

“ *The most significant civil rights problem is voting. Each citizen's right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship and the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 make it the responsibility of the Department of Justice to protect that right.* ”

-- Robert Kennedy

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Babies sans citizenship

THE beauty of the United States of America, apart from being the wealthiest nation on earth, is also the mosaic of cultures and races that it represents. The world looked at the US with awe also for the reason that anyone from any part of the globe could one day hope to become a citizen of this country and enjoy all the benefits that it offers its very own people. It only required a procedure to be gone through over a period of time. Now, there's going to be a pause.

Whimsical American President Donald Trump has said it's time for his country to consider a change in the long-held policy of citizenship. A Republican conservative to the core, he's bent on doing everything to ensure that the nation and its people and their interests, got first priority over and above others, as also humanitarian considerations - a clear break from the past when Americans were willing to be accommodative to the rest of the world. The President's plan is to stop the existing system wherein a child born of immigrant parents in America will automatically become a citizen. Trump's argument is, no other nation on earth allows this, so why America?

The US, despite earning the epithet of a war-monger, prided itself on its humanitarian face. It is the highest contributor to not just the setting up of the United Nations, but also to its efforts for human betterment through the multiple agencies working under it. American food programme has for long years reached out to starving multitudes, and India has been a beneficiary of that largesse. Church-induced humanitarianism is at the core of its global policy framework, though there are two opinions about the kind of treatment being meted out to African-Americans by the American establishment. Large segments of them live in ghettos with minimum facilities.

This is the age of the rise of nationalism. Trump rode to victory by upholding the view, America First. It meant that citizens and their children have first priority for jobs and in more spheres of enterprise, including the IT sector where those from nations like India dominate. America is no more the America that existed before the Al Qaeda attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq that followed. The banking sector collapse and the resultant slowing down of the economy have had irreversible impacts. America has reached the height of its glory. Perhaps it's time for the climb-down.

TO THE EDITOR

Winter allowances to retired employees

Editor,
With some sense of self-satisfaction, I feel elated to know that the Meghalaya Govt. has for the first instance endorsed the recommendation of the Meghalaya 5th pay Commission in granting Winter Allowances to the retired staff and family pensioners residing in specified State's locations for consecutive four months annually with effect from November to February end, vide OM NO.F (PR) 57/2017/18 dt 7.12.2017. This news must have come as a piece of heart-warming information to the retirees in the forbidding chilling months of winter in Shillong and other such places sharing identical winter condi-

tions.
Incidentally, I feel enthused to articulate the fact that such allowance has come to pass perhaps due to one of my letters that figured in your esteemed daily (ST May 24, 2017) under the caption, 'Issue before the Meghalaya 5th pay Commission' wherein I have advanced 2 (two) timely suggestions before this Commission when it was at the fag end of its session. The first suggestion appealed to the Commission to revisit the blanket ban on compassionate appointments even to the most deserving applicants which was imposed since December 2010, and the other solicitation being to extend the hitherto inadmissible Winter allowances to the retirees of our State Govt., given that in a brief span of 2 (two) years post retirement the superannuated staffers would be dubbed 'Senior Citizens'.

And under such ages, the impact of the winter chill would have telling effect on their increasing frailty with passing of years. In a word, I humbly feel self-assured to say it was most likely my letter with its no-nonsense suggestion to the said Commission that nudged the latter to recommend to the Govt the granting of a winter allowance to the retirees.
On the flip side though, I am disillusioned that the State Govt. is still ambivalent as to how to deal with the revival of compassionate appointment which the Meghalaya 5th Pay Commission had recommended. The same has become a contentious issue on pending cases of those worthy candidates whose working parents, guardian etc had passed away after the deadline of December, 2010 till the setting up of the Meghalaya 5h Pay Commission. Thus, I hope the present dispensation shall humanely intro-

spect and formulate actionable mechanisms to satisfy all concerned to the utmost possible. Thus, the aggrieved ones may have every right to say that the erstwhile Govt. had imposed a ban on compassionate appointments without in the least thinking of the adverse consequences that would follow. Either way, I hope those at the helm will reconsider the question of compassionate appointment, based exclusively on meritorious grounds. In fine, I therefore, feel obliged to the Meghalaya 5th pay Commission headed by P.J. Bazeley and all its member for, perhaps, considering my aforesaid 2 (two) appeals and to your esteemed daily which couldn't have been printed at a more opportune moment
Your etc...
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong-2

Unwarranted knee-jerk reaction

Editor,
On the evening of October 29, 2018 near Seven Set School I approached a school girl (dressed in Pine Mount School uniform) for directions as to where 'Malki Point' is when all of a sudden her father appeared before me and threatened me with dire consequences of getting me bashed up as he apparently thought I was misbehaving with his daughter. He further told me to stay away from her as he claims to have seen me with his daughter before. But the truth is that I never knew of her existence prior to the incident. His daughter also tried telling him that I was only

seeking assistance for directions but the father would not listen. The man is of an average height with a dark complexion. He also claims to be a Doctor having some sort of acquaintance with the Police. My only objective to approach this person was to seek assistance to my desired destination.
I humbly request you to please highlight my grievance so that people are aware of the atrocity and shame I was subjected to.
Yours etc.,
Ronald Rynjah Sagoipa
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.

Reliving and writing history with karuna (compassion)

By Saji Varghese

groups in India seek to re-write Indian history highlighting Islamic excesses and showing the minorities in bad light. It is reported that Pakistani textbooks describe Jews as tight-fisted money-lenders, Christians as vengeful conquerors, Hindus as devours and cowardly people. China and Japan have serious differences of opinion about their recording of World War II events. All states have minorities within their borders, and if they divide according to community further, they will find other minorities within the new area, ad infinitum. History records repeated clashes between neighbouring communities. And thus, ancient hatred remain. A narrative of victory stirs resentment on those who were defeated. A narrative of defeat calls for redressing a grievance. There is a general human weakness that when we revive our memories we tend to be selective, prejudiced and lost in self-pity. Only a healing of memories can make the world into a less destructive one.
There is no nation probably more internally diverse than India : twenty two official languages, over three hundred languages that are actually spoken, the major religious group are the Hindus which form the majority followed by the Muslims and Christians, Parsis, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and a small number of Jews. Regional differences are immense: some regions especially in the south had for centuries, more association with South and South East Asia than other parts of India. In India riots were very common in places like Bombay (present Mumbai) where a large number of non-Hindus and migrants live. They were victims, often of political vendetta of groups/individuals who consciously spread hatred and violence in the name of religion and caste. There are two conceptions of nation prevalent among the normal citizens also the political party affiliates in India. One sees India as a pluralistic society built on ideas of respect for different regional, ethnic and religious traditions, united by a commitment to democratic and egalitarian norms. The other believes that this morally grounded unity is too fragile, that only the unity of ethnic homogeneity can make a nation strong. The clash between the proponents of ethno-religious homogeneity and of those of pluralistic norms is a perpetual warfare between two groups in a single society .
In all countless events of violence which we were subjected to in colonial and post colonial periods, mi-

norities, subaltern groups or otherwise marginalized individuals tend not to share the mainstream social memory rooted in any of these official national narratives. Referring to the political context surrounding the November 2008 terrorist carnage in Mumbai, Arundhati Roy wrote, "On this nuclear sub-continent, that context is Partition. . . . Each of those people carries, and passes down, a story of unimaginable pain, hate, horror, but yearning too. That wound, those torn but still unsevered muscles, that blood and those splintered bones still lock us together in a close embrace of hatred, terrifying familiarity, but also love."
Nevertheless, in a land like India with its heterogeneous culture and chequered history, the narratives linking place and humans are innumerable, couched in diverse perceptions and points of view, and filtered through multiple discourses over a long period of time. Geographically, historically, and geo-psychically, Indian narratives afford pluralistic and complex readings. Philosophy, religion, and poetry have a deep history in this part of the world, as much as oppression, domination, and ideologies of resistance and subversions. Riots and instances of violence and its consequences upon the generations later, must find an answer ,and it can come only through healing by way of creative day to day exercise of dialogue and co-existence. Dialogue and responsibility are integrally linked. As there are growing movements of violence and hatred and monological closure of many kinds, there is also a need for movements of dialogues across borders. However, it is not just only differences but also a complex and many-sided relationship that as a matter of fact, get established between hegemonic and sub-altern cultures. This relationship is not only one of the most important expressions of the central social conflict that has marked human societies, but it is also one of the essential clues that allows us to understand the important defining elements of that which we encompass under the complex term of "culture." It is clear that relations among cultures that dominate and those that are dominated within one society do not only include diverse realities and expressions of the opposition and struggle that exists between both cultures, but rather, a vast range of interrelationships. These interrelationships include exchanges, borrowing, and mutual cooperation together with situations of commitment and confluence that also include 'dialogue' as one of the many forms of connection between antagonistic groups or communities of cultures.

Lanka Turmoil
India watches, mustn't meddle

By S. Saraswathi

A serious constitutional crisis unleashed in Sri Lanka, like any other neighbourhood problem involving constitutional crisis and political instability, will not leave India in peace. Already its repercussions are felt in our country and some political parties are loudly expressing their views. The course of events read like a drama with each scene opening a new development.
Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, who in collaboration with Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the United National Party (UNP) ousted Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2015, has played the same game again. He now abruptly pulled out of Sri Lanka's National Unity coalition government, sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on 26th October and replaced him with former President Mahinda Rajapaksha. There was no majority test and no open split of parties reducing the strength of the ruling party.
Next day, he also suspended Parliament till November 16 which prevents it to react and got 14 ministers sworn in. Rapid action by the authors and supporters of this coup, such as updating the official portal of the government as reported in some press, suggests political action forecasting instability.
All these events happening in quick succession have undermined established parliamentary procedure and need equally fast action to convene Parliament and test the majority for installation of a valid government, if democratic principles, as we know, have to be restored. Suspension of Parliament for over a fortnight in the situation obtaining in Sri Lanka is unbecoming of a democracy and is open to criticism as officially granted time for switching sides and horse-trading, which has become common political practice everywhere.
At the time, Wickremesinghe-led United National Front (UNF) was the largest party with 106 members in the House of 225 members. The number gives him strength to challenge the President's action and demand a floor test to ascertain parliamentary support of the two sides. The United People's Freedom Alliance including supporters of Rajapaksa has 99 members.
Declaring that his UNF has the support of majority in Parliament, the sacked PM wants reconvening of Parliament to prove his majority. He seems to be confident of his strength to reenact his victory through the No-Confidence Motion against his ministry, hardly six months ago. The constitutional validity of the change is certainly debatable, but fortunes change with changes in coalition partners.Outbreak of street level politics in the island nation over these developments is inevitable. Loyalists of the two sides openly clashed, which ended in the death of one person. The Speaker of Parliament questioned the President's decisions and for his part recognised the ousted Prime Minister as the leader of the government, who was the legally elected Prime Minister and had the mandate to form the government. He wants immediate resolution of the political conflict so as to avoid "bloodbath" on the streets. The strong words used by him have to be taken seriously by democratic societies, particularly nearby India, closest to Sri Lanka in many respects.
The Sri Lankan Constitution as amended in 2015

ruled out the possibility of the President removing the Prime Minister who can be removed only by Parliament. The US, UK, and the EU and most of the European countries individually are in favour of upholding the Constitution and the democratic process. On the other hand, China welcomes the change and has promptly conveyed its good wishes to the new PM Rajapaksa, thus reflecting a visible division in world opinion.
India preferred to wait before giving its views. It has to weigh the options and consider its long-term interests keeping in mind its relationship with other neighbours. Rajapaksa is known to be leaning towards China, which is assigned several big infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka. He has also given strategic entry to China into the island by leasing out Hambaddota Port to them, assigning the major project of building the Colombo port, and allowed them to dock its submarines in Sri Lanka -- all of which directly reduce the sphere of Indian influence in the region to the extent it increases that of China.
While the Indian government prefers to wait and watch the situation as it unfolds, political parties in Tamil Nadu -- the DMK, AIADMK, MDMK, PMK, VCK, and also the CPI and CPM are all voicing concern over the recent developments, anticipating further troubles to Tamils under this change. Their stand has been part of local Tamil politics and not necessarily in alignment with that of the national policy of the Centre.
Their grievances with the regime of Rajapaksa unite them to cry about the safety of Tamils there and of Indian fishermen fishing in the Indian Ocean. The coming together of Sirisena and Rajapaksa is viewed with apprehension by these parties, though for the common people of the State, Sri Lankan politics is not a crucial problem and cannot be made an electoral issue.
Sirisena's realignment with Rajapaksa after parting in 2014 to become President is a bit of a surprise. The constitutional validity of the move to bring in Rajapaksa in place of Wickremesinghe is questioned by democratic nations. The relative popularity of the two contending PMs within their country and outside is not relevant when the nation has a written Constitution to follow.
Barely a week back, Ranil Wickremesinghe was in Delhi and discussed the progress of a number of pending development projects with his counterpart Modi, who expressed concern over the delay. The two Prime Ministers went through the whole gamut of bilateral relations between the two countries and explored the possibilities of furthering the relations. Progress on several decisions reached between the two neighbours in recent past and delay in carrying out the projects, particularly those agreed to in 2017 were reviewed. Differences between President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, who were affiliated to different alliances when they joined in 2015, seemed to have hindered progress.
While India and particularly Tamil Nadu has some reasons to worry about Rajapaksa's return to power, efforts are going on from the side of Sri Lanka to improve ties between the two countries through development projects.--INFA
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

“*You can't deny laughter; when it comes, it plops down in your favorite chair and stays as long as it wants.*”

--- Stephen King

The Shillong Times

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World's tallest statue

THE nation should rightly honour its stalwarts, particularly those who have taken part in the Freedom Movement and the nation-building process thereafter. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was independent India's first home minister and deputy prime minister. His singular efforts helped in the annexation of the princely state of Hyderabad then ruled by the Nizams - a 'mini Pakistan' in the midst of India - shortly after the first nationalist government took charge. Patel did this despite hesitation from his all-powerful Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. He carried the task forward when he later sent in the army to take over Goa from the Portuguese rulers. Notably, he achieved both the national goals without shedding a single drop of blood. United India owes much to Patel, just as it does to its first prime minister. Leaders like Sardar Patel blazed a trail that is not seen in the country today. His reputation was squeaky clean and he was also a no-nonsense administrator. India's history in the post-Independence era would have been largely different and possibly less inspiring had Patel not been present prominently in the first government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. His valiant efforts helped in unifying India from the mess that the British rulers had left behind in 1947.

The Statue of Unity, fashioned on the iconic Statue of Liberty in New York, is the brain-child of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Inspired by what he saw in the US during his first visit there as an RSS pracharak, Modi broached his idea of having a similar statue in the name of Patel in Gujarat when he was state chief minister in 2010. The works were initiated three years later - the precise time when he started the BJP-led bid for the PM's post. The Rs 3,000 crore statue standing tall at 180 ft high, with its accompanying settings near the Sardar Sarovar Dam, is not far from the meeting points of three states - Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh; another fitting demonstration of the ideal of unity. However, even a noble project has its pitfalls. Reportedly several tribal farmers had to be relocated to make way for the mega statue. Six villages - Navagam, Waghariya, Limdi, Kevadiya, Kothi and Gora -- immediately around the Sadhu Bet, the location of the 'Statue of Unity' are badly affected. Of these, Waghariya has lost all of its land, while Kevadiya village has lost about 90% of land. This does not auger well for a country with a huge population that is living from hand to mouth.

TO THE EDITOR

Sports to kick out drug menace

Editor,

It is encouraging that we have a Chief Minister who is an ace footballer. Our previous CM, Dr Mukul Sangma enthralled music lovers across the country. Many youths from other states envy our youthful CMs. Of course, nothing could be better lubricants than sports and music in life. They potentially enhance the mind's efficiency and keep the body fit and active.

At a time when drug abuse and alcoholism are posing a serious threat to the society, sports can well be used to kick out the menace. Unemployment and idleness are two situations that often drive the youth straight into drug addiction. In view of the increasing drug abuse prevalent among youths, the government should adopt various measures to contain the menace. Sports and employment creation should be given top priority.

I think it's not irrelevant to mention here how the picture of the Chief Minister in goalkeeper get-up, published recently in 'The Shillong Times', helped me drive home the points to a druggist. A class-12 passed substance-dependent boy was very impressed by the fact that the State's CM has an avid interest in sports. With a deep sense of regret, he disclosed that he was misled by his wrong circle of friends. He also blamed his mobile phone for acting as an enabler by giving information

about the vendors and their availability, where, how and when. All at his finger tips! After critically explaining the adverse effect of a drug upon the body and mind, I extracted the "promise" from the boy that he would not return to it. He has promised to practice football every day. The boy is quite convinced now and thus determined to knock the addiction out of him with the help of sports.

Hope the athletic CM will give serious thought to this considering the frightening increasing in drug abuse in the state. The youths are our state assets and their "energy" must be channelized for productive purpose. Sporting activities are one way of weaning away our youth from drugs. Under the care of compassionate coaches and mentors we can get our youth back from their destructive habits. So let's all think together and get our youth into meaningful activities before it's too late.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

Opposition should raise the right issues

Editor,

Dr. Mukul Sangma and his colleagues in the Opposition were correct in raising the issue of the Assam-Meghalaya border problems, the discontinuation of the

Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme and the unjustified continuance of the barricades of the Mawlong Harijan Colony by the MDA government. I congratulate them for raising these issues. Yes, the relentless criticism of Dr. Mukul and Co against the MDA government on these issues is fully justified. Many skirmishes have taken place at the Assam-Meghalaya border during the short tenure of the MDA government which have resulted in many dislocations in the lives of our border people, yet the Government did not take steps to address the problem either by visiting the place of occurrence and helping out the affected people or by engaging with their Assam counterpart. Nothing of that sort has taken place so far. In fact since March this year Conrad Sangma has not met his counterpart from Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal, to sort out the border problem. This shows the total insensitivity of the present Government. This is unacceptable indeed. We demand that this Government should immediately hold border talks with Assam Government not only to stop the skirmishes and tensions in the borders but also to arrive at a lasting solution to the long pending border problem.

On the discontinuance of the Health Insurance (MHIS) the government

knew well in advance that this scheme was to expire soon but took no steps to ensure continuance due to the carelessness and total neglect of the Principal Secretary, Secretary and the Health Minister. The scheme was allowed to lapse and this has resulted in the hardships of the people of the state with regards to health insurance cover. This too is unacceptable. What are these people doing there in the Secretariat ? Are they there to serve the public or for self aggrandizement? We urge the Minister of Health, and the senior officials to immediately restore the health insurance scheme for the people of the state immediately. If there are problems, sort them out and opt for the best option for the benefit of the people and not for any selfish ends.

On the continuance of security barricades and cordon of the Harijan colony at Mawlong Hat or Them Metor even after nearly five months of the incident, this is sheer lack of governance and poor security arrangements by the Home(Police) department. The barricades should be immediately removed to allow traffic to flow freely through the Harijan colony which is a thoroughfare. The barricades have affected the flow of traffic especially the SPTS maxi taxi and buses. We demand that the cordon and the barricades of the

locality should be immediately removed to facilitate free flow of traffic and to remove the sense of curfew-like insecurity of the public at large. The barricades are not at all justified as there is no insecurity or law and order problem in the area. The fear of the Police is highly misplaced here and it is time for the barricades to go.

Lastly, I appeal to Dr. Mukul and his colleagues in the Opposition to raise the right public issues and make the right noises at the right time but, please don't indulge in political gimmicks and rhetoric just to make a political point for the public abhor them.

Yours etc.
Philip Marwein,
Via email

The Art of Giving

Editor,

The sun is equally generous to all, especially to those who live out in the open ~ poor people, flora and fauna. The burning sun gets comfort and reward in and identifies itself with the smile of sunflowers, dancing kids and the bodies that enjoy heavenly bliss in basking in its morning glory or melatonin - rich hypnotic noon or melancholic late afternoon. Trees pray to the generous sun to return soon whenever it sets in the western horizon. This is the moment the birds and

uncomfortable questions before the MDA about their not having a policy to tackle militancy, if his MUA Government had one? What was the policy adopted or adapted vis-a-vis the ANVC or the GNLA? Did he share it with the public or was it a hush-hush affair? It's easy to raise a million queries when in the Opposition and to ride roughshod over due procedures while in the Government. And the questions raised today by the Opposition Congress have reached the point of belligerence. It's like the Khasi saying, 'wohkjat' which means sticking out a leg to trip someone so they fall and disgrace themselves. Clearly, nitpicking is not the remit of the Opposition but putting the Government on notice for its acts of omission and commission is, and there is a difference between the two.

At this juncture I want to ask both Mukul Sangma and Conrad Sangma if they agree that militants be given general amnesty? Why should they not pay for their crimes? Is killing and extortion not a crime? And I am aghast that surrendered militants should now be guarded by the State. Worse, is that they enter politics and muddy up the already murky space. If the two Sangmas agree that crimes committed by militants should be watered down then it won't be long before some other adventurous group picks up guns, dons fatigues and repeats the journey. After all, if crime pays then who cares for the law?

Tailpiece: These days the daily mudslinging between the Congress and the MDA has created a weary cynicism among the public. And then our own penchant for change is royally betrayed even as one set of politicians replace another, with all of them proving to be gluttons of privilege. This predilection for privilege seems to arise out of our own pygmy-sized self worth. Otherwise why pursue the good life when the constituents wallow in poverty, illiteracy and the absence of basic amenities such as health care? Truly, the more things change the more they resemble the past.

People who generally do not apologise
Free thinkers who are fixed on their agendas

By Sushil Kutty

There are a bunch of "free thinkers" in Kerala quoting the Constitution: "It is the duty of every citizen to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." They wear constitutional morality on their sleeves and marvel at how the Supreme Court cut through chaff to deliver gender justice to women. They say it took 100 years for "lunatic asylum" Kerala to become 'Navodaya Kerala' and the Hindutva cannot be allowed to return the state to the regressive it caters to.

Essentially, they say, the court asked three fundamental questions: Were there previous instances of women of reproductive age entering the Ayyappa temple? Is the Sabarimala shrine a public place? Is the Ayyappa sect a separate religious denomination? To the first two questions, the answer was a resounding 'yes'. The third came up with a 'no'. The outcome was the landmark Sabarimala judgement, which ruled that women of reproductive age could like any man go where he can.

The Kerala free thinkers cheered. But not before they stopped thinking! The SC forgot to ask follow-ups: Did the previous entries take place by breaching long held custom? If Sabarimala is a public place, why were women of reproductive age not allowed entry? If the sect is not a separate and distinct religious denomination, why the reluctance to identify Sabarimala as an exclusively Hindu shrine?

It was a custom (however dated or recent) breach which made it possible for some privileged women of productive age enter the shrine. The custom of age-restrictions stood but a breach was deliberately perpetrated to clear the way for these women of barred age. Among them royalty and influential citizens like PM Manmohan Singh's "PMO secretary" TKA Nair's mother. TKA claims his mother took him to Sabarimala when he was aged one, and the 'A' in his name stands for 'Ayyappan'.

To the "public place" query, the court failed to note that a public place by definition does not discriminate, but a "private" place often does, and Sabarimala openly at that, like the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple. There are other Ayyappa temples in Kerala which don't allow men in and, therefore, those too are not strictly public spaces. That all of them are administered by the Travancore Devaswom Board doesn't make a difference.

As for the third point about the separate religious denomination, the court dwelled on it and ruled 'no'. Kerala Sahitya Academy award winner Sunil P Elayidom agrees, insisting that the Sabarimala temple is essentially part of Hinduism and there is no running away from that fact. But delivering a lecture to insurance agents on October 30, he contradicted himself and scoffed at the Hindutva applications asking for the Sabarimala shrine to be declared a Hindu temple! "How can that be possible?" he asked. "People of all religions go there."

Clearly, the Kerala free thinkers have stopped short of "inquiry" and aren't putting their vaunted "scientific temper" to use. Elayidom and Dalit thinker Sunny M Kapicad provide intellectual ammunition to the Pinarayi gun aimed at the Hindutva gut. They speak of "humanism", gender equality and fundamental rights. The 'Raja' and 'Thantri' and the resurgence of 'Brahminical hegemony' are anathema to their logical minds.

Kapicad and Elayidom are ardent spokespersons for the Malayara Adivasi, whose claim on Ayyappa was forced to make a climb down from the Sabarimala hilltop by the scheming 'Raja' and cunning 'Thantri'. Kapicad holds aloft the ideal of the 'Modern Malayali' - break the shackles of customs and traditions and march forward, out of the purgatory and into Heaven! But giving back to the Malayara "his Sabarimala", however justified, will only substitute one set of tradition-keepers with another equally custom-bound medieval mendacious mendicant monk order.

The free thinkers are shy of demanding a surgical strike on the caste system. Their method is to bring down traditions, one by one, till there are none left. But that will take a long time and wouldn't that mean unending strife and public disorder. The barbarian Hindutva sort will not relent, locked as he is in a do or die battle. Elayidom asserts 'aacharams' - customs and traditions, rituals - will all fall to reason and logic and there is no stopping Utopia. He is perhaps living in Utopia!

The Bhagwats and Bhayyaji Joshis are no less adamant. Besides, banishing the Brahmin priesthood will not rid the system-politic of caste divisions. The Nair Service Society will still have hegemony and the SNDP Ezahava will not stop throwing his weight around. Lacking hard cash, the Adivasi Malayara will enter into pacts with vested interests and moneybags to run Sabarimala. Elayidom quotes Sree Narayana Guru, Ambekar and Gandhi to make his case and it is impossible not to agree with him. He speaks in anecdotes and he has everything pat and only an idiot will try to halt his caravan of logic and reason.

But it is important to rein in tradition-busters. What is wrong with faith if it helps keep order in society? Remove the 'Raja' and 'Thantri' and the Sabarimala Ayyappa will still survive, but dump Sabarimala customs and traditions in the depthless valley and Ayyappa will be a dead deity, impotent not celibate. "Fertile women" have an Ayyappa temple to carry their menstruation to, why insist on spoiling the male party, gatecrash!

Traditions and customs have a certain logic about them, the likes of Elayidom and Kapicad don't see. For instance, the 41-day 'vratham', which is part of the Swami Ayyappan tradition, has a reason to exist, the 'ready to wait' women understand: The "41-day crash course and spiritual journey" help women discipline their men. And that is not a joke. Then again, if busting customs is the new tradition, why stop at Sabarimala? Go on to mosque and church, bar and pub; unchain D'jango and set him loose on caste in all its compartments, destroy the entire illegal structure. Sunny M. Kapicad suggests as much but not aloud. He is inmate of the halfway house, and the parole officer is on his case. Bottom line: Everybody has the fundamental right of freedom of expression and speech and it's not Kapicad and Elayidom alone who are free thinkers. We're not, this or that side of the aisle, people who apologize. (IPA Service)

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

“We are inclined to believe those whom we do not know because they have never deceived us.”

--- Samuel Johnson

The Shillong Times

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NPAs and NDA

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is today a shadow of its formal self. It is facing an image crisis, just as several other key institutions of governance are. Among other things, it holds a regulatory authority. Yet, common consensus is that, unlike in the past, it has not exercised due diligence in several matters, including situations of public sector and other banks throwing caution to the winds and obliging top businessmen with grant of huge sums in loans without sufficient collateral guarantee. The result is the piling up of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), or bad debts, of Himalayan proportions. RBI's role in making a mess out of the Demonetisation exercise is also well-known. At the top of all these are the failure on the part of the present NDA government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to set things right.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley himself is not above board. Yet, he now shifts the entire blame on the central bank by saying that the RBI "looked the other way when banks gave loans indiscriminately during the 2008-2014 period" - meaning the UPA terms. Question arises as to why he waited until the fag end of the tenure of the present NDA government, to make this "revelation." Non-performing assets of Indian banks -mostly in the public sector -- are of the order of Rs 400,000crore or \$61.5billion. This forms about 90 per cent of the total NPAs. Much of these bad debts, or un-repaid loans, are remaining as they are, as the business sharks are avoiding repayment even as they have the capacity to do so. Vijay Mallya is just one among the many who are believed to have fooled banking institutions and scooted from the scene with rare ease. Granted that the present government exercised some caution and tried to regulate matters, fact is also that it has not accorded the seriousness it deserved for the recovery process. A part of the blame lies with courts, which halt recovery processes at the drop of a hat. The Company Law Board too is seen taking things easy. What the government could have done to speed up matters were often not done. Blaming the political rivals for what went wrong in the past alone will not help. It is understandable that top RBI officials are not enthused at the comments made by Jaitley. However, their defence of the wrong actions by seeking to put the blame on politicians will not cut much ice.

TO THE EDITOR

On caring for the elderly

Editor,

A few evenings ago, we had the most adventurous concert at the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, India's prominent intellectual and artistic hub. The organisers were preparing us for the audience who we are told are a highly cultured, well travelled people who have seen it all and were known to be one of the toughest crowds to crack. Daunting enough as it already sounded, moments before the show, major technical glitches started revealing their ugly faces and there we were, the mountain growing even taller before our eyes as the over packed thumb-twiddling spectators anxiously waited for us to perform.

Onto the stage we went and from the outset we could sense that the sound was far from decent. Our past experiences, however, taught us to soldier on and the crowd was treading it along with us. The sound got better and what we were beginning to see was similar to a gentle sunrise seeping over the darkness with each passing song. Late Gen Sundarji's wife, Vani propped her 90 year old self up on her walking stick and started jiving to our

A trilateral synergy emerging in Asia

India, Japan, China in a new developmental axis

Gone are the days when the US sneezes, Japan gets a cold. Today, Japan can say 'No' to US. Despite USA's grave concern over the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the recent visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to China shows Japanese willingness to justify Chinese President Xi Jinping's initiative. This will make a turning point in the Sino-Japan bilateral relations, which were shackled by age-long political hostility. The volte-face of Japan is viewed as a silent negation to Trump's protectionism. To this end, Modi's visit to Japan, on the close heels of Abe's visit to China, showcases a new pattern of trilateral relationship between the three leaders in Asia.

Nevertheless, whether the rebuilt relationship between Japan and China will sustain or not, it is hard to say in the wake of ongoing dispute on Senkaku Islands, which erupted as a volcano.

The main agenda of Japan-China summit was to end the development aid to China and jointly work for the development in third countries, especially the countries embraced by Belt and Road Initiative.

Modi's visit to Japan, even though it was for the 13th annual summit of India-Japan, attaches special significance, given the fact that summit was after the visit of Abe to China -- the formal visit of a Japanese leader after seven years and its aim was to rebuild political trust with China. The Chinese official media, Global Times, ushering the visit, saying that 'China-Japan economic ties should lead to political trust'

India and Japan have several commonalities in their relations with China. Both have a long history of political enmity with China. Notwithstanding that, China is the biggest trading partner of India and Japan. In both summits - India and Japan and China and Japan - Japan asserted to take forward the relations in a new direction in the economic realm by proposing joint partnerships for development of projects in third countries in Asia. With

cooperation and play a prime role in maintaining peace in Indo-Pacific region. The aim will further be spearheaded by the normalisation of Japan-China relations.

Japan's joint partnership with China for development of infrastructure and joint cooperation in the private sector in third countries in Asia will curtail the scope for under-cutting competition in Asia and will establish a fair ground for development of infrastructure. Indonesia was a case in point. Japan lost the high speed railway project in Indonesia against biggest stake holder in it. But, a proxy war triggered by Japan and China made the borrowing countries face headwinds. The thaw in Sino-Japan relations will likely pitch for a smoother road for India to avail of funds from ADB, in addition to AIIB fund.

As a matter of fact, after the trade war intensified, China dwarfed its aggression against India. It is tending to emerge as a new important export destination for India.

For example, China will open a big market for India's soybean meal after Beijing restricted its imports from US as a retaliatory measure by imposing 25 per cent tariff. China is the biggest importer of soybean in the world and US has the biggest stake in Chinese soybean import market. The high tariff on US soybean will make space for new entrants in the Chinese market. To this end, India stands a bigger chance to cut a big pie of Chinese soybean market, with the tariff expected to slip to zero from 3 percent. Recently, it dropped a ban on import of rapeseed meal from India. The ban was imposed in 2011 due to quality concerns. China planned for a bigger role in infrastructure investment in India. Last year, China's Sany Heavy Industry planned an investment of US\$9.8 billion in India, while Pacific Construction, China Fortune Land Development and Dalian Wanda planned Investments of more than US\$5 billion each.

Narendra Modi was never averse to Chinese investment. His yearn for foreign investment pitched China not as a foe. His desire for Chinese investment surged when he was chief minister of Gujarat. During his prime ministership, India signed MOUs for setting up four industrial parks with Chinese investment. China too seemed to be comfortable to work with Modi.

Given the new silver line approaches between India and China, which was further spearheaded by US protectionism, Japan's volte face to China will act a boon to India. (IPA Service)

stiff completion from China, despite providing better technology and after half a decade of hard negotiations with the Indonesian government.

The thaw in Sino-Japan relation will bring ADB (Asian Development Bank) and AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), the two big Asian multilateral financial institutions, closer to each other. Both are to fund the development of infrastructure in Asia. ADB is dominated by Japan and AIIB is dominated by China. India is the second biggest stakeholder in AIIB. Both ADB and AIIB are competing against each other.

According to ADB, Asia requires US \$8 trillion to meet its vast infrastructure fund by the end of this decade. Of these, India's requirement is the biggest, amounting to US \$1 trillion. The funding requirements are beyond the capacity of World Bank, IMF and ADB. This led India to join AIIB and become the second

seem to have been composed using a typewriter and then made into horrible photocopies as a form of "mass publication". Khasi newspapers are of a satisfactory quality and sell at higher prices as compared to English dailies. Most students are also discouraged to take up the language as part of their education because of too many books (Class 12 Khasi-MIL has 7 books as compared to 1 book of Alternative English) or people saying, "Khasi lah kut ha Khanapara" (Khasi ends at Khanapara).

Even though Khasi is an official State language, it is rarely used or used only on the Secretariat bulletin boards ordering the people to maintain decorum and to not spit. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), the prime autonomous government body in charge of protection and promotion of local languages and culture, seems to have failed in its principal objective. All of this can also be applied to the Garo language too. The Garo language also lacks recognition. The State Government itself uses these languages very rarely. Also, most advertisements on DD

RBI-Govt Spat

Playing with people's money

By Shivaji Sarkar

There is both good and bad news. India rises to 77th in ease of doing business, jumping 23 paces in World Bank ranking, which is good. But the Rupee is touching 74 to a dollar and the stock market moving up and down, which are matters of concern. The RBI versus Centre, having a spat or the confrontation between the two, wading into uncharted territory, is sending out a confusing signal.

Last year, India was at 100th position and 142nd in 2014 in WB ranking. This jump is a shot in the arm for the Modi government, ahead of the impending elections. The WB says that India has done well in six of the 10 parameters such as construction permits, getting electricity, getting credit, paying taxes, trade across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

This means a lot. It means more people around the world may be willing to come to India either to set up shop or transact with Indian business or government organisations. Simply put it means somewhere the government has changed and has stopped the nagging and unnecessary interference. This should augur well.

But there are glitches. Inflation though in a band, is not stable. The prices are varying at domestic level. At the international arena it is in a bumpy region. As rupee decelerates, prices of export and import vary every day, which impacts the domestic market, pricing and makes export prices volatile.

The most glaring impact is seen in petroleum prices. Almost 80 per cent of crude is imported and about 20 per cent is prospected within the country at half the cost. But when it comes to pricing, it is based on the day's international price, with many questioning its prudence.

Worse, it impacts the stock market, which remains a factor in inviting investment. A choppy market creates a wary situation. So despite the government wanting, even with favourable WB certificates, all is not hunky dory.

The big question then is whether the government is at fault? Normally, it's not. Businesses, despite the several ease of norms initiated, are dependent on various government steps despite its stance of neutrality. The government still finds itself doing a lot of hand holding. Indian businesses too are at fault. Since Independence, almost for the past 70 years, businesses themselves could not develop the confidence of being on their own. When they do well, they resent government asking even a simple question, but when they are in the slightest difficulty, they rush to the government for succour.

Then there is the bureaucracy, which feels that if there are no problems, it would become redundant. Thus, sometimes problems are deliberately injected. But the fact that businesses cannot do without government is testified by Donald Trump administration in the US. Howsoever the business houses may want, both government and businesses cannot fully chart out separate courses. They have to be in each other's benevolent neighbourhood.

This clearly means the government cannot be wished away and that both must appreciate it. However, at the same time the two should be kept at an arm's length from each other. Often this thin line is missed. If there is high NPA of banks today, the

government is made to bear the brunt of its "policy failure". The biz forgets that in 2008, when they were doing not so badly and did not need the huge lendings from the banks, at the back of the Lehman Brothers meltdown, they rushed to the government to "incentivize" them. Unfortunately, the government then did not act in a prudent manner and fell into the biz houses' trap.

As a result, no biz house today says why they took such huge loans, which mostly they did neither need nor did repay. So the NPA is their doing and of course the government needs to take the blame because its interference in banks was not needed at that time. No doubt, both biz and government committed a fundamental mistake. Both had their understanding that public sector banks were "government properties" and that "public fund is nobody's money". So squandering it away became a national pastime.

Everybody forgot that it is the common man's hard earned money. They also forgot that it is poor man's savings that has been running this country for the last 70 years. The government forgets that it has always been borrowing from that poor man through national savings scheme (NSS), Kisan Bachat Patra (KBP) or Public Provident Fund (PPF) and now directly delving into banks deposits. For NSS, KBP and PPF, the government had been paying attractive interest rates and that it partially helped the poor.

Now as the government and businesses scoop bank funds, it shakes the very foundation of banks and the poor man at every level loses his interest payments. The Rs 12 plus lakh crore NPAs have shaken the foundation of the economy.

The government and RBI spat is a result of this "basic misunderstanding". The bank's money is not the money of the government. It is people's or nation's wealth. The government as it repeatedly says should have kept away from the bank funds and the banks should have been allowed to take commercial decisions. There is no scope for treating it on compassionate ground and using it for doles. Finances are hard earned. Any non-commercial outlook creates the mayhem that the nation is facing today. Thus, the RBI has to be a tough regulator.

Despite all of it, even in the past, though Section 7 of the RBI Act was not invoked, the RBI is known to have acquiesced with government requests. The section provides for an emergency when the government can give instructions. In all regulations, such safety clauses are there lest the regulator itself becomes a monster.

Yes, the NPA boom was there because the RBI did not function as prudently as it is expected to. Politically, there could have been a different government then. But RBI also did not act prudently when it allowed the high-end currencies to be demonetised. So it appears if the regulator does not function, biz or government transgress the unwritten limits, the nation can face a crisis.

The country certainly has learnt a lot. The poor man has suffered and businesses are on a roll. The government needs to find out how the table can be turned by keeping off honour accepted niceties and let the economy boom. They all have to sail together for the common man. That is the great limit for a thriving nation.---INFA

indulgence. The Shillong Chamber Choir (SCC) doesn't often speak out on issues because we wish remain focused on our music, however, looking after the elderly is a matter we feel deeply about and would like to urge our friends to give those around you a small fraction of your undivided attention and see the joy that you'll bring. We'd like to end by saying - "Let's give them a reason to live, for they are the reason we are living."

Yours etc.,
William Richmond Basalawmoit, SCC member
Via email

What a futile journey!

Editor,

The state of Meghalaya will soon be half a century old but the main objectives of the statehood movement remain unfulfilled. According to what I have learnt, the statehood movement was started when the erstwhile Assam government declared Assamese as the official language of the state. This was met with fierce opposition and gave birth to the 12 year non-violent struggle for statehood. The main objective of the

statehood movement was to promote the use of the Khasi language and to protect it from extinction. Also, another objective was to protect and propagate Khasi culture and tradition. The movement also wanted to spread development into the interior hill regions which were "neglected" by the government. However after over four decades of statehood, the Khasi language has not made much progress and remains where it was in 1972.

It is now 2018 but our politicians and government have not yet been able to make Khasi an official language under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. They have also not been able to create a Khasi Sahitya Academy which is one of the most important criteria for language to find a place in the Eighth Schedule. Also, there is no educational institution which uses Khasi as a medium of instruction and interaction. Even though the Khasi language is a part of the MBOSE syllabus under the MIL (Modern Indian Languages) subjects, very little seems to have been done to promote the propagation of this language. Khasi textbooks are of very poor quality as compared to English and Hindi textbooks. The letters

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

The Shoe Story

In Toronto’s Bloor Street West, the Bata Shoe Museum is an ode to the civilisation’s Cinderella story. *Sujoy Dhar* visits the only museum of its kind founded by Bata Shoes first lady Sonja Bata who passed away this year after a lifetime in collecting footwear from every corner of the world

An astronaut’s space boot, the lofty heels and dainty embroidery of shoes narrating the history of Western fashion or a glimpse of footwear worn by some of the world’s most notable people — at this address in Toronto’s downtown, you undertake a fascinating journey of examining footwear from the earliest civilisations to the modern day of high fashion.

We are talking about the Bata Shoe Museum (BSM) founded by late Sonja Bata, the Swiss Canadian business-woman, and philanthropist who had moved to Toronto in 1946 after her marriage to Thomas J Bata of Bata Shoes.

Sonja, who died in February this year, since the 1940s, had scoured the world for shoes of every kind, from the most ordinary to the most extraordinary.

Over the decades of her travel, she had built one of the world’s finest collections and North America’s foremost shoe museum that boasts of a wealth of fashion lore and historical information — from Sibera to India.

The museum brochure says that “when in 1979, Sonja Bata’s collection had outgrown the available private storage space, the Bata family established the Bata Shoe Museum Foundation”. Over the years, the foundation had funded various field trips to collect and research footwear in areas where traditions are changing rapidly. Finally on May 6, 1995, the Bata Shoe Museum opened its doors at 327 Bloor Street West in downtown Toronto.

The five-storey 39,000 sqft shoebox inspired building, designed by Moriyama and Teshima Architects, is a Toronto landmark. The Museum’s unique collection of over 13,000 artifacts ranges from the earliest civilisations to the catwalks of today’s leading designers.

According to the Bata Shoe Museum, its aim is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the role of footwear in the social and cultural life of humanity.

“Through acquiring, conserving, researching, communicating and exhibiting material evidence related to the history of footwear and shoemaking, the museum illustrates the living habits, the culture and the customs of people. Its international collection of over 13,000 artifacts spans 4,500 years of history,” a museum official said.

Primarily funded by the Bata Shoe Museum Foundation, the mandate is to operate an internationally recognised centre for footwear research that maintains and displays the Bata Shoe Museum’s collection, sponsors field research, publishes findings and pro-

motes education.

At present, the permanent collection contains artifacts from virtually every culture in the world. Where else could you find French chestnut crushing boots under the same roof as delicately embroidered Chinese silk shoes, bear fur shoes for Japanese samurai and footwear made from human hair?

According to museum officials, rare and well-preserved velvet-covered platform mule from 16th-century Italy is one of the treasures of the comprehensive collection of historic and contemporary fashion footwear, ranging from the Italian Renaissance to the catwalks of today’s designers.

The five-storey 39,000 sqft shoebox inspired building, designed by Moriyama and Teshima Architects, is a Toronto landmark. Its unique collection of over 13,000 artifacts ranges from the earliest civilisations to the catwalks of today’s leading designers

“This Italian velvet chopine, so tall that the wearer could not walk unaided, provides an interesting complement to other outrageous styles endured by many over the centuries. In other words, Salvatore Ferragamo and Vivienne Westwood weren’t the first designers to think of platforms. Nor, if history teaches us anything, will they be the last.”

The Indian collection is impressive too. It says about India: “Bejewelled mojari, paduka made of precious metals, and extravagant ornaments such as toe rings and ankle bracelets were all part of the traditional splendour of Indian aristocratic pageantry and dress. Even today the footwear worn to important occasions such as weddings is exceptionally embellished in emulation of India’s regal past.”

One of the most important aspects of the Bata Shoe Museum’s holdings is an extensive collection of Native American and circumpolar footwear. This collection and the field trips sponsored to study indigenous shoemaking have greatly contributed to the scholarship of shoemaking.

Among the collection’s most popular features is an extensive assortment of celebrity footwear, including Queen Victoria’s ballroom slippers, Robert Redford’s cowboy boots, Elton John’s monogrammed silver platform boots, Terry Fox’s running shoe, Elvis Presley’s blue patent loafers, Karen Kain’s ballet shoes and John Lennon’s Beatle boot.

The museum’s archaeological collection includes footwear from some of the earliest civilisations on earth: ancient Egyptian sarcophagi with painted sandal designs, leg-shaped perfume vials made by an ancient Greek potter, and Roman bronze lamps representing sandal-clad feet. The collection also includes intriguing examples of medieval footwear.

But the collection doesn’t stop at shoes. Enhancing the actual footwear collection is a companion collection of shoe-shaped ornamental artifacts such as Majolica hand warmers and inlaid fruitwood snuffboxes, as well as all sorts of graphic materials, from 14th-century woodcut prints through 19th-century caricature lithographs, to original paintings and sculptures, all illustrating aspects of the history of footwear.

According to BSM, on the surface, shoes are an indication of personal taste and style, but a closer examination yields a different picture.

“Viewed chronologically, shoes trace a path through technological development and mark even the subtlest shifts in a society’s attitudes and values. Footwear illustrates entire ways of life, indicating as it does the climate, religions, professions, and attitudes to gender and social status of different cultures through the ages. Whether they are objects of beauty or instruments of torture, shoes are surely signs of the times,” a BSM official says.

The museum also hosts some of the most remarkable exhibitions. An ongoing exhibition which is open till January 6, 2019, is a stunning retrospective by one of the world’s most influential figures within the fashion industry, Manolo Blahnik.

Manolo Blahnik: The Art Of Shoes, is a tribute to Blahnik’s inventiveness and superb artisanship of over 45 years, crossing boundaries between fashion and art, inspiring elegance and perfection. The underlying theme of the exhibition – that shoes are art – aligns perfectly with Blahnik’s own approach to creating footwear.

For the lovers of both chic footwear and high fashion as well as history, this is one address in Toronto which should not be missed. (IBNS/TWF)

(Images by author)



Tip toes: (Clockwise from top) A unique pair at the museum; the BSM building; cowboy boots; royal pride; a photograph of Sonja Bata at the museum; Manolo Blahnik collection on display; protecting from deadly winters; a visitor admires boots of various designs and with colourful patterns; and slippers

Kangla’s like Ayodhya for Meiteis, keep it sacred

By Madhu Chandra

Kangla is a small area, less than one sq km, in the heart of Imphal city, the capital of Manipur. Kangla is an important historical place that includes everything that took place in the history of Manipur. The history includes the establishment of Kangla in 33AD, the religious infiltration of Hinduism at the arrival of Shantidas Gosai in 1717 and before him, the burning of the Meitei Sacred Writings known as Puya Meithaba in 1729.

Kangla was conquered and captured by the British in 1891 and then under the dominion of Assam Rifles until it was removed in 2004 by the United Progressive Alliance government under the Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh.

The establishment of Kangla in the early part of the first century, down through the religious infiltration of Hinduism, then conquered by the British followed by military control of Kangla are very much related to the socio-religion and political identity crises of the Meiteis faced today. The control over Kangla was the factor of controlling social, religious, political and ethnic points of Manipur.

The establishment of Kangla in the early 33 AD gave the socio-religious and political identities of Manipur which included all the communities in the state. The religious infiltration of Hinduism and control over Kangla, the mass conversion to Hinduism and then the burning of Puya have widened the gap between the hill and the valley. Ever since, the Meiteis, in particular, have suffered the distorted identity crisis.



The British rule over Kangla brought changes in Manipur. The hills chose to embrace Christianity and the valley continued with Hinduism. Education began in both the valley and hill under the British. The first primary school at Yaishkul, Pettigrew College at Ukhrul and the first English-Manipur Dictionary are the symbols of the education system brought by the British.

Then followed Independence and the Indian Army’s occupation of Kangla till 2004. The military dominion in the state added to the Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958, which has

been termed as a draconian law, under which the state has suffered to a great extent.

The consciousness of people to keep Kangla sacred and holy has begun with a few ongoing issues. The protest at Manipur University saw demand for the removal of AP Pandey, the Vice Chancellor, by Manipur University Students Union, Manipur University Teachers Union and Manipur University Staff Association. Then the construction of Rash Leela Mandap inside Kangla.

People in Manipur across political

line and the diaspora have demanded the state government to stop construction of the mandop immediately. It has been alleged that the construction of religious structures inside the holy Kangla is aimed at hurting religious sentiments and defiling the sacred religious place belonging to Sanamahism. There are valid reasons why Kangla should be kept sacred and holy:

Kangla is Jerusalem for Sanamahism

Kangla is like Jerusalem for Jews

The current crisis of Rash Leela Mandap, whether it was done by the previous government or the present, must consider the sentiments of the people. Any art and cultural structure must be set up elsewhere

and Christians, Mecca for Muslims, Ayodhya for Hindus, Bodh Gaya in Bihar for Buddhists, the Golden Temple for Sikhs. Every religion has its historical establishment place. These places are very important for their religious propaganda and proclamation. Kangla is the centre for Sanamahism. Without Kangla, Sanamahism, the religion of Meiteis, will not succeed like any other religion in the world. In order to make Kangla a centre for Sanamahism, it must be kept sacred and holy without adulteration with Hinduism or any other religion.

Mothers paid the price

The world shook when mothers of Manipur stripped naked at the gate of Kangla with a banner, “Indian Army Rape Us”. That was the price paid by the mothers to rescue Kangla from the clutches of the Indian army. The mothers of Manipur sacrificed their modesty to ransom Kangla back after

it was taken away from the people of Manipur 1891 until November 20, 2004. Kangla is the identity which was sanctified by the mothers. Manipur cannot afford to make Kangla enslave and defiled once again in any form.

Kangla has over 360 sacred khubhams

It is believed that there are about 360 khubhams, the sacred places inside Kangla. According to the royal chronicle, the Cheitharol Kumbaba, Nara Singh Maharaj (1844–50) was cremated here at the ‘Manglen’.

Rash Leela Mandop at Kangla

Manipur in general and specifically the Meiteis have been facing an ethnic identity crisis ever since the emergence of Hinduism before and following Puya Meithaba. The ethnic identity of the Meiteis in the valley is a mixture in the social and religious spectrum. The quest for self identity is the need of the day. Setting up any other religious structure that hurts the sentiments of the people is termed defiling the religious sanctity. Such act is a punishable offense under the section of 295A of Indian Penal Code. The current crisis of Rash Leela Mandap, whether it was done by the previous government or the present, must consider the sentiments of the people and refrain from hurting religious sentiments. Rash Leela or any art and cultural structure must be set up elsewhere.

(The author is a Hyderabad-based freelancer and former spokesperson of North East Helpline)

Human greed creates jellyfish menace

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



I have just spent a week in monsoon washed Goa without going to the beach. The reason for this sacrilege? Jellyfish.

The Goa government has issued a warning to beachgoers that the beaches and coastal waters have swarms of live and dead jellyfish. These long tentacled gelatinous marine creatures are beautiful and deadly.

There are over 1,200 known varieties of jellyfish. They range from tiny ones which you can ingest while swimming, to 200 kg. The Blue Bottle and Portuguese Man-of-War jellyfish, currently invading Indian coasts, have nematocysts on their long tentacles (going up to 10 feet) — microscopic barbed stinging structures which can pierce human beings and inject venom. Dead jellyfish washed out onto the beach can do it as well, as nematocysts remain potent in moist conditions for months.

The victim may experience skin irritation, muscle cramps, headache, nausea, diarrhoea, fever. In extreme cases, it may cause acute pain, breathing difficulty, heart attacks and even death. One is more likely to die from a jellyfish sting than a shark attack.

As the population of jellyfish spins out of control, beaches have become dangerous for humans. Every year, thousands of people are stung. The beaches of Mumbai, Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were a problem in the monsoon. Now there are invasions throughout the year. A bloom of jellyfish has been reported off the Visakhapatnam coast for the first time.

Australia and Southeast Asia have the dreaded box jellyfish, whose venom causes the heart to seize. In the Philippines, 20-40 people die annually from box jellyfish stings.

The Irukandji is the size of a sugar cube and its stinger leaves no trace. Ten minutes after contact, victims suffer excruciating lower back pain, to incessant vomiting, to constricted airways, brain clots and heart failure.

“It’s difficult to know how many victims the Irukandji have claimed,” writes biologist Tim Flannery “many deaths have been put down to stroke, heart attack or drowning”.

Some 150,000 people are now treated for jellyfish stings in the Mediterranean

each summer.

Jellyfish don’t just sting they have a huge economic and ecological impact. They are wreaking havoc all around the world by disrupting food chains, causing massive power plant outages, jeopardising fisheries and tourism potential. Jellyfish eat plant plankton and ichthyoplankton — the eggs and larvae of fish – as well as young fish, reducing fish populations. They can eat 10 times their body weight daily.

In the 1980s, a severe outbreak of comb jellyfish brought from America in the ballast water of foreign ships to the Black Sea, eliminated mackerel and anchovy fish, and collapsed the \$350 million Black Sea fishing industry. The jellyfish preyed on anchovy fish eggs and larvae and consumed the same zooplankton that the anchovies ate. Soon the anchovy fishery crashed and the jellyfish bloomed. By 1993 it was 95 percent of the total biomass of the Black Sea.

Nuclear and thermal power plants use coastal waters for cooling, and discharge the heated water back into the seas. This increases temperatures by 1 to 1.5°C and affects waters for hundreds of miles. Jellyfish increase in heated waters. The atomic power station at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu suffered reduced production efficiency due to swarms of jellyfish clogging the sea water intake piping.

Jellyfish have been around for centuries. Why are we facing overpopulation now? It is entirely our fault.

The human race has created conditions leading to an explosion of jellyfish blooms around the world.

The waste from farms and human settlements are thrown into waters that lead to the ocean. This leads to “eutrophication” (from the Greek eutrophos, “well-nourished”) — nitrates and phosphates from sewage and fertilisers cause plants, such as algae and phytoplankton, to flourish to such an extent that the whole surface of the dam/river/ocean is covered.

This thick green algae at the surface blocks sunlight from reaching aquatic plants and marine creatures, killing them. Oxygen levels drop as the algae take oxygen from the water, causing the death of fish and molluscs. The water is acidified. This environment suits jellyfish which thrive.

While killing larger fish, eutrophication supports the survival of plankton, larval sardines and other organisms, which the Jellyfish feed on.



Overfishing by humans has reached catastrophic levels and has led to a situation where most of the natural predators of jellyfish, like sea turtles, salmon, mackerel, blue fin tuna, pilot whale and albatross, have become scarce.

Jellyfish are eaten by 120 species of fish and 30 marine animals, including mushroom corals. Unfortunately these fish are commercially fished. Their competitors for plankton and small fish, such as billfish and dolphins, are also endangered. Sea turtles, particularly leatherbacks and loggerheads, are suffocating on plastic in the ocean.

So jellyfish get a free run of the ocean and its small fish and larvae.

Overfishing has also made enormous room for plankton to grow. Fish like anchovies, sardines and menhaden which are plankton eaters, are harvested for fish meal for aquaculture. Plankton is

the jellyfish’s favourite food and now they have no competitor. By devouring huge quantities of plankton, jellyfish also deprive small fish species of food and they stop breeding. A particularly large Nomura’s jellyfish takes in enough seawater each day to fill a swimming pool, gobbling up any plankton it catches in the process. Jellyfish wreak havoc on the entire food chain.

Without a curb on their population, growing hordes of jellyfish start eating the eggs of smaller fish, as well as their food supply. They then occupy the niche that was once filled by other species. In Namibia, catches of anchovy and sardines have reduced dramatically after 1988 and large populations of 2 jellyfishes now predominate.

Aquaculture is increasing the number of jellyfish. The captive fish are free food; from giant shrimps, killed

in India’s captive breeding stations, to salmon and trout in Scotland, Ireland and Norway. When additional feed is provided, eutrophication of the waters takes place. The aquaculture structures, like rafts, provide shade for polyps to grow.

Studies show that jellyfish started increasing in the 1980s, but have increased far more dramatically in the last ten years.

Human structures built in the oceans have provided jellyfish with ideal places to reproduce. Jellyfish polyps need a solid structure to stick to in order to multiply, develop and ‘hatch’. They have a variety of options to choose from – embankments, granite seawalls, docks, artificial reefs, floating plastic waste, ships, offshore oil rigs. Even packets of cigarettes, plates and statues of religious idols serve as breeding grounds for polyps to stick and grow.

Jellyfish thrive on ecosystems in distress. Biologist Lisa-Ann Gershwin writes “As seas become stressed, the jellyfish are there, like an eagle to an injured lamb – more than just as symptom of weakness, more like the angel of death.”

We need to urgently change the way we treat our oceans and the beings in it. First, eutrophication needs to be controlled by reducing the nutrients that we indiscriminately empty into the oceans. Waste needs to go through much more stringent treatment before it can be let out into the sea.

We need to immediately stop overfishing. The huge trawlers, which amass tonnes of fish in one catch and throw away 90% of them as waste need, to be stopped completely. The government should introduce quotes to control the amount of fishing. This will increase the number of predators that feed on jellyfish.

Our permanent interventions in the sea, such as ports, marinas, offshore rigs etc., need to be cleaned regularly so that jellyfish polyps cannot survive on them. In fact, this practice of building in the ocean itself should be discouraged.

I know these solutions seem long term, but unfortunately they are the only ones available. In any case it may be too late and we can’t do much to stop jellyfish from taking over the oceans.

From an evolutionary standpoint, Jellyfish are biologically primed to take over the sea. They reproduce on the sea floor, or any other hard surface, and breed in massive numbers (in thou-

sands/day). These blooms are increasing in intensity, frequency, or duration, says Lucas Brotz, a jellyfish expert at the University of British Columbia. Brotz’s research of 45 marine ecosystems shows an increase of 62 per cent in blooms since 1950.

Will the oceans of the future soon be filled with jellyfish? They are moving closer to becoming the dominant species in the seas, filling the niche of the disappearing fish.

Global temperatures are expected to rise 0.2°C during the next 2 decades. Warming of the oceans will increase jellyfish populations. As the climate changes the ocean currents change and blooms will crop up in new locations.

The current world human population is projected to increase 46 per cent by 2050. Human influences and demands on the ocean will increase. Increased demands for energy will drive more dam and power plant construction, causing more sea warming in coastal waters.

For example, China has 3 operative nuclear power stations and 4 are under construction. Increased fertilizer use, particularly in Asia, will cause eutrophication to double. Global aquaculture has doubled between 1997 and 2020.

Our oceans’ ecosystem is almost at its end. A new ecological system is coming along, with jellyfish at the top of the food chain. Once this stabilises, the removal of its dominance may prove difficult. Fish will almost disappear even if we stop fishing. Jellyfish will prevent the recovery of overfished populations, by eating their larvae.

Once jellyfish own the ocean, global warming will be even faster. Jellyfish promote climate change by releasing carbon-rich mucus and faecal matter. Marine bacteria use this jellyfish to breed, which creates even more carbon dioxide and methane. “Climate change promotes jellyfish blooms, and jellyfish blooms promote climate change,” Gershwin, the author of “Stung”, explains, “and like all robust feedback loops, where it stops nobody knows.”

You will soon be eating jellyfish curry instead of fish. Scientists from eight countries have begun a project called GoJelly to create jellyfish-based products — water filters, fish feed, face cream, fertilisers, food, salt, alcohol and jellyfish ethanol for cars.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 4, 2018

Moon sextile Jupiter on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. Relationships can be one of the biggest areas of growth for you during this year of your life. Creative impulses are also powerful. While you may struggle at times with motivation levels, you possess the endurance to further your goals. You can be particularly prolific and creative with writing, speaking, or other communications fields this year - you have a strong sense of what your audience wants. You express yourself with more imagination and appeal. You may be actively involved with teamwork and collaboration with others this year.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You tend to concentrate your vital force on self-nurturing as well as nurturing those close to you. It is a time to honor your roots, stabilize your home life, and build the connections you have with the family. It's a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones. This is a good time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to enhance your professional skills and efficiency. Your mind is especially inquisitive and you bring in a new perspective too. Short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your social life is likely to increase and bring you in contact with influential and helpful people. It's a good time to do something that requires additional bravery or courage, as some of your inhibitions are released and you live more spiritedly. Competitive activities, such as sports or business, thrive in this period. Career and reputation matters require extra attention. Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you, and you are able to attract fortunate circumstances into your life. Problems are easier to resolve.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would be establishing a happy and harmonious work environment through friendly relations with co-workers. Tidying up your work area too comes into focus now. Romantic and social activities may revolve around your working environment. You are generally well liked and respected socially on the job right now. Some laziness is possible now, as you tend to be drawn to leisure activities. Perhaps you are socializing more than usual. You have good team spirit and are more tactful with your co-workers.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This phase brings new responsibilities. These are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously. You are especially fond of the home life and are more family oriented. Take care when it comes to presenting ideas, writing letters, and any detail work. You may not see the whole picture. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to real estate matters and domestic issues. Be as non-judgmental as you can with family members. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering; you have to positively use your talents and efficiency.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Matters related to higher education, religion and worship and publishing proceed smoothly. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training and further your education. You would work in association with well experienced people and this brings more confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities related to augment the business and boost work opportunities. It may be challenging to keep a healthy perspective regarding deeply personal matters and family. It's an excellent time for entertainment and to pursue hobbies.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

People in authority tend to be more inclined to appreciate you and recognize your work. This is the right time to share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. You would do best to allow yourself to explore your inner needs so that you can nurture yourself and others in a healthy, growth-oriented manner. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand

new subjects. You would be able to see the world around you in practical terms. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes come about.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Any love affair begun now will be characterized by good cheer, having fun, and a fair share of emotions. You would enjoy increased powers of concentration. You may require solitude in order to get mental work done. Your memory is more retentive than usual, and your thoughts often turn to personal matters, family, and loved ones. Try to hold off on household repairs if you can. Put off decision-making with regard to home improvement, moving, and family matters for the time being. New initiatives surrounding home and property are best left for a better time.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are less inclined to fall in love for the sake of love itself during this time; your tendency is to consider whether it is clever to do so. You're most successful doing tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. You could find that your talents or skills are especially appreciated. Romantic and social activities may revolve around your working environment. You would be recognized or rewarded in some way for the efforts you put forth because you project a more responsible and credible image. This planetary combination promotes your good luck in physical and laborious work related areas this week. You could feel stressed and anxious while meeting people's expectations and approval.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This is a very self-expressive time when you have lots of energy, but not necessarily the self-discipline to match. You have more energy at your disposal to express yourself creatively, through activities with children, romantic activities, hobbies, or sports. This could be an especially passionate time as your love life may step up and you tend to put more energy into play and pleasure. You are more playful than usual, and especially magnetic. The flowing, expressive, and spontaneous energy surrounding you attracts like-minded people. Be sure to take time to enjoy yourself. You remain practical, realistic and your judgment is sound.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would maintain an optimum balance between optimism and practicality. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of security and status. Your business partnerships are highlighted right now, and it's time to compromise and adjust. Insecurities in your partnerships are brought to light now, and the best way to handle this is to understand that you need others instead of competing. Trying to go it alone won't work just now. Concentrate on truly listening to those close to you, and on playing a supportive role. You feel reflective rather than expressive.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

An especially busy, and perhaps hectic, period on the domestic front is indicated. For example, you might take work to your home or find that people drop by your home often. You may need to adjust your plan of action. Errors in judgment made now are likely due to impulsiveness and the overlooking of crucial details. You could have so many new ideas that you don't have time to implement. Your family, home, property concerns, and heritage come into focus and become a source of pride. Its perhaps not yet a time to make a vital presentation or to come on strong to the world.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. The seeds you plant now, you will reap later. You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. Career and reputation peak at this time. Your credibility is important and efforts at self-promotion might be made now. You're at your best when you are showing the world your practical, competent, and responsible side. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. Health will take a turn for the better.

Experience real India

By Ranjan K Baruah

Rural development is the process of improving quality of life and economic well-being of people living in isolated and sparsely populated areas. It is important in a country like India where majority of the population still resides in the rural areas.

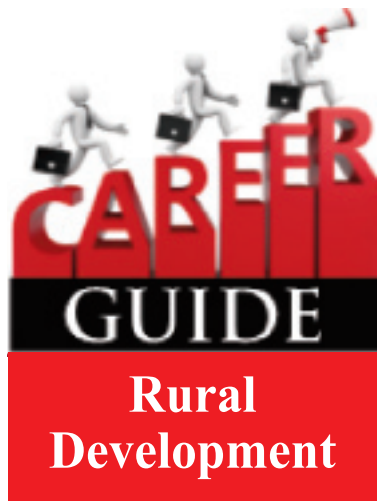
Development of rural areas and the people is a must for the progress of any country. Change in rural areas and change in the mindset of people will lead towards sustainable development which is being discussed globally.

Rural development has traditionally centered on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry. However, changes in global production networks and increased urbanisation have changed the character of rural areas.

Increasingly tourism, niche manufacturers and recreation have replaced resource extraction and agriculture as dominant economic drivers. The need for rural communities to approach development from a wider perspective has created more focus on a broad range of development goals rather than merely creating incentive for agricultural or resource based businesses.

Education, entrepreneurship, physical infrastructure and social infrastructure all play important role in developing rural regions. Rural development is a comprehensive term. It essentially focuses on action for the development of areas outside the mainstream urban economic system. We should think of what type of rural development is needed because modernisation of a village leads to urbanisation and village environment disappears. As there is demand so a subject has also evolved as rural development. There are subjects and similar courses like Social Work or Development Studies but now rural development has also become an independent subject which can be studied by our young people.

There are post graduate courses and also diploma programmes in some institutes. Courses are like Rural Development, Rural Management, Sustainable Rural Studies, etc. After finishing these courses one may get engaged with different



change in our society. Young people from our region may take up rural development and get themselves engaged in rural development for making a vibrant society and nation.

Updates:

Scholarships for D.Ed. and B.Ed from Tata Trusts: Tata Trusts is offering scholarships for students pursuing D Ed and B Ed for the current academic year 2018-2019 for studies in India. This scholarship is applicable only for those pursuing studies in Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra and North-East India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura). This scholarship is applicable only for the tuition fees and other related fees paid to the Institute / University. Candidates should have secured 60 per cent and above in their last academic year. Aspirants may apply before November 5.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“I bid him look into the lives of men as though into a mirror, and from others to take an example for himself.”
--- Terence

The Shillong Times

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Ayodhya again

A new urgency is evident in the Sangh Parivar’s decades-long campaign for the creation of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya. That urgency, prima facie, has to do with the fact that the present NDA government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has very little time left to complete its five year term. But, there could be other issues as well, including a requirement for the new leadership of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that spearheaded the cause for long to prove that it is serious about the matter. The time to push the case is now also for the reason that it’s at this juncture that the BJP runs governments both at the national level and in Uttar Pradesh, under two able stalwarts of the RSS.

Giving out a feeling to the hard-core Hindutva activists that these governments are not being serious about the main plank of the Sangh Parivar is also to give a chill down their spines – something that Prime Minister Narendra Modi can ill afford in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls. This is the time the full energy of the Saffron brigade needs be put to best use in the election arena. Instead, if the government as also the Sangh Parivar waited for a court order in the matter – as was the RSS stand till a while ago – it could prolong the matter endlessly. If so, it could give no political dividend to the BJP in the coming general elections. The case could go on and on with this case, as is the way of the judiciary in India. It must be surmised that the RSS is bent on pushing the case at this juncture for the reason that Prime Minster Modi as also the rest of the BJP leadership could be made to see the benefits it could derive politically if the matter – dear to Hindus across the board – is brushed out of the cupboard and given a new and energetic lease of life. At the same time, enactment of a legislation even now is not easy since the BJP does not have the majority in the Rajya Sabha. Antagonising the Muslims is, as far as the BJP is concerned, a non-issue. They are bound to vote almost en masse against the saffron party and Modi. There, thus, is “merit” in the contention that this is the time to consolidate the BJP’s Hindu support base.

TO THE EDITOR

The hawker menace in Shillong

Editor,
With a population of over six lakh, Shillong today is overcrowded. The hawkers and vendors aggravate the crowded scenario. If we make a proper survey right from Laitkor, Mawblei, Madantring, Happy Valley, Demthring, Nongthymmai down to Pohkseh, Rynjah, Lapalang, Nongrah, Umpling down to Nongrim Hills, Jingkieng, Fire Brigade, Motinagar, Risa Colony, Malki, the whole of Laitumkhrach, Dhankheti, the whole of Lachumiere, Barik, the whole of Laban, Red Cross, Civil Hospital area, Keatinge Road, Secretariat Hill and its periphery, the areas under SBI, Shillong Club, Ward's Lake, the areas near Assembly Secretariat and Crowborough, the whole of Police Bazar, Bivar Road, the whole of Polo areas, the whole of Maccabe Road, Demseining, Nongmynsong, Pynthorumkhrach, part of Golf Links, the whole of Mawlai Town including Mawiong, Lawmali, the whole of Jaiaiw, Mawkhar, Wahingdoh, Umsohsun, Riatsamthiah, Mission Compound, Wahthapbru, Motphran, the whole length of Mahatma Gandhi road and Tirot Sing Road, Them Metor (Harijan colony), Mawlong Hat, the

Anjalee complex, the whole of Iewduh and its periphery, Quallapatty, Stand Jeep, Garikhana, the whole of Mawprem, Lumsophoh, Luckier Road and the periphery of the Cantonment Areas, are taken over by hawkers and vendors. Only the Upper Shillong side is comparatively free from hawkers but even here there are signs of invasion by hawkers in some pockets. Hawkers and vendors have every right to thrive and survive, and we are not against them for many of us derive some benefits from them but the problem starts when they invade the main roads which are the thoroughfares for vehicles and the footpaths which are for the use of pedestrians. It is here that they become a menace. Vendors and hawkers have invaded the roads and footpaths with impunity. They sell food items, vegetables, fruits, clothes including second hand wear, footwear, mobile sets and all sort of accessories and wares under the sun. Pedestrians just do not have space to walk and most of the time they have to negotiate with vehicles on the roads to be able to get to their destinations. Oh, it is a horrible experience. When pedestrians, by mistake and because of the push and pull and congestion

happen to stamp on the wares displayed by hawkers then the foul mouthed hawkers start manhandling people. Vehicles find it very difficult to run through the roads as drivers have to negotiate between the hawkers and the roads. Even in Laitumkhrach, which till recently was comparatively free from hawkers, is today overgrown with hawkers and has lost the tag of being a religious and educational hub. No locality of Shillong is free from hawkers. Hawkers should occupy only free and open space free from pedestrians and invade the roads and footpaths. The main reason for this problem is the inability of Urban Department Authority, the Shillong Municipality to regulate hawking and the unwillingness of the state government to take action on the illegal encroachment of the hawkers into the public thoroughfares. Another reason is because there are organisations which support and sympathise with the hawkers. We appeal to the Meghalaya High Court to intervene here through its judicial activism by passing a suo moto order to prevent hawkers from encroaching and invading public thoroughfares which is a public menace in Shillong. Shillong is already choked, over-stressed and

over-populated. There’s congestion and population explosion. The citizens of Shillong need some breathing space to be able walk and breathe freely. Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Viaemail

Delay in appointing DGP

Editor,
There has been much consternation over the State Government's indecision over the selection and appointment of a senior and well-experienced officer to the post of DGP in our State Police. Of late this decision has been compounded by a certain political compulsion which overrides principles and rules that are important for the overall interests of the State, its people and the force. The retirement of Mr Awasthi former DGP has left the State Police without a leader to direct and assume charge which is the gravest lacunae in the event of any internal security disorder. Add to this the State Govt's intent to bring in tainted police officers from Assam to head our State Police Force which will not only be a blot to the image of our State but will also demoralise the Police Force and set a poor example in bringing ethics and

discipline. We have senior officers who are very capable and who understand the social complexities of our society and state, therefore it will be prudent for the Chief Minister to walk the talk and think of the larger interest of Meghalaya and appoint a person from within the State Police Force.. Yours etc. Dominic S.Wankhar Viaemail

Time to resolve issue of Them Mawlong

Editor,
It is disheartening to read that there will be no change in the traffic restrictions at Harijan Colony (The Shillong Times, Nov 3, 18), five months after violence broke out in the city on May 31st 2018. Deputy Chief Minister and Chairman of the High Level Committee very categorically stated that the HLC is not sitting idle but isn't it high time that the Them Lew Mawlong or Harijan Colony issue is taken up in a priority basis as this matter requires immediate resolution? As of now this area is guarded with barricades and police personnel at the entry points of the colony and the traffic movement is completely restricted. Isn't it ironic that while the roads along Lew Mawlong area

and Them Bijoy to Motphran are congested with traffic jam, the stretch along the Harijan Colony is restricted for now, The million dollar question is when will the matter be solved? It's been five months and the matter is still under discussion. Is this how governance works? And yes, the question still remains as to what is the need to prevent vehicular movement through this road? The basic purpose that it has served is in adding to the traffic congestion in the adjoining areas. To maintain peace and order there are police personnel already stationed there. For how long do the people have to wait for the HLC to finally come up with concrete, viable solutions? The biggest fear is that this present government also follows the footsteps of its predecessors and allows Them Lew Mawlong or Harijan Colony to die a natural death by leaving it where it was decades ago. Yes, if the MDA government fails to solve the matter once and for all and dilly dallies then similar situations or perhaps even more violent ones may again erupt in the near future. Can we afford that? Yours etc., Jennieffer Dkhar, Via email

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

Khasi Pnar’s own Ubuntu moment

By HH Mohrmen

The story that best describes the Ubuntu culture of the people of Africa is the account of an Anthropologist who proposed a game to the African tribal children by placing a basket of sweets near a tree. The man then made the children stand 100 meters away and announced that whoever reaches the basket first would get all the sweets. When he said, ‘ready steady go,’ the children instead of competing among themselves held each other’s hand and ran together towards the tree. They then divided the sweets equally among themselves and had the fun of their life. When the Anthropologist asked them why they did so, they answered in unison ‘...Ubuntu’, which means “I am because we are.” How can one be happy when others are sad; is the value behind this profound way of life. This same Ubuntu spirit is there in the Khasi-Pnar culture too, although we call it by a different name. In fact it is like fine threads which weave around the culture of the people, because it is there in every aspect of the people’s life. In fact it is evident in the Khasi-Pnar way of life both in times of joy and sorrow. The slogan in the movie the three musketeers is; ‘One for all; All for one’ and similarly, in our culture we have a common goal which is important for all to follow. A wellbeing study conducted by the North East Slow Food and Agro biodiversity Society (NESFAS) in the two villages namely; Moosakhia and Samanong of West Jaintia Hills District, confirmed the fact that this profound value which is an intrinsic part of the society is still alive amongst the rural community of our state. The tradition of living for each other in the community is in fact the foundation of a Khasi- Pnar way of life. The tradition of helping each other called “Chu-nong” is still alive in some farming communities. Chu-nong in Jowai is a traditional exchange of a day’s labour among the members of the farming community. The family would announce the

day that the community can help farming in their field and each family in the village would send at least one member to lend a helping hand to the host family. The same arrangement rotates from one family to another and every family would send one member to represent the family till every family in the village had their turn. The host family does not have to pay any wages to the farmer; they simply provide food to the farmer who participates in the community farming on that particular day. This tradition is used now even on affairs other than farming; particularly when constructing houses where members of the community would donate at least one day’s labour to help the other family. This is how farming communities in the area support each other and the tradition is still being practiced in some part of the district, but sadly it is dying in larger parts of the region. This same tradition is called ‘Iah Kurui lok’ amongst the War Jaintia people, which literarily means helping and supporting each other by way of exchange labour especially in farming activities. Among the War Jaintia there is another tradition which of course is dying and it is similar to ‘chu nong or iah kurui lok’ but this practice is unique because it is only meant for Jhum or slash and burn and cultivation of millet in particular. It is dying because people in War Jaintia area do not practice Jhum cultivation anymore and millet is becoming a forgotten crop in the area now. During bereavement in the War Jaintia area people have a name for the practice of visiting the family who had lost their dear one. It is called ‘Beh dot.’ Simple translation of the two words ‘beh dot’ in Khasi would mean, ‘leit pynshit pynsyiad ne pynsyang’ or visit to comfort or console. When there is bereavement in the community each family would ensure that at least one from the family should visit or at least

mother is recuperating, as a mark of love and respect family, friends and near and dear ones take turns to cook the best of meals to provide to the mother. Again this tradition is still very popular amongst those who belong to the Niamtre in Jowai. Sadly, as ma Toki Blah has mentioned in his last article on the editorial page of this paper, now, bereavement is becoming like a feast in the Khasi Pnar society. People are now afraid to die not because they are afraid of death perse, but because of the expenditure that the family have to expend when on account of the death of a family member. This is very un-Khasi- Pnar like because death is supposed to be a sad and solemn occasion. Amongst the followers of Niamtre in Jowai, not only that there is no feast like arrangement but even today it is forbidden to cook meat when somebody dies in the family. We are gradually drifting away from these profound values that best define us as a community. These are practices which instil the values that inspire us to care for each other. The most important findings from the well-being study that was done in the two villages was that ‘bhalang ka imlang sahlang’ is the most important aspiration of the community.’ The good and the wellbeing of the all is the paramount goal of the community is our profound tradition and this is our own Ubuntu. It is that which binds us as together as one community, but sadly these values are eroding. Our Autonomous District Councils are fighting a wrong battle and instead of working to preserve this value system which best defines us, they are instead trying to separate us on basis of who we marry, when inter-marriages were practiced by our ancestors in the past (Hamlet Bareh Ngap Kynta The History and Culture of the Khasi People). The question we need to ask is not who we marry but whether we still practice this tradition which defines us. Or can we still consider ourselves Khasi-Pnar when we are no longer bound by the spirit of ‘bhalang ka imlang sahlang’?

“Right to vote as a constitutional right”
- Lessons from Telangana

By P Niroop Reddy

With the Supreme Court refusing to apply Article 136 to uphold the right of the first-time voters, running into lakhs, in the poll-bound State of Telangana, young voters will not be able to exercise their franchise even upon attaining the eligibility age of 18 years. The denial is purely on ‘technical grounds’, which is an anachronism in the digital age. In a near similar situation, in the American context, in the year 1962, when nearly 70% of the voters of the Tennessee State, were deprived of their voting rights in the matter of reapportionment, since they had migrated from the rural to the urban areas, resulting in an ‘inequality of the distribution of urban/rural voters’, the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Baker vs. Carr, 369 US 186, in a 5-Judge majority opinion led by Justice Brennan, upheld the citizens’ most prized possession, in a representative democracy i.e. the right to vote. Not to gloss over the fact, that this very Court in the year 1946, in the case of Colegrove vs. Green, 328 US 549 refused to enter into what it called the ‘political thicker’ and said it was beyond the Court’s jurisdiction. But with the Baker’s case, the circle is completed, when it considered the ‘right to vote’ as the greatest civil right and the most fundamental, under the American system of Government, in keeping with the ‘equality clause’ of the 14th amendment to the Constitution of America. In the Indian context, the right to vote has metamorphosed, during the last 60 and years of electoral democracy, from a ‘statutory right’ as held in N.P. Ponnuswamy’s case (1952 SCR 218, 6 Judges) into a full fledged fundamental right, integral to the freedom of expression guaranteed under Art. 19(1)(A) of the Constitution of India, as held in the PUCL case (2013) 10 SCC 1 (3 Judges).

The above legal position is not without the bearing of the movement for ‘inclusive political participation’, at the international level, in the form of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which at Article 21 provides as under: “(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of Government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.” and further the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), at Article 25 says- “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in Article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.” and further let’s not forget that the said right, through English history, the giver of the mother of Parliaments, has held the right to vote, at an election, on par with the ‘right to legislate’ and thus treated the said right with the highest importance and as a great privilege, which no elector can be deprived of. Sir Winston Churchill summarized the ‘election process’ in his inimitable style, as quoted in M.S.Gill’s case (1978) 1 SCC 405 (5 Judges): Para 2, “.....At the bottom

of all tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into a little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper – no amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of the point.” Going back in history and asking oneself, as to why the voting age in the first place, was reduced from 21 to 18 years in India in the year 1985, the straight answer is this. In 1985, the Rajeev Gandhi Government, to commemorate the International Year of Youth, introduced the 61st Constitutional amendment, in order to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 years, which was subsequently converted into a YUVA (Youth United for Voter Awareness) campaign, by the Election Commission of India, acting under the (a) National Youth Policy 2003; (b) National Policy on Education 1992; and (c) U.N. Millennium Development Goal of 2000, in order to empower youth by way of inclusive political participation. The direct fallout of this lowering of age, has been a drastic reduction in the average age of the Members of Indian Parliament. In fact, the Election Commission of India, observes 25th January of every year as the National Voters’ Day, a day on which it tries to rope in, as many first-time voters as possible for registration, since the increase in the voluntary enrolment of first-time voters, who have attained 18 years of age even by 1985, has been a marginal 15% between 1985 and 2010. But in the subsequent years, it has picked up momentum going up to 73% by the year 2014. If the disenfranchisement of Telangana first-time voters, is not to be faced by the youth of other Indian States, the Union Government, should legislate, to have at least 2 ‘qualifying dates’ as defined in the Representation of Peoples’ Act, so that the youth who have attained the voting age of 18 years, need not wait for more than a year before they can exercise their franchise. The sad case of Telangana first-time voters is that, they are not able to vote, although they have attained the eligible age of 18 years, since the ‘qualifying date’ for enrolment, is taken as the first of that particular election year. That is to say, if elections are held in 2019, then 1st of January 2019 is the cut-off date for enrolment, and if the elections are held in 2018, then first of 2018, is taken as the cut-off date, for enrolment and release of the Final Electoral Rolls. Such discrepancies/ anomalies should not be allowed to play foul with the sacred ‘right to vote’ in an electoral democracy. The first-time voters, though on the electoral roll, will not be able to vote at the hustings in Telangana, because of the qualifying date of 1.1.2018, and will now cast their votes only in 2023, by which time they are well past their youth, which is internationally recognised as 15 to 23 years of age. The said denial of right to vote for the eligible youth due to technical reasons, is a ‘slur on Indian democracy’ and should be rectified at the earliest, as part of ‘electoral reforms programme’ undertaken by the Election Commission of India and in fact a Bill to that effect is pending in Parliament. In a recent study by two professors at Harvard, namely Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in their book entitled, “How democracies die” have given a checklist of symptoms of a dying democracy. Not recognizing the voters’ rights and aspirations, is one of the signs of a dying democracy. That being so, let the citizens of the Indian republic save Indian democracy from its own elected rulers, who are indifferent to the rights of first-time voters. (The writer is Advocate, Supreme Court of India, Former Addl. Advocate-General of Meghalaya)

“ *The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.* ”

-- Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No. 86 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2018

Radical shift in US Policy

TRUMP'S radical policy 'America for Americans' has received a new thrust. In one more step against illegal immigration, the US President has expressed the desire to end the right to citizenship for the children of non-citizens and unauthorised immigrants born on US soil. He has sent troops to stop an immigrant caravan from Mexico. He can do nothing against African Americans who have been integrated into US society for nearly 200 years. His campaign seems to be against the borrowing off of Americans. He proposes to strike at the root of US citizenship - the principle of Jus soli. Jus soli is a Latin term that means law of the soil. According to this principle, citizenship of a person is determined by the place where a person was born. which is almost globally accepted. So far the US was in league with all great democracies. A child born on US soil automatically became an American citizen. The colour of its skin had nothing to do with its birth.

The law of birthright citizenship in the US came in 1868 in response to the Dred Scott v. Sandford case in which Scott, a black slave, claimed that he and his wife should be granted their freedom because they had lived in the state of Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory for four years, where slavery was illegal. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was enacted to guarantee the right to citizenship for all persons born within the United States and subject to its jurisdiction. India may have shown the way to Donald Trump by opposing mass emigration from Bangladesh and the recent hassle over the National Register of Citizens in Assam.

In the US the 14th Amendment is the constitutional guarantee of American citizenship. The place of birth is the determinant. Even legal documents are not strictly necessary. Trump was wrong in claiming that the US is the only country that grants birthright citizenship. While most countries, including India, do not offer such citizenship, more than 30 countries do. Trump will of course face legal challenges. But the maverick US president does not seem to care having fallen foul of the US Supreme Court a number of times during his short term. His new move will disenfranchise millions of citizens as it would have retrospective effect. Many of them may have distinguished themselves in various fields, academic, scientific, corporate and even political. Is Trump afraid of a multi- racial constituency?

TO THE EDITOR

Medical College at Umsawli

Editor, Right from day one selection of the site at the Reid Chest Hospital, Mawprem, for establishment of a Medical College by the MUA-II government was a wrong move. The site is not at all suitable for establishment of Medical College for various reasons. First of all the area for the purpose is very small. Setting up a medical college cum hospital requires a sprawling area to accommodate the college buildings, the laboratories and all other facilities such as hostels and dining halls for medical students, playgrounds, recreation centres, parking spaces, students' and teachers' recreations parks, teachers' quarters, incinerator's and dumping areas etc. Hence the place has to be reasonably huge and suitable for setting up a medical college cum hospital. Again, the proposed site at Mawprem is overcrowded and surrounded by slums, residential and commercial areas so much so that the whole place is almost choked to death. Moreover, there is only one very narrow road leading to the site which is im-

possible to expand because of the existing residential and commercial areas. Hence, the only alternative left for the present MDA government is to shift the site to Umsawli where the new Reid Chest Hospital is built by acquiring more land to meet the requirements of the Medical College. Moreover, the new site will facilitate proper planning to suit the standards of a Medical College. Besides, it will also be environmentally friendly for the students, faculty members and members of the public.

Yours etc., Philip Marweii, Via-Email.

Tagging a Mahseer

Editor, The recent move by the Government to give a tag to the indigenous Mahseer, a state fish, is a welcome step from the conservation point of view. The endemic Mahseer species, especially the endangered golden Mahseer or Khalat in the local dialect are unique riverine species with their long slender and streamlined body shape and a unique black

It's been a week of stark contradictions in India's ongoing political nautanki. At one end we have talk of an Opposition Mahagathbandhan to oust Modi's BJP. On the other State funded perceived altruism to massage the public into deception of national and spiritual values. Exposing our fallacious trust with good governance!

Last week the Prime Minister unveiled the Statue of Unity, a 183 meter monument dedicated to Sardar Patel, Independent India's first Home Minister credited with uniting all 562 princely states into the Republic. Built at a cost of Rs 3050 crores by the BJP Gujarat Government on the banks of the Narmada its claim to fame is being the tallest in the world, 23 meters taller than China's Spring Temple Buddha and almost double the height of the US's Statue of Liberty's 93 meters.

Undoubtedly, Patel was a true blue nationalist Indian whose contribution to unify the country was remarkable, a source of inspiration for generations and needs to be lauded. But spending crores of tax payers hard earned money on his statue? Even he would have balked at the idea. Which therefore raises a moot point: What purpose does the Statue serve? Would not the money have been better spent on alleviating poverty and helping Gujarat's 3.6 million people officially living below the poverty line or health, education and homeless feeding their hunger on the neon signs of a burger? Sic.

Why did the Government not spend BJP cash? And, why doesn't it fulfil the mandate of solving people's basic problems? Remember how the BJP criticized BSP's Mayawati for splurging the aam aadmi's money to prop up her own statues at a cost of Rs 1200 crores at Ambedkar parks in Lucknow and Noida.

Today, the boot is on the other foot. Why blame Modi? All others too are no different. Politicians and Parties use statutes to expand their voter base and political footprints to areas they have very little influence. Cast in stone or metal, they plan to take their icons to every nook and corner of the country, thereby following the well-trodden path of po-

stripe running across the torso. Their golden glittering skin under the sun-piercing water distinguishes them from other fish species. These species are adapted to living in the rough cloud foaming, fast flowing turbulent incisive rapids and big boulder terrains of rivers originating from the Himalayas and flowing towards the north and northeastern India including the highly scarred and rugged plateau of Meghalaya which receives abundant monsoon. These species are deeply respected and revered by many passionate sport anglers from all over the world for their tremendous powerful rod bending and screeching line taking, full fighting strength and lasting stamina. Anglers love this hair-raising and heart-pounding experience, when the Mahseer is hooked on a line because it is as if he is being pulled on one end of the rod by a powerful demonic nymph of the abyssal depth of the river.

Mahseers have earned the nickname of water tiger for their stealth and strength in the water. These species are an apex predator and control the proliferation of other species in their environment. Their size determines how

healthy a river is. The inconvenient truth is that the elusive Mahseer population is rapidly declining in all the big and small rivers of Meghalaya as was gathered from the anecdotal narratives of fisher-folks of yesteryears. One would rarely encounter a wild Mahseer of a bigger size in the big rivers like the Kynshi, Wahblei, Wah Khri, Umngot, Umiam - Umtrew river. Isn't this a cause of concern for us as a community? Their sudden disappearance from our rivers is due to indiscriminate and destructive fishing practices prevailing in our community. Poachers use every method to get a massive catch from the rivers irrespective of size and species. Greed has overshadowed everything. Dynamite use, large scale netting and widespread pouring of toxic pesticides by people with a rapacious mentality would lead to a long term repercussion in pushing the species towards rapid decline and might push them to become unsustainable because they would not be able to reproduce their own kind unless protective efforts are initiated. The human correlation with rivers is somewhat

litical competitiveness.

It's all about leaving behind a legacy for future generation, Sic. Else who will remember one? Besides, aren't memorials part of the fishes and loaves of office? Look at the huge bronze statues of powerful leaders to eka duka Party chieftains coming out of every nook and corner of Parliament house and its surrounding areas. All stand guilty. After all, Government money is nobody's money!

Clearly, more than a colossal waste of public money, the statue represents the contempt our netagan have for the aam aadmi in whose name they govern. Predictably they will use, misuse and abuse everything even turning our iconic freedom fighters into a commodity of the bazaar.

All to satiate their lust for power and gaddi. Alas, the statue spree continues unabated. Recall in 2016 Modi laid the foundation for a gigantic and expensive memorial to Shivaji in the Arabian sea near Mumbai at a cost of Rs 3600 crores. Ostensibly, the statue is to exploit Shivaji politically and appease Maharashtra's majority Maratha community who worship him. Never mind if the statue's cost is more than the budget for Mumbai's schools and health care.

Think. Public funds allocated for everything from food grain to flood and drought subsidies inexplicably end up in the hands of our brazenly corrupt politicians. Who while swearing by democracy, love to glorify the past to justify their feudal ways. State-sponsored memorials are unabashed political projects, and no Party is an exception to this practice. Sab chalta hai.

Ironically even as the Congress lambasts the memorial sprees of others they seem to forget and refuse to explain the logic of naming nearly every airport, most Government statutory institutions and cultural hubs after the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty? Justifying it as 'honourable collective remembering na-

Tale of statues

Govt money nobody's money

By Poonam I Kaushish

ational" leaders. What to speak of re-naming roads, lanes, mohallas et al. Either way the fact is that no matter who builds what, all statues and memorials are political spectacles.

Ditto the BJP which last year celebrated RSS and Jan Sangh leader Deendayal Upadhyay Centenary by naming Agra airport after him, launching a skill development scheme to train rural youth to maintain mobile towers, repair optical fibres and fix other communication technologies across India along-with the 'Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana' for power sector reforms in rural areas and installing his statues or busts for which Rs 100 crores was allocated in the Union Budget.

The DMK too is memorial mania driven. In fact, Tamil Nadu is looked as the badlands of memorials. In 1961, Congress leader Kamaraj built his statue and got Nehru to unveil it. As the Party was waning with the DMK's meteoric rise, it resorted to inscribing the cityscape with memorials as a part of its political propaganda.

When the DMK came to power in 1967, it lined up statues of its own leaders on the same road where Kamaraj had his statue unveiled. This is not all. Houses where Congress leaders lived, including that of Nehru, Shastri and Indira have been converted into memorials.

True, it can be argued they Parties are obliged to be seen as populist in the no-holds-barred free-for-all electoral race, as it would be stupid to wish away symbolism and political lollipops to entice the electorate.

Thereby, underscoring that what ails India and its burgeoning poor is not poverty, which can be corrected, but the ruthless heartlessness of our netagan who not only lack humility but also empathy for the garib. Worse, it exposes their sheer ennui and paucity of ideas along-with accentuating their moral bankruptcy. And a perspective completely divorced from reality.

Notably, sound economic sense has been surrendered

to political gamesmanship as populist shenanigans yield better electoral rewards than reasoned issues and sustainable programmes. Also, given the economic logic that there is no such thing as a free lunch, a populist scheme is invariably paid for either in the form of higher taxes or increasing inflation.

Sadly, there is no agency which can stop public funds from being wasted, notwithstanding, expert views expressed by various committees. Thus, given the level of dishonesty, populism and irresponsibility which increasingly governs our political system along-with a leech-infested environment of the undata takes it all, our carpetbaggers refuse to let up.

In the ultimate analysis, given our narcissist polity with a proclivity for lack of integrity we need to evolve a code of governance to minimize the Executives' unjustified misuse of public funds. Time now, for the Prime Minister to realize that populism will only provide immediate succour at the expense of the future. It is no remedy for neglect of poverty eradication schemes, education and health. What's the use of building toilets in each home when there is no water?

He needs to concentrate on the big picture. Wherein, energies are channelized to address garibi through faster, broad-based growth, supported by well-functioning delivery mechanisms. The effort must be to reduce the number of people in need of handouts.

Modi needs to realize that if the statues and symbolism spree continue people will lose faith in politicians and the system of governance. Public accountability is indispensable in a democratic set-up. A democracy cannot allow exercise of public funds as private spending. Government money is certainly not Apna money, money! ---- -INFA

implementation of stricter fishing norms and practices depending on breeding season of the species are important measures. Enhancement of forest cover along river stretch, promotion of angling sport tourism and eco-watching along the river to enhance income generation and to divert the destructive activities of villagers and taking them into confidence as stakeholder partners in conservation are also imperative. Humans have depended on rivers for sustenance and civilization flourishes on river banks. Similarly civilizations decline because of mismanagement of rivers. Taking this as a note the River monster man conservationist Jeremy Wade rightly said, 'The day, the big river monster species disappears from every river in the world it wouldn't n be long for a catastrophe to befall humans.'

Yours etc., WB Syiemlieh, 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.

Modernising Railway Time, comfort for all vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

In one of its recent decisions, the Railways will soon bring an engineless high speed train (Train-18) from Howrah to New Delhi. The train, the first of its kind, has been manufactured by Integrated Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai and capable of running at 160 km per hour. The 1440 km journey between the two stations would be approximately 12 hours and reduce the present journey period of Rajdhani Express by around five hours. Before it actually starts operation, the Research Designs & Standards Organization (RDSO) will monitor the tests.

At the same time, it has also been reported recently that the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) has launched the first locomotive in the country's history, capable of hauling trains at a speed of 200 km per hour. In fact such electric locomotive had been manufacturing 5100HP WAP-5 locomotives for passenger trains for long. The WAP-5 has redesigned and it is now aerodynamic to reduce air drag at higher speeds, thereby making them more energy efficient. The gear arrangement has also been modified to maintain a maximum speed of 200 km/hour.

Locomotive-hauled trains like the Rajdhani and Shatabdi run on an average speed of 90 kmph due to several speed restrictions. With the introduction of these locomotives, the reduction in journey time would be possible if the permissible limit is proposed to be raised to 160 kmph or even more. The introduction of new trains is expected to cut down the travel time by at least 20 per cent in comparison to any train drawn by a loco due to faster acceleration and deceleration.

This has indeed been a landmark achievement of Railways as Indian trains are normally very slow. Thus in special routes, such trains have to be fast enough and manufactured with indigenous technology. Rajesh Agarwal, member (rolling stock), also announced the next series of train called Train-20 and will be capable of achieving 200 km per hour. At such a juncture, there is need for connecting all the metro cities with either the Train-18 or Train-20 within the shortest possible time, say within two years or so.

There was, in fact, no justification in spending valuable foreign exchange for survey and then importing bullet train which will run between Ahmedabad and Mumbai. It is not known what justification was advanced for such trains when congested routes like Howrah-Delhi, Mumbai-Howrah, Bangalore-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai need faster trains. But instead of focussing on this aspect, there was lot of talk of bullet train.

Obviously, political pressure from foreign countries must have pressurised the government to go for importing bullet trains. If one is a frequent traveller by train, it would be easily discernible that the poor and the lower income groups comprise around 65 to 70 per cent of the passengers. In such a situation, the resources have to be judiciously used to improve functioning of trains and improving the safety network on a priority. The Railways unfortunately has not been able to contain the accidents and improve on its poor record. Added to this, adequate flyovers would have to be built to tackle recent incidents of stampede and resultant deaths.

With most airlines offering low cost fares and good

connectivity, a large number of the people have started using this mode of transportation in recent years, and therefore the justification of a bullet train, more so with fares being inordinately high, stands no logic. Moreover, the selection of Ahmedabad city for starters appears to have been influenced by the Prime Minister to give Gujarat another feather in its cap.

Apart from the speed, these new trains would have an aerodynamic nose for reduced drag and improved aesthetics. These will also have continuous window glasses, 'automatic plug-type' sliding doors and sliding footpeds which will open and close automatically at the stations and zero discharge vacuum-based bio-toilets.

However, the technical upgradation of Railways is an imperative necessity and so also improvement of the stations, which should be the Railway Board's priority too. It must take into account that it is of utmost importance to reduce the travel time, specially between capital cities, and at the same time provide minimum comfort to passengers who travel in sleeper classes and also those unreserved. Though finances are a problem, the entire policy of the railways needs to be geared towards providing comfort and safety to the aam janata.

Finances may have to be geared up by public-private participation in modernising railway stations, bringing an end to ticketless travel as also fining those who enter stations without platform tickets etc. If sincere efforts are initiated by railway authorities, it could improve its financial situation and offer the much-needed facilities to all. This apart, there is need to check on corruption within the sector and vigilance officers must ensure that there is no more laxity.

Simultaneously, the government's plan of public-private participation in modernising railway stations and commercial use of railways - some of which may be occupied - would also help in gearing up finances of the railways. But it appears that very little has been done in this direction as the railways have not yet come up with any innovative plan.

It cannot be doubted that the Railways has to be a thoroughly professional organisation unlike most government organisations, given the mammoth operations it carries out. This professionalism and a work culture have been missing and attitudes need to change. Whether in enforcing rules or in matters of technical upgradation or in completion of projects in time, this approach may go a long way in raising revenues and help in curbing the deficit in passenger tariff. In fact, accountability has to be fixed for those at the top and middle officers than in the lower cadres.

Undeniably, it's indeed distressing to note that all policy decisions and refurbishment by subsequent governments have been largely geared for the well-off sections. The interest of the aam janata must be given topmost priority and the officers will do well if they take a ride in the sleeper class and get a feel of what they are offering. It may also be prudent to say that the functioning and finances of the railways in other Third world countries would be better though the number of passengers travelling in our country is far more.

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“ Everything is a railway junction where past and future are sliding over one another, not touching. ”

-- Timothy Morton

The Shillong Times

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BJP loss in Karnataka

THE by-election results from Karnataka – once a key base for the BJP in the South – have come as a deadly blow to the ruling party at the Centre. Clearly, the party that called the shots in the state for many years could be certified to be in retreat mode. Of the three Lok Sabha seats that were up for the bye-polls, the party could win only one, conceding one each to the Congress and the JD-Secular. Prima facie, this is a loud acknowledgement of the people’s support to the post-poll alliance cobbled by these two parties in a surprise alignment of political forces in the state post-poll May this year.

No one had expected of the JDS and the Congress to pull together for long, also as the CM post went to the junior partner in the alliance. The Congress that won almost double the number of seats, vis-à-vis JDS’, took the back seat. Now that mass acceptance has come for this alliance, chances are that it will weather odds and carry on with a renewed sense of confidence. Clearly, communal and political equations are to the advantage of the coalition government headed by HD Kumaraswamy.

The BJP, which had ruled the state with warhorse BS Yeddyurappa as chief minister in the past, failed to ably harvest the discontentment arising out of the Congress rule in the last five years, with Siddaramaiah at its head. It, however, succeeded in turning a new leaf by allying with the JDS, and put the BJP on the defensive. The BJP’s defeat in Bellary, where it reigned supreme for the past 14 years, is proof that old equations no more work to the party’s advantage in Karnataka. The muscle-flexing Reddy brothers who called all the shots for the party in the coal belt have proven to be irrelevant in the changing scenario in the state.

The signals from Karnataka are a wake-up call to the splintered Opposition forces. The Congress and others having put their best foot forward in Kamataka, out of the blue, had paused for a while after the Kumaraswamy-led ministry was put into the saddle. Bickerings of a minor nature arose often, testing the strength of the alliance, while the plans for formation of a grand alliance against the BJP at the national level faced odds. This is time to move forward. Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu has moved closer to the Congress in recent days. More of such firm steps could be expected in the coming weeks.

TO THE EDITOR

Unemployment a major issue

Editor, Students and youth are facing serious hitches after they have passed out of schools, colleges and universities. This should be the time for the greatest happiness in their life but it is vice versa in our state. After passing out our young people face frustration, depression, pressure and anxiety. This is the dilemma that students face in our state of Meghalaya. With unemployment comes despair, hopelessness, brokenness and depression. They became addicted to drugs and alcohol which in turn creates problems for their families too and society too. They are crying for jobs to make a living and to support their family but jobs elude them. The youth are voiceless and have no platform to make their tragedy and misfortune felt in the public domain. I am quite sure that every household has one if not more unemployed young person. It has become a disease which is proliferating in our state but no one really cares. Not especially those who have not experienced such travails in their homes. We are now living in very selfish times and care only for ourselves. We have be-

come selfish and indifferent about the problems of others. The politicians we have elected have turned a blind eye to this critical problem of unemployment. The Government on its part seems to encourage only blue collared jobs not the white collared variety. Should Government not think about start up capitals for youth especially the poor and down-trodden so that they can start their own small businesses? The Government seems to pay a deaf ear to these crying voices which blow in the wind. As a society we should be the voice of the voiceless. But very few speak up for real issues. I strongly believe that it is a high time for the Government to seriously address this issue faced by our youths. The people of Meghalaya can no longer remain silent spectators to this issue of unemployed youth. Many of them are now roaming in the streets of our localities with a desire for a job just so they can survive and add to the family income. If our young people commit crimes and become law-breakers can we blame them entirely? This I feel is the most neglected issue in the state. Let us as concerned citizens not take this issue lightly but engage with the Govern-

ment on the need to think out of the box to create job opportunities and to skill our youth on the market needs. Our youth have the right to live with dignity but how can they without jobs? As a young person I am just highlighting the issue with the hope that others who are more knowledgeable and intellectually capable will address this issue. Today those of us who don’t have money to give bribes to government officers and politicians have no hope of getting a job. Where do we go? And by the looks of it Government does not seem to have roadmap for the youth of the state. Yours etc Batskhem Mawlein Shillong-2

Time to close our kitchens?

Editor, Indian Oil Corporation, the supplier of LPG cylinders under brand Indane, in a statement late on Wednesday (31st October 2018) increased prices of LPG or cooking gas once again marking the sixth monthly increase since June. While the subsidised LPG was hiked to the tune of Rs.2.94 per cylinder in Delhi, the increase

Modernising railway Time, comfort for all vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Train-20 within the shortest possible time, say within two years or so. There was, in fact, no justification in spending valuable foreign exchange for survey and then importing bullet train which will run between Ahmedabad and Mumbai. It is not known what justification was advanced for such trains when congested routes like Howrah-Delhi,

logic. Moreover, the selection of Ahmedabad city for starters appears to have been influenced by the Prime Minister to give Gujarat another feather in its cap. Apart from the speed, these new trains would have an aerodynamic nose for reduced drag and improved aesthetics. These will also have continuous window glasses, 'automatic plug-type' sliding doors and slid-

“ Locomotive-hauled trains like the Rajdhani and Shatabdi run on an average speed of 90 kmph due to several speed restrictions. With the introduction of these locomotives, the reduction in journey time would be possible if the permissible limit is proposed to be raised to 160 kmph or even more.”

M u m b a i - H o w r a h , Bangalore-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai need faster trains. But instead of focussing on this aspect, there was lot of talk of bullet train. Obviously, political pressure from foreign countries must have pressurised the government to go for importing bullet trains. If one is a frequent traveller by train, it would be easily discernible that the poor and the lower income groups comprise around 65 to 70 per cent of the passengers. In such a situation, the resources have to be judiciously used to improve functioning of trains and improving the safety network on a priority. The Railways unfortunately has not been able to contain the accidents and improve on its poor record. Added to this, adequate flyovers would have to be built to tackle recent incidents of stampede and resultant deaths. With most airlines offering low cost fares and good connectivity, a large number of the people have started using this mode of transportation in recent years, and therefore the justification of a bullet train, more so with fares being inordinately high, stands no

ing footsteps which will open and close automatically at the stations and zero discharge vacuum-based bio-toilets. However, the technical upgradation of Railways is an imperative necessity and so also improvement of the stations, which should be the Railway Board’s priority too. It must take into account that it is of utmost importance to reduce the travel time, specially between capital cities, and at the same time provide minimum comfort to passengers who travel in sleeper classes and also those unreserved. Though finances are a problem, the entire policy of the railways needs to be geared towards providing comfort and safety to the aam janata. Finances may have to be geared up by public-private participation in modernising railway stations, bringing an end to ticketless travel as also fining those who enter stations without platform tickets etc. If sincere efforts are initiated by railway authorities, it could improve its financial situation and offer the much-needed facilities to all. This apart, there is need to check on corruption within the sector and vigilance officers must ensure that there is no more laxity. Simultaneously, the government’s plan of public-pri-

vate participation in modernising railway stations and commercial use of railways – some of which may be occupied – would also help in gearing up finances of the railways. But it appears that very little has been done in this direction as the railways have not yet come up with any innovative plan. It cannot be doubted that the Railways has to be a thoroughly professional organisation unlike most government organisations, given the mammoth operations it carries out. This professionalism and a work culture have been missing and attitudes need to change. Whether in enforcing rules or in matters of technical upgradation or in completion of projects in time, this approach may go a long way in raising revenues and help in curbing the deficit in passenger tariff. In fact, accountability has to be fixed for those at the top and middle officers than in the lower cadres. Undeniably, it’s indeed distressing to note that all policy decisions and refurbishment by subsequent governments have been largely geared for the well-off sections. The interest of the aam janata must be given top-most priority and the officers will do well if they take a ride in the sleeper class and get a feel of what they are offering. It may also be prudent to say that the functioning and finances of the railways in other Third world countries would be better though the number of passengers travelling in our country is far more. Primarily, the comfort of all sections has to improve for which the Railways should frame an action plan. Obviously, a major segment of the resources have to be geared in that direction so that people travelling in non-AC coaches can have a relatively comfortable journey. This is not to say that technological improvements should be made to wait but both must go hand-in-hand. --INFA

period of time the escalation of LPG price to a reasonably stable level, the rural population throughout the country would be forced to resort to massive de-forestation and use fire wood as domestic fuel adding to the rising global- warming crisis by reducing the already fast diminishing “forest-cover” to an alarming level. This unabated increase in price of cooking gas with the tacit support of the Central Government reeks of foul play. This could be a dangerous game that could lead to a mass commotion or conflict ahead of the impending general election. The very electorate that voted the ruling party today may vote them out. The Union Government may, therefore, take immediate remedial measures including the immediate exemption of GST from pricing of LPG Cylinders.

Yours etc., Samares Bandyopadhyay, 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.

Let the ‘slaughter’ of Gods begin Police can’t match resolve of Ayyappa devotees

By Aditya Aamir

Sujata. Girija. Lalitha. The trio caused an upheaval at the Sabarimala temple Wednesday morning. Blame it on Kerala women and coconut oil, Parachute! One of the ladies did not look her age (52), her hair darker than a tropical forest, her time on earth looking less than the required 50+ summers, and the male Ayyappans surged in protest, over 3,000 defiant bristling chins. The 2,300 policemen were no match and it required an Aadhaar test of age for tempers to settle. The Kerala Police enterprise to dictate proceedings, control the chessboard, came a complete cropper. Sujata, Girija and Lalitha were allowed the coveted ‘darshanam’ and they returned home (Trichur), sat-

wouldn’t, what did they think? The BJP is a political party and a pretty blatant one at that, with a bagful of lowdown tricks. The Hindu consolidation around Sabarimala was a work in progress and the BJP owned it. Did Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan err on the side of choosing the wrong side; that of the progressive instead of the regressive? Did the Congress opt right by staying neutral; with the devotee, but against the communal, in a scenario where it was hard to distinguish between the two? Maybe. But bottom-line is, the Haindava forces have succeeded in convincing Hindus that they are the “oppressed”, and it was time to “correct the histori-

“Did Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan err on the side of choosing the wrong side; that of the progressive instead of the regressive? Did the Congress opt right by staying neutral; with the devotee, but against the communal, in a scenario where it was hard to distinguish between the two? Maybe.”

ified but shaken. This was not what Kerala Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan wanted. Some top police officials will have to answer to why police bundobast was in shocking disarray? Why devotees were not sent packing immediately after their rendezvous with Swami Ayyappa? As was the plan. The plan was to keep them on the move, not take root. But, like they say, the best laid plans of men and mice... The 25-hour window to try once more to implement the Supreme Court order on women’s entry into the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple was closing by the hour, and it looked like mission impossible by the minute. The Haindava resolve not to let even one ‘yuvati’ into Swami Ayyappan’s “sight” was rock solid. Neither lack of drinking water nor locked toilets could take the rock out of cal wrong.” There is no data showing a swing in the BJP’s favour, but if the fortunes of a Haindava television channel, Janam TV, are taken as a weathercock, there is an upsurge in Hindu sentiments. The Barc ratings of Janam TV rose from rock bottom to second high in a matter of a fortnight, just behind Asianet TV, which is partly owned by BJP MP Rajeev Chandrashekhar and is contemptuously called “Vasiyanet” by the Malayali Hindutva for its pro-LDF slant. The Sabarimala Temple closes Tuesday night at 10 pm and then it is for the Supreme Court to rule on the clutch of review petitions on November 13. Depending on what the top court decides, the battle will come to an end or go ahead unchecked. It is not without significance and symbolism that gender equality and gender justice are facing a

“The Sabarimala Temple closes Tuesday night at 10 pm and then it is for the Supreme Court to rule on the clutch of review petitions on November 13. Depending on what the top court decides, the battle will come to an end or go ahead unchecked.”

their solidarity. No wonder much maligned ‘faith’ could run the gauntlet of centuries. Friday evening, a staunch communist brought his 30-year-old wife and two children aged 5 and 6 to Sabarimala, insisting that the wife be taken to the Ayyappa temple under police protection. Wife was reluctant but husband would not budge. A quick police check revealed he was a murder accused! Then, to the relief of the police, wife’s family arrived looking for “missing Anju.” Game Over! The BJP-RSS game-plan to take advantage of the “golden opportunity” provided by the SC directive, was on course. UDF and LDF went to town with “Sridharan Pillai’s criminal pettiness”, with TV news anchors asking both political formations, “Why is he not in the dock and you all in the witness box, it doesn’t add up?” But, of course, it test in a society which is supposed to be famously matriarchal but is actually notoriously patriarchal. That said, winning entry into Sabarimala is not going to make a marked difference to gender inequality. Hinduism has a plethora of 36,000 million gods and goddesses and if each one of them is not indistinguishable from the other, unique in some or the other way, then why have as many at all? A slaughter of gods is in order, and Lord Swami Ayyappa could be the first to face the guillotine. The best is, because he’s celibate, there will be no heir! And if anybody at all will mourn, besides the disenfranchised Thantri family, it will only be the unwed Malikappurathamma! Let the slaughter of gods begin. But, of course, it’s a joke only, take the 's' out of slaughter and what is left is laughter! (IPA Service)

“ *Diwali is about setting goals, not accumulating gold. As Lakshmi comes from Lakshya, meaning Goal. ’’*

– Tapan Ghosh

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No. 89 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2018

Citizenship in India

INDIA boasts of being the largest democracy in the world. But large numbers of Indians have been disenfranchised because of loopholes in the registration process. In the 2014 General Elections, 814.5 million Indians were eligible to vote. 66.4% exercised that right. The facade of egalitarianism hides dark realities. The criteria followed by central and state commissions are far from satisfactory. Prejudices of local policemen and administrators vitiate the process. A ration card, utility bills, educational records and birth certificates are perhaps not sufficient eligibility requirements. Aadhar cards and passports do not remove doubts. In Karnataka, there is a trend of disenfranchising more Muslims compared to Hindus. 15% of adults are excluded from the voters list. Muslims who were left out account for as many as 25 %. Then in many cases only one member of a family of eligible voters is on the voters roll. The rule is that only a lunatic or a convicted criminal can be eliminated. The reason all members of a family are not put on the voters list is due to negligence of family members as well as that of those who prepare the voters list.

The Election Commission prepares the electoral rolls through a process of intensive revision where house-to-house enumeration is done and electors residing in each house are registered by official enumerators who are expected to physically go from door-to-door to collect the information about electors. This process is done normally once in five years. Between two Intensive revisions, summary revisions are done every year during a specified period when persons who are left out of the electoral rolls are given an opportunity to register themselves by applying in Form-6. Voters are expected to get their names deleted from the place of earlier residence if they have shifted elsewhere and get the names included at new place of residence. Short absence from place of residence does not debar one from voting. Similarly, deletions are carried out of electors who have died or have shifted residence from one area to another outside the prescribed part of the electoral roll.

India's problem is due to laziness and inefficiency of surveyors, corruption and prejudice. This, despite the policy of the government to extend the franchise regardless of faith, wealth or caste. The Election Commission should be up and doing to remove the loopholes. US President Donald Trump's policy of disenfranchising brown Americans shows an unparalleled narrow-mindedness. Indian policy makers should not be tarred with the same brush.

TO THE EDITOR

Promoting the performing arts

Editor,
The most disheartening part about our politicians once they assume power which also reflects on the government of the day is that they announce gibberish schemes and proposals along with big talk without any concrete action. The state has the best potential to promote tourism through the local film industry and this is a nascent yet employment generating institution that should be given full support to encourage budding film makers, photographers, sound engineers, musicians and many other trades. It is disappointing that the previous government willingly gave Rs 2 crore to producers from Bollywood to promote Rock On 2 - a film that ultimately flopped, but when it came to our local talent the standard answer is, ' No Money,' and this trend continues till date. The habit of promoting unproductive festivals which do not make sense or create any avenues for our local artisans is sheer waste of public money. The saying, 'Practice what you preach,' rings out to those

who sit in their couches and warm themselves until the next elections, instead of coming out to support initiatives for local youth many of who excel in the performing arts.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

Internet, a threat to Democracy?

Editor,
In the 2016 elections it was believed that Russia had interfered in the US elections, through the social media by posting nasty and outlandish posts on social platforms that ended up influencing voters to vote in a certain way. Furthermore, during the Brexit voting they put up posts, such as, 'The EU wants to stop you from drinking tea'. This hinders democracy and preservation of human rights, as it ignites animosity towards specific groups and puts the state in jeopardy. In a world where the internet is not filtered and is constantly subjected to 'fake news,' the inaccuracy of in-

formation shared, or the half-truths, allow many to be swayed into making decisions based on such fake news. This is no longer what democracy stands for, as voting is no longer by free will but by influence from external factors. Taking the US for example, one year after the election of Trump a survey showed that given a choice, 60% of the people interviewed would have not voted for Trump again. But due to other factors, also including the post seen daily on social media and the slogans he sang, many people ended up voting for him.

In the same US elections, Facebook came under fire for selling information of users to a company called 'Cambridge Analytica' which later worked with the Republicans to target voters and to sway their votes through adverts that would arouse their fear and anger. However, although the internet seems like a bad place for democracy, there are a handful of benefits we can derive from it. For instance, the ability of politicians to connect with their voters to hear their problems and make efforts to address them is all due to this virtual connection. Fur-

ther, the internet has allowed us, as a world community, to be more in touch with each other as we are able to reach different people in different places at a quicker pace, allowing us to know and work together on difficult issues. For example, agencies like Amnesty International receive emails from across the world to put pressure on state authorities to repeal their decision on the sentencing of a human rights activist. Another good example is the #MeToo movement, where people tweet about how their rights are being violated.

So while the internet may violate certain norms by going against people's rights but if used correctly, it is a great tool in the promotion of democracy and human rights.

Yours etc.,
Evaris Pala Slong
Webster University
USA, Leiden Campus.

Amul milk economy pack costlier

Editor,

Burdened with an itinerant Government

By Patricia Mukhim

among the chattering class. But what else can we expect when people put politics at the centre of their psychological, emotional and even spiritual life? Like someone said, "This is asking too much from politics, for, once politics becomes your ethnic and moral identity it becomes impossible to compromise because compromise becomes dishonour." Let's face it. We have reached a crisis point and we don't know how to deal with this looming crisis.

Coming back to our own penchant for expecting new political players to be different, more accountable, more prudent and more oriented towards peoples' needs, we would have realised that this is a futile aspiration. Governments succumb to the pressures of those who pay them the money so they can get elected. The entire five years is 'pay back' time. At the moment the UDP which has been in the dog-house for nearly seven years seems to be controlling the plot and the direction of the MDA Government. Some of the contractors who are loyal to the UDP think this is the time to make good their service to the Party. Check out where all the major contracts are going now. Not that the same was not happening under the MUA but just that we were naive enough to believe things would be different.

In this Government even a straightforward appointment of the State Police Chief has had to go through tortuous twists and turns. You begin to wonder who is advising the Home Minister; then you dig up some dirt and realize that the HM takes his cue from some cop with an unsavoury past. It's not common for a police officer to be seen in the social company of the Home Minister. But perhaps things here are different. We tend to even sup from the same cup so long as the desires converge and each one gets what he wants. The roots of political dysfunction have sunk so deep in this society that if there is going to be any improvement then it is the society with its multiple connections and galaxy of relationships that has to improve. But politicians will not allow that. Look at how HS Shylla has demonised those with a dissenting

voice against the series of hurriedly passed legislations. They have been constructed as the "enemies of the jaidbynriew" (Khasi society). This binary of, "You have to concur with my legislations and Khasi national ambitions or you are a traitor," will have far reaching effects on society. We have already begun to list out those enemies. A cursory glance at some Facebook posts administered by certain self-appointed guardians of this society (who the cyber crime cell of the Police here is just unwilling to tackle) will give you a feel of the poison darts that are regularly shot at dissenting voices. But of course we are told to let it pass and not give much credence to such posts! That's supposed to be sane advice to victims of social media trolling. Sigh...

Meanwhile the Government and the Opposition Congress are daily engaged in a war of attrition which adds no substance to governance. The city of Shillong and the Police Bazar pedestrianised area is now a huge free-for-all market and in the evening an equally huge garbage dump. Today there's only about two feet of space left out of that 20 ft or more walk from Delhi Mistan Bhandar to Dreamland Cinema. Pedestrians and shoppers bump into each other and sometimes inadvertently stamp on the goods laid out on the streets and get a drubbing for it. Those hawkers are certainly not old residents of Shillong. I say with some certainty that they are new entrants protected by some MLAs and politicians. And my curiosity is aroused by the fact that some very powerful pressure groups are unwilling to take them on. What's the deal here? I asked some hawker from whom I bought stuff just so I can establish a company zone for him to speak up. He said, "We pay hafta to so many people to protect us." Of course he dared not name the collectors but said, "If you are from here, you will know who the bosses are." So that's the story of the hawkers and one has to believe them because it takes guts to spread the wares bought from hard earned money if they were unsure of protection to carry out their trade.

Shillongites have all but lost their voices. That's why those who can afford to, have burnt holes in their

pockets to let out mini atom bombs during Diwali. Is that a letting out of frustration, anger and the impotence of being completely helpless?

Meanwhile brothers James and Conrad will return in time for the Cherry Blossom Festival (Nov 14-17) - another jamboree created by the MUA Govt and which will continue because some people will make a killing out of such festivals. But will we still have the Cherries respond to the demands of the MDA Government and blossom in their pink finery until then? Already many have faded after they have delighted us during the peak flowering season between the last week of October and the first week of November.

News just out: RTI activist Agnes Kharshiing has just been attacked at Khliehriat where she gone to investigate the illegal coal mining activities despite the NGT ban and has sustained serious head injuries. I doubt that the criminals will ever be caught. We live with grave uncertainties

Tailpiece: Recently I was with a judge who said that the people of Shillong are so laid back they won't even lift a finger to claim their rights to good, motorable roads (the road to UCC being a case in point), or steady, potable water supply et al. He says courts hardly ever get cases from citizens which seek to redress the deprivation of their rights under the Law of Torts which provides relief to injured parties for harms caused by others and imposes liability on parties responsible for the harm, so as to deter others from committing harmful acts. Torts can shift the burden of loss from the injured party to the party who is at fault or better suited to bear the burden of the loss."

If someone suffers a broken back or a pregnant woman a miscarriage for riding on the road towards the Union Christian College (UCC), the onus for redressing that loss should be with the Government. Can citizens come forward and become more pro-active? We can't allow a government, any government to rest on its haunches and for ministers to merely enjoy foreign jaunts from World Cup Football to other sojourns even while things at home are getting from bad to worse.

Lokayukta finally!

Editor,
The long felt need of the people of Meghalaya has been answered as the former judge of Guwahati High Court Justice P K Musahary was sworn in as the first chairperson of the Meghalaya Lokayukta. An anti-corruption committee has the potential to take our nation's governance to new levels with a professed view to curb corruption and misuse of power in high places. Corruption has grown exponentially, so much so that people find it hard to believe that anyone in our polity can ever be non-corrupt. The need for Lokayukta has never been more felt and with the growing influence of money power in society, the courts of law alone under the Prevention of Corruption Act are in no position to handle the burgeoning number of crimes related to corruption.

Yours etc.,
Madhu Agrawal,
(Guinness Record Holder for letters in newspapers)
Delhi - 6

Demonetisation crippling informal economy, job market

Arun jaitley still resorting to white lies after two years

By Nitya Chakraborty

It was two years ago, on that fateful night of November 8, 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his "historic" decision of demonetization promising that it would act as a game changer in the Indian economy by driving out black money, weed out fake notes and check terror funds but the Reserve Bank of India's figures show nothing has been achieved in the last 24 months, whereas the informal economy still remains shattered leading to high joblessness and under employment.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has been continuously changing the thrust of the initial objectives announced by the PM during announcement year after year and on this second anniversary of demonetisation, he claimed in his blog that confiscation of currency was not an objective of demonetisation. Getting it into formal economy and making

jobs were lost during January-April 2017 due to demonetisation. The estimated total employment during the period was 405 million compared to 406.5 million during the preceding four months of September-December 2016. A CMIE study showed that the lasting effect of demonetization in labour participation rate is apparent in the months of 2017 and in 2018 also, the jobless growth is continuing and it is most visible in the informal sector.

The situation in the informal sector of the economy is still pathetic. According to the economic census, there are 56 million non-agricultural enterprises and if 72 million farmers are added to this, 120 million economic entities exist in the informal sector. This sector has the largest number of employment in the country and it is in distress. There is really no reliable data about the real impact of the demonetisa-

“Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are not talking of terror funds or black money. Jaitley is now talking in more general terms trying to explain how the tax collections have improved leading to more resources, better infrastructure and a better quality of life.”

the holders pay tax was the broader objective. The system required to be shaken in order to make India move from cash to digital transactions, he said. Nothing is far from truth. RBI figures again show that cash is back and there has not been substantial change in digital transactions.

On the other hand, the disruption which the demonetization created, led to deaths of about 120 persons, mostly poor many of whom died while waiting in the queue before the banks and crippled the informal economy which is still to recover. Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are not talking of terror funds or black money. Jaitley is now talking in more general terms trying to explain how the tax collections have improved leading to more resources, better infrastructure and a better quality of life.

The opposition parties have decided to observe this demonetization day as black day. The Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari has demanded an apology for running and wrecking the economy. Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has correctly said that in the case of demonetization, time has not acted as a healer, the scars and wounds to the economy are only becoming more visible with the passage of time. The Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was more direct when he said that 'though the lists of financial scams of the Modi government is endless, demonetization was a self inflicted deep wound on the economy which even two years after remains a mystery'.

In the recent weeks, much of this mystery is being unraveled as reports are appearing how some businessmen including bullion merchants took advantage of the demonetization in making huge money through fool means. Further many of the people had some inkling of the measure coming. The impact in the job market was immediate. Studies made about first four months of 2017 show that 1.5 million

tion on the rural jobs, but the rise in distress among the farmers , is an indication of the nature of woes that have hurt the informal economy. The CMIE report for the first four months of 2018 also indicate that the number of new jobs is going down. A report by the International Labour Organisation has projected that the number of unemployed has risen in India I 2017 and the trend will continue in 2018. CMIE has also recently reported that the employment situation is getting worse. The unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent in September 2018 up from 6.3 per cent in August. This is when the labour participation rate has fallen to 43.2 per cent in September 2018 from 46 plus in September 2016.

What better quality of life is the Finance Minister talking? If there are no jobs and the prospects in the next six months are dim, how can the quality of life of the people improve? Finance Minister has talked of positive impact of demonetization on collection of taxes. What is the actual position? Against the budgeted growth of 19.15 per cent of net tax revenue, the growth rate between April and September 2018 was only 7.45 per cent over the collections in the corresponding period of 2017. To reach the target, the net tax revenue has to grow by 28.21 per cent in the remaining six months of this fiscal. Is it possible?

The Indian economy is in a real mess and it is not possible to revive it before the coming Lok Sabha elections in April/May 2019. The BJP government and its frontmen including the PM and the Finance Minister will be deploying all methods to project a picture of a buoyant economy to the electorate. But that is not going to click. The Karnataka by elections results have shown that the Modi magic is not working. Arun Jaitley's bid to project demonetization in a positive manner, has also failed. Time has come for frank admission that the PM made a historic blunder on November 8, 2016 night. (IPA Service)

“ *It's the duty of any government: where there is disregard of the law, that law and order must be instituted.* ”

--Emmerson Mnangagwa

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No. 90 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2018

Law and order compromised

THE heinous attack on Agnes Kharshiing a Right to Information (RTI) and women's rights activist leading the Civil Society Women's Organisation (CSWO), and her colleague Amita Sangma deserves the severest of condemnations. Another environmental activist from Jaintia Hills was reportedly hunted down by the law enforcers for blowing the whistle on their shady deals. The activist was coerced to withdraw the FIR he filed. In March this year, another RTI activist Poipynhun Majaw who was trying to unearth the unsavoury goings-on in the cement companies of Jaintia Hills was also brutally murdered. His killers are still at large. Some arrest has been made in the Agnes Kharshiing case but one doubts if the law keepers would dig in their heels in this case, for, if the arrested spill the beans it could point at powerful people in the seat of power today. This Government had better prove that it has a handle on the law and order situation in the state. Mob violence of the kind unleashed on the CSWO activists on Thursday and earlier at journalists documenting the illegal transportation of coal are becoming the modus operandi of the coal mafia in Meghalaya.

The present situation is worsened by the fact that Chief Minister and Home Minister - two of a family, are both on a foreign tour. The Chief Minister has issued a statement that violence would be dealt with firmly but the Home Minister has maintained a stoic silence. The public is no longer convinced by empty threats that are not made good by quick arrests of criminals. Meghalaya, a state with potential to grow as a tourism destination is quickly sliding into the quicksand of lawlessness. Those in the know say that the recent transfers and postings of policemen have been orchestrated to facilitate illegal mining and transportation of coal. Those officials are now in strategic positions. Meghalaya also stands out for one fact - that some high ranking police officials also own coal mines and therefore have a vested interest in facilitating the coal trade despite the ban by the National Green Tribunal. The collusion between politicians, police, bureaucrats and the coal and cement mafia in Meghalaya is a carefully knit web of associations. This is a dangerous portend and could lead to complete collapse of law and order. It is at this juncture that civil society should raise the banner of protest and reclaim the power vested in them as citizens of a democratic country.

TO THE EDITOR

Do they belong to Shillong Cantonment Board?

Editor,

A few days back when I was on an exigent duty and while walking along the Anjalee petrol pump en route to Civil Hospital and on reaching one of the junctions leading towards the Nethralaya eye clinic, I chanced to see two youths who were in hot dispute with a senior citizen. These youths were not allowing the man to walk past unless he paid them Rs 5000 as fine for urinating in an isolated corner along this pathway. That the man was frozen with fear was unmistakable from his facial expression even as he pleaded that he did not have the amount demanded by them. However, those youths were adamant and threatened to take the victim to the Office of the Cantonment Board to be dealt with accordingly. I was moved with deep sympathy for that senior citizen who may perchance be a diabetic having to pass water more often than not. Given that I was in a tearing hurry I could not, therefore, see what transpired thereafter. Subsequently, I was informed from reliable sources that such youths are used to hanging around those areas and extracting hefty fines on unwary people,

especially the loner and the feeble looking, who happen to respond to the call of nature along these paths, but without issuing any receipts whatsoever.

Now, I have to ask the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Cantonment Board if these fine collectors are appointed staff of the Board? If that's so then why has the Board levied such a humongous amount as a penalty on an incident referred to above? If, however, the Board states otherwise then is it unaware of the existence of such extortionists? Who has authorized them to penalize those who commit nuisance? Based on these contentions, I appeal to the CEO, Cantonment Board to ensure that such hideous actions of the extortionists are nipped in the bud at the earliest so that the good name of the Shillong Cantonment Board is upheld. I also appeal to the police posted within the Cantonment area to patrol these grey areas and bring to book these anti-social elements by charging them under the proviso of penal code as indicated u/s 388 of Indian Penal Code for such revolting intimidations on unwary passers-by, especially in the evening when such goons take full advantage.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Routine versus urgent in Gogoi's court

There is discernible change in approach

By K Raveendran

When Congressman Kapil Sibal, claiming to represent the Sunni Waqf Board in the Ayodhya Ramjanmabhoomi title dispute, sought to put pressure on the three-man bench headed by the then chief justice Dipak Mishra last year to delay hearing of the case until after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he almost invited a rebuke from the court. The bench, which questioned the lawyer-politician with a flourishing practice as to what the elections had to do with the case, went ahead with the hearing and achieved steady progress, which made it appear that an early resolution of the dispute was on the cards. It also declared that no adjournments would henceforth be allowed.

But by an unexpected twist to the tale, Sibal can now have the gratification of getting his wish fulfilled by default. New Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi has adjourned the hearing to January 2019, rejecting a plea by the Uttar Pradesh government for an early decision, saying the court had its own priorities. The court's decision has led to Hindutva elements getting restive and putting pressure on the Modi government to go for the ordinance route to overcome the delay and go ahead with the construction of the Ram Mandir at the disputed site.

Justice Gogoi made it clear on his first day itself as CJI that cases would be taken up only in a routine manner and there would not be any urgent hearing of matters brought up by lawyers as very important issues. The CJI, who has been expressing frustration at the long pendency of cases at various forums, promised to come up with new parameters and streamline the practice of mentioning cases. "Till then only matters where someone is getting evicted or hanged or killed would be heard," he declared. The approach is at variance with the practice followed during Justice Dipak Misra's time, when matters of urgent nature were taken up for hearing straightaway.

Apart from the Ayodhya dispute, the new CJI has refused to consider the perceived urgency in a number

of cases, including the tricky Sabarimala issue in which a large number of review petitions have been filed in view of an explosive situation that is developing there due to stiff

the temple complex alone, to maintain order, not to speak of the elaborate bandobast all along the routes leading to the temple.

Well, it's all about approaches. Justice Gogoi

“Justice Gogoi made it clear on his first day itself as CJI that cases would be taken up only in a routine manner and there would not be any urgent hearing of matters brought up by lawyers as very important issues. The CJI, who has been expressing frustration at the long pendency of cases at various forums, promised to come up with new parameters and streamline the practice of mentioning cases.”

resistance from devotees to the entry of women to the hill shrine. The temple is scheduled to reopen for a full season lasting over two months by the middle of this month, but the issue would be taken up only a couple of days before the scheduled opening of the temple. An urgent plea to consider the matter ahead of a one-day

was one of the four judges in the dramatic presser under the leadership of Justice Chelameswar, which was all about the approaches of the former CJI. So, it is patent that the new incumbent would naturally make a break from the past.

The four judges, two of them now serving on benches headed by Justice Gogoi, had expressed seri-

“Apart from the Ayodhya dispute, the new CJI has refused to consider the perceived urgency in a number of cases, including the tricky Sabarimala issue in which a large number of review petitions have been filed in view of an explosive situation that is developing there due to stiff resistance from devotees to the entry of women to the hill shrine.”

puja on coming Monday was not allowed on the ground that it was only for one day and things can be managed. The Kerala government is deputing 5,000 security personnel, including armed commandoes at

ous issues about the ways of the former chief justice, which could "not only lead to unpleasant and undesirable consequences of creating doubt in the body politic about the integrity of the institution. Not to talk about

trouncing the BJP 4-1 in the recent bye- elections for three Lok Sabha and two Assembly seats, with the victory in Bellary ending the saffron rival's 14-year vice-like grip on this parliamentary constituency. This marginal victory may be a sign that people are able to understand that the Congress is the need of the hour. I think the people of Karnataka have realised the hardships and tribulations being faced by small businesses and the middle class because of what BJP has done in the past four and half years. Now it is high time for BJP to realize that people are losing their faith in the Party and learn lessons that the country cannot be ruled only with rhetoric. Rather, people want the country to develop and progress so that they reap the fruit of that development.

Yours etc.,
MF Kasmi,
Via email

Making mockery of hunger and deprivation

Editor,

In the famous allegorical fiction, The Happy Prince, Oscar Wilde depicted how the costly statue of the

prince began crying with sadness after seeing the plight of poor people all around. Had Sardar Patel got life in the Statue of Unity, the same thing would have happened on seeing 190.7 million hungry children and adults all over India. He had once categorically said, "My only desire is that India should be a good producer and no one should be hungry, shedding tears for food in the country."

The Statue of Unity cost India almost 3000 crore rupees when India ranks 103rd among 119 countries in the 2018 Global Hunger Index with "serious levels of hunger". Moreover, India has been identified along with Djibouti and South Sudan as the country where child wasting is most prevalent. In the 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2017' report, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN has estimated that nearly 40 per cent of the food produced in India is wasted or lost. And this costs India one lakh crore rupees every year. Obsolete technology used in infrastructure and transporting food items is the culprit for food wastage in India. We could easily solve the problems of child wasting, child stunting and hunger

the chaos that would result from such departure". The judges also referred to instances where cases "having far-reaching consequences for the nation and the institution had been assigned by the Chief Justices of this court selectively to the benches 'of their preference' without any rationale basis for such assignment."

If one applies the essence of the grievance to decisions in several cases of national importance, it may be seen to provide the ground to suspect a connection between the constitution of the bench and the nature of the decision arrived at. This was, in fact, the burden of argument in the complaint by the aggrieved judges. So, the decisions of the new CJI may be expected to reflect a departure from the line adopted by the former chief justice.

If there is one man ruling about his misfortune in the wake of the new approach, it would be Karnataka BJP leader Yeddyurappa, whose fate was sealed by a midnight hearing of a Congress-sponsored petition, which had no possibility whatsoever of making it worthy of such urgent consideration if Dipak Misra had followed the standard procedure, the type of which Justice Gogoi is now talking about. The previous midnight session was to hear a plea against the execution of Yakub Memon for his role in the 1993 Mumbai blasts case. The Congress lost the plea to stop the swearing in, but when the hearing resumed the next morning, the court reduced the 15-day window that was allowed by the Governor to one day and ordered a floor test. The rest is history.

Had the issue been considered in a routine manner, which is the prevailing order today, for all one knows about Yeddyurappa, he would have been sitting on the chair now occupied by H D Kumaraswamy. Also, the coming days will reveal how the change of approach reflects in the court's judgments. (IPA Service)

if we adopt better technology for infrastructure and transporting food items and distributing the excess food among the poor in a more effective way.

Sardar Patel must have been wondering from the height of 182 metres, how we have become so small that we fight shy of spending money on stopping food wastage. He will certainly feel sad on seeing that we shamelessly spend crores of rupees on his statue while totally ignoring his only desire to make India a country where "no one should be hungry, shedding tears for food".

It will be highly unfortunate if we keep on constructing more such costly statues to make those great persons groan under the weight of abysmal inequality, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, child labour and lack of human development.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

The rage is all in the journalist's name

Where Trump is different from Modi

By Aditya Aamir

You will have to be in a Faraday Cage to get out of earshot of toxic journalism. Better still stop breathing. Let the lifeline flatten out on the box next to the hospital bed. Part of it is because the journalist is becoming the story. The reporter is a witness. He doesn't spiel opinions. Ask Jim Acosta. His surname is an aptonym or aptonym, which explains his attitude, his style: aggression, accosting!

For that matter, Acosta's perennial target POTUS Donald Trump's surname is no less an aptonym. The guy loses the House midterms by a substantial number yet claims he came up trumps! And true to their monikers, Acosta and Trump were eyeball-to-eyeball at Trump's post-election presser. Acosta accosted Trump and questioned his

But a certain dilution in reportage is there in the media in India. For example, no media has so far asked why the Kerala Police stationed a cop with a cell-phone jamming machine outside Sabarimala chief Thantri's chamber? Isn't that a breach of privacy, arbitrary and illegal?

The much vaunted Malayalam media failed to ask some pertinent questions regarding two incidents of crime reported during the ongoing Sabarimala stir, opting to be quite at ease with whatever explanations have been offered by the Kerala Police. Swami Sandeepanand Giri's ashram is torched and the police give a clean-chit to Giri, despite glaring holes in the Swami's narrative.

Similarly, Ayyappa devotee Shivdasan goes missing

“For that matter, Acosta's perennial target POTUS Donald Trump's surname is no less an aptonym. The guy loses the House midterms by a substantial number yet claims he came up trumps! And true to their monikers, Acosta and Trump were eyeball-to-eyeball at Trump's post-election presser. Acosta accosted Trump and questioned his claims to victory.”

claims to victory.

Now, CNN's Chief White House correspondent cannot step on the White House lawns, his "hard pass" revoked by the Trump White House, triggering more name-calling from mainstream American media, which are overwhelmingly anti-Trump regardless that 'The Donald' has delivered stunning employment numbers and the "economy booming" in his two-year rule so far.

The remaining two years

and the police makes his son run from pillar to post. Then the man's body is found in a depression and the police rule it an accident. The media accepts the police version though several aspects to his death refute the accident-theory. For instance, why didn't the moped sustain damages in the fall? And who took off Shivadasan's shirt?

The problem with media in Kerala is that some of the best journalistic talent on display are journalists and anchors who, before they

“The problem with media in Kerala is that some of the best journalistic talent on display are journalists and anchors who, before they took to journalism, were student activists and members of the student-wings of political parties. They raised slogans for party and coalition and cannot be expected to change. It just doesn't sit right on their ideology. It is impossible to take their politics out of their journalism.”

promise more of the Trump-bashing and media-victimization. If it's not Acosta, there are scores of others on the WH beat, who will carry the anti-Trump baton for him. Part of it is because Trump is not shy of taking to the podium, if only to tell his base one more time that the media is the "enemy of the people." Prime Minister Narendra Modi will never face the Press one-on-one. Tiger Trump and Chicken Modi are unlikely chums!

And the media is relatively more evenly divided in India. If there's a Republic TV, there is also NDTV. For a Times Now, there is an India Today TV and Indian talk-show hosts are not like MSNBC's Racheal Maddow or CNN's Don Lemon. Off and on Nidhi Razdan will bristle but even she will not call Modi a "racial pig" like one CNN contributor labeled Donald Trump.

took to journalism, were student activists and members of the student-wings of political parties. They raised slogans for party and coalition and cannot be expected to change. It just doesn't sit right on their ideology. It is impossible to take their politics out of their journalism.

Similarly, if Prime Minister Narendra Modi will never hold a Trump-like press conference, women's right champion Republic TV is not as true to gender justice and equality after BJP president Amit Shah went to Kannur and said his piece on what the SC can deliver in terms of verdicts and what it cannot. Come 2019, Arnab will flip with the results. And come 2020, if the Democrats edge out Trump, CNN will not be sending Jim Acosta anywhere near the Democrat White House. He is and will remain an aptonym. Blame it on his name! (IPA Service)



By Gideon L Kharkongor

Cherry blossom in northeastern India, particularly around Shillong, is the species called *Prunuscera-soides*. It is also known as Wild Himalayan Cherry and it blossoms in autumn. The fruits are inedible but in perfect bloom the trees are full of pastel-hue pink and soft white blossoms.

Cherry Blossom is known in Hindi as *padma* or *padmakashtha* and the local name in Meghalaya (Khasi) is *Dieng Sohiongkrem*.

In Meghalaya, the cherry blossom was introduced by the Britishers and later on the missionaries, while travelling around the globe, brought cherry seedlings and planted them around Shillong and other places in the periphery of Shillong.

In the later years, these cherry seeds were taken to different parts of the state. The cherry blossom is also one of the species that has been included in the Social Forestry by the Department of Forest and Environment. Hence, we see the new cherry blossom trees blooming in the last few years across the state. The Cherry Blossom is a handsome middle sized (of about 15 mts high) deciduous tree. It is distributed in Khasi Hills (up to an altitude of 6,000 ft) of Meghalaya and its range extends in the Himalayas from Himachal Pradesh to South West

China, Myanmar and Thailand.

The tree sheds its leaves towards the end of the rainy season. Flowers are usually pink in colour, fading into white, appearing without or with leaves. There are two types of cherries — one edible (fruits) and the other, ornamental (flowers).

The probable origin of this variety of the cherry is the Himalayas. The wood is hard, strong, durable and the branches make excellent walking sticks. The fruits give a dark green dye and the seeds are used for manufacturing necklaces. The Cherry Blossom, when in full bloom, is a majestic sight to behold.

Though no enumeration has been done, the forest official of the state has put the number as low as 2000 trees in Shillong. Between 2015 and 2017 the State Forest Department planted about 5,000 cherry trees in and around Shillong. These include avenue plantations and along the highway passing through Shillong. According to a forest official it is said that in the next three to five years the cherry blossom trees will be in full bloom.

The Cherry Blossom Festival started in 2016 has witnessed the visit of a large number of tourists coming from other states of India and from abroad. Such an important festival would definitely boost up the tourism industry in the state. Such festivals help in restoring the pristine environment around Shillong which has



of its colder climate and then spreads to the core of the city. The delay in flowering may also be attributed to climate change as many institutions like the Institute of Bio-Resources and Sustainable Development (Manipur) has found that the unique bio-resource of the late flowering of the cherries has come as indicator of climate change.

A cherry blossom (or commonly known in Japan as sakura) is the flower of any of several trees of genus *Prunus*, particularly the Japanese cherry, *Prunusserrulata*.

Prunusserrulata or Japanese Cherry, also called Hill Cherry, Oriental Cherry or East Asian Cherry, is a species of cherry native to Japan, Korea and China and is used for its spring cherry blossom displays and festivals.

The *Prunusserrulata* is a small deciduous tree of short single trunk with a dense crown reaching a height of 26–39 feet. The smooth bark is chestnut-brown with prominent horizontal lenticles. The leaves are simple, ovate-lanceolate, 5–13 cm long and 3–6 cm broad, with short petioles and the serrated or doubly serrated margins. The leaves are arranged alternately. At the end of autumn, the green leaves turn yellow, red or crimson. Many of the varieties that have been cultivated for ornamental use do not produce fruits. Edible cherries generally come from cultivars of the

In Japan, cherry blossom symbolises clouds due to their nature of blooming en masse

seen sprawling of ‘concrete jungles’ in the past few years.

The festival will also showcase, preserve and promote the rich art, culture, environment and biodiversity of the state. This festival celebrates the autumn cherry blossoms with several community events including guided night walks under illuminated cherry blossoms, live musical events, a beauty pageant and stalls showcasing the cuisine, arts and craft of the region. Alongside, programmes like photography competitions, bicycle rallies, storytelling sessions and sports showcase the talent of the youth during the festival.

Cherry blossom normally blooms during the onset of the cold season. At a micro level, the blooming of the flowers can be seen increasing at the higher altitude. Hence, there is no hesitation in saying that the flowering of the trees can be first seen at Upper Shillong because

related species *Prunusavium* and *Prunuscera-sus*. Cherry blossom is also closely related to the *Prunus* trees such as the almond, peach, plum and apricot and more distantly to apples, pears and roses.

There are about 200 cultivars or varieties of the sakura or the cherry blossom trees. Currently it is widely distributed, especially in the temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere including Japan, Taiwan, Korea, China, West Siberia, Iran, Pakistan, India, Canada, and the United States. Along with the chrysanthemum, the cherry blossom is considered the national flower of Japan. It is found in the Himalayan states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, North Bengal and North East India especially in Meghalaya. Temple Towns like Kalpa, Sangla and Narkanda have cherry blossom during spring and their flowers are often offered to appease the gods.

In Japan, the cherry blossom symbolises clouds due to their nature of blooming en masse, besides being an enduring metaphor for the ephemeral nature of life — an aspect of Japanese cultural tradition that is often associated with Buddhist influence. This is embodied in the concept of *mono no aware* which literally means ‘the pathos of things’ and also translated as ‘an empathy toward things’.

The Japanese have the Festival of Hanami or the Cherry Blossom viewing where people would come out of their homes and enjoy the viewing of the flowers for hours together. The blooming of the flowers is during the spring time where it also coincides with the opening of schools and offices in Japan while in Meghalaya it coincides with the 100 Drums Festival or the Wangala dance and the Shad Pomblang or Shad Nongkrem.

During World War II, cherry blossom was used to motivate the Japanese people, to stoke up the spirit of nationalism and militarism among the populace. Even prior to the war, the Cherry Blossom was used in propaganda to inspire the ‘Japanese spirit’ who was ‘ready like the myriad cherry blossoms to scatter’.

A cherry blossom painted on the side of the bomber symbolised the intensity and brevity of life. In this way, the aesthetic association was altered such that falling cherry petals came to represent the sacrifice of the youth in suicide missions to honour the emperor. The first kamikaze unit had a subunit called Yamazakura or wild cherry blossom.

A Japanese folk story of the Sakura or cherry blossom tree says that once there was a handsome boy called a Natsume who met Sakura, a spirit which lived beside a beautiful tree that glowed by the moonlight and bloomed beautifully. Natsume and Sakura got married but soon Sakura’s time on earth came to an end. While leaving, she gave Natsume a seed and promised to remain by his side forever. From then on, the tree was called Sakura or cherry blossom tree.

(The author is an associate professor at St Edmund’s College)
Photos: Bertrand Dkhar & Rajesh Dutta

Untold tales of Kaziranga, the pride of Assam

Kaziranga frequently makes headline but for the wrong reason. Poaching, flood and apathy of authorities to take sustainable and effective measures have always been highlighted clouding hope for change in the national sanctuary. Despite all these, journalist-turned-author Dileep Chandan, in his latest book *Ballad of Kaziranga* sees light at the end of tunnel. His fiction, set in Kaziranga, ends on a positive note.

Chandan, who devoted over five years to this novel, says, *Ballad of Kaziranga* is an attempt on my part to speak about not just the problems wildlife sanctuaries world over are facing today but also to highlight the work the state agencies and voluntary organisations are doing to preserve these sanctuaries. Kaziranga happens to be a small piece, an important one though, in the world-wide scenario.”

In his career as a journalist over 32 years, Chandan has intensively reported on the wildlife sanctuary. “I was always curious about Kaziranga. But there were so many things which I could not express in my news reports. I took six years (to research on the place) though I did not stay there continuously. Also, I have so many friends there in the administration and police (who helped in the research). Then I took two and a half years to write the book,” the author, who has 18 books to his credit, told The Shillong Times over phone from Guwahati.

Chandan knew the importance of putting Kaziranga as the backdrop in his novel.

“Kaziranga is every Assamese’s pride and joy. My novel is not just about the wild life and rhino poaching, but a complete picture of the life of the people living in and around Kaziranga, their culture, the life and problems of the forest guards, natural calamities like flood which Kaziranga faces almost every year and the struggle of the wild animals for their survival. And of course, not to forget its history. Hope this novel will be able to generate awareness about



(Above) A safari at Kaziranga National Park; and Dileep Chandan in Chandigarh

Kaziranga among people,” a press statement quoted Chandan as saying.

The book is originally in Assamese and has been translated by Parbina Rashid.

A discussion on the deep secrets of Kaziranga, which makes up the subject of Chandan’s book, was held at Chandigarh Literature Festival 2018 on November 3. The author, Rashid and critic Maninder Sidhu were the speakers.

“Probably I would have never known the real Kaziranga, had I not chanced upon Dileep Chandan’s novel *Kaziranga Ballad*, which hooked me, not to just read it from cover to cover but to translate it so that the



treasure this book contains reaches a wider section,” says Rashid, a senior journalist with The Tribune, Chandigarh, who hails from Assam and is now settled in Chandigarh.

Kaziranga has an interesting history. In 1904, Mary Curzon, the wife of Viceroy Lord Curzon, came to Kaziranga to see the world famous one-horned rhino. Despite spending several days, she could not find a single rhino.

Disappointed, she pestered her husband to preserve the one-horned rhino by declaring Kaziranga a reserved forest. After a few months, on June 5, 1905, steps were taken to preserve this 232-square km of forest area as a reserved forest. This