received donations through electoral bonds to submit the details of the receipts to the Election Commission of India.

The 2020 amendment has been challenged before the Supreme Court in Noel Harper vs. Union of India, on the grounds of it being manifestly arbitrary and violative of Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. The government defended the amendment by claiming that there is no fundamental right to receive "unregulated" foreign contributions. The 2020 amendment was found to have the potential to adversely impact the functioning of mid-sized/small organisations. Rights activists/groups criticised this amendment, some terming it to be a tool to silence and punish civil society organisations.

The Supreme Court in Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) vs. Union of India (2020) ruled that supporting public causes by resorting to legitimate means of dissent would not be enough to curb any organisation's receipt of foreign contribution. Thus, organisations supporting or involved in activism against the government, can still accept foreign funding.

The government seeks to "control" foreign funding received by NGOs, whereas it allows political parties to receive it with anonymity. On being asked about the 2016 and 2018 amendments, Shivani Kapoor, Legal Program Officer at ADR, said that "these amendments in the FCRA have opened the floodgates to unlimited, unaccounted and anonymous corporate donations to political parties by Indian as well as foreign companies which will have serious repercussions on the Indian democracy, that can pose a serious danger to the autonomy of the country, participatory democracy, and the rule of law." If these amendments are not set aside, Kapoor remarked, foreign governments, corporate houses, and special interest groups can have a stranglehold of India's electoral process and governance.

The Prime Minister recently stated that focus on rights has made India weak, as we have forgotten our duties, so the coming years would be dedicated to sacrifice and tapasya. The FCRA and electoral bonds cases may well suggest how these legal instruments could prove to be handy to a government keen on changing this focus, to the detriment of democracy itself.

FCRA is bad in law, as it empowers the government to autocratically cut down foreign funding to organisations, which should be done only if the organisation is actively involved in an "unlawful" activity. Experts view FCRA as a statute that hampers the right to receive foreign funding, a part of the freedom of association. The FCRA framework is overall undemocratic and unconventional, as it puts the government in charge of deciding on its whim which institution will receive funding and which would not. With the continuance of the electoral bonds scheme, the damage to our democratic fabric is nearly complete, unless and until the Supreme Court steps in to mitigate it. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

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Courtesy: The Leaflet

## Round The States

By Insaf

### Hijab & Tricolour Row

#### Karnataka politics to hit

Karnataka has more on its plate than it can handle. In the midst of the raging hijab controversy, there is another, on the national flag. The opposition Congress has laid siege in Legislative Assembly demanding Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Minister Eshwarappa be sacked and booked for sedition for his statement. This after Eshwarappa last week said the 'Bhagwa dhvaj' (saffron flag) may become national flag sometime in future and may be raised from Red Fort. Both minister and BJP government hit back saying his statement was 'misconstrued' and Congress was disrespecting the national flag for protests in the floor of House. Plus, Congress was 'playing politics' when 'people/government are working towards creating a conducive atmosphere for students in schools and colleges.'

Take it with a pinch of salt? While the court addresses the hijab row and addresses the question "If there are 100 symbols, why is the government picking on only hijab?... Bangles are worn. Why only pick on these poor Muslims girls?...", the Dept of Minority Welfare, Haj and Wafk has issued a fresh circular. Quoting HC interim order it said it would apply to Maulana Azad Model English Medium schools too. Ruffling more feathers instead?

#### Third Wave Over?

All is now well, is the Centre's message to States. Minimise Covid-19 impact on "the lives and livelihood of people," is its advice. A letter to Chief Secretaries on Wednesday last, by Union Health Secretary said: "Presently, as the case trajectory across the nation is showing a sustained downward trend, it will be useful if States review and amend/ do away with the additional restrictions so imposed after considering the trend of new cases, active cases, and positivity," so that people's movement and economic activities are no longer hampered. Fortunately, the Omicron variant has been much milder and case counts have remained below expected levels, with daily numbers having dropped to 30,000-odd, the lowest this year from 3.47 lakh in January. Just about 75 districts are now reporting a weekly positivity rate of over 10% and 80 districts less than 5%. States are gradually easing restrictions on social gatherings, occupancy in restaurants/theatres, opening schools/colleges, lifting night curfews etc. However, there's a nagging fear that complacency shouldn't set in. Families and friends can't forget the horrific second wave wherein people became victims not to the virus but governments letting down guard. Once bitten twice shy, is sound advice.

#### Punjab Faux Pas

A classic case of putting one's foot in the mouth? During a poll rally, closing on the campaigning, Congress Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi stirred a political storm by saying: "Punjabiyan di bahu hai Priyanka Gandhi, eh saadi Punjabian hai, iss karke ikk passe ho jao Punjabian... UP, Bihar aur Delhi de bhayee aake ithe raj karan lagge, vadan na deo ithe (Priyanka is Punjab's daughter-in-law. She is our Punjabi. So Punjabis, get united. The bhayias from UP, Bihar and Delhi want to rule here. But we will not let them enter)." Worse, it got an applaud from Priyanka! Obviously, BJP and AAP got their opportunity and slammed Channi saying it was an insult to the people of UP and Bihar. With Channi's

faux pas going viral on social and polling on Sunday, Congress went into damage control. In a video message, Channi said his statement 'is being misconstrued. All migrant workers who came to Punjab till date, have toiled and taken it on the path to development. We have only love for them, nobody can change it.' Plus, he wasn't referring to migrants, but to AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, 'who come here and create disruption.' The big question is whether the sizeable migrant community let it pass? To be sure the Congress, also put out a video message from former PM Manmohan Singh urging people to vote for the party and blaming the Centre for trying to "malign Punjab and Punjabis". Will his magic work and undo the damage?

#### Reprieve For Haryana

It was well worth knocking on Supreme court's door. The Khattar government got reprieve and now hopes "The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020", may no longer face hurdles. On Tuesday last, the apex court set aside the Punjab and Haryana High Court order staying the law, which provides for 75% of private sector jobs for residents of the state. It said the HC hasn't given 'sufficient reasons for staying the legislation' and asked it decide within four weeks. Besides, it restrained the government from taking any action against employers under the law till then. The SC was approached by the government and argued that three other States – Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand had similar laws and that the law was a means to regulate migrants from settling in other States. The apex court did contemplate transferring pending matters to it, but said it would have to hear it on merits as the issue "is about livelihood and we are concerned about it". Be that as it may, the Khattar government may be able to fulfil its poll promise. All eyes will now be on what reasoned order the State HC gives.

#### Lalu's Freedom!

Former Bihar Chief Minister and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav may have to give up his dream. On Tuesday last, a CBI court in Ranchi convicted him in the fifth fodder scam case shattering his desire to return back to active politics and Parliament. The court is to pass an order on the quantum of his sentence on Monday and till then an ailing Lalu was sent to Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences, Ranchi. Recall, Lalu was jailed in December 2017 following the Rs 950 crore scam and then shifted to RIMS after his health deteriorated in jail; admitted to AIIMS and set free May last after the Jharkhand High Court suspended his remaining jail term, because he had already served half the sentence. The BJP is elated and its leaders have reacted saying, 'the verdict is the curse of the poor... is reaping what he had sowed' and now that he is convicted in five cases 'he can't contest any election for even a Mukhya!' His son and leader of Opposition Tejashwi claimed the verdict "hasn't dampened the party's morale, the order needs to be respected". However, he wondered whether this was the only scam in the country. "There had been some 80-odd scams in Bihar. Has any action been taken against anyone? What about cases against some influential businessmen in the country?", he said at a press conference. He needs to remember two wrongs don't make a right! ---/NFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### Life - threatening speed breakers

Editor, It is indeed very satisfying to see our Honorable Chief Minister visiting and encouraging localities to keep their surroundings clean. This am sure will motivate many more localities and hopefully bring about a sense of pride in one's own locality. While this is happening, it would be sensible to also look at the safety of travelling within the Town of Shillong. Shillong, I must say holds the record of having hundreds of speed breaker crisscrossing the town. Sadly, none of these speed breakers are ever painted and this poses a huge threat to even an alert driver driving well within the speed

limits for one simply cannot see them. Maybe the Honorable Chief Minister might want to allocate a minimal amount to either the department concerned or localities to ensure that the speed breakers are painted. This I feel would also satisfy a criteria under the Smart Cities program and Road Safety.

Yours etc.,  
KM Pala  
Resident of Shillong  
Via email

#### Jowai's garbage issue

Editor, While there are pressing issues hitting the news lately, I would like to highlight another issue in this esteemed daily that needs immediate attention; the ever-growing pile of garbage in Jowai Town. As I write this letter, a huge pile of garbage is accumulated at the hub of Jowai. Specifically, one small mountain of garbage is lying adjacent to the DC's office in Jawmusing and another right across from the prestigious Thomas Jones Synod College, besides other areas. This is due to the unavailability of a proper dumping ground. As a layman, the only solution I know, is to rely on my individual effort to segregate waste and dispose it properly. Although this is worthwhile, it is however time-consuming and right now we are desperately in need of a quick fix. In other words, a fast and temporary solution like a dumping ground to give time for yet another (and this time perhaps a much more serious deliberation) by our MLA and other concerned

authorities for resolving this big garbage issue before things get out of hand.

Yours etc.,  
E. Pohsnem,  
Jawmusing  
Jowai

#### Kudos to Meghalaya CM!

Editor, The news item published in your esteemed daily on 16th Feb, 2022 titled 'Conrad announced enhanced welfare scheme for soldiers', is really a pleasant proclamation by the Chief Minister of Meghalaya in this year of Azadi ka Amrit Mohotsav celebration. After 75 years of attaining independence, the Defence personnel and Gallantry Award winners, who by risking their lives

and making supreme sacrifices protect the security of the country, are not given their due respect in our state compared to other states of the country. The North and South Indian States reward their Gallantry Award winners with handsome amounts of cash awards and a piece of land. They are highly respected by the civil society too.

I don't want to mention the meagre amount of the cash award given till date annually in our state which too was initiated by the tremendous effort of some retired army personnel.

Kudos to the Indian Army and Rajya Sainik Board for organising the rally and communicating the grievances to our CM Conrad K. Sangma. His announcement to enhance the welfare schemes for soldiers is praiseworthy. My

sincere thanks to GAD minister Sniawbhalang Bhalang, DC East Khasi Hills, Ms Isawanda Laloo, Air Marshal A.P. Singh, Lt. Gen. Panchanathan and others involved in this initiative. I strongly feel that if our government and Defence Department pay proper attention to the welfare of our ex-servicemen and Gallantry Award winners it will not only honour them but also encourage our students and youths to take up a career in Defence.

Yours etc.,  
Reeta Ghosh  
National Awardee  
Teacher and a Defence family member

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

*"Never look back unless you are planning to go that way."*

—Henry David Thoreau

### The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 191 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2022

## Diplomacy, Democracy

DIPLOMACY is obviously not a strong point with the Modi government. This was glaringly evident in the way the external affairs ministry summoned the Singapore high commissioner to register its protest over a statement made by the island nation's prime minister Lee Hsien Loong. Significantly, former prime minister Manmohan Singh too, in a different context this past week, stated that the present government was squandering the goodwill that the UPA government had created with other nations. Singh noted, rightly, that Modi's acts of 'hugging' on the world stage etc., by themselves help little.

In the case of the Singapore prime minister, what Lee had stated in his parliament speech did not breach diplomatic protocols. He cited some facts about India in the wider context of performance of democracy worldwide to stress on the emerging flaws in the system. There was nothing vituperative or baseless when he stated a large number of MPs in Indian parliament have faced criminal cases including murder. His reference to "Nehru's India", to which too the Modi government took exception, was by way of a reference to the good times of Indian democracy when the first prime minister led the nation. Facts speak for themselves. In a similar fashion, the West now describes India as Modi's India. This is the way it's spoken. By summoning Singapore's envoy to register India's protest, the Modi government has done a disservice to the cause of diplomacy. A small nation in the South Asian region, Singapore has over the past six decades built a great reputation for good governance. The island nation famously has a higher per capita income than even the nations in the West. Its governments worked wonders. By contrast, India is today an example of bad governance -- including in the way permissiveness at political and bureaucratic levels are breaking the back of public sector banks with serious implications to the national economy, or in the freewheeling corruption in government. Both Modi and Singh worsened the scenario in several respects.

Erudition, restraint and strategy are integral to global diplomacy. Whimsical actions have no place there, as was also in the case now cited by Singh -- of the abrupt Lahore visit by Prime Minister Modi, only to soon get a hit from Pakistan via a terrorist attack on the Pathankot air force base. Starkly, in the past seven years, India's ties with most neighbours have worsened. Sustained efforts to build bridges with nations near and far are the way forward since co-operation and not confrontation brings more gains. India needs to learn from Singapore how to tackle corruption at all levels!

### Letters to the Editor

## Congress a sunken ship

Editor,  
Apropos of the news, "KHADC MDC Quits Congress", "Most MLAs have their check gates in State, claims Pala" then "Coal trade-ultra nexus is old allegation: Acting DGP" and the editorial "Political quid pro quo" (ST February 19, 2022), Bajop (Winner) never surrenders in life when he dares to speak the facts. He has taken the right decision to come out from a party that does not believe in inner party democracy and he rightly stated that "staying with the Congress would be 'political suicide'. Now he needs to connect with his constituency in Rambrai-Jyrngam as he is from the grassroots rural constituency. Bajop should keep up the reputation of being a proud Edmundian, the school that certified him "A born leader and a team man" when he was made the Captain of St. Edmunds School.

Bajop Pyngrhoe has to maintain the eagle mentality not that of the chicken, turkey and the crow. It is good that he leaves the crow behind so that he can soar like an eagle. He is young and time is on his side. Coming to the second news item I feel that there is also a need to probe who the big cats are that are indulging in benami activities and patronizing the

same. Coming to the third news item the upright and low profile DGP Idashisha Nongrang rightly said that the "allegations of coal trade-insurgent nexus are nothing new". I think she knows better what is cooking and boiling on this matter. The Police should boost their morale and act without fear on criminality in the State for the safety of the citizens.

Finally, the editor stroked the right chord in her editorial "Political quid pro quo" that the "MDA government is unconcerned, comfortable in the thought that the NPP -- the political party leading the government -- is growing from strength to strength". The editor is also 100% percent correct in pointing out that "The regional parties have repeatedly failed to take a stand on any issue. In short they have abandoned the cause of the people and what's in the larger public interest". The Group of Five Congress MLAs have taken a timely and wise decision to jump the ship which is sunk and support the NPP-led government because the next election is going to be another term for the NPP government under the brilliant leadership of Conrad Sangma who is approachable, humble, firm, and listens to the people. He is the best bet when it comes to connect with the powers in New Delhi and the advantage is that he has the command of both the Hindi and English language.

Whither Meghalaya's medical college  
Editor,  
With all Government-owned and mission hospitals now crowded due to population explosion and newer diseases that are af-

# Thiah Chloor or the 'Night Visit' System in Jañtia Hills

By H H Mohrmen

The above is a study on one of the aspects of the matrilineal family system of the Pnar and the War Jañtia people of the state. The link of this interesting study was shared with me by Mr Phrang Roy from Rome. The study titled, "Overview of the Jañtia unique matrilineal system," was authored by Mitali Chakrabarty PhD and Barphukan Chaudhury PhD both professors in the Department of Anthropology Guwahati University. It was an in-depth study on the very important aspect of marriage and which is an intrinsic part of the matrilineal society which is commonly known in Pnar as 'thiah chloor'.

However, this write-up is not so much a comment on the study, because it was very well done and needs to be appreciated. The selection of study areas which include certain localities of Jowai, Mihmyntdu and Nartiang too was very well thought off and helped to capture the true picture of the case that was studied. This article however is an attempt to understand how "thiah chloor" or the night visit system (NVS) which is a tradition which survived the test of time is still prevalent among certain communities in Jañtia hills. It is also an effort to understand this tradition which at one point of time was an important aspect of the society. "Thiah Chloor" will also help us understand the marriage system in the tradition and how this is linked to the matrilineal family system of the tribe.

### Marriage among the Pnar and War Jañtia matrilineal system

The most common mode of marriage in the past and till today is by cohabitation. Cohabitation or 'ia chlong or pynche kurim' without any ceremony is the most popular form of marriage amongst the Pnar and War Jañtia people. Traditionally when a couple decided to enter into wedlock, they would inform their mothers and uncles and then the female's uncle would organize the meeting of the two clans. In such weddings only the two clans are involved. In some cases the family on the father's side 'ki kha' of both the male and the female too were invited as observers. The popular tradition is the sharing of words by maternal uncles of both the wife

and husband to be. There is no a ritual or ceremony. The 'Kha' are invited out of respect for the paternal family and their role in the tradition is to witness because the major part of the ceremony is performed by the maternal uncles of both the man and the woman.

The other type of marriage by cohabiting is, when the woman brings her man to the house and introduces him to her parents and her uncle. He would from that night stay with her in their house and the two would become husband and wife. When the appropriate time arrives, the husband would then take his wife to his clan house and introduce her to his family. But before that there were the usual courtships in which the man and his friends would visit the girl's house and depending on the chemistry the girl would choose the one amongst the many young men and the couple then starts dating. There is no specific time as to how long the courtship would be but the two will decide on the right time to inform their parents about the decision they made.

Marriage with ceremony in the case of the Pnar involves the tradition of 'lam futang' where rituals and ceremonies are performed to sanctify the marriage but the tradition was not that popular in the past. It is still not that popular amongst the people who follow the indigenous faith in the War Jañtia area of Amalrem even today.

### "Until dead do us apart" is an alien idea

Marrying multiple times or remarriage was not a taboo in the cultures of the Pnar and the War people of Jañtia hills. In fact, remarriage was very prevalent even during the time of our grandparents. This can be corroborated on two counts - the fact that there is a detail custom on how to file a divorce and also till about 80 years ago marrying multiple times or remarriage by both males and females was still prevalent.

Therefore the idea of "until dead do us apart" is definitely an influence of western culture or to be precise Christianity on the tribal culture. In fact, keep-

ing two wives is also not uncommon in the past especially amongst the well-to-do men in the society.

### The tradition of divorce

The tradition of divorce amongst Pnar and War Jañtia couples is known as "pynlait san shyieng" or "pynleit kurim" or "e thnem". In short when the couple decides to separate one of them will go to the Pator and send through him to the opposite party "i thnem" which comprises of fifty paisa and maybe half of a betel-nut and half of a betel-leaf which symbolizes separation of the union. The traditional head will inform the opposite party about the state of affairs and later in the evening announcement will be made in the community that the couple has been separated. The announcement is considered to be the official recognition that the couple is no longer husband and wife.

### Clan is the beginning and the end

In the Pnar matrilineal system the clan is the centre of an individual's life and the individual's life revolves around the maternal family. Though by tradition they do have place where they consider holy or sacred, traditional religion does not have the concept of a temple, a church or a mosque. Instead, they have "Kmai iung or the iung blai" where the religious rites and rituals are performed. All rites of passage from birth ceremonies to cremation and everything in between are held only at the "Kmai iung." By tradition, on his demise, the body of a male member of the family will have to be taken to the "kmai iung" to be kept in state till it is cremated and the last rites of the person are completed. In fact, even the charred-bones or the remains of the deceased person's body after cremation, will also be kept at the clan's ossuary for its final rest. Clan is therefore the essence of a matrilineal family system. It is the beginning and the end of the member's life and without the clan matrilineal family system will have no meaning.

In the matrilineal family system, the male member of the family is responsible for his sisters, his brothers, his

nieces and nephews and the Kur or clan and not as much for his wife and his children. They in turn will be taken care by their own "khi" or maternal uncle.

### Bam iungkur

Till date many of the male members of the society continue with the practice of eating their two primary meals in their parental home. Even though they live with their wives and their children yet, they will only have their meal in their mother's house or "Bam iung Kur/ Bei." Although "bam iungkur" may not be NVS per se, but it cannot be denied that it is a moderate version of the system.

The Pnar and War society also practice joint family system, hence the husband will eat his evening meal and his morning meal at his mother's house and he will only visit his wife's or the in-law's house in the night. In fact, all his needs are also arranged by his mother or his sister as the case may be. The tradition of eating at the mother's house basically ensurex "u khi" or the maternal uncle's presence in the house to look after his relatives needs and also to fortify his status in the family.

### NVS or Thiah chloor

In the Pnar matrilineal system "Thiah chloor" or night visit system is still prevalent where those following the Niamtre is still significant. "Thiah chloor" or NVS basically means that the husband leaves his wife's house for his mother's house immediately after he gets up in the morning and would only return during the night to sleep. "Thiah chloor" is the practice which defines the matrilineal family system because it clearly indicates that the male member of the society belongs to the clan and not to his wife. It is also convenient because then, traditionally Pnar and War societies practice a joint family system and the husbands of all the sisters live under one roof.

This tradition is no longer practiced by people who are not following the Niamtre (indigenous) faith. Unfortunately, it is gradually diminishing even amongst the people who practice traditional religion. And with the joint family giving way to nuclear families even the role of maternal uncle and the clan is gradually weakening in society today.

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# Putin May Win the Battle Without Fighting a War

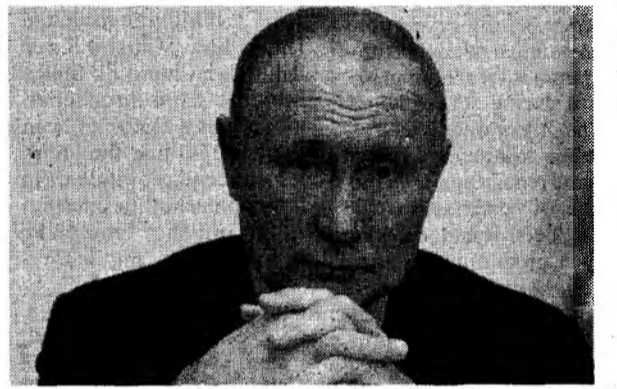
By TP Sreenivasan

War is generally believed to begin when diplomacy fails. But President Vladimir Putin of Russia has used the threat of war to force diplomacy to resolve intractable issues. His basic objective is to keep the former Republics of the Soviet Union within the sphere of influence of Russia, even if he cannot establish a new Soviet Union. In fact, this is a point that the West is said to have conceded at the initial stages of the break-up of the Soviet empire. But there are various interpretations of what precisely was agreed in 1990 and this historical issue has been a bone of contention between Russia and the West. The Russian position is that the West had cheated Russia "shamelessly" on this issue and that no state should strengthen its security at the expense of the security of other states.

Having made Russia a viable big power, Putin has set his eyes on Super Power

keep the options open. It is generally believed that the process of NATO admission for Ukraine has been stalled. The Russian announcement of troop withdrawal may have been in the light of some assurance in this regard, even though the troop withdrawal has not been acknowledged by the west. "There is what Russia says and then there is what Russia does," said Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State.

The French and German visits to Russia at the highest level show the difference in approaches between them and the US. The US would like to use the threat from Russia to keep Europe away from its temptation to embrace Russian and Chinese economic cooperation. Moreover, disruption in energy supplies from Russia to Europe will benefit the US in the future. For the US, NATO continues to be a bulwark against Russia and no dilution in its mandate can be tolerated. In



status and the recent events are the first stirrings of his journey. Contrary to the general impression, he is not threatening to go to war against Ukraine, but to use Ukraine as a hostage to save it from becoming a NATO member and an ally of the West. The demands submitted by President Putin to NATO are clear and explicit. Apart from legal guarantees against aggression by NATO, he demands that Ukraine should not be allowed entry into NATO. NATO should also remove weapons deployed in the vicinity of Russia after 1997. NATO should also rule out further expansion to the east. Russia has clarified that it has not given an ultimatum, but it will take immediate action if Ukraine is admitted to NATO. NATO has announced that concrete proposals on transparency, risk reduction and arms control have been made to Russia. The measures proposed are "preventive, proportionate and de-escalatory", it said. Russia has not responded to the proposals as they do not seem to be satisfied with it.

The Russian troop movements on its borders with Ukraine since November 2021 are different in nature from its actions in March 2014 in Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed on the ground that the area was gifted by Russia to Ukraine in the first place. Though the international community has rejected the annexation, Crimea seems to have benefited by a phenomenal increase in tourism as the liberal Ukrainian visa system has been retained for Crimea. The annexation of Crimea is today a fait accompli. The conflict in Donbass region of Ukraine by Russia backed separatists, which began in April 2014 is still continuing after 14,000 deaths. The region has become the most mine contaminated areas in the world. The Minsk Agreement meant to resolve this conflict is still not implemented, but it has come to focus and Germany has endorsed the Minsk Agreement as part of the current negotiations with Russia. India has also supported the Minsk Agreement.

Russia has never said that it would invade Ukraine. The amassing of troops was only to prevent the admission of Ukraine to NATO, it claimed. If that was indeed so, Russia is well on its way to blocking Ukraine's admission. Several European countries are not averse to the idea of keeping Ukraine out of NATO, even though others like the US would like to

a sense, Putin has exploited the situation to his advantage. In that sense, he has succeeded in his intention to bring Ukraine's admission to NATO to the center stage and extract as many concessions as possible before ending his escapade.

Russia has gained another advantage as a result of its latest actions. It has come closer to China than ever before by obtaining Chinese approval to the military action in exchange for its support to China on the Taiwan question. Russia has transformed the expected US-China Cold War to a three dimensional one. The new bond between China and Russia has been described as stronger than the military pacts of the Cold War era. If this turns out to be a durable arrangement, the very structure of international relations will change.

It must be heartening to Russia that India has adopted a neutral position in the present conflict situation. India not only abstained on the resolution in the UN Security Council, but also avoided any mention of Ukraine in the Melbourne meeting of the Quad. This may change if a China-Russia-Iran-Pakistan Quad comes into being, but for the time being, Russia has no reason to be concerned about India.

Today, all parties, including the United States are calling for negotiations. "I am here today, not to start a war, but to prevent one," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the UN Security Council most recently. He acknowledged that in the past, the US had brandished what turned out to be false intelligence in the Security Council, as in the case of the war in Iraq. But he said that Washington would be more than happy to be proven wrong if Russia decides not to invade.

Russia seems to have gained much by its military adventure without invading Ukraine and, without antagonizing Europe. All options remain open, but Putin may win the battle without fighting a war.  
(TP Sreenivasan is a former Ambassador of India and a member of the National Security Advisory Board and presently the DG of the Kerala International Centre. He has nearly 20 years of experience in multilateral diplomacy and has represented India at a number of international conferences organised by the UN, the Commonwealth and the NAM. He has chaired several UN Committees and Conferences.)

backgrounds as they can afford the expensive NEET coaching. Such students when they pass would not contribute to the healthcare system of Meghalaya. They will leave for higher studies; pay back the bond money and then go abroad.

Also, its time to do away with the bond as the rich after graduating find no difficulty to pay back the bond money and do their private practice while the PHCs suffer for want of doctors. Now with new diseases we need meritorious doctors trained since childhood to serve the poor and marginalised.

Sadly, as citizens we have no way of voicing our concerns except through the newspapers. In any case the Chief Minister and his Deputy are too powerful to be asked any questions on any policy matters such as the reemployment of the retired DGP, amidst cries of severe unemployment. If this re-employment policy is not stopped forthwith we are going to witness many old and inform people struggling to come to office with a walking stick.

Yours etc.,  
W Passah  
Via email.

eyebrow. The public never spoke up when bureaucrats were allotted land by those in power at throw-away prices during the tenure of the first MDA Government led by Dr Donkupar Roy with the present CM, Conrad Sangma as Finance Minister, endorsing the project in spite of outcry from the public.  
Here we see the attitude of this Government which has thrown all precautions of to the winds to crowd Greater Shillong with two hospitals and medical colleges. The incurable traffic snarl from Fire Brigade to Barik that affects the 8 Km radius from GPO has simply blinded their conscience. They only care about political convenience and money power. The public are hapless and what's worse is that this same Government will dominate the 2023 polls, as people look at local gains and don't have a vision for the state.

We the public have been rendered voiceless but we demand that the Medical College in Shillong should be made operational since it is Meghalaya's only achievement since 1972. This is important for students who cannot afford the fees in other medical colleges outside the State which range from Rs 30,000- 50,000 a year after passing NEET. Only in NEIGHRIMS are the fees a modest Rs 1000 a year. Most medical students passing NEET come from privileged

backgrounds as they can afford the expensive NEET coaching. Such students when they pass would not contribute to the healthcare system of Meghalaya. They will leave for higher studies; pay back the bond money and then go abroad.

fluctuating us, these hospitals are overcrowded. In 1987, NEIGRIHMS was established with the motto, 'Towards knowledge and life,' and it has served the motto with dedication and distinction. However, the accessibility to NEIGRIHMS from different locations is problematic. The Umpling bridge which was dismantled in 2019 is still incomplete hence people are forced to take the crowded Rynjah-Lapalang-Umpling road. If Government had provided transport services with fixed rates to and from NEIGRIHMS the poor would be benefitted.

Neighbouring Assam now has 8 medical colleges. Most of our doctors had graduated from Assam Medical College and have served to the best of their ability. They were not allowed to continue serving in the urban areas and civil hospitals as doctors today do by pulling strings. Those doctors in the past had to serve distant PHCs and CHCs. These doctors served with such dedication that when they were transferred the villagers would weep and headmen would implore upon the DHS not to transfer them.

Coming to the proposed medical college in Shillong which was considered over ten years ago it is sad that politics has crept into this issue too. First the TB hospital at Jhalupura was proposed as the site. Later this changed to Greater Shillong but the public does not even raise an

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

*"A man will fight harder for his interests than for his rights."*

— Napoleon Bonaparte

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 191 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022

### Mother Language Day

FEBRUARY 21 is observed as Mother Language Day. It is unfortunate that this Day is not given due importance in Meghalaya. Mother language is about identity, the sense of self, the cultural values and the meaning of words and aphorisms that the ancestors had coined and why they did so. Most importantly it is language that keeps cultural heritage alive. Cultural information read or heard in a foreign language can be difficult to understand or identify with, owing to a loss of meaning, impact and context.

Humans are social beings who connect to each other through language and the best connect is the mother language. Prof Jim Cummins of the University of Toronto states that the mother language has a very important role in the over-all development of the child. It helps in better cognitive and intellectual development. Cummins also says that there is enough evidence that a person who has mastered the mother language is better able to learn a second and third language and therefore has a deeper understanding of how to use different languages effectively and learn from other cultures as well. Extensive research supports the notion that a child who only knows only one language doesn't know it well enough. Also, that children who speak more languages are often more flexible in their thinking as they can process information in different languages. Cultures are enriched through synthesis and language is that synthesizer. It is unfortunate that many so-called English medium schools in the past never emphasised on learning the mother language. On the contrary students were told not to speak anything other than English in the classroom and the school premises. Students were taught Hindi as a second language but not their own mother language. Those who had passed out of school during that phase lost something valuable in their life experiences.

The undue emphasis on English as a language for passing examinations and for better job opportunities has relegated the mother language to the background. Today, elected representatives in Meghalaya who don't speak English are unable to make speeches in the Assembly. Since when has the mother language become less important than English? It is high time that MLAs are allowed to express their views and answer questions in their mother languages. It is for the State Assembly to organise the simultaneous translation facility. It is important that parents speak the mother language at home since feelings which are so important for the child's development are transferred through the mother language. It is high time for the Government of Meghalaya to dig in its heels and push for the recognition of Khasi and Garo languages to give them the official language status they deserve.

The Covid19 pandemic should open our eyes to see the hard work and dedication of the ASHA volunteers. The ASHAs are the foot soldiers who act as the first line of defence, not just during the combat against Covid19, but in the larger battle for improving public health in the country since its inception in 2005. This write up is neither to pay tribute nor to felicitate the ASHA volunteers, but it is an attempt to understand their contributions towards improving community health, the economy and to especially learn about their issues and plight. At the same time, it is a campaign for their rights.

The ASHAs are volunteers under the Government of India's National Rural Health Mission. The object and reason of this mission is to recruit and appoint health volunteers in every village in the country. These volunteers are the first points of contact in the chain of health services provided by the State. This group of health volunteers are vital for tackling health issues and planning. However, the usage of the term "volunteer" in the scheme is paving way for exploitation to a degree which is dehumanizing.

The amount of work and commitment made by the ASHA towards the mission, especially as witnessed during the pandemic 2020-21, has gone past those of regular health employees. The ASHAs are trained female health volunteers and while volunteering for the work, their livelihoods should not be hampered, but the ground reality is that the ASHA is working full-time from dawn to dusk to fulfil the tasks. The primary functions of the ASHAs are to (a) mobilize the community for health camp and awareness programs (b) to teach and exhort the community on the importance of health interventions (c) to disseminate information on various health schemes (4) to guide people to make use of the services and facilities which are available to them. Her role is also to counsel and assist pregnant women as in birth preparedness, help them to get access to institutional delivery, explain the importance of breast feeding and immunization etc. The ASHA also gives awareness on health protocols and guides people to a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, they are also responsible to give care in limited health issues and make referrals.

As honorary volunteers the ASHAs do not get any

salary or honorarium, but they are compensated for the works they perform in the form of monetary incentives. As per the Government of Meghalaya's document, when the mission was launched in the State, the ASHAs were receiving Rs 150 to Rs 1000 per month and the incentives earned by the ASHAs largely depends on the number of beneficiaries they could get in a month from the villages. There are various incentives under different schemes like, JSY, Family Planning, Immunizations (UIP), Village Health Nutrition Day and other vertical programmes which they can accrue. Though these sources of incentives seem to be useful but they don't add up to the sum, per ASHA. Despite the low incentives and the irregular payment of such incentives, it has been reported that the ASHA assisted institutional deliveries were very high under Dalu block in West Garo Hills in the past years.

Under the scheme each village has to constitute a Village Health and Sanitation Committee with ASHA as the secretary. The Committee has to prepare and facilitate a health plan for the community in the village. But there are villages which do not have a Village Committee and in the State like Meghalaya which does not have a robust Village Administration Law, the implementation of such a significant health mission might be suffering from serious lapses.

Till date there are about 6697 volunteers working in both urban and rural villages in the State. The ASHAs do not need our verbal praises and appreciations, rather the society should learn about their work in order to understand their plight. It has been said that the mission also provides a means of subsistence for women and to an extent the door-to-door visitations made by the ASHAs to enquire about the health of the people and to offer medical attention or remedies in certain cases have eased the burden of people and helped them save their daily wage loss.

Are the incentives given to ASHAs enough to sustain and meet the basic requirements in life? It is heart wrenching to learn that for a door to door work they are paid a meagre amount of Rs 1650 (in other States) and between Rs 1850-2000 per month in Meghalaya. In 2011-12 the

Government of Meghalaya had announced the ASHA Benefit Scheme (ABS) in order to augment the incentives, improve the working conditions and to tackle the issue of volunteers dropping out from the service. Under the ABS, the ASHA will be paid a matching amount she earned during a particular year. For example, if the ASHA earns Rs 1000 from incentives throughout the year, she will be given the matching amount of Rs 1000 by the State government and the incentives will be disbursed at the end of financial year in March. It is learnt that the ABS got discontinued in 2019 for reasons best known to the government.

It is important to lay bare before the public a sample of incentives which the ASHA earns. The ASHA can earn Rs 300 in rural area and Rs 200 in urban areas for ensuring antenatal care for woman. Also, she can earn Rs 100 from attending quarterly meetings of the Village Health Committee, but where there is no Village Committee, she loses that one hundred rupee. The ASHA has to conduct health surveys in a village and subsequently compile the reports. On the basis of her report the Government makes health plans and even policies. In fact, they are now tasked with malaria and tuberculosis control programmes etc. These programmes require certain knowledge for which the ASHA has to undergo a special training. During the Covid19 pandemic the ASHAs are the ones who go from one household to another collecting data on covid19 patients while risking their lives and they also played a major role in vaccination drive in the village. The State Government had announced a payment of Rs 1000 as Covid19 incentive per ASHA. Has the incentive reached the ASHAs in the State? It is perplexing to witness a few functions held in a couple of Shnongs or localities to felicitate or give cash rewards to the ASHAs. Where is the money coming from? It is unfair that only a few ASHAs in a few localities are being felicitated while the rest are being left out.

On two occasions the Meghalaya ASHA Workers Union had organized agitations and cessation of work to protest against the delay in payment of incentives,

among other issues. In 2018 and 2021 respectively, during the agitations the ASHAs had expressed displeasure at the Government's apathy towards their plight and demanded from the Government to disburse the incentives in a time bound manner. Today, in Meghalaya where do the ASHAs get their incentives from? Is it from the Central share only, which is Rs 2000 per month? Where is the State Government's matching amount of another Rs 2000 a month which adds up to a marginal sum of Rs 4000? Thus, the ASHAs are the most underpaid workers/volunteers and they are being exploited to the hilt.

The work and services rendered by the ASHAs are humungous and significant to the society, especially since healthcare interventions at the grass roots are perennial in nature. The local self-government, like the Dorbar Shnong can improve their role by way of legislation. However, at this juncture in the larger interest of the ASHAs in the State and for better implementation of the scheme it is necessary to extend support and join forces with the ASHAs in their struggle for a just, fair and equal treatment. Therefore, I urge the general public to express empathy and demand from the Government the following: (i) to immediately amend Rule 9 of the guidelines and replace the word volunteer with worker. (ii) to consider ASHAs as workers in accordance with the Labour Laws (iii) to extend full rights and entitlements, like leaves, provident fund, medical and educational allowances etc (iv) to ensure that ASHAs get not less than Rs 18,000 as monthly earnings and they must be paid as per the Minimum Wage Act. (v) to consider ASHAs as skilled and highly skilled workers and pay them accordingly. (vi) to improve the working conditions, standardise the working hours and protect them from exploitations. In 2018, the ASHA Workers (Regularization of Service and Other Benefits) Bill was introduced in the Parliament and although the Bill was a mere tokenism it is important to follow up and persist on the demands for uplifting the livelihoods of ASHAs.

It is our moral duty to stand in solidarity with the ASHAs and support them in all aspects. Let the ASHAs remain to be the most underpaid and exploited women workers in the State.

## The curious case of Meghalaya's COVID-19 relief package

By Rakshita Swamy & Angela Rangad

Audits, transparency and citizen-centric accountability need to be a part of fund support and disbursement.

Every COVID-19 wave in India has brought us face to face with the dire precarity of life and livelihood for India's vast numbers of unorganised workers, and the inadequate response of the state and society to their plight. The latest global OXFAM inequality report highlights how India's billionaires have grown dramatically in numbers and wealth, while 84% have reduced income and 4.6 crore working people have plummeted into acute poverty. It provides damning indicators of how poor the state response has been in terms of relief and social sector expenditure during this period. The delivery systems of the meagre amounts that have been allocated by the Centre and State governments, therefore, become even more important. A massive public audit of a gratuitous relief scheme in Meghalaya for unorganised workers provides important lessons about the critical importance of transparency, public participation, and peoples monitoring for those who have had to bear the brunt of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

When the Government of Meghalaya announced relief for workers affected by the COVID-19 lockdown through the Chief Minister's Relief Against Wage Loss (CRAWL) scheme, it was welcomed by many. But this announcement came without necessary details. There was no notification outlining the quantum of financial support. There was no published scheme, or guidelines with minimum norms for identifying beneficiaries, and verifying their eligibility. Nevertheless, the state of economic desperation led a large number of people to apply for the assistance.

**RTI and response**  
Unfortunately, people had no way to check whether their application for support had been successful or not. Payments began trickling into the bank accounts of some of the applicants, but even they were confused about the amount of support they were supposed to get. Some unions of unorganised sector workers such as street vendors and domestic workers immediately brought this to the attention of the government, but not much was done. In October 2020, a local civil group, Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR), filed an RTI application asking for the list of unorganised workers to whom payments had been made. This information should have been mandatorily and proactively disclosed in the public domain by the State government as mandated under Section 4, RTI Act.

The response to the RTI was provided in December 2020 with details of around 1,60,000 people and transfers. The response also seemed to indicate that the scheme for financial assistance to unorganised workers facing a wage loss was worth ₹2,100, and to construction workers registered under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) Act was ₹5,000. The unions decided to widely disseminate this information over WhatsApp, community websites, and through local electronic news channels. The RTI response was subsequently also converted into a searchable digital database with the help of Graamvaani, a social tech company, via a dedicated site called hok-meghalaya.in. This enabled people to ascertain whether and how much money they had been transferred as per government's records, with the option provided of filing a grievance with the Chief Minister's Office if they contested the Government's claim. Using IVRS, calls were also made to 1,35,617 people to inform them that as per the Government's record, ₹2,100 or ₹5,000 had been transferred to their bank account.

This virtual "public audit" and facilitation exercise was carefully planned and carried out by civil society groups and workers' unions using digital technology at a time when COVID-19 restrictions made physical verification impossible. The results were an eye-opener. Out of 11,509 people who responded to the IVRS calls, only 13% stated that they received the full amount that was mentioned in the RTI response; 47% received nothing, in spite of the Government records showing ₹2,100 having been transferred to each of them. Nearly 8,000 people submitted individual grievances to the Chief Minister's Office and the Labour Department. Thousands of others searched through the RTI data and submitted their grievances. This was a process that should have been carried out by the Government, which was far better resourced, and duty bound to check on whether the money had reached the beneficiary. Instead, the Government became defensive and refused to accept or even engage with the findings. Faced with a deadlock of mounting dissatisfaction among workers who had not received their benefit, and the Government's attitude of denial and obfuscation, the unions and civil society groups organised a public hearing in Shillong on World Human Rights Day, in December 2021, to draw additional focus to the issue.

### Need for accountability

Chaired by Justice Madan B. Lokur, a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, the four-hour public hearing was an example of the democratic potential and social ethos of Meghalaya and its people. Over 200 workers gave up another day's wages, and came armed with their bank passbooks and labour cards to show that the money had not been credited in their bank accounts more than a year after it was due. The issue was about the need to get answers. Regrettably, as Justice Lokur noted, the Department of Labour boycotted the public hearing. Faced with such a situation, civil society groups have now approached the Legal Services Authority to pursue and enforce independent mechanisms of grievance redress and accountability.

This exercise has implications beyond Meghalaya. The Centre and various State governments have collected and spent thousands of crores, including the use of District Mineral Foundation Trust Funds, disaster relief funds, Compensatory Afforestation Management Funds Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds, etc. for "relief payments" with almost no disaggregated information in the public domain. Expenditures made by governments under these various funds for COVID-19 relief have not been subject to either statutory audits of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India or institutionalised social audits, and necessary grievance redress platforms are conspicuous in their absence. This assertion, demanding transparency, and citizen-centric accountability cannot be seen as an isolated movement in a small State. Rajasthan too for instance has an ongoing movement and campaign demanding an accountability law, which is drawing support. This is a demand by marginalised groups to be acknowledged and heard, raising pointed questions that apply to all, and demanding precise answers in order to make democratic participation meaningful. The strong human assertion emerges from the pain and the ruins of a crisis, but it has creative implications for all. It is eventually about the power and the dignity of democratic citizenship — and once again, it is our most marginalised who are showing us the way.

Rakshita Swamy is with the Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research (SAFAR). Angela Rangad is with Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Regional satraps cannot lead India

Editor,  
It is evident that the coming together of the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Telangana- Mamata Banerjee, M.K. Stalin and K. Chandrashekar Rao respectively to attempt to defeat the Modi-led BJP government at the Centre in 2024 is driven by personal ambition and the political atmosphere in the respective states rather than a commitment to national interests. They must realise that the front each one wants is best suited to their own states than to the general needs of India.

As for Mamata Banerjee, the crushing defeat that she inflicted on the Modi-led BJP in the state in the Assembly elections has made her to position herself as a national leader and a challenger to PM Modi. In her idea of a front, the Congress will be excluded and a few regional parties will come together. Stalin and KCR also want to convince the people of their states that they have the potential to play a larger role in national politics. The three leaders coming together are the heads and CMs of three different states. As such their alliance won't create an electoral

impact. Such an alliance does not have the potential to secure additional votes. As these parties are more powerful in the respective states and do not have much influence in other states, they cannot succeed in convincing the voters of other states. It is difficult to predict the electoral prospects of the alliance. We may get a clear idea about it after the results of the Assembly polls currently underway are out.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

#### Unity or homogeneity?

Editor,  
In a country like India, no issue that concerns or triggers the religion of any individual or group is ever a simple matter. In a recent incident six teenaged Muslim girls from a government run college in Karnataka's Udupi district were barred from entering the college as they were wearing head scarves-hijab. A small issue that could have been easily tackled between the students and college authorities ultimately spread like wild fire due to videos going viral. The incident further accelerated as several other educational institutions in Karnataka also started stopping their Muslim students from wearing the head

scarves.

The above action was justified on grounds that it is done to maintain equality and uniformity within the classroom premises. But the majority opinion is that this action will rather create a feeling of hostility and discrimination among the young minority minds who will be the future face of India. This issue is further worsened because of instigating statements of political leaders who tried to politicise the entire issue for their personal agenda.

In a classroom where children are encouraged to sow the first seeds of education, where they are taught about the negative repercussions of discrimination and separatist feelings, where they read and understand the words "secularism" and "religious tolerance", such outrageous actions will only scar their thought process and tend to divide them from their fellow mates, their friends and their own people.

When a wall made of caste and religious differences is created between two individuals, it takes years to dismantle. The pertinent question that this issue evokes is whether equality or unity can come only through homogeneity. Can only people of the same kind be said to conserve unity? What about those people who are of different races, languages, cultures and religions that India represents

but who still stand together? Is that not the unity that India needs — a unity where people can converge on issues and rise above language, caste and creed?

Yours etc.,  
Ritika Das  
Indraprastha College For Women (IPCW)  
University of Delhi

#### Meghalaya still controlled by Assam

Editor,  
I was amused to read the report, "Coal trader-ultra nexus is old allegation: Acting DGP" (ST Feb 19, 2022). The Acting DGP is trying to defend the indefensible but that's only to be expected. When has a civil servant ever accepted that he/she could be wrong? That requires some amount of humility and soul searching which is not the attribute of a police officer or a bureaucrat. The Acting DGP claims that 90% of FIRs filed against illegal coal mining and transportation are by the police themselves. Does the Acting DGP expect us to believe that an FIR is everything? Let her inform the public about the current position of those FIRs. Have the cases been enquired into? What were the findings? Are these state secrets that cannot be divulged to the citizenry? Out of the 90%

of FIRs filed what percentage have been investigated; how many of those cases are charge-sheeted and how many criminals who mined coal illegally and the truck owners who transported the contraband coal have been arrested? Will the Acting DGP be more precise rather than just rubbing the allegations that there is a nexus between the underground outfits (read mafia) and the coal mine owners?

Let me remind the Acting DGP who has been away from the State for a long time that the police in Meghalaya are never held accountable for failing to convict criminals. I can name several cases including the one where a police constable himself was murdered in Ri Bhoi for daring to prevent illegal coal transportation. What about the fake encounter where Cherrisherfield Thangkhiew former HNLC General Secretary was killed? Has the case arrived at any reasonable conclusion by the Enquiry Committee? This is already the 6th month. Who is delaying the enquiry? How many murder cases have been closed for want of evidence? Why is the Investigation Branch of Meghalaya Police not able to reach anywhere? Every day coal trucks are plying and carrying coal that is illegally mined but police are unable to arrest the culprits.

The worse case scenario is that of the poor miners

from Assam who came to work in a coal mine in Shal-lang, West Khasi Hills and died of asphyxiation inside the mine. Every time it's the coal miners who are blamed when they are only poor labourers coming to work to earn their livelihood. How can the police of West Khasi Hills not know of the illegal coal mining when trucks daily come from there through the highway and sometimes through forest routes on their way to Assam. Sometimes they take the route via Garo Hills to Bangladesh.

It is a fact that Ms Non-gang and her team had shown great courage and dedication during those dark days when Meghalaya was under the grip of insurgency and for that we are grateful to her. How we wish she could head the Meghalaya Police today. But no, she can't do that because she is only holding the fort until the man from Assam comes and takes over as DGP. Meghalaya will always be subservient to Assam when it comes to appointment of DGP. What's the point of having a separate state for 50 years and being dictated by Assam?

Yours etc.,  
Jubanlak Lyngdoh,  
Via email

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*"The voice of conscience is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it; but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it."*

--- Madame de Stael

## The Shillong Times

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### Race before the race

THE five-state assembly elections are, if anything, raising the confidence of the Opposition parties – to get set and face the BJP in the general elections slated for the year 2024. A lot can happen between now and the coming two years. Yet, the writing is on the wall. This round of assembly polls, principally in the northern sector, is bound to have embarrassment in store for the BJP. As it stands today, the party is not sure of a win in any of the five states. Results, though, are unpredictable and could swing either way. But, the palpable anxiety on the faces of the all-too-powerful BJP leaders on the campaign front is proof that all is not going well for the party.

Punjab is seeing the main fight between the Congress and the AAP; Uttarakhand has the Congress and the BJP face-to-face; Uttar Pradesh has the BJP and the Samajwadi Party in a close fight; the results of UP being the keenly watched one. If the BJP loses UP, the party would start the walk for the 2024 general elections with a lost face. If it wins UP, the rest is less of a worry. Manipur and Goa have regional parties at play and how things shape up there is unpredictable. It is this sense of uncertainty on the face of the BJP that is raising the hopes for the Opposition to start the preparations in advance for the upcoming 2024 fight in earnest. Telangana's chief minister Chandrashekar Rao met his Maharashtra counterpart Uddhav Thackeray to take his campaign against the BJP forward but has won conditional support – that any opposition alliance should have the Congress included in it. This is the stand being taken by Tamil Nadu's MK Stalin as well.

On the Congress turf, this round of assembly poll campaign was jointly led by Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vaidya, she having come more upfront compared to the previous round of assembly polls in West Bengal, Assam and elsewhere. The two are, by now, like bread and cheese on the campaign front. The Congress clout will be high if it can retain Punjab and grab Uttarakhand. Goa and Manipur can be sidekicks. What would follow are elections to Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat in the next round. In all the three states, the Congress still has the firepower. It lost MP by a whisker in terms of a clear majority, won Rajasthan and narrowly lost Gujarat in the last polls. The next time around, a loss for the BJP could entirely be the Congress party's gain.

# Weakening the democratic set up

By Albert Thyriani

"All 5 Congress MLAs in Meghalaya join BJP-backed Meghalaya Democratic Alliance" was the headline of most national media recently. The point made is that, in the rare of rarest case, the Congress and BJP are now coalition partners in this state. The unimaginable has happened. The five beamingly posed for photographs along with the Chief Minister displaying their letter of support to his government. The rebels were promptly suspended by Congress for their unilateral decision. Unfazed by the show cause notice, four of the five legislators are already on plum posts with one likely to be inducted as minister. The grand old party will have to expel them. What happens next will be unfolded but the behaviour of the 'netas' is least appreciated.

It is amply clear now that the Congress MLAs are incapable of sitting in the Opposition. They are unable to function in opposition benches. The diametrical ideological difference with the saffron party is forgotten in a flash. The plea that as opposition members they are deprived of development in their constituencies is an insult to the democratic set up. This is a lame excuse for not doing their work. MLA schemes are there. The opposition members too can apply for projects for their constituencies. If the government denies their dues they should protest loud and clear. They should make known the unfair treatment of the government. This is the role of the opposition. To say that opposition MLAs can benefit only if they stop being in opposition is an affront to the Constitution itself.

The Constitution clearly spells out the role of the opposition in all elected bodies. Democracy can survive and is strengthened only if there is a strong opposition. It is the opposition that makes the government answerable to the people. It is the opposition that keeps a check on the policies, performance, failures, commissions and omissions of the government. It is the opposition which keeps the government on tenterhooks. In the absence of a robust opposition who will question the government? The five respected MLAs can weaken the Congress but they have no right to weaken the democratic framework. They were elected as opposition and should play their role as best as they can. By their actions they have fed wrong

information to the public that a government allots developmental works only to its own MLAs or those who support it and unless they join the government they are deprived of development. Voters should be highly wary of the now suspended Congress MLAs. Legislators who scatter all over the place in just five years in opposition do not deserve to be in politics.

The effects of the alliance of the MLAs with the MDA is already visible. The opposition to the illegal mining in the state has disappeared. Ampareen Lyngdoh has made a volte-face on illegal coal mining and trade. Bizarrely the East Shillong MLA has said that as an urban MLA she is unaware of the issue. One never knew of her extremely narrow outlook. That her concern is limited to her constituency alone is shocking. If illegal mining which affects the whole state, damages the environment irrevocably and an open invitation for corruption does not bother her, then one is at a loss for words. Since now that the hundreds of trucks do not ply through the main thoroughfares of Laitumkhrah illegality does not distress her. It is appalling. We can infer, therefore, that she is indifferent to poverty, illiteracy, lack of education, health care and other basic amenities, high dropout rate, infant mortality, teen pregnancies and other numerous challenges in the other parts of the state. A lawmaker contributes to legislations that extends far beyond a Legislative Assembly segment. This 'don't care' attitude of the MLA for her political convenience is condemnable.

Illegal mining is an open secret. Many labourers are in mines. Incidents have come to light from time to time. Tragedies have occurred regularly, the latest being the coal quarry deaths at Langmar village (Shallang). In spite of these clear leads the government insists on hard evidences and is firm on not ordering a probe. This is purely to hide the underworld business that benefits the coal mafia, politicians and government officials. It stands accused of lying. With new friends on its side the government is emboldened to continue ignoring demands for an independent inquiry. If the government escapes being scrutinized it is also because responsible

people like Ampareen show no conviction whatsoever as to what is good and bad for the state. When one shifts one's position so easily on an issue as serious illegal mining then politics is left without any principles.

The government has no right to deny development to the opposition. However, it is up to the party in power to promise greener pastures to those who in opposition to weaken it. Questions are, therefore, directed to those who fall into the trap in the guise of development. Should ideology for which they profess be forgotten for the sake of power? Should they turn their backs on their party in favour of their own ambitions? Which party allows their MPs or MLAs to act without sanction? The five state that they want to convey a message to the High Command. Unless they desire to pioneer an era in which elected representatives decide for themselves independently they are in an imaginary world. Mamata Banerjee, as manifesting right now, won't permit her party's parliamentarians and legislators to take a course on their own. Shiv Sena's, Uddhav Thackeray will take his decision. K. Chandrashekar Rao centralises party matters of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi. Mayawati of the BSP does not tolerate indiscipline. Akhilesh Yadav of the SP is the ultimate authority. J. Javalitha and Karunadhi once had firm control of party affairs. The legacy will pass on. The BJP which once ridiculed the Congress' high command culture, is copying the same under the very same nomenclature.

The five Congress MLAs have already decided to part ways with the 'sunk ship'. Candidates are already in election preparation mode. Media reports have indicated that Ampareen Lyngdoh and Kimfa Marbaniang will enrol with the NPP. PT Sawkmie has warmed up with the UDP and Mayralborn Syiem might follow suit. In due time confirmation will come.

The biggest beneficiary is undoubtedly the NPP. The appeal of Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has been enhanced. The NPP has emerged stronger due to the 'political quid pro quo'. Is it justified for the government to incur additional spending from the state exchequer for the gain of the ruling party?

The co-chairmen of the Meghalaya New and Renewable Energy Development Agency (MNREDA), Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) and Meghalaya Government Construction Company (MGCC) have to be paid with perks and facilities under Category "A+". Without a co-chairman were these agencies handicapped? Will these agencies record marked improvements with the incoming new bosses? What will the new chairmen bring to the table of nodal agencies for the central government? When chairmen are there why co-chairmen? These are mere political rewards mainly in exchange for political support? Is it not a waste of public money?

The action of the five MLAs is to counter the former colleagues in the AITC. It is also a sign that the NPP might dump the BJP sooner or later. Their relationship is getting strained. Former minister, AL Hek is more a critic of than an adviser to the Chief Minister. The party accused the state government of providing misleading information on implementation of the central schemes to the central government. In Manipur the two are fighting the election separately. NEDA and Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma declared his party does not need the NPP. With the latest development, in Meghalaya it may be the other way around. The NPP might not need the BJP in 2023.

Loyalty is a rare virtue in politics. Out of power for all and the unresolved leadership crisis the Congress has seen it in plenty. Abandoning the party has happened over and over again. From 17 in 2017 to just 2 in 2022 in Goa, from 28 in 2017 to mere 13 in 2022 in Manipur, the Meghalaya Congress could beat the record. The once largest party and then a formidable opposition of 17 MLAs, the Congress might end up with zero representative in the State Legislative Assembly for the first time in a long time. In the recent Goa elections the Congress and other parties went to the extent of making their candidates swear by the Gita, Quran and Bible in a temple, mosque and church, respectively not to leave party after the polls. Whether or not this works remains to be seen. How this attrition from a 137 year old party pans out is a matter of conjecture. If the trick pays off post March 10, the churches in Meghalaya could see similar scenes.

We had this ability, not too long ago. As recently as two generations back, people used to be familiar with death. People used to die in their homes. Elders were familiar with the signs of dying, the changing nature of breathing, the limbs getting cold and sometimes rattling in the throat. Extended families used to pray together, achieving not only some spiritual solace, but also experiencing togetherness and the value of a fond farewell.

This has changed and is changing for more and more people. It makes for a paradox in the modern medical system, as pointed out by the Lancet report, which noted: "While many people are overtreated in hospitals with families and communities relegated to the margins, still more remain undertreated, dying of preventable conditions and without access to basic pain relief."

"The unbalanced and contradictory picture of death and dying" tells the tale of a society lost in modern medicine and unkind of where this is taking us. It turns death into a scary prospect, and makes for not a happy way to go.

The change from dying at home to dying in a hospital has been swift and is of fairly recent origin. Even in the 1990s, intensive care was meant for those with a reasonable chance of getting back to a reasonable quality of life. That changed. Healthcare became the healthcare industry. It became high-tech. The industry created protocols. If the oxygen saturation or the sodium level drops, as

## When death takes away dignity and more A new Lancet report highlights the value of dying surrounded by loved ones

By M R Rajagopal and Jagdish Rattanani

As the pandemic recedes, some memories will not. One of the more terrible outcomes of Covid-19 was the isolation of those infected, often in a hospital ward, amid unfamiliar surroundings and with unknown people, without a loved one to touch, talk and comfort. For every death recorded as a pandemic statistic, many more were emotionally distressed, indeed torn apart. Families continue to live with memories that will haunt them for a life time, of not being present at the time of death of their loved ones.

But even before the pandemic, this kind of a death, in a remote location, amid the cold steel of an ICU bed and away from home, has been invading society. It has in fact become so common these days that the Lancet Commission studied it and put out a report with the rather thought-provoking title: The Value of Death.

The report dated Jan. 31, 2022, said: "Death and dying have moved from a family and community setting to primarily the domain of health systems. Futile or potentially inappropriate treatment can continue into the last hours of life. The roles of families and communities have receded as death and dying have become unfamiliar and skills, traditions, and knowledge are lost. Death and dying have become unbalanced in high-income countries, and increasingly in low-and-middle-income countries..."

What Lancet is bringing to light is precisely what palliative care teams have been struggling to highlight – that a highly medicalised death, a lingering pushed by modern technology and specialised and skilled doctors mandated to "do everything" often means prolonging the inevitable. This comes at a huge cost not only in terms of medical bills but also in terms of comfort of the patient. It robs the dying and their loved ones of dignity and of opportunities for quiet moments together, reflections, apologies, blessings and the peace of having been close as they part for ever.

The critical pre-requisite for all this to happen is the ability to accept death as the inevitable consequence of life.

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The change from dying at home to dying in a hospital has been swift and is of fairly recent origin. Even in the 1990s, intensive care was meant for those with a reasonable chance of getting back to a reasonable quality of life. That changed. Healthcare became the healthcare industry. It became high-tech. The industry created protocols. If the oxygen saturation or the sodium level drops, as

it inevitably has to in a dying person, the person is to be shifted to the ICU. This of course means separation from the family. The person is covered with tubes so that even during the five minutes of entry into the intensive care unit, the family is afraid to touch the person. There is no longer any healing touch nor any healing words that the family can carry as memories for the rest of their lives. The grief leaves raw wounds which never heal, particularly affecting the emotional health of adolescents and children.

There is of course no question that what is treatable needs to be treated. Hospitalisation cannot be ruled out as a norm – that would be disastrous. But it does call for a careful assessment of the health condition of the patient so that hospital is not the unconsidered, natural and inevitable destination for everyone who is ailing and has little time left.

The Lancet report discusses the importance of human connections and community involvement during the time surrounding end of life. It discusses in depth the consequences of irrational over-medicalisation of death which has already been normalised by the medical system during the last quarter of a century. The proposed solutions are many; but fundamental to them is the need for discussions within families and communities. The commission lauds the palliative care networks of Kerala which support people dying, caring and grieving, and calls for conversations on death, dying, and grief.

These are difficult conversations. Not all doctors are equipped to help or advise here. Only well-trained palliative care professionals can respond effectively by looking for a balance and guide family members, who themselves would be in a state of confusion and struggling to respond and cope with the situation.

Rather obviously, the value of time increases dramatically when someone suffers from an incurable disease. Compared to a young person with a reasonable chance of living to a life of average expectancy of 70 years, every hour is so much more precious for the person with only days, months or years to live. At this stage, any life-prolonging treatment has to be balanced against the quality of life.

The person has to be treated for pain and any other distressing symptoms and made comfortable with palliative care. Anxiety, depression, anger, guilt or other emotional issues need to be brought out into the open and resolved. The person's time needs to be filled with love, dignity and meaning.

As one of the writers here (M R Rajagopal) who has contributed to the Lancet Commission report writes in that document, death is not always benevolent and beautiful. "When the physical suffering in people with diseases like cancer was extreme, no philosophising, compassion, or companionship helped enough. The suffering was excruciating. People just stood watching helplessly... (yet) the dying person and the family members were never alone in their suffering or grief." Pain relief comes from palliative care, but comfort comes from family care. These are lessons that can hopefully be taken to heart and can spread across India, where the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the horrors of separation at the time of death.

(Dr. M R Rajagopal is Chairman of Pallium India and Director of the Trivandrum Institute of Palliative Sciences, a WHO collaborating centre for training and policy on access to pain relief. Jagdish Rattanani is a journalist and a faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal (Syndicate: TheBillionPress)

### Letters to the Editor

#### When coal turns gold

Editor,  
Apropos of the letter, "Meghalaya still controlled by Assam" by Jubanlak Lyngdoh (ST Feb 22, 2022), I fully agree with the writer. The NGT had banned coal mining in 2014. Yet we recall those 16 rat hole miners who died in the Ksan mines, of which 3 were local Jaintias. This was followed by another mine accident at Krem Lule not far from Ksan and 15 KMs from the office of the DC's East Jaintia Hills and recently in Shallang. The fact is that the NGT had never affected the mining or transportation of coal. And the Police Department has not only completely failed to prevent coal mining and transportation but has assisted in the process. When two activists Agnes Kharshing and Anita Sangma dared to investigate this illegal coal mining they were brutally attacked.

Coal trucks cover their load with tarpaulin. Few handymen are equipped with a 2 feet brush and before the checkpoint they clean off the dust. Only when trucks overturn is the whole crime exposed. There is no doubt that the NGT ban on coal mining had hit the poor miners hard. The coal barons have nothing to lose. The poor miners risk their lives to engage in the deadly rathole

mining. I fully agree with the writer that the DGP cannot wash his hands clean of the free for all mining and transportation and let us not forget overloading. Yes weigh-bridges are only for collecting money for the over-loaded coal but the money does not go to the government coffers. The most reliable weigh-bridges are (1) Dwarksuid and (2) Puriang, Riat Turiem and Sohshrieh that today are the workshops of smashed engines, broken gearboxes and snapped axles, sleeping for weeks. And it all happens in broad daylight and in the dark of the night.

Yours etc.,  
W.Passah  
Nongkrem

#### Why the Lukha turns blue

Editor,  
Sad to read about the poison flowing in the Shillong rivers. All of us who have lived in Shillong right from the 1950s could predict what would happen to the rivers in the 1980s because they were not shown any respect. The first victim was the river Demthring when a no man's land - a triangle of hardly 8m base and 10m height - was expanded to build a house at the elbow on which the bridge stands

right now (about 50 metres from the source). The width of the river was reduced to 2 metres. Now from that source till Polo Bazar, buildings housing 20 to 25 tenants were allowed to stand right on the river.

The Wah Umkhras has become a common septic tank. Upstream cars are being washed without any regulations. Umshyipi is no different, especially with medical wastes being allowed to flow into the river. The river Myntdu captured the headlines recently. Even with alum and bleaching powder added to the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) it may not be sufficient. It is advisable to boil water or filter it.

Coming to the Lukha river in Jaintia Hills, it first exhibited its blue colour in 2007, six to seven years after Star Cement was established. A team of St Edmund's college students and teachers rushed to find out the reason. Their findings were that the pH balance of the River Lukha was 3.5 and PPM only 3 when the minimum required to support life is 7. The report was shown to the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) but since it was not a government report, it was not considered damning enough. Hence it was simply ignored.

Then the River Lukha became severely abrasive which could be attributed to the calcium sulphate of

gypsum, the worry of the National Industrial Occupational Safety Hazard (NIOSH). A friend of mine from Lumshong told me that the MSPCB took pains to study the reason for the River Lukha turning blue in 2017. The team was led by Dr D.P. Mukhopadhyay (Retd senior scientist, Central Pollution Control Board, New Delhi). The blue was said to be elusive. This compelled the experienced scientist to proceed right to the source near Saipung, a village down the Khaddom Range. It was found that the water was clear until it converged with the River Lunar which carries all the industrial and human wastes of all the cement plants mushrooming around. With such findings it is not fair for the Cement companies to blame the blue colour of the Lukha due to pollution on rat hole coal mining. This is simply untrue.

It has been almost 5 years since the report was published and it is still a mystery as to what is the cause for the Lukha turning blue and all riverine life dying. And for this the MSPCB is answerable! However, the blame should also lie with successive governments and their bureaucrats and technocrats who are all fully aware of the notoriety of cement plants in air and water pollution, apart from being the heaviest guzzlers of electricity plus their captive power plant using coal which violates the COP

26 principles. This is the reason why Bill Gates donated 5 billion \$ to COP out of which half is to do away with traditional cement plants by going to green plants even if the green premium is costing 70% more. For the philanthropist, life is worth more than 70%.

Sadly as long as abbreviations like EPA, FA, MoEFCC, MSPCB do not act as per their nomenclature the Lukha will never recover and other rivers too will die a quick death.

Yours etc.,  
M. Khyriem  
Via email

#### Is opposition to NEET fair?

Editor,  
Tamil Nadu is the only state to oppose the National Eligibility-cum Entrance Test (NEET). Competitive politics, nexus between authorities of some private medical institutions and politicians have caused the Dravidian parties to oppose NEET. This exam was prescribed by the Supreme Court for admission to medical colleges and to put an end to the ills in medical admissions.

There have been several suicides by aspirants in Tamil Nadu since the exam was introduced there. As a consequence, it has become an emotive issue. The state puts the blame on the Centre

for supporting such a "democratic" NEET. A narrative has been formed in the state that NEET disadvantages students from rural and poor backgrounds. As a result, the Dravidian parties are competing with each other to dispense with the exam. As scrapping the NEET exam is DMK's election pledge, the party is putting in all efforts to do away with it.

In September last year, the Tamil Nadu Assembly passed a Bill to enact a law for scrapping NEET. Given that the central government has the power to repeal any Act, the passing of the Bill won't exempt the students from writing the NEET exam. If a state wants to get exemption from NEET, it needs to be granted permission by the Supreme Court. Considering that the Bill challenges a central legislation, it cannot come into effect without the President's assent. As the law enacted by Parliament prevails, the law made by the state becomes invalid. It must be remembered that the AIADMK government had passed two such Bills but the President did not give his assent to the Bills.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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

**"Nobody who takes on anything big and tough can afford to be modest."**

—Orson Welles

**The Shillong Times**

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**Time for PIL on coal mining**

IT has been proved beyond any shadow of doubt that illegal coal mining and transportation has been going on in Meghalaya even after the ban on rat hole mining by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in April 2014. The NGT banned rat hole mining after some miners died inside a mine in Garo Hills. Mines are known to flood especially during the rainy season or late autumn when the water that collects in abandoned mines floods into a new mine nearby. When that happens miners are buried alive but in the past such incidents never came to light. In 2018 December the Ksan mine tragedy that trapped 15 people inside came into the limelight after a public spirited Delhi-based lawyer with a humanitarian concern for the poor miners filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court.

After several hearings and representations by lawyers for the defendants (coal mine owners) and the state advocate general, the Supreme Court in July 2019 ruled in favour of lifting the NGT ban on coal mining but on specific conditions. The Supreme Court ruling said "We clarify that in event mining operations are undertaken in privately owned/community owned land in Hills Districts of Meghalaya in accordance with mining lease with approved mining plan as per the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and Mineral Concessions Rule, 1960, the ban order dated 17.04.2014 of the tribunal of the NGT shall not come in way of carrying mining operations." The MDA Government has not complied with the directives of the Supreme Court. Till date Meghalaya has no mining plan or policy which should be in line with the MMDR Act, 1957. The MMDR Act does not espouse rat hole mining because it is fraught with danger and has already claimed several lives thereby violating Article 21 of the Constitution.

The MDA Government is under pressure from the coal lobby, some of whom are part of the government, not to come up with a Mining Policy as that would cut into their profits. It is more profitable for the coal lobby to continue with the rat hole mining method and use migrant labourers for the purpose. The Ksan mine tragedy was followed by another at Krem Ule and the latest one where miners died of asphyxiation in a mine in Shallang, West Khasi Hills. In recent times the Meghalaya High Court has taken up the issue of river pollution with the seriousness it deserves and passed stringent orders which the State Government has to comply with. There is a strong feeling among the public that the Meghalaya High Court should now take suo-moto action and direct the CBI to enquire into the repeated cases of miners' deaths and illegal coal mining and transportation in the State.

# Juvenile militancy

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Militancy is not a recent happening in Meghalaya. It has been there for decades and does not look like it will subside anytime soon. The problem with militancy is the cliché that 'one man's terrorist is another man's hero.' This acts as a motive/basis for militancy to initiate and thrive. In the process, its members increase. Now, it is always a problem when someone joins a militant group. It is even more so if that someone is a child/young adult whom we commonly refer to as a juvenile. Recently, the arrest of a juvenile member of the HNLC in connection with a blast in Shillong city (Khyndai Lad [Police Bazar] on 30th Janu-

lic of Congo, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. In relation to these facts, an observation is that juvenile militancy happens when there is lack of opportunities (or mechanisms to highlight opportunities) and desperation. Meghalaya has features of both. This must be taken as learning to help reverse the trend.

**Family in the spotlight:**

The state government pointed to the role of the family in curbing the youth from involvement in militancy. Well, it is right; families do play an important role. The point to be noted here is that the moment the govern-

welcome the youth to pick up arms. It can be construed that these current events of juveniles working for HNLC is an outcome of this consistent encouragement. In today's world, reaching out to the target people for brainwashing into militancy is not difficult. The tools and means are readily available. Social media is used for testing the waters and hooking of the desperate and disillusioned youth. Once hooked, the young adult is opinionated through nefarious means such as alcohol, drugs and a certain feeling of communalism and hatred against the

it is better to work towards being a 'fulfilled citizen'. If one is successful, it may not mean that he/she is fulfilled. But, if one is fulfilled, then it would include being satisfied and successful too. This is because being successful is trying to become someone by force. But, being fulfilled is becoming someone which best suits us. A fulfilled citizen is one who is happy in his/her own position, employment, profession, assets and wealth, etc., without comparing himself/herself to others. It is about being happy where we are. For example, not everyone can become an officer. Some of us are destined to become entrepreneurs, artists, singers, etc



ary, 2022 evening) has come as a worrisome development. Who is to be blamed for this? Is it the government or the family? Is it the HNLC for scouting juveniles to join them? These questions need answers.

**Some learning:**

To start with, let us put things in perspective. In Meghalaya, the involvement of children/young adults in militancy may have surfaced recently. But, it is not so, globally. One may infer that the present tendency of HNLC to rope in young minds for their cause may have been motivated by such global experiences. To this, add the frustration of the youth and the result is juvenile militancy. Although such juveniles may not be used for extreme ends (like killing), in any case their involvement is troubling. According to Human Rights Watch, 'boys and girls as young as eight are involved in armed violence where they may fight on the front lines, participate in suicide missions, and act as spies, messengers, or lookouts, and girls may also be forced into sexual slavery'. Juvenile militancy is a continuous problem with the United Nations reporting that 'more than 8500 children were used as soldiers in 2020' with maximum violations in Somalia, Democratic Repub-

ment takes up 'family', the entire discussion on juvenile militancy gets watered down. One explanation for this is the societal psychological make-up where a lot of importance is given to the 'role of families' in child/youth development. But, what the government has failed to factor is that the external environment does play an equally important role in character/personality building. The mental make-up of a youth is more an outcome of this externality which is epitomised by friends and acquaintances, peer pressure, commercialization and the want for assets, free flowing electronic communication, access to violent content through gaming, a dynamic social media platform, etc. Now, these act as fluid mediums of desperation (and even depression) if they are not addressed appropriately. For example, the want for assets (gadgets or certain clothing, etc) combined with what is seen through social media can be a source of depression for the youth. To this, add the lack of employment opportunities; the mind will wander towards militant acts.

**HNLC, do keep away:**

In recent years, the encouragement by HNLC for the youth to join militancy can be traced to 2014. It openly claimed that it would

government. In fact, Human Rights Watch has observed 'drugs and alcohol' as the main tools of militant groups worldwide. The ground reality is that if HNLC would continue to entice the young minds to join its cause, then it would probably still succeed. This is because there are many who do support it openly. For example, just look at the support for HNLC in the YouTube comments section in any news concerning its activities. Being at an advantageous position, it would be best for the HNLC to be more responsible and at least care for the future of the young minds. As such, HNLC should keep away from the young adults if, as it claims it is fighting for the cause of the jaidbyrniew.

**Counselling towards becoming a fulfilled citizen:**

Everybody is busy running after success. The goals we set are success oriented. This race does bring with it many pressures. Sometimes it leads to using any ways and means to achieve one's goals. If we fail in achieving our goals, we are termed as failures. Today, when there is so much peer pressure and comparisons amongst the youth, it is time to revisit how the young minds are nurtured and trained. Instead of being a 'successful citizen'

because of the skill sets. Here, counselling is needed from all the stakeholders for the youth to achieve this end. In the process, that would make for a fulfilled citizen.

**The role of teachers:**

No matter how much we talk about family, the fact of the matter remains that children/young adult spends most of their time interacting with teachers. The teachers are role models. Hence, it becomes imperative for teachers to keep track of the activities and behaviour of the young minds and guide them accordingly. Learning English, arithmetic, science, social studies, etc., has no meaning if we cannot nurture them into being 'fulfilled citizens' by understanding their potential and interest in life. The parents generally believe that 'they listen more to the teachers than to them'. It is a paradox of sorts but a valid one. This only throws into sharp focus of the important role that the teachers and the educational environment plays in shaping the mental make-up, thinking processes and behaviour of a youth. If parents get it wrong, a character is spoiled; but, if the educational environment gets it wrong, the entire future of a person is destroyed!

(Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

**From Turkey to Israel, region has a lot at stake**

## Middle East faces spill-over effect from Ukraine war threats

By James M Dorsey

Europe is likely to shoulder the brunt of the fallout of a rapidly escalating crisis over Ukraine. Middle Eastern states could prove to be a close second. That is no truer than for Turkey and Israel, whose management of the Ukraine crisis could determine their ability to protect perceived core national interests.

Indeed, for NATO-member Turkey, the stakes could not be higher. Its 2,000 kilometre-long Black Sea coastline stretching from the Bulgarian border in the West to Georgia in the East is the longest of any of the sea's littoral states, including Russia and Ukraine. Black Sea ranks on par with Turkey's determination to prevent at any cost a permanent autonomous, let alone independent, Kurdish presence on Syrian soil.

"Ukraine is like a dam that stops further Russian influence and pressure in the region. If Ukraine falls, it will have direct implications on Turkey," warned a Turkish official. Turkey's stakes are magnified by last year's discovery of a natural gas field in its Black Sea littoral waters that, according to Energy Minister Fatih Donmez, could by 2027 provide nearly a third of Turkey's domestic needs.

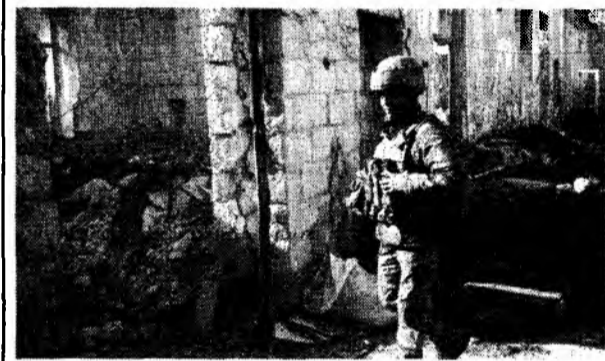
As the crisis in Ukraine

by a patchwork of military forces from Turkey, Russia, the United States, Syria, the Kurds, and various militant and jihadist groups.

US cooperation with the Kurds in the fight against the Islamic State has been an irritant in relations between Ankara and Washington because of Turkish assertions that the SDC is linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and Europe, the PKK has waged a low-intensity war in south-eastern Turkey for almost four decades that has cost the lives of tens of thousands.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to fend off a potential further Turkish incursion by agreeing to joint Russian-Turkish patrols in a region where Turkey has already built a chain of outposts as a buffer with Russian and Syrian regime forces. However, Turkey accuses Russia of failing to fulfill its pledge to disarm Kurdish fighters in a 30-kilometre area along the Syrian-Turkish border.

For its part, Israel doesn't share physical land or maritime borders with either Russia or Ukraine. Still, it is discovering that its ability to counter Iran and its



escalates, Turkey could discover that protecting both of those interests may no longer allow it to perform its virtuoso balancing act. Turkey has been maintaining a fragile partnership with Russia sustained by careful management of differences while remaining a Western ally committed to the defence of the Western alliance. Turkish economic and military support of Ukraine and Crimean Tartars and its refusal to recognize the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea fit well with Turkey's tightrope act and was aligned with NATO policy. Russia's recognition of the breakup Ukrainian republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and the moving of Russian troops into those regions threatens to throw Turkey off its tightrope and create a Catch-22 for Ankara.

The imposition of US and European sanctions against Russia is likely to be the straw that breaks the back of the Turkish tightrope act. "Syria remains Turkey's soft spot. For that matter, Russia is likely to put pressure on Turkey through Syria," said Turkey scholar Galip Dalay. "At a broader level, Russia and Turkey have cooperated and competed with each other through the conflict spots in the Middle East and North Africa. However, Moscow has been less open to repeating this experience with Turkey in the ex-Soviet area."

Days before the recognition of the Ukrainian regions, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Bogdanov fired a shot across Turkey's bow. Bogdanov declared that Syrian Kurdish participation in diplomatic efforts to negotiate a post-war settlement in Syria was necessary to prevent Kurdish secession and ensure the unification of the war-ravaged country.

Speaking to state-controlled Russian RT television, Bogdanov noted that the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) controls large areas east of the Euphrates River. The region is pockmarked

Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, militarily in Syria may depend on its approach to the Ukraine crisis. Earlier this month, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova condemned Israeli strikes against targets in Syria as "a crude violation of Syria's sovereignty." She warned that they "may trigger a sharp escalation of tensions." Ms. Zakharova added that "such actions pose serious risks to international passenger flights."

The Russian warning came weeks after Moscow announced that joint Russian-Syrian air patrols had become routine. The announcement came after one of the first patrols flew along the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that divide Israel and Syria.

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz defiantly insisted in response that "we will continue to prevent the Iranian entrenchment that is eating Syria up from the inside. This is a supreme interest for the Syrian people and the regime: to stabilize, to remove Iranian forces from their territory and allow the country to be rehabilitated." At the same time, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid acknowledged that "We have a kind of border with Russia" given the Russian military presence in Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad. Lapid noted further that Israel has sizeable Russian and Ukrainian Jewish communities and that a significant number of Jews are resident in the two feuding countries.

As a result, Israel, caught in a bind similar to Turkey's, scrambled to avoid further provoking Russia's ire. It announced that it was banning Baltic states from transferring to Ukraine weapons with Israeli components. In contrast to Turkey that may feel it has greater manoeuvrability in its relations with Russia, China, and the United States, Israel feels that its options, like in the case of China, are more limited when it comes to Russia. It cannot afford to put its relations with Washington at risk. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

### Government steeped in deceit

Editor,  
I fail to understand the song and dance being carried out in our state over illegal mining and transport of coal. The public, the Nokmas, the man on the street and almost every citizen of Meghalaya confirms and is sure that the above mentioned illegal activity is not only rampant but is being carried out right before the eyes of those mandated to stop crime - the police. On the other hand the Government and its supporters firmly deny this claim of the public and are actually ready to defy the electorate on the issue. Every trick in the book even bending that flexible spine of the Department of Mining and Geology have been employed to prove the voter wrong. Now what can be more precious than a vote to our politicians? I believe the ABBAs got it right first time as they quipped "Money, money, money it's a rich mans world". Money is important for one can buy votes with money! Elementary Dear Watson. Elementary.

However, my take on the issue is somewhat different. Illegal coal mining is going on in full swing with or without the knowledge of our blind, innocent, righteous and guiltless lawmakers. (Hey, hey I'm not trying to

defame you guys. I am simply describing your guileless take on this illegal coal mining thing. So cool it!) It's also obvious that mining the coal is meaningless unless it can be transported to the market to be sold. As far as we know there is no transport aircraft nor train operating in Meghalaya. So the most obvious means of transport is by road, which in turn is manned and patrolled by uniformed policemen, whose duty is to prevent crime. It does not require rocket science to put two and two together to come to the interesting conclusion that politicians in power are using the police to perpetrate a crime. Everyone knows this so why all this drama denying a known and accepted fact?

The public knowledge also comes with a rider - the need to stop illegal mining of coal. This pinches and this is the reason for all the hemming and hawing from the donkeys. Now my point is since the illegal coal has to move by road; since police stations are usually situated along such roads/highways, why not equip each police station with a CCTV to catch/record the movement of illegal coal. Caught on camera the policeman on duty can be punished. The possibility of him then naming the involvement of higher mortals cannot be prevented. The chain of command indulging in criminal acts will then be revealed. Political bigwigs

caught with their hands in the cookie jar will make more and better headlines than all the political fence jumping we are now witnessing. The holy claim that all this is being enacted for the benefit of the electorate; for stability of Government (as if that ever mattered) will then simply come out as hogwash. That of course will never do. The primary duty of the Government to protect crime must never be challenged. So press on regardless, for money in 2023 will determine through the ballot box the criminal from the innocent. That's political justice!

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

### Cancer: The threatening storm

Editor  
The news report, "Cancer patients need better facilities: HC" has thrown the spotlight on the Meghalaya healthcare system which is yet to catch up even with next door Assam which already has in place its eighth medical college hospital inaugurated recently. Northeast India is slowly becoming a hotbed for cancer cases and markers such as proper nutrition, routine medical checkups, mental conditioning and proper follow-up procedures are some of the steps which can help to minimise the

risk of cancer. But in 50 years of statehood the trust has surely been broken in a state like ours which seems to lack direction and realistic goal setting. Providing basic amenities such as clean water is becoming a far-fetched dream.

Military hardware spending in India is gaining traction and focusing on a more deadly enemy such as re-emerging microbes is not on the agenda. The lack of change across cultures coupled with disparities among the rich and poorer segments are clearly showing up. To ramp up measures in order to fight not only cancer but any infectious disease is proper surveillance which can be expanded if there is political will in a joint effort with the private sector. Science journalist and author Laurie Garrett in her groundbreaking book 'Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health' highlights the challenge of public health and it is upon ourselves to understand evolutionary change of microbes in a fast paced environment.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Shillong-10

### Poll season and party hopping

Editor,  
The major ally of the MDA

government, the Nationalist People Party (NPP) has been 'poaching' the members of its own allies, the UDP, PDF and BJP. It is not surprising since there wasn't a "no poaching agreement," when these parties joined the NPP led MDA alliance. Despite large scale poaching by NPP, the regional parties keep up with alliance and have never thought of exiting from it. The reason is that these 'power-hungry' regional parties don't want to be out of power. In the words of Alder, "The power-hungry individual follows the path to his own destruction".

Yours etc.,  
Marbianglang Rymbai  
Via email

### Pine Walk

Editor,  
Through this letter, I wish to reiterate once again that the Pine Walk Gate has to be reopened. This is in the interest of ordinary citizens and the Cantonment has no right to obstruct civilians from walking through a particular path/road that connects to civilian areas. The MLA, South Shillong Constituency, Sanbor Shullai needs to approach the Shillong Cantonment Board authorities to reopen the Pine Walk Gate. The world is returning to normalcy, thanks to the receding Covid-19 cases, and since every possible sector of the economy is opening up, why is the Pine

Walk Gate being locked up and on what grounds? This path connects the town's commercial hub, Police Bazar, as a short cut and is used by hundreds of pedestrians throughout the day. Reopening this path is becoming extremely crucial now since local taxi fares have increased threefold. This path can also save us commoners our hard earned money besides saving all of us from the messy traffic jams.

Are we to understand that the Shillong Cantonment Board is wary that Covid-19 may still hit this lane even if it is leaving the rest of the world? We all know the role played by Sanbor Shullai in erecting the 58 - GTC Gate at Mawshbuit village and shifting the same to another location for the convenience of the villagers last year. But the inaction on his part to reopen the Pine Walk Gate in his own constituency and for his electorate is not understood, so far. After all, what purpose is this locked up gate serving? What the Cantonment does is often without any rationale.

Yours etc.,  
BC Paul,  
Shillong - 4

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

*"The military don't start wars.*

*Politicians start wars."*

— William Westmoreland

## The Shillong Times

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### Ukraine a sitting duck

RUSSIA'S invasion of neighbouring Ukraine was by no means an abrupt action. For weeks, it was waiting to happen. What unfolds now is an unequal fight. Russian military might is several times mightier than that of Ukraine though these two are Europe's largest and second largest nations. Ukraine on its own cannot hold on for many days. A collapse of the West-leaning government of President Volodymyr Zelensky is likely, but this depends also on how serious the West is particularly the US and Europe, in defending Ukraine. Economic sanctions alone will not deter Russia from its aggressive push. Ukraine is not a member of NATO. Its attempt to become one was a reason why Putin acted fast. The present Ukrainian president had dragged the matter for many years. Putin, who had invaded Ukraine in 2014 and annexed the small sea-side province of Crimea, was danger personified. Having vacillated, Ukraine can only throw its hands up now. Ukraine's total military strength is 2.5 lakh soldiers, while Russia has nearly 9 lakh. What's more important is the aerial might. Russia has 700 fighter jets; Ukraine has just 70. In a matter of hours, Russia might already have destroyed all the airports in Ukraine. Kyiv said it brought down five Russian fighter jets in what was only a one-sided incursion.

On his part, Putin has made clear his invasion is aimed at 'demilitarization' of Ukraine and not an attempt at occupation. What he might do is install a puppet regime and rule Ukraine by proxy from Moscow. This would suit his ultimate goal of re-taking this large nation that won independence from the erstwhile USSR in 1991. His obvious aim is to recreate a Soviet empire. Several of the USSR's break-away nations are now under the NATO alliance; and an attack on them would not be easy. Ukraine was a sitting duck.

With dictators like Putin and Xi Jinping around, neighbouring nations are at risk of border incursions, wars and even annexation. Matching Russia's or China's military might all alone is impossible. This is true even for India. Dictators mark their time. They can go any extent. The disadvantage for democracies is body bags. With casualties rising, public opinion would turn against the governments. Yet, George Bush junior demolished a dictatorship in a matter of a couple of nights in Iraq and imposed a pro-West Shia government there. He did the same in Afghanistan and made it pay a price for harbouring Al Qaeda. Besieged Ukraine sends several signals to the world. President Joe Biden's leadership is also under test.

# Merit, Opportunity, and Failure in Education

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

Recently I came across two thought-provoking posts on my social media page. The first was a discussion on the NEET examination for medical admissions, and whether such tests demonstrate merit and social justice. Does intelligence equate to merit? According to Dr KS Jacob, a professor of psychiatry at CMC, Vellore, "Psychometrically measured intelligence is only one of the many contributors to social outcomes. It accounts for less than a quarter of scholastic and occupational achievement. There is a realisation that social circumstances outweigh test scores in predicting future performance and that differences between racial and social groups are better explained by environmental variations".

In 2019, a book by Michael Sandel, called "The Tyranny of Merit" challenged conventional definitions of merit. The book, based on extensive analyses of social and economic data, concludes that populist discontent, globalisation, misogyny, and racism emanate from a cherished idea of 'merit'. After millennia of accessing the best education, jobs and wealth at the expense of the poor, the upper classes are in a dominant place, to ensure that their children end up being the most meritorious, thus embedding vast social inequalities between different classes.

### Supreme Court has explained merit

Justice Krishna Iyer in a 1981 judgement said, "A sensitized heart and a vibrant head, tuned to the tears of the people, including its rural stretches and slum squalor, sincere dedication and intellectual integrity—these are some of the major components of merit. Candidates from the SC&ST who, from their birth, have had a traumatic understanding of the conditions of agristic (rural, unpolished) India have more capability than those who have lived under affluent circumstances and are callous to the human lot. Moreover, our examination system makes merely the master of merit".

In 1985, Justice Chinnappa Reddy asked, "how an SC child, brought up in an atmosphere of penury, illiteracy and deprivation, who scores 40 per cent in a competitive exam, could be considered inferior to a child brought up in the lap of luxury, who studied in the most exclusive schools and colleges and got 70 or even 90 per cent."

The Supreme Court in

2019, quoted: "Marc Galanter notes that three kinds of resources are necessary to produce results in competitive exams that qualify as indicators of merit. These are (a) economic resources for prior education, training, materials, freedom from work, etc.; (b) social and cultural resources such as networks of contacts, confidence, guidance and advice, information, etc.; and (c) intrinsic ability and hard work."

Even equality of opportunity is not enough, said



Justice Subba Rao. "Two horses are set down to run a race — one is a first-class race horse and the other an ordinary one. Both are made to run from the same starting point. Though theoretically they are given equal opportunity to run the race, in practice the ordinary horse is not given an equal opportunity to compete with the race horse. Centuries of calculated oppression and habitual submission reduced a considerable section of our community to a life of serfdom. They would not have any chance if they were made to enter the open field of competition without adventitious aids till such time when they could stand on their own legs."

So even if a student gains access to a prestigious institution or career, he or she still faces difficult odds. In answer to a question in Parliament, the government reported that 63% of the dropouts at the IITs are from the reserved categories. The same is seen in the IIMs and AIMS. Activists have long argued that those students face a higher level of pressure and discrimination at these institutions, but the stereotyped answer is that because they did not have academic merit in the first place, they could not cope with the high academic standards for passing. So having been given the opportunity for higher education in an

elite institution, many still failed.

**Failure: a terrible word**  
The other social media post came from an ex-teacher who said, "I have always felt that the word 'fail' conjures images of a wasted life; of someone who can never reach expected levels; a nobody at all... a kind of dropout from life. The word 'fail' truly needs to be replaced by a word that does not send one into depression. We often use words without thinking of the impact it might have on

ity, interests, and motivation, reasons for failure to have adequately learned may vary from student to student. This type of failure is difficult to eliminate. Those that dropout are quickly forgotten.

There is also a difference in the effect on the student. It is well known that pupils who succeed in learning are more likely to pursue further learning than those who have failed. For those who have failed, it is not just academic failure, there are emotions of shame, guilt, and fear, and notions of family honour and stigma, leading to making excuses, finding blame, denial, anger, depression, dropout, and even suicide.

Dr Jacob, whom we quoted earlier goes on to say: "Pursuing a quest for knowledge, mastery of abstraction, self-discovery, development of creative and intellectually rigorous thinking and understanding practice are daunting tasks for those from less privileged backgrounds. While lowering university entrance grades may give them a leg-up, it throws them in the deep end. Young people who have succeeded against odds, sink into despair and feel intimidated by the confidence of their better-educated and privileged peers. Some stagger from examination to examination, increasingly demoralised."

New research tells us that individuals learn more from success than failure. "It doesn't feel good to fail, so people tune out", according to Fishbach, a researcher from the University of Chicago. He adds, "Our society celebrates failure as a teachable moment, but a series of experiments found that failure did the opposite: It undermined learning." In his experiments, participants learned less from failure than from success, even when learning was incentivized with rewards. It boils down to self-esteem: success builds self-esteem, failure lowers self-esteem, those with higher self-esteem learn better.

Still, society keeps telling people to learn from failures. There are many aphorisms and proverbs like "Failures are stepping stones to success", but very few have made it on their own. Of those who fail, very few repeat. Of those who repeat, very few pass. In most cases, failure begets more failure.

The academic system needs to provide individualised teaching-learning and better career pathways and many students need individual counselling and mentoring.

the prestige of that college. The world is becoming more cruel every day where the poor but meritorious in all government departments are discriminated against. This is the way of the world. But karma never forgets!

Yours etc.,  
M.Khyriem  
(affected father)  
Via email

### Good news for the environment

Editor,  
India is all set to ban single-use plastic items from July 1. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has asked all states to implement the ban accordingly. The CPCB has issued notices to producers, stockists and e-commerce sites so that single-use plastic items are not produced, sold or used again.

Plastic is considered to be a major contributor to rising pollution levels in the world and in India. Half of all plastic produced is meant to be used only once and then discarded. The world produces about 300 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. Most of the plastic that has been produced has ended up in the environment.

Only a very small percentage of plastic is recycled or incinerated. The rest is accumulated in the environment. It is a matter of concern that 8 million tonnes of plastic end in oceans every year.

India must be commended for its decision to ban single-use plastics. On the other hand, it is not the only solution to plastic pollution. People must be sensitised about the health hazards of using plastic. In addition to the ban, there must be other initiatives and regulations. Manufacturers need to be directed to specify the kind of plastics used in a product so that it can be properly recycled.

Although plastics cannot be completely dispensed with, their overuse can be stopped. Environment must be conserved for posterity. We cannot afford to degrade the environment and harm ourselves. Let's live in clean and green surroundings. As a first step, let's bid adieu to single-use plastics.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G.S.,  
Kollam

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### Putin's war against Ukraine is unjust & challenge to the West

## India & China will face a crucial choice as battle escalates

By Anjan Roy

As Russian military moves into Ukraine, our familiar world vanishes. The world order returns to the point when Winston Churchill had said "an iron curtain" was falling across Europe. The single step of a Russian soldier in Ukraine brings back the Cold War dispensation in international affairs.

To be sure, the Russian move is not a battle against Ukraine, which is a minnow compared with the invader, but a war against the West, which includes the whole of Western Europe and the United States of America, Australia and Canada. Japan also joins in the coalition.

In this emerging scenario, Ukraine would be vanquished in no time. But the post-Ukraine world will be divided in sharp opposite camps.

With this single sledgehammer blow, Russian president Vladimir Putin has sought to convey a single message: don't take us for granted. NATO expansionism in eastern Europe, which was considered to be a Russian backyard, will not be tolerated and the West must respect the red lines.

So the lesson is, nations must stay up for its own. When the push comes to the shove no one stands beside you.

In this new global order, India would be facing some stark questions. It will no longer be possible to ride two horses — India will be facing a fork in the road. We cannot possibly buy the Russian military hardware and then move over to US missiles.

The viciousness of the new global order would be determined by the extent to which Russia has to pay a price.

The west has already slapped sanctions on Russia. The economic sanctions like embargo on purchase of natural gas by the west European countries from Russian entities would sting. True, Russia has some buffer with its chest of foreign exchange reserves of \$600 billion to tide over immediate purchases from outside world.

These are other costs that the West is promising like personal sanctions against the coterie members of Vladimir Putin. Some talks are on that even the children



In some ways, today's Putin is the creation of the "Triumphalism" of the west post collapse of Soviet Union. Russia was treated with far lesser courtesy in international affairs than even middle level ones. Russia was smarting from the pains of being side-lined from the status of an equal partner from the days of the Yalta Conference.

Later still, it was the only contender with America. From that high podium to be thrown out of the lease of the leading — as a member of G8 — was a disgrace, which Putin felt personally and wanted to avenge.

To make matters even worse and foreboding, Putin has his lurid notions of nations and destinies, as he unfurled in his speeches lately. Some nations are great — like Imperial Russia — some other nations are meant to serve the biddings of the Great.

With his moves in Ukraine, Putin has thrown a direct challenge at the West and America with his speech this morning, announcing to the world that his military was moving into Ukraine. He has promised severe consequences, such reprisals that the world has never seen. It is not quite clear if he was brandishing the nuclear option in case of intervention by others.

This is a sad end of the effort for building an international order, devoid of using force. The new order, would no longer be unipolar or multipolar. It will be to a large extent determined by display of force.

In this catastrophic course, if one country was short changed it was Ukraine itself. Egged on by the West, Ukraine had been making displays which were like the proverbial red rags to the bull. It was in the end left to fend for itself with not much of help other than some hard hats, which Germany had symbolically sent it in the run up to the current crisis.

of the Russian oligarchs who are currently in the west will be adversely affected. Not one of the senior Russian officials or politicians would now be free to move out of the country.

Yet the third sanction which is going to kick in is the ostracisation of Russian banks in international payments systems. This measure, pursued with vigour, can make life extremely difficult for Russia and its elites.

For some reasons or other, the oligarchs, elites and senior politicians had a perchance for Britain and placed most of their ill-gotten wealth in Britain and British financial operators. There were up-scale streets in London counting ownership of Russian rich.

Britain had already started seizing these and moving them beyond the reach of the Russian owners. So much so, that the Russian president himself had protested against the British moves. However, such punishments would be relentlessly pursued now that the threshold had been breached by both sides.

But if one country is genuinely inconvenienced, it is Pakistan, with none else than its prime minister, Imran Khan, is stranded in Moscow. With across the board flight restrictions in Russia, Khan might not simply get a flight back home.

It just so happened that Pakistani prime minister, Imran Khan, was in Moscow when the Ukraine operation, much loathed by the entire free world, was launched by Russia.

In this changed world of Putin's making, China would be seeking its role in a vague and essentially unequal competition with Russia.

It looks as though it would be a bi-polar world, with a tri-polar tendency. There would be conflicts galore and shadow boxing matches. Maybe, not a pleasant phase. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

### Men of straw leading Meghalaya

Editor,  
The four week imbrogio on the elevation of the CEM, Mr Rakesh A Sangma has exposed the total lack of leadership on the part of the NPP. Mr Rakesh A Sangma was elected democratically CEM, by the MDCs of the GHADC, through the process of 'Parliamentary Representation.'

Any organisation can oppose his elevation but the spineless MDA Government instead of seeking a solution through the process of the courts had the gall to send an MLA to negotiate with those organisations that have a difference of opinion on the election results of the democratically CEM, Mr Rakesh A Sangma, who they felt was not the best man to be the CEM.

Who is an A'chik? That has been clearly stated by many renowned A'chik scholars on the A'chik customary law. There's no dispute on the ethnic status of Rakesh A Sangma. So why this pussy-footing on this issue by the NPP? One pussy-foot in order to appease, instead of going by principles of governance.

And the entire state has witnessed this charade of pussy-footing and has exposed the 'invertebrate leadership' of a "National Party" that lacks courage to take a stand and support the citizens of the country, (eg the People of Meghalaya)

Tomorrow another issue may arise and we may yet see the MDA Government bending over backwards to soothe the bruised egos of some people who may have a different point of view.

Is the MDA Government made up of 'Men of Straw' that it cannot stand up for principles of governance?

It's ironic that this is happening in the 50th year of the Statehood of Meghalaya. Have we elected 'Mental Dwarves' that none of the people who have been elected by MDCs, MLAs or even the 3 MPs have the courage to take a stand on the side of Righteousness? The organisations in the Garo Hills protesting against the GHADC, CEM are doing so within their democratic rights. Rightly or wrongly, they can protest, but the lack of leadership shown by the NPP led MDA is indeed pathetic. This display of lack of leadership cuts a sorry figure.

2023 is around the corner and I appeal to all Meghalayans - let us vote with a

clear conscience and elect men and women who are not 'Men of Straw', but people who deliver to a better 51st year to the state of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
Tyrone D'Brass  
Tura

### When merit is a thorn for the powerful

Editor,  
I sincerely pity our medical aspirants who have to sit for the NEET exams. They are facing a double edged sword. They have studied hard from KG to Class 12th and passed out from MBOSE, ICSE or CBSE. With hard work and dedication and with the support of the entire family, they managed to score in the range of 95 - 98% each in Physics, Chemistry and Biology in Class 12. But since 2019 after NEET won back the case in the Supreme Court our toppers failed to qualify their NEET exam. The SC ruling was based on the heavy capitation fees charged by some medical colleges, some in crores. The year NEET took charge of medical entrance examinations our toppers failed to qualify. Some had to go for Veterinary Science.

The others switched to Arts to be lost in the crowd forever. Those who can afford attend coaching classes for NEET paying a hefty sum as coaching fees.

Those who wish one hundred percent success in NEET go to KOTA in Rajasthan which guarantees high scores in just one attempt. There was a time when after passing the Higher Secondary exams students scoring 425 marks and with ST concession would be called for screening and then sent to different medical colleges. They were allowed to give two options for their college of choice. This was appreciated by all as merit of a candidate is the certificate to a better medical college. Sadly the much appreciated method that had stood the test of time is now dumped to allow political interference, especially just a year before the polls. Because of NEET a boy with higher scores both in Higher Secondary and NEET was sent to a less prominent college and a boy with lesser percentage is allotted a better college.

Be that as it may I encourage and support the candidates who qualified their NEET and no matter which college they are allotted they should give it their best shot. If they emerge meritorious they would raise

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

--- Bertrand Russell

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's failing power scenario PEOPLE who come to Meghalaya from Mumbai and other states wonder at the frequent power outages. They don't recall having power cuts, come hail or storm. In Meghalaya it takes a small weather event for power to be shut down. This is what the state has achieved in 50 years. Neither the Chief Minister nor the Power Minister give any hope to the public that the power scenario will improve any time soon. On the contrary those in the know say that several power utilities have stopped supplying power to Meghalaya for reasons best known to the MDA Government and which is a state secret. Daily there are shut down notices for different areas of Shillong and all this is happening because the equipments used - from the electric posts to the transformers - to the power generating turbines are all of inferior quality. Politicians, contractors and engineers have all milked the Meghalaya Electricity Corporation Ltd. (MeECL) since the time it was a Board. Corporatisation has changed nothing; not the work culture; not the employment pattern nor the realization of dues from major industrial consumers. Transmission and Distribution losses which have a major impact on the Corporation and add to its loss-making has not been addressed. Instead, Meghalaya is a fertile playground for all kinds of dubious businessmen who come to the State with the intention of making a quick buck by paying off a few people in the system.

In the latest Union budget 2022-23 there is a clear focus towards privatisation in the energy sector, both of assets and of supply chain, especially in the existing sectors of power, coal, and natural gas. While it has provided some allocation and measures for clean energy, it likely is not enough in the direction that the sector was hoping for. In the areas of clean energy the Union Government has given a big push to electric vehicles. However as of now the biggest challenge is the time associated with charging the batteries of the electric vehicle models. The Central Government has sought to address this issue by establishing battery swapping stations in the country. NITI Aayog is working on a policy which will set the standards for interoperable batteries connector dimensions that will allow a seamless battery swapping framework. These are ambitious goals that the country is working on but where is Meghalaya in all of this?

Even the Education sector with a focus on televised lessons as enunciated in the budget 2022-23, would require uninterrupted energy supply. But is that even possible in Meghalaya especially in the rural areas of the state where at times even charging a mobile phone is a huge challenge due to frequent power cuts. While states like Assam have a clear vision on where they are headed, in Meghalaya politics dominates over development and people accept all this meekly.

# In UP Polls, BJP has a clear edge

By Rajdeep Sardesai

In the narrow lane from the Hanumangarhi temple to the Ram Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya, the local shopkeepers are visibly upset. Their shops will be demolished as the town administration plans to widen the road as part of its grand renovation design. "We have been here for decades and now they take such a big decision without even consulting us," a shopkeeper laments. So who will you vote for, I ask? "Vote toh BJP ko padega sir, without Modiji and Yogi ji, there would be no Ram Temple. Aastha (faith) bhee important hai!" is the telling response.

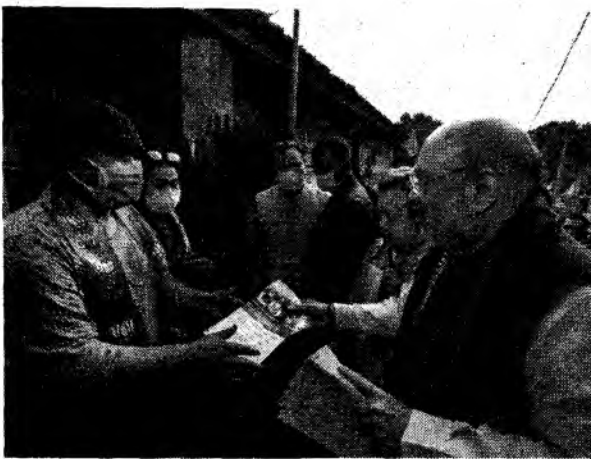
We are in a village near Kanpur, discussing politics over a cup of chai with a group of farmers from the Kurmi community. The rising price of diesel and cooking oil and the stray cattle menace is cause for concern. "Mehngai bad gai hai," they moan, but then add that their vote remains with the BJP. "Yogi ji's government is giving us free ration for months now," is their reasoning. Not surprisingly, the ration packets carry pictures of the chief minister and the prime minister.

Switch to urban Lucknow where the city's young and restless are hanging out at a food street. Many of them admit that they are troubled by the lack of job opportunities in the city. "I am a software engineer but here in Lucknow there is only one HCL campus that was set up when Akhilesh Yadav was chief minister," grumbles a young woman. So who will you vote for is my standard question. "Akhilesh has a vision but I would like to give Yogi government one more chance, at least women's security is now better and I can move around after 7 pm," she answers.

While criss-crossing the Awadh belt of central UP, the country's most populous and politically influential state remains a puzzling bundle of contradictions. This isn't quite the turbulent 1990s where Mandal was pitted against Kamandal, where caste and community 'wars' were fought with frenetic zeal. Yes, there is disquiet over the tough times that so many have endured in pandemic times but the anxiety hasn't turned into anger. Not yet. Except for western UP that was the epicenter of the farmer agitation which dramatically changed po-

litical equations in the region, UP seems to have settled into a more stable order in a previously chaotic political universe. What explains the paradox of a disenchanted voter but a relatively clear-cut political preference?

Firstly, the lack of political options are stark. Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj party which only 15 years ago won a remarkable majority appears to have suddenly disintegrated: only her core Jatav vote seems to still stand by her. The Congress under Priyanka Gandhi Vadera has at least tried to lift itself



from the mire but decades of organizational sloth can't be overcome by a few months of effort. That leaves Akhilesh Yadav as the last man standing up to the BJP juggernaut. His attempt to recast the Samajwadi party by intelligently striking alliances with smaller caste based parties is a recognition of the limits of the party's original Muslim-Yadav base but he still has to

between the traditional upper caste elites and the recent entrants but on the ground it has meant that the BJP has a much wider social base than its competitors.

Thirdly, the flagship welfare schemes of the Modi-Yogi so called 'double engine' have created an unmistakable pro-poor image that may enable the ruling party to tide through 'mehngai' (price rise) and creeping anti-incumbency against its MLAs. For example, the PM-Kisan launched by the Centre in February 2019 has continued since, assuring

the farmers an income of Rs 6000 per year over three instalments. UP has the highest number of such farm beneficiaries at around 2.5 crore: it is this vast pool of 'labhartis' or beneficiaries of cash transfers and free rations that are at the heart of the BJP's political outreach.

Fourthly, the media narrative is so tightly controlled by the Yogi government's

ernment will not hesitate to punish its own. The occasional journalistic expose has been met with heavy-handed state action, including FIRs against media persons, creating an atmosphere of fear and foreboding.

But above all else, there is the lure of the Hindutva project, wherein UP, much like Gujarat in the Modi years, has become the centre-piece of an ominous religious polarization. Yogi Adityanath's controversial '80:20' remark for example isn't just inflammatory rhetoric but is designed to shore up his image as a 'protector' of 'Hindu interests'. The chief minister, in fact, has been a serial offender when it comes to brazenly appealing to one religious grouping while demonizing another. But what is crude and offensive to those who swear by constitutional norms of non-discriminatory politics, is cheered by the vast multitudes of Yogi supporters who contrast Hindu assertiveness in the last five years with the 'appeasement' of Muslims in the previous regime. In fact, even the chief minister's core appeal of being tough on law and order is viewed through the prism of anti-Muslim sentiment: 'Muslim gangsters are seen as prime targets of Yogi's 'bulldozer' boast.

This doesn't mean UP's deep caste fault-lines have entirely disappeared or that local anti-incumbency isn't a factor, one reason why the BJP does face a decline in numbers. It is just that a majority in UP seem unwilling to break with the Modi-Yogi fixation: women in particular remain a key demographic whose support may cut across the caste barrier. Just how long this cult-like fascination for the BJP's 'UP-Yogi' poll pitch lasts is uncertain but for now it seems that the Hindi heartland is still content to keep rocking in its Hindu cradle.

Post-script: In the power corridors of Lucknow, there is much speculation whether a section of the BJP leadership would prefer a narrow victory to an overwhelming one. As per this theory, a downsized Yogi would suit certain political interests within the BJP's established power structure. If only electoral politics was so easy to control.

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

# Global left can never support Russia's invasion of Ukraine at this hour

By David Broder

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is sickening. Vladimir Putin had this Monday claimed that the "Kiev regime" refused any resolution of the conflict in the Donbas except through "military means." The Russian president now claims to resolve it with far more bloodshed, already spreading beyond the Donbas region and risking a wider conflagration.

Putin's open disregard for Ukrainian independence expresses a reactionary civilizational politics, as expressed in his article scouring medieval myths for reasons to kill and maim in the present. True, he famously once claimed that the fall of the USSR was the last century's "greatest geopolitical disaster." Yet it was no accident that this week he cast Lenin as the "architect" of Ukraine, who had subverted an older and thus somehow more authentic tsarist imperial order.

Putin's rule surely has drawn legitimacy from Russia's post-Soviet malaise.

antiwar left faces a mighty security state apparatus. It is far from clear that most Russians are really mobilized in support of the war: pollsters like the Levada Center suggest that there is much less unanimous support for recognition of the Donbas separatist republics (never mind a full-scale invasion of Ukraine) than was true with the 2014 annexation of Crimea. But open civil resistance will face a sharp clampdown.

If the conflict does remain limited to its current scope, its main victims will be civilians in Ukraine, on either side of the now-contested border in the Donbas. It is hard to predict how Volodymyr Zelensky's government might respond, given the pressure from headline nationalist forces domestically, the vast imbalance of forces, and his reliance on Western aid. His appeal to the Russian population, in the language which they share with so many in his home region, was surely



His government's credo of militarized stability built its support in an atmosphere of real popular despair following the destruction of the pre-1991 social order; a series of border conflicts have in turn radicalized its nationalist revanchism. But his insistence this week that he would "really decommunize" Ukraine, by dismantling it, showed his hatred even for the most formal Soviet rhetoric of "fraternity among peoples."

Putin was not driven to invade by Western threat or by a small but militant far-right minority in Ukraine. Yet it should clearly be recognized that Western actions have helped prepare the way. This is not only because NATO's post-1991 expansion has encircled Russia or empowered its militarists to claim that lands devastated during World War II are again under threat. More than that, Putin's claim to

admirable. As for the United States and UK, even if they do not send troops to Eastern Europe, we can expect a warlike atmosphere perhaps echoing that which followed 9/11, with smears against supposed "stooges of Putin," and clampdowns on media really or simply alleged to be Moscow-linked. A key focus of left-wing politics will be resistance against the already encroaching policing of public discourse by social media giants and state McCarthyism. Another will be to defend the right of refugees from the war — and its likely fallout on the global food supply — to settle in Europe.

In recent weeks, media-political rhetoric in Western countries has been heavily directed at delegitimizing the Left and antiwar forces domestically. This also points to its unreality and impotence without regard

"The likes of Blair, Clinton, Trump, and Putin have often been on one same side, through material collaboration in the War on Terror and in their common undermining of the international law which they all claim to uphold."

stand up for minorities in the Donbas draws on a now well-worn playbook of "humanitarian" intervention.

To observe that those who destroyed Iraq, Libya, and Yugoslavia have no standing to condemn him is not an exercise in "both-sidesism." The likes of Blair, Clinton, Trump, and Putin have often been on one same side, through material collaboration in the War on Terror and in their common undermining of the international law which they all claim to uphold. Time and again, Washington has allied with despots, come to see them as unreliable, then launched military offensives against them that succeeded only in spreading chaos. The Left has every duty to remember these disasters — and prevent them from being repeated in the present.

This war also has wider consequences on domestic politics, including in Russia, where a small organized

to events in Ukraine. Liberal pundits often speak of Putin's hirelings on the European far left and far right; yet no socialist parties are funded by Russian bankers and oligarchs in the manner of British Tories, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, or Italy's Lega. Putin's erratic conduct has surely embarrassed them; socialists never admired him to begin with. Even compared to the Cold War era, the Left in most countries is far less politically and organizationally prepared to deal with the present crisis, never mind acting effectively to stop it. But we can at least rely on certain core principles: an unrelenting rejection of the use of military force; a refusal to justify one set of generals by citing the crimes of another; and, above all, a defense of our own right to speak without fear or accusation of disloyalty. (IPA Service) Courtesy: Jacobin Magazine

Letters to the Editor

## Russian roulette

Editor The geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine has once again ballooned into a full scale war with Kremlin strongman Vladimir Putin ordering attacks similar to a 'shock and awe' operation while the west is pushing further economic sanctions against the top oligarch.

Putin, a former member of the Russian security services (KGB), is trying to shape the battlefield of Europe according to his playbook. No doubt the aggression will cause human misery apart from causing needless deaths just when the world is recovering from the third wave of the pandemic.

Going back to history during the invasion of Afghanistan it did try to fight a rag tag army of holy warriors and the lessons are etched on the memories of the Russian military might which they are trying to change in a 21st century battle-space using cyber weaponry, information warfare, air power, dominance and electro-magnetic pulse weapons.

Gas and oil are powerhouses for driving the Russian dream. The ramifications of such acts of war will create a dent on world history. To delve deeper on the mindsets of Russia's strategic and economic interests, Tim Marshall's book Prisoners of Geography explains why

Vladimir Putin is always interested in Crimea. Yours etc., Christopher Gathpho, Shillong-10

## The good news is stale

Editor, Apropos of the letter, 'Good news for the Environment', by Venu G.S (ST Feb 25, 2022) I am sorry to write that the good news is 20 years old. Our high school children from Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills would annually attend Science Exhibitions & Seminars, arranged by Government of Meghalaya. The topics discussed are Global Warming and Pollution and exhibits are low cost ones that warn of excessive luxuries and extravagant lifestyle being detrimental to the health of mother earth. The topper would proceed to Delhi for receiving the National Prize. Once a student of St Mary's School did Meghalaya proud when she bagged the prize. She was invited by President Dr Abdul Kalam for dinner. It was heartening to see teachers escorting their students and most of these are now doctors and engineers in our state and outside.

The plastic menace was recognised way back in the year 2000. The Education Ministry then selected the theme, 'Plastic: A menace to the world.' Those days were devoid of Google and the seminar speeches were

the students' own concept assisted by teachers eagerly waiting to watch their words deliver their speeches.

It all started with the sad fact that 'plastic is non-biodegradable'. And worst, burning emits poisonous air and the remains still pollute the landfills. They were yet to learn then that fishes or all aquatic lives at the mouth of rivers were then choked. They suggested that the lowest microns be banned outright. So Laitumkhrhah was the pioneer to ban plastic bags, followed by all markets in Shillong. But the enthusiasm was short-lived. Another suggestion was to use thicker plastic bags that were reusable. But old habits die hard and the last resort in that seminar was to go back to traditional cloth or jute bags. All these fell on deaf ears and we don't seem to be worried about the environmental impact that plastics have on our environment.

In the US, green activists urged their government to impose huge taxes on plastic factories. Little did they know of the shady deal between government and corporate giants. Such is our callousness that we fail to protest that even when we buy a vehicle, the seats are all covered with plastics. We are heavily duped by tinselled items that hasten the climate change impacts. Rivers laden with plastic garbage empty into seas and oceans and suffocate marine lives and subsequently cause their death. Coca Cola has

vowed to retrieve all their bottles but will others join? A whale in the Mediterranean was rescued by animal lovers when plastic choked its wind pipe. Even cows are choked and die after consuming plastics but we humans are consumed by greed and callousness. Let's see if the plastic ban from July 1 this year really works.

Yours etc., W Passah Nongkrem

## The upright are never rewarded

Editor, The "upright" coach of the Indian cricket team is indeed a "very honest" personality. Also he holds "immense respect" for those who have contributed much to the team! And this is exactly the reason why he himself has admitted ("very very honestly") that just because of his "immense respect" towards the contribution of Wriddhiman Saha, the former indeed clearly asked the latter to move on. In short its like saying, "Your services are no longer required in the national team!" This also means that those who hardly contribute, fail regularly and demand "less respect" can be asked to "continue in the team!"

No wonder why the greatest wicket keeper of the world in current times gets thrown out from the team in the most

barbaric fashion while those that have failed regularly are getting promoted, retained and pampered shamelessly! The Indian cricket team and its management have not fallen from the sky after all! They are part and parcel of this unjust, biased prejudiced society! So not only in the cricketing sector, rather in every sector of this Indian society, from the political arena down to government to offices the silent efficient workers/contributors have absolutely no value! Rather it is the era of empty vessels that make the most sound that are literally worshipped by all and sundry!

So get lost Wriddhiman and those unknown tireless, honest persons slogging silently in their professional spaces! And reward the utmost failures everywhere for their shrill, vocal rhetoric and relentless chest thumping! What a moral fall! What a warped sense of justice!

Yours etc., Kajal Chatterjee, Kolkata

## Is St Edmund's College being privatized?

Editor, Recently, St Edmund's College had advertised for recruitment to the teaching posts in Biochemistry, Botany, Education, English, Commerce, Political Science and Sociology. The minimum qualifications required

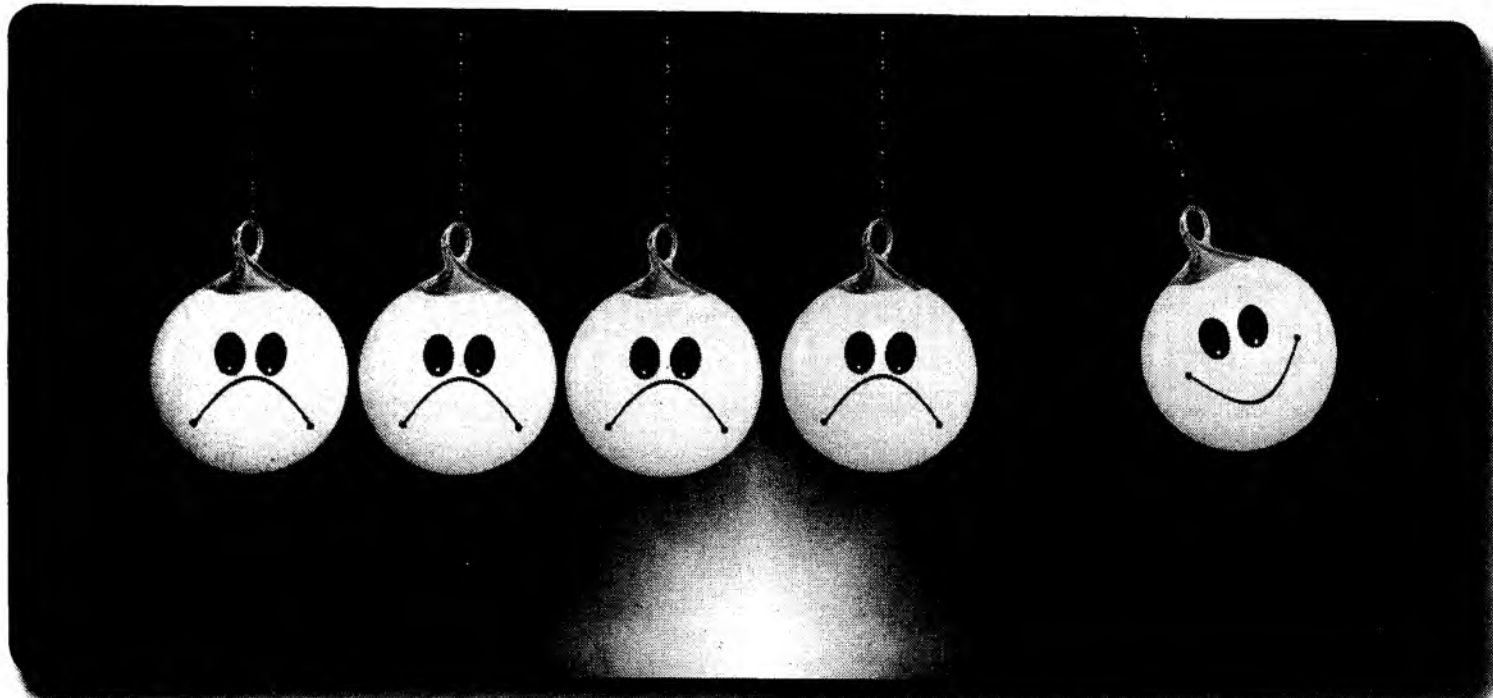
for filling up these post is UGC Regulation 2018, since the College is under Meghalaya Government Deficit Grant in Aid. However, as per the advertisement in the local dailies these vacancies were advertised as Private Sanctioned Post Teachers instead of government sanctioned posts. It appears that the College is in the process of privatisation which essentially means increasing reliance on private sources i.e. increase of tuition fees which will have a significant impact on students especially students from lower income families.

According to Article 29 (2) of the Indian Constitution, "No citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language, or any of them". However, the educational privatization or commercialization means that the hungry people living below poverty line (BPL) are again left to suffer in poverty. The College was established to provide equitable quality education and to serve the poor. Hence, it is expected to uphold its Vision and Mission.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

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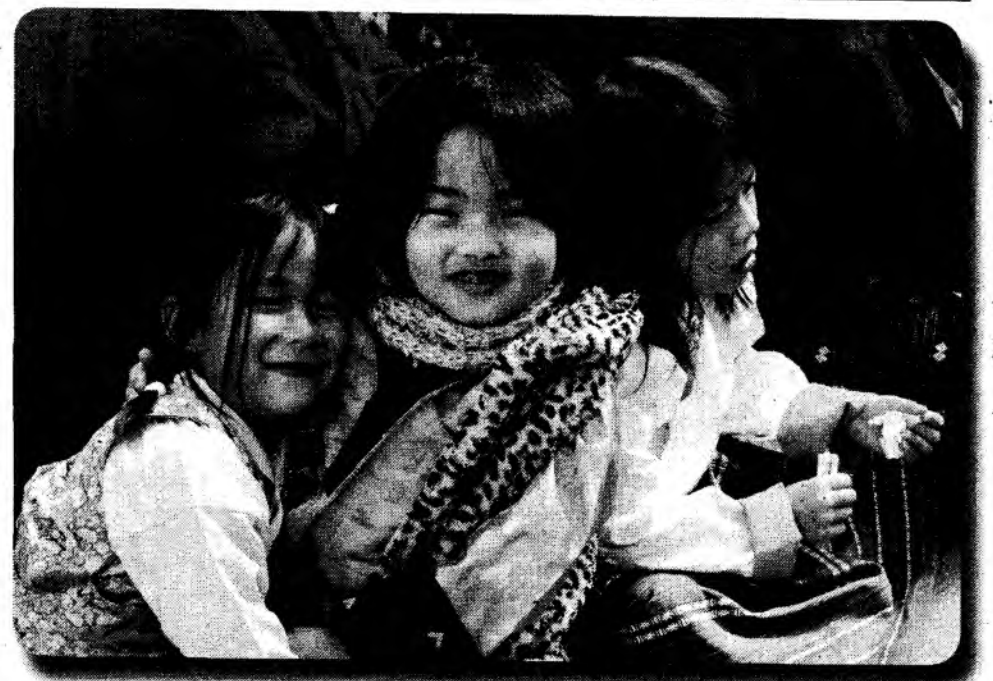
# PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: A NOT-SO-GOOD THING



**H**appiness is one of the most important goals in life. During the pandemic, it trended as the most searched word on Google. But here's why the pursuit of happiness can be bad for you. It can make us more self-centred. The active pursuit of happiness can exacerbate individualistic tendencies to seek out pleasures at the expense of others (breaking up a friendship because it is not fun), society (driving fast may make you happy, but it endangers people's lives) or the environment (keeping the air-conditioning on overnight). Ironically, that self-centredness, apart from not serving others well, also makes people who pursue happiness more lonely.

Focused on making ourselves happy, we forget the basic principle of happiness, which is to look outside ourselves for true happiness. Those who score the highest in any happiness rankings report good social support (for instance, supporting others when in need and in return being offered support), live meaningful lives that allow them to contribute to society (put effort into developing skills that serve others well), experience abundance of positive emotions which are often created in the company of others (we smile 30 times more often in a group than in solitude). This is the irony of the single-minded pursuit of happiness. Focusing on ourselves and wanting to be happier reduces

our chances of experiencing happiness. It can make us realise that we're unhappy. The idea that we should be searching for it can highlight the absence of happiness in our lives. The more we value happiness, the more likely it is that we will be disappointed with our current situations. Even worse, the more desperate we become about finding happiness, the more likely we are to experience symptoms of depression. It can make us blame ourselves for being unhappy. The implication that we should all be happy and that it is easy to achieve can make us feel like there is something wrong with those who are not happy, causing further distress. Our



obsession with happiness has spawned an industry of people and organisations promising quick-fix ways to make us happy. This is just one of the reasons why the narrow focus on "happiness" can be damaging. Apart from happiness not being good for the pursuers, it is often inappropriate to talk about happiness when interacting with people suffering extreme poverty, experiencing political injustice, living through devastating conflicts or facing natural disasters. To put it simply, being happy is not a priority in these situations. Advocating for initiatives to increase happiness can lead to people feeling alienated and misunderstood. In traumatic times, exhorting people to "be happy" can come across as tone deaf or lacking in compassion. **Boost your wellbeing instead** If we focus too narrowly on the pursuit of happiness, we are at risk of forgetting about wellbeing, which runs deeper than

simple hedonism and includes connections with people, life purpose, a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Here are five ways to improve your wellbeing:

1. Ensure that you can meet the basic needs of yourself and those you care for.
2. Allocate regular time for pleasurable activities, such as a walk, playing a game or watching or listening to something you enjoy.
3. Invest in building and maintaining positive relationships. Meet with friends, keep in contact with family members, nurture your work relationships.
4. Stay connected with what makes your life meaningful. For example, supporting a movement, following a faith or committing fully to your personal or professional role.
5. Make things better for your community by, say, advocating for better services, volunteering in your community, or challenging unfair practices. (*The Conversation*)

## 'Democracies must stand together on Ukraine'

Author William Dalrymple has stressed on the need for all the democracies to stand together on war-torn Ukraine.

"And we all thought colonialism was over... I am not an Indian nor can I tell anyone what to do, but it seems short-sighted when there is not a single word of condemnation from here on the invasion of Ukraine. It is extremely important for democracies to stand up. Who knows what is next? Russia may not afford a prolonged war but China can definitely," Dalrymple tells IANS.

Author of *The Anarchy*, *Return of a King*, *The Last Mughal* and the *White Mughals* among others, Dalrymple, who is the co-founder and co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) which returns to its physical avatar in March feels digital can never substitute any festival on the ground.

"Half the fun of any such festival is in meeting people, enjoying the weather, those parties in the evening and interacting with the speakers first-hand... something we all have missed immensely. Of course, one can still get an awful lot out of the digital as a speaker and as an attendee. It's obviously something that has blossomed over the last few years. This time, Jaipur Literature Festival will be seen in a hybrid avatar, offering the best of both the worlds."

Admitting that it was not easy to convince many authors, especially from abroad to come down to Jaipur, in face of the Pandemic, Dalrymple, adds, "But I am quite surprised as there a lot of them willing to travel. We have a fantastic lineup of writers from India and abroad."

The author, who wrote the evergreen *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* is now heading towards the end of research for his forthcoming book *The Golden Road*.

He says, "Initially, it was not able to get to Cambodia and other places owing to the Pandemic, but ultimately it happened. During the lockdowns, many writers managed to do more than they had done in 10 years. I was back from *The Anarchy* tour when everyone was forced to stay indoors. An author's worst enemy is the temptation to go to the different literary festivals, but they

did not take place. I was therefore forced to work hard and now it is time to sit down and write this book."

Talking about historical fiction, a space that was unexplored in India before he came in, Dalrymple remembers, "When I started 30 years ago, there was a weird absence. In other places like Britain and the US, non-fiction sells just as good as fiction unlike here. While people were winning major prizes in fiction not much was being done on the historical non-fiction side. That has changed now and we have some wonderful new writers - there is a thirst for non-fiction. From leftists, right wingers to centralists, everyone is writing."

Also a photographer who shoots in black & white, Dalrymple is all set to hold his exhibition in Baroda next month and launch a podcast called *Empires*.

"Photography helps one use a different side of the brain. I have been a lone traveller for a long time and these journeys on the road have produced some wonderful opportunities for writing as well as photography."

Even as his son, Sam is set to release his debut book next year, the author says it is exciting to have another writer around.

"He is also being forced to concentrate, and both of us are researching our books. In fact, his brother was doing a history thesis as well. Well, my reference books keep disappearing... other than that it's an enormous pleasure. There is no guarantee that your children will share your interests - but this is perfect. I am learning a lot from them. They keep telling me things that I've never heard of," he says.

Dalrymple, who spends two-three years researching - reading what is already been written on a subject he is exploring, going through archives, art history, and archaeological sources elaborates on his process, "Travel, note taking and card indexes are involved. I tend to write quickly. The key is to get everything cut out and to really know your stuff. And then you can write fast. But yes, writing *The Golden Road* is going to be tough, I have never written about South-East Asia." (*IANS*)

## Hassle-free travels for Indians in COVID era

According to Agoda's recent 'Indigenous Travel' survey, 39 percent of Indians anticipate travelling internationally in 2022, while its Return to Travel survey found that their biggest concern to travel internationally was understanding restrictions and vaccination or quarantine requirements.

Countries are now taking tentative steps to reopen borders, easing their entry restrictions and opening their doors to international tourists, including Indians. Fully vaccinated passengers flying to these select countries are no longer required to present a negative RT-PCR test upon arrival at the airport.

So, what are you waiting for? It's time to pack your bags and set out for that much-needed vacation.

Here's a list of exciting off-beat destinations that will come in handy when planning your itineraries.

### Egypt - The Gift of the Nile

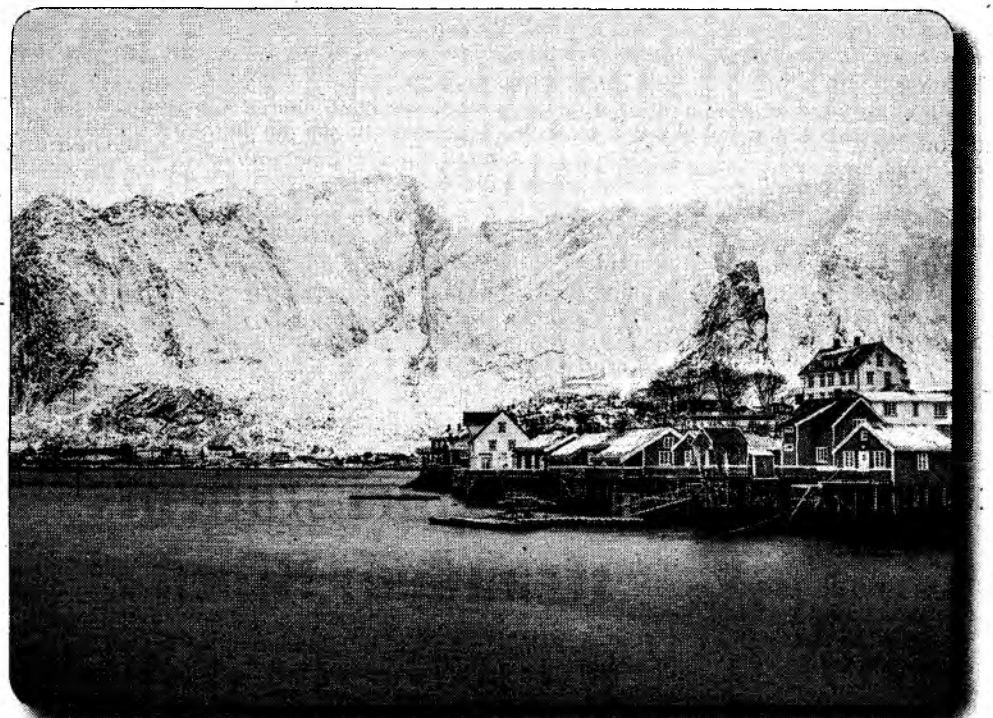
Travellers vaccinated with Covishield or AstraZeneca can now fly to Egypt without an RT-PCR test. All you need to do is fill out a health declaration form and you're all set. While visiting the land of the Great Pyramid of Giza, don't forget to also check out the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and the famous Khan el-Khalili market. Sailing down the Nile River on a felucca, a traditional wooden sailboat, and the hot air balloon ride at Luxor are also must-dos. Travellers can also visit the Sahara el Beyda, the white desert national park, or travel to Hurghada to experience Egypt's expansive underwater marine life - you can take a submarine ride or even opt to go scuba diving. If you want to soak in some of the intricate cultures of the country, you should definitely visit the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

### Bahrain - The Middle East's Best Kept Secret

This island country situated on the Persian Gulf is now allowing tourists to enter without a pre-departure PCR test irrespective of their vaccination status. There are so many exciting things for travellers to see and do in Bahrain. Visit the famous and ancient Al Jasra House and Al Bahrain site museum to indulge in the rich history and civilization of this place, wander through Manama Souq for some amazing spices, souvenirs and delicious sweets, and try out traditional Bahraini cuisines such as Machboos, meat or fish served with fragrant rice cooked in a spicy broth or Muhammar sweet rice with dates, across the island. Do spare some time to dive into the world's largest underwater theme park, Dive Bahrain, and for kayaking and other water sports at Nurana Islands.

### Lebanon - Small in size, big in adventure

Fully vaccinated travellers do not require a pre-departure PCR test to fly to Lebanon if they received their second



jab at least six months before travelling. All you need to do is upload your vaccination certificate on the Ministry of Health's website.

Lebanon has so much to offer with its geographically diverse country that offers you mesmerizing panoramas, rich history and architecture, and delectable cuisine that will make your trip a truly memorable one. Explore one of the best-preserved Greco-Roman temples, Baalbek - the temple of Bacchus, the famous cedars of Lebanon in the Chouf, on Mount Barouk, and the Beiteddine Palace that dates back to the eighteenth century. Go on a boat tour at Byblos to enjoy the sunset in the birthplace of the Phoenician civilization, hike the beautiful QADISHA valley to explore old churches and monasteries and separate yourself from the outside world. Don't miss the Batarra Gorge waterfall that drops 255 metres down into the Balaa Pothole, a cave of Jurassic limestone.

### France - The land of wine and love

From 12th February, France decided to scrap the requirement of the RT-PCR test for fully vaccinated travellers. While visiting one of the most romantic destinations in the world, you will without a doubt visit the Eiffel Tower, go cruising down the Seine River, pilgrim to Mont-Saint-Michel, or wander around the Old Quarters of Paris.

However, there is so much to experience in France beyond this. Run across the Lavender fields in Provence, take a helicopter ride over French Alps, take a stroll in Dijon - a walking city where cars are not allowed, explore vineyards in Burgundy, taste exquisite Champagne in Champagne, and explore Lyon city, recognised for its delightful cuisine.

### Turkey - The land of four seasons

People vaccinated across the globe are welcomed in Turkey without an RT-

PCR test. Travellers only need to fill out a health form 72 hours prior to their arrival. Turkey is the perfect destination to resume your travel post-pandemic. It has the right blend of cultural influences from Asia, Europe, and the Middle East paired with unforgettable natural wonders throughout the Turkish landscapes.

Relax at the Thermal pools of Pamukkale lake, the pure white travertine terraces cascade down the slope looking like an out-of-place snowfield amid the green landscape; explore one of the oldest cities of the world, Konya, which has been inhabited since the 3rd millennium BC, and Kaymakli - an underground city in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey; take a hot air balloon ride to experience the surreal, swooping rock valleys of Cappadocia; and unwind with a traditional Hamam (Turkish bath) experience.

### Norway - The land of the midnight sun

Travellers vaccinated within nine months of their arrival do not need an RT-PCR test to enter Norway. In case the final dose has exceeded the period, you will need a booster shot. If you're planning a trip to Norway, chasing the Northern Lights and seeing the Arctic circle will definitely be at the top of your itinerary.

Apart from this spectacular sight in the skies, this Scandinavian country houses majestic mountains, glaciers, museums, and a whole bunch of activities to do on your travel.

Travellers can hike to Mount Floyen, a 399-meter summit which will get you the best view of the city, explore the Geirangerfjord region, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its icy Norwegian scenery, marvel at the beautiful architecture of the Arctic Cathedral, and even visit the world's most powerful whirlpool, Saltstraumen Maelstrom. (*IANSlife*)

By Sharon Morein

Many of us may find we have acquired too many possessions that clutter our living spaces, but refuse to part with things "in case we might need them".

Although having too much stuff is something many of us can relate to, for some people, a persistent difficulty parting with possessions can become a problem: hoarding. When these tendencies significantly impair somebody's quality of life, this leads to a condition called hoarding disorder.

Curiously, understanding how hoarding manifests and how it relates to other difficulties in everyday life has not received much attention until recently. Only in 2013 was hoarding disorder officially recognised in the DSM-5 (the American Psychiatric Association's manual for assessing and diagnosing mental health conditions), and its key characteristics agreed upon.

In a recent study, we found people with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have a significantly higher frequency of hoarding symptoms compared to the general population. This indicates that hoarding should be routinely assessed in those with ADHD.

Hoarding disorder is characterised by persistent difficulties discarding items, regardless of their actual value. This results in excessive accumulation of possessions that clutter living areas and compromise their intended use. Hoarding disorder leads to major distress and problems in socialising, work and other areas of daily functioning.

Anecdotally we know participants in hoarding research often report problems with attention, with many believing that they should have received a diagnosis of ADHD. Indeed, evidence does indicate that people with hoarding disorder experience greater problems with attention compared to others.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition, with one of its key characteristics being problems

# Hoarding – People with ADHD are more likely to have problems



with attention.

"Inattention" encompasses issues with concentrating, but also considerable difficulties with organisation, forgetfulness, procrastination and being easily distracted to a degree that impairs everyday functioning.

If there is a link between hoarding and inattention, then what about people with ADHD? Do they have more hoarding problems than most?

## Our study

We asked all patients in an adult ADHD clinic in the UK to

complete a series of questionnaires about their traits and behaviours including hoarding. We had 88 people, one-third of the patients, take part. A control group with similar age, gender and education characteristics who did not have ADHD answered the same questions.

Using three different questionnaires, we applied thresholds previously established by hoarding researchers and clinicians to indicate hoarding disorder.

Some 20% of participants with ADHD reported clinically significant hoarding symptoms, versus

2% in the comparison group (close to the 2.5% prevalence of hoarding disorder in the population).

Hoarding was roughly as common across both genders, with patients who exhibited hoarding symptoms aged on average in their 30s. Clinically significant hoarding in ADHD patients was associated with poorer quality of life and higher depression and anxiety.

People with ADHD who scored below the threshold for hoarding disorder still reported considerably greater issues with hoarding compared to the control group. Further, those with more severe attention

problems were more likely to report problems with hoarding.

Even if not suffering from either ADHD or hoarding disorder, many people will relate to the difficulties characteristic of these conditions, demonstrating that symptoms exist along a continuum in the population.

We therefore reran the study online in 220 UK participants, finding this time that 3.6% scored above the threshold, and that there was again a strong link between inattention and hoarding.

The findings from our study, which we understand is the first to

examine hoarding in adult ADHD patients, suggest that people with ADHD should be routinely assessed for hoarding symptoms – particularly given the limited awareness around any impairments associated with hoarding. While patients did not spontaneously raise hoarding-related issues in the clinic, they did endorse them once explicitly raised in our study.

## Research gaps

A limitation of our study is that hoarding symptoms were investigated with self-reported questionnaires. Future studies should replicate the findings with trained clinical staff assessing hoarding through interviews. Future research should also investigate why this association between ADHD and hoarding disorder exists.

More generally, one challenge to understanding hoarding and providing effective treatment is that many of those who suffer from hoarding disorder have limited insight. This means they don't necessarily recognise or accept that they are suffering from a mental health condition, or that they have a problem at all.

Research on hoarding disorder has tended to focus on people who do come forward or those noticed by health and social care systems. Time and again studies describe samples of predominantly female participants in their late 50s. But these participants tell of severe hoarding beginning much earlier in life, often by one's 20s. In addition, indirect evidence from demographic studies suggests that hoarding is evenly split across genders.

The evidence from our study indicates that our understanding of hoarding may be enriched by targeting these younger people with ADHD and hoarding to get a fuller understanding of their symptoms.

This could ultimately support more effective interventions and treatments in both ADHD and hoarding disorder, and help illuminate the link between the two.

(Sharon Morein is an Associate Professor in Psychology and Mental Health, Anglia Ruskin University.)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, FEB 27, 2022

Moon perigee on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. You will have monetary gains. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will get full support and backing of your peers and colleagues. You will throw yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. You will get new job/business offers. You will make best use of money. Additional sources of income can be explored. The time will be extremely good and happy. Lovebirds will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will get suitable marriage offers. Students will get success in some interview or competitive exams. Your right advice will help a person when you need it most. You will also pursue your interests. You will also acquire new skills and knowledge. A long standing worry will come to an end. Family happiness will increase. Your influence and impression in the work place will remain.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will turn out to be a wonderful week. You will continue doing all the good work. In the process, you will get lot of success too. You will also find time to pursue your interests and hobbies. Not only you will feel refreshed yourself, but you will feel peaceful and ease at home. You will also be getting monetary benefits. You will be careful about fulfilling responsibilities and contacting people. In case of all financial matters, investments the situation will remain in your favor. You have the possibilities of getting new job offers. Husband and wife will share better understanding. You should focus on dieting and balanced meals. You will adopt a lavish lifestyle.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It will be a week giving you fabulous benefits. You will get support of your peers and bosses. You will do such work, which will bring you your applause. You will also feel the need for change in today's fast pace life. Students will be extremely alert about their performance. After assessing your abilities, you will plan the future. You will have benefits and gain in your business. Business trips will keep you busy. You will also plan to go out with your family. You will pursue your dreams and also fulfill them. You will deal with issues relating to home, land and office with ease. Time is fine. But you will need to adopt to a fast moving life. You will also start a work that had been stuck for a long time. You will be with your loved ones. You will also make changes in your home and office. With the new contact you will proceed forward. You will love to keep meeting new people.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will face variety of troubles. Your expenses will also rise. A matter at your workplace will need your attention. You need to take care of your health. Otherwise, time is good. You will get full support of your bosses. You will create a good image and guide your friends and relatives. You will be a better advisor. You will have a huge perspective. You will be self sufficient and will take full care of your children. You will be happy in the company of your family members. You will work extra for the income and will also take responsibilities properly. You will be happy with your achievements. You will also make every decision with discretion and tact. Love birds will plan to get married. Your health will remain perfect. You will also make future plans. Your expectations and hopes will get fulfilled. You will feel yourself with energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Money and wealth will keep coming. You will have money inflow. Along with work, you will also enjoy time. You will get success in court matters. In romance and love you may develop new relations. The results of your efforts will be good. But you need to keep working hard. Profits in business will grow. You will also have to take care of yourself, children and family. You need to open up all the way to communication with people. It will convey your ideas and imagination. You can do a new partnership. In this sequence, the bachelors might be engaged and the marriage will be decided soon. You will get a chance to hang out with your spouse. You will be highly enthusiastic and full of energy. Your creativity will be at the peak and you will be successful in attracting people's attention. Jupiter will bring success for you. You will be engaged in interview, meeting, conference.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your efforts will bring in lot of money. You can also give loan to someone. You will also plan to invest your money wisely. You will also make a blue print of your future plans. Your mind will be clear about its goals. Tension at work will get released. You will also fall in love relations with a person known to you. Your efforts will bring in relief and make gift from each other. You will also do some welfare work. You will also spend your time with family. Your financial position will be stable and you will adopt a positive approach towards life. Your personality will bloom with the success you achieve. You will be full of self confidence and enthusiasm and will make maximum use of contacts. Conversations and contacts will be of importance to you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will be making new accomplishments and this will enhance your personality. The time is favorable for students. Whatever work you do you will be successful and you will not rest till you achieve success. Your interests in activities will reach a peak. You will avoid arguments

with your colleagues. You will take pleasure in things. You will also be busy in entertaining activities and will be happy. You will get opportunities for employment and also for earning money. Your boss and superiors will be happy with you and praise your work. Your parents will bless you. Students will concentrate in their studies better. You will also share good bonding with your partner. You need not have any expectations from your relatives. You will be creative and will leave your impressions on others.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

You will enjoy lot of luck favoring you this week. You will be able to receive money that was considered as bad loan. You will work with sincerity. You will also make a list of pending works and finish off each work according to priority. You will also develop your personality. Financial problems will besiege you. You will not divert from your objectives. Some big order will come to you in your business. Do not make any decision under the influence of emotions. The love of your life partner will take you out of your tensions. You will move towards your objective with determination and courage. You will be under the glare of publicity. You will wield considerable influence at your workplace and business. You will get guidance from a senior person. Matters relating to property will be resolved in a peaceful manner.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Matters relating to property will get resolved. Your financial position will remain strong and stable. There will be an increase of material possessions, happiness and amenities, but there will be void in your heart and mind. You will be busy in your work. You will have to work very hard in order to bring your business back to the right track but gain very little benefits. There are some possibilities of some change at work and home. You will establish contact with influential person. Your boss and superiors will be happy with your work and you may be given some important position. A meeting with a superior will open the doors of your future. You will be capable enough from a mental, emotional and intellectual viewpoint. You will go a long way with a balanced budget.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It will turn out to be successful week for you. You will complete your pending works. You will also enjoy your time with loved ones. You will also make changes in your home and office. You will be inspired to take up new projects. This may also motivate you to plan a new work strategy. Immense financial gains are indicated. If you have lent money, this is the right time to recover it. Those involved in media and politics will get success. Renovation process at home will be in full swing. Your opponents will have tough times. You will get success in legal matters. The period will prove to be profitable in all respects. Income will grow and you will get support from loved ones. Those looking forward to start a family will get good news. New collaborations will attract profits.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It will be a favorable week. People around you will appreciate your creativity. With little efforts things will turn into your favor. Make sure you focus on your thoughts and efforts. You will make right decisions in work. You will also get involved in political activities and get to associate with those who are already associated in the field. Your spouse may face health problems. You will try and meet goals but destination will seem far. It may require high patience. Things will work according to your expectations. New business prospects will come your way. Arts and commerce students will get success. Your spouse will support you a lot. You will be involved in show-off. You will make plans to expand your business.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will be excellent in developing new contacts. People in the family will live with mutual love and respect. Visitors will come to your house and it will create a vibrant atmosphere. You will look after your children and will be a good guardian. You will also plan for your child's future. The path like a good guardian. You will also plan for your child's future. You will get the expected help from your friends and colleagues. You have to be very humble and soft with your relationship. There can be tension with colleagues at the slightest provocation. But it will be resolved soon. Love partners will pass time in joy and cheer. Your worries regarding children will come to an end. Property disputes will get resolved.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will move in the direction to acquire wealth. Things will also move at a rapid pace. Commercial activities will be fast paced. You will feel a change of environment in your office. You will work without tension, and will feel very light. Don't say anything to anyone which you do not like. You will meet an old friend or relative and feel happy. You might attend a function. You will get some respite from worries. Your work will get completed soon due to your team efforts. Long pending disputes and problems will be settled. Your personality will grow and you will get credit for things. You will establish a good balance with your partner and business people. You will try out new practices in your business.

## A HEALTHY SUMMER DIET

Unlike other times of the year, during the summer we naturally lose our appetite and need extra fluid to hydrate the body. It is a common to resort to cooling drinks such as lime juice, Chaas, Nira water or something that we feel cooler.

It is extremely important for us to know this body language and get into a proper dietary habit so that we don't tax our body even more and at the same time support our body's tissues and cells with a nourishing diet to escape from the scorching heat. With a planned diet consisting of a range of refreshing drinks and fruit, we can cool down and face summer heat.

Consuming summer fruits and drinks is one of the easiest ways to lower the body heat and protect our body. The summer diet must also provide energy and help reduce tiredness and fatigue, something many of us experience during the summer season. Let the sun's hotness be dealt with easily with a few of the following dietary tips.

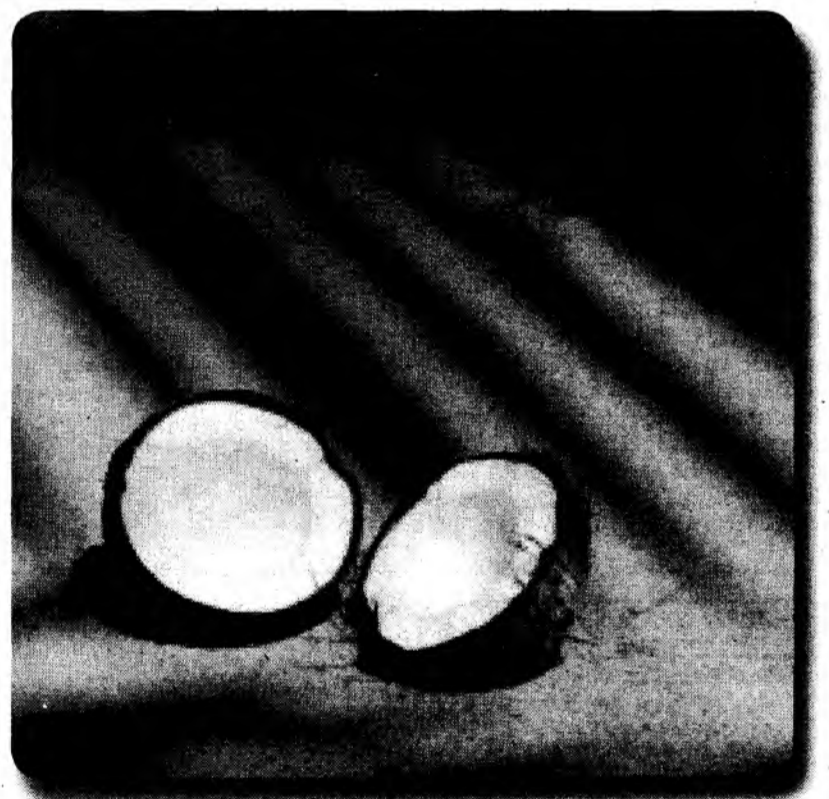
### Wake up routine

During summer, we tend to sleep under a fan or in an air-conditioned room. This can further dry up the skin and throat and when you wake up it is quite natural to feel the dryness of the throat, eye irritations or skin dryness. Start your morning with 2-3 glasses of water even. If required one can also use lime juice or cinnamon soaked in the water.

Following this, a cooling drink is highly recommended like Ashguard juice with a few drops of lime and Amla juice. This is highly beneficial to health in keeping the blood glucose in check and also to regularize your weight. Ash gourd juice can be replaced by wheatgrass juice, moringa juice, celery and cucumber juice or even coconut water.

### Breakfast during summer

It is important to consume at least 4-5 handfuls of fruits and vegetables during the day in summer. Breakfast should always start with a bowl of healthy seasonal fruits such as melons, papaya,



mangoes, lychees, plums etc. Following this one can have either a miller porridge or smoothie bowl consisting of coconut milk along with sabja, seeds, chia seeds, butts and a few dry fruits.

Dry breakfast such as bread or other fermented grain items can cause indigestion if eaten on a fresh stomach. Also, reduce the number of grains and other preparations for breakfast.

### Midmorning boost

Depending on your hunger levels, one can either go for buttermilk with a pinch of cumin powder and ginger or hing around midmorning time. You can also opt to have a bowl of salad at your convenience or even coconut water.

### Lunch options

The meal that you have at lunch also should have abundant vegetables. If you prefer to consume carbs this is the meal you can try adding carbs along with plenty of vegetables. Make it mandatory to include a soup for lunch. Reduce the macronutrients such as carbs, proteins and fats to only half of the lunch portion.

### Sundown diet

Towards the evening, you may consider taking a bowl of summer fruits and can also include a few soaked nuts along with this. This can give you good energy towards the latter part of the day and prevent any form of fatigue or tiredness after a full day's work.

### Healthy Dinner

Night meals are better to be kept as light as possible. It is preferred to have a "Budha bowl" with lots of cooked vegetables – sauteed, braised, grilled or boiled along with a protein option. Include a soup before the meals and a herbal tea post-dinner. Some of the great cooling teas are chamomile tea, hibiscus tea or even mint tea.

### Hydration during the day

One has to consume at least 3-litres of water during the day to keep the body cool. Besides drinking water, herbal teas, soups, infused water etc are great ways to combat body heat. Water infused with vegetables like celery, parsley, lemon, orange, cucumber, kale etc is great during this time. (LANSlife)

*"The great art of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even in pain."*

—Lord Byron

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 197 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2022

### Fighting against odds

CURIOSLY, it now is the turn of Russia to seek negotiations to end the Ukrainian war, which it thought could have ended in a matter of days and an overthrow of the Volodymyr Zelenskiy government a simple exercise. The resolute president of war-hit Ukraine is holding on, bravely, and protecting capital Kyiv. The strategy he adopted in view of the smaller number of troops he has is to concentrate them around the capital and major cities, making the advance difficult for the Russians to dethrone him. He's providing aerial defence too with the equipment he got from the West, making it difficult for Putin to advance on both the ground and in the air. The strategy has worked well for Ukraine till now but what happens next is unpredictable, though.

There is merit in the stand of the West not to send in military to defend Ukraine as it is not a part of the Nato alliance. Sanctions have been imposed on Russia, its flights have been banned from the air over the UK and, in another punitive step, France has seized a Russian ship carrying a cargo of cars. Sanctions against Moscow are being enforced at multiple levels and the latest is the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT banking system. Germany overcame its hesitation and joined the US and allies to do this. This will have serious financial implications on Russia. What the world experienced now, however, is that the UN and other global agencies have again proven their lack of effectiveness in checking war and acts of aggression by wayward nations. Like India, most nations are guided by their own interests and are excusing themselves out of a critical situation. China, on its part, has stressed for a dialogue. Yet, the Russian action is sure to give China legitimacy for a similar aggression on Taiwan, a breakaway republic that's leaning heavily on the US. Sadly, might is right even in the new world order; and the US had proven it when it went and uprooted the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq at the outset of the new century.

President Zelenskiy deserves praise for the zealotness with which he's facing the odds and defending his country. He has dismissed the calls to have a safe exit and made clear what he wanted now was more arms to stay on and fight. This is quite unlike what happened in Afghanistan when president Ashraf Ghani fled from the theatre of action when faced with the Taliban offensive in August last. Leadership is all about guts.

# Politics and the rich man's game narrative

By H.H. Mohrmen

As the election to the State Assembly approaches, apart from the usual defection of politicians from one party to another, new entrants have started to announce their candidature to the respective constituencies. No wonder news space both in the print and electronic media outlet is replete with election related stories. Stories are either about new candidates joining the fray or new parties launched to contest the ensuing state assembly elections or the usual story of politicians switching sides. But the common denomination in all the stories that are being published is the financial worth of the candidates. The general assumption is that any new candidate, particularly a new candidate one is either a rich person himself or that he has the backing of somebody who is rich.

**Only rich candidates can contest the election**

I call this a rich man's narrative. Wherever there is a discussion about the prospective candidate, the first question that people ask is how much money does the candidate have or how big his bank balance is. And if he is not rich, then the next question is whether he has the backing of wealthy people. This is a rich man's narrative precisely because this is the narrative that those who want to control the government peddle. Even if this is not true, they still want people to believe it because that is the only way they will be able to control the government and the state. In fact, I personally have never received any money to vote for any candidate during elections. I have also asked many of my friends if they had ever been paid money during the election and the answer is 'no.' The pertinent question then is who takes money during the elections then? My estimation is there is very small percentage of people who are literally being paid to vote for a particular candidate during elections. So, the next question is why is it said that only rich people can contest the elections.

**Ways how money is being used during elections**

Large chunks of money are being spent in organizing campaigns and rallies but there are also other ways how money changes hands during elections. Rich candidates buy their way to success during election by extending monetary sup-

port to the Dorbar Chnong for the locality's projects or even churches and other religious organizations. Yes even religious organizations, for they too have schools, hospitals to run or even a church building to complete. Technically, the leaders may not asked favours for their personal gains, but on behalf of the church, the shnong or the organization they are affiliated to. Yet it is still a favour they are asking from the candidates during the elections. Again, this may not comprise a large part of expenditure during election to decide which candidate wins the election.

**Political Parties and "Winnability" factors**

Whenever they are asked about the factors on which they select the candidates to contest from the party ticket, the standard answer of the leaders of political parties is the candidate's "winnability" factor. On a closer look, this does not have to do with the person's educational qualification, neither is it about his or her experience in public service or the candidate's character, but "winnability" basically means how much money the person has. Political parties are the first one to use money as a yardstick to decide the potential of the candidate to win.

**Common people are singing the same tune**

Sadly, we are all falling for the 'rich people narrative' and almost everybody believes that election is an expensive proposition and only those with extra cash to burn can indulge in. The rich section of the population seems to be winning this psychological battle, where even common people of the state are also singing the same tune now. Like a caged parrot they keep on repeating the same propaganda which only benefits the rich. This is what they want us to believe and in fact not surprisingly, this is how propaganda is spread and ingrained in the human psyche.

**Writers and thinkers are falling for it**

Even writers and thinkers are beginning to sing the same tune and they have stopped looking for alternative narratives. We have not done studies or even exercised our minds to study if this is really true? We have not even conducted a simple

survey to find out if money is really everything during elections? Is money really everything during elections? Maybe the reason is because we don't have psephologists who study elections in the state, but the question that begs the answer is how much is election in the state being influenced by money?

**Is There no more honesty amongst humans?**

Considering the popularity of this narrative in the state today, the question that one could ask is where have all the good people gone? If the narrative is true, are there no good and noble people anymore in the state? Have all the people in the state succumbed to greed and selfishness and are willing to sell their souls for a dime during election? This is the question that we - 'all the right thinking people' in the state need to ask ourselves.

**The good in every human soul**

Every religion or every culture in the world teaches that there is good in every human soul. Or that the core of human is good and noble. Yes, in spite of the negativity that is happening in the world, yet there is goodness in every human soul. In fact, humans by nature are good and that is what makes the world go round. The trust that we have in the pilot who pilots the aircraft despite the fact that we do not know the person is the kind of trust that helps make the world go round. The trust that human are generally good by nature is what makes the world as it is now. It also helps connect people between nations and races despite the differences they have. This is what we should bank on to bring back some decency in our electoral process and ultimately have a good government.

**Between the devil and deep sea**

How far is it true that money is the major factor which contribute to the candidate's winning the election? Is it true that we do not ask the candidate's credentials, his/her educational qualifications, experience in public life or his/her character and integrity during election? Do we only consider their money power before we cast our votes in their favour? The fact is people are aware of the candidate's credentials and yet they continue to send uneducated persons to represent them in the assembly.

Why do people continue to vote for rich candidates only? Rich people continue to win the elections because there is no better candidate in the fray. All the candidates in the fray are no different because the parties use the same mechanism to select candidates. We often hear people quip that the situation that we are in like we are between the devil and the deep sea. Money plays a crucial role in deciding which candidate wins the election because there are no better alternatives.

Even if we have a well-qualified candidate with better character than the rich candidate, yet he still loses the elections because he plays the rich man's game. You cannot win the rich man in the rich man's game for the simple reason that he is experienced in every department of the game. The trick is for the poor man to defeat the rich man by changing the rules of the game and not be tempted to play the same game.

**Changing the Game**

To change the game is not to use money to win the elections. Period. Using money is a wrong approach for the simple fact that the rich have more money than you and it is impossible to beat them at their own game. Changing the game means to do the opposite of what they are doing. It means the candidate needs to be honest and clear on his or her stand. The candidate needs to have a clear vision and plan on how he/she wishes to serve the constituency. That is how one can counter the influence of money during elections.

**Countering the False Narrative**

Of course a healthy democracy needs a vibrant and active participation of the citizens during elections, but it should be voluntary. The voters do not have to be paid to attend the election rallies or to cast their votes in favour of any candidate. A healthy democracy is when we have honest leaders to represent us in the august house and this has to start from the elections. We can counter the false narratives only by having leaders who are honest and truthful in whatever they do or say. The time to change is during the elections and that is by electing good, credible leaders with character. That is how we can change the narrative.

(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

## Ukraine conflict will lead to oil price led inflation

By Ajit Ranade

The Russian invasion into Ukraine's sovereign territory is very bad news for Europeans. It has the potential of unravelling belief in what is known as the post - World War II "Europe Project". This project has been an experiment for more than fifty years, and a belief that dissimilar countries separated by language and ethnicity who have had bloody conflicts can live peacefully as neighbours. For over sixty years it seemed to be working.

There have been occasional spurts of violence. The peace of six decades has been punctuated by the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and subsequent intensive bombing of Kosovo by NATO forces, which was not approved by the United Nations. But until recently the belief was that the very existence of Europe, a salad mix of two dozen plus nations, was proof that peaceful coexistence was possible. The peaceful unification of East and West Germany in three decades after the Berlin wall was built. The introduction of a common currency, the Euro, embraced by nineteen countries, is a testimony to the desire to live together in harmony.

The Schengen treaty signed by twenty-six countries meant no border controls. Signed in Schengen, Luxembourg, the treaty too has survived, fostering the free movement of people. The Maastricht treaty introduced voluntary fiscal discipline and free movement of capital between member States and was signed by twelve major EU economies. The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union was a severe jolt, an unthinkable act of a major nation breaking away. But even that did not shatter the belief in the endurance of the European project.

*The exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union was a severe jolt, an unthinkable act of a major nation breaking away. But even that did not shatter the belief in the endurance of the European project.*

War weary Europe wanted no conflicts which could not be resolved by dialogue and diplomacy. The Europe project is also like a beacon of hope for troubled neighbourhoods around the world, showing them that peaceful coexistence is possible, and that disagreements can be resolved without war.

In 2014, Russia annexed the autonomous Republic of Crimea, situated along the Black Sea coast. While Russia and many UN member States recognise Crimea as part of the Russian Federation, Ukraine claims Crimea as part of its territory. A wound in the belief structure that has not healed. The current intrusion into Ukraine has the potential to provide a fatal crack in that belief structure. The crack may get repaired over time, but scars will remain and will show. Europe seems helpless and cannot stop Russia. It is bound by trade links, but cannot condone an attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine. And who knows how long drawn this violent conflict will be. The Russians have indicated that they are ready for talks and negotiations just one day after the bombing. But they might change their stand the next week. The United Nations is trying to get the world community to stand as one and impose sanctions against Russia, but the permanent members of the Security Council will use their veto power to scuttle any resolution. Obviously, Russia will not vote against itself, and China is likely to remain non-committal about condemning the Russian action.

India faces a double challenge, one diplomatic and the other economic. Both challenges are formidable. On the diplomatic side, it is under pressure from the United States and allies, to strongly condemn the

Russian action. But India has historic, military and diplomatic ties with Russia, which to this day provides reliable military support in terms of armament supplies, maintenance, other hardware and training. The S-400 missile system which India is thinking of buying from the Russians is state of the art. But this too has displeased the United States, which can threaten punitive actions against India for proceeding with the purchase.

When it comes to military supplies and technology, what the U.S. offers India is not top-of-line, but at least one or two generations older, and runs the risk of obsolescence. So that is a sore point for India. On the other hand, it was the U.S. which brought India out of nuclear apartheid, by signing the Indo-US civil nuclear deal in 2006. Since then, the India U.S. bonhomie has blossomed into highlevel strategic dialogue, and more recently the formation of QUAD or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Bilateral trade is also robust and rising. The U.S. is one of the very few countries with which India enjoys a large trade surplus, thanks to the export of software services. But bear in mind, that a lot of that software export is from American companies which are based in India, such as IBM, Ernst & Young, Accenture or Google. Indians of course have a cultural affinity with America, and now many Indian Americans are visible not just as corporate leaders but also as political leaders in that country. So, India will have to do a tight-rope balancing act, in the way it deals with the Russian aggression in Ukraine. It

cannot be prescriptive, nor can it condemn, but can articulate its principles of why such action is unacceptable. For the Americans it needs to show support but without being seen to tilt too much. Incidentally, the Americans and other allies have not exactly gone overboard in supporting India in the face of Chinese aggression at Galwan.

The other formidable challenge for India is economic. If oil prices spike up and stay above 100 dollars a barrel, it would have four adverse effects. Firstly, the current account deficit will worsen, secondly the exchange rate will be under pressure, thirdly the domestic inflation might flare up and lastly the fiscal deficit will take a hit, since a lot of subsidies like fertiliser and cooking gas, depend on oil prices. To add to this, are investor anxiety and nervousness, the pullout by foreign portfolio investors, the consequent tremors in the stock market and overall business sentiment. Ukraine can indeed cast a long shadow on the economy and markets. The LIC IPO too looks vulnerable. All this cannot be countered easily by economic policy. As a developing country dependent on global oil prices and foreign inflows (to plug the trade deficit), India will have to grin and bear it (or rather the right metaphor may be that it will have to "clench its teeth"). There has been considerable domestic heft to the economic momentum, and the country's post pandemic recovery is well under way. The Union Budget gave a capex boost signal. However, the Ukraine conflict can undermine India's economic momentum.

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

### Letters to the Editor

#### Women's rights trampled yet again

Editor,

Some people say that women in Meghalaya have come a long way because at the present juncture women are holding the powerful posts of Chief Secretary, Director General of Police and Deputy Commissioner of East Khasi Hills District. This may be true insofar as women's position in modern democratic institutions is concerned but when it comes to traditional institutions, women without a doubt are still stuck where they were centuries ago. To cite an instance, there was an election to the office of the Rangbah Shnong of Lumdiengjri locality conducted by the Hima Mylliem where women were debarred from voting under the so called "Mylliem Act". Subsequently, the "elected" Rangbah Shnong held a Dorbar where once again only men were allowed to vote and elect the other office bearers like the Asst. Rangbah Shnong, Secretary, etc. When questioned, all concerned hid behind the fig leaf of "tradition". This happened despite a Meghalaya High Court Judgment allowing women to participate in the election of Headman and other office bearers of the shnongs.

In this regard, a report by the "Hindustan Times" dated February 1, 2020 may be referred to. As per this report the women of Nohwet village approached the High Court of Meghalaya when they were deprived of their right to vote and elect their Headman and the Hon'ble High Court went ahead and empowered the women with the right to vote in the elections of traditional institutions. This judgment of the Hon'ble High Court should have served as a guide to all subsequent elections to traditional institutions but instead the Hima Mylliem disregarded the judgment of the Hon'ble High Court and subsequent elections to Hima and Shnongs continued without the women.

Under the circumstances, I believe that the arbitrary and retrograde actions of the Hima Mylliem and the Lumdiengjri Dorbar constitute a contempt of court and is a fit case for suo-moto action by the Hon'ble High Court and the Meghalaya State Commission for Women.

When it comes to the Dorbar Shnongs, may be recalled that because of their arbitrary and whimsical actions, the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya had truncated several of its functions in its order dated 10th December 2014 and inter alia observed that "... no rule of law or the constitution has empowered them. They try to function at their whims and run a parallel government. As a result, common citizens are the worst sufferers which should not be allowed at any cost." Further, the Hon'ble Supreme

Court in its order dated 12th February 2016 while providing partial relief from the above High Court order allowed "the persons occupying the posts of headmen to continue to function subject to the various instructions framed by the Autonomous District Council as per law under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India." In this connection, is not the KHADC duty bound to see that the laws made by the Hima Mylliem and the actions of the Rangbah Shnongs do not violate the tenets of our Constitution when discriminatory, misogynistic and arbitrary laws like the "Mylliem Act" are applied?

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Which side are you on?

Editor,  
In 1918, Ukraine became a free country. After 3 years of independence in 1921, Lenin invaded Ukraine. During the Cold War, Ukraine was part of the USSR but became free after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. Ukraine looking back to their history and also the present scenario like in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, parts of Georgia and also interfered in the Luhansk and Donetsk area it felt unsafe. Ukraine for the first time in the Brussels summit evinced interest to join NATO and in recent

years they were sure about joining the alliance as Russia kept on stretching their power in the region. NATO welcomed Ukraine with open arms which worried Russia. In fact, Russia played the victim by accusing NATO of creating a threat for them when in fact Russia is the one creating a hostile environment for neighbouring countries.

Well, the Russians may have their own reasons too but are those reasons enough to justify their actions? There are no justifications. Thousands of Russian civilians protesting against Vladimir Putin knowing that he is a dictator and strict actions will be taken against them is worth applauding. Russia is facing condemnation from across the world with only a handful of friends by their side. Which side are we on? Well, the answer should be "Humanity".

Yours etc.,  
Joseph Lalchuanawma Rokhum  
Law-u-sib, madanrining Shillong Meghalaya.  
Shillong- 21

#### Russia playing with fire

Editor,  
The barbaric invasion of Ukraine by Russia has once again proved that the world is still far distant from attaining the ideal height of civilization. Instead of an ardent desire to attain the divine height of peace and

love, it is the imperialist mindset of dominance over others through expansion of territories or imposition of language-religion-culture-ideology over others unfortunately that still rules the roost. All right-thinking persons and countries of the world are thankfully protesting against the Russian-engineered mayhem taking a huge toll upon lives and properties of innocent Ukrainians with even the soldiers of aggressor Russia destined to pay with their lives causing immense suffering and pain to their families back home !

After all, the fangs of war and aggression are bound to annihilate all; akin to playing with fire.

Unfortunately, a section of the population don't seem to realise the horrific consequences of war. No wonder why bold announcements of intrusion in foreign territories and bombing from high above killing "numerous aliens" promptly catches the imagination of that section of society!

Are these "nationalists" aware of the woes of the innocent people(of our own country) who get stranded in the war zone often losing their lives, huts, animals and properties or get displaced from their habitats; thereby suffering a huge toll on the physical economic psychological front ! In these times of muscular "nationalism" with the "patriots" baying for blood of "enemies" from safe refuge of their homes located

hundreds and thousands of miles away from the war front, it requires compassion to feel the pain, loss and helplessness of the innocents who find themselves amidst the shower of bullets and shells !

Gurmehar Kaur, the young daughter of a Kargil martyr, had asserted "Pakistan didn't kill my father; War did." This invoked a lot of threats and cuss words from the "patriots"! Yes, irrespective of national identities, innocent citizens stranded in war zones, professional army men and their families of both sides of the divide are bound to suffer severe repercussions. But their remains unappreciated by the war-mongering "patriots" in safe zones and the powerful leaders who gloat over much-flaunted "victories"!

Lastly, as far as the world is concerned, it has no scope to act "neutral" in this episode of aggression. Remember, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." If the world claims to be humane and civilised, then all countries should learn to draw inspiration from Desmond Tutu's eternal call of humanity, truth, sanity and fair play by discarding all pretence of "neutrality".

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Kolkata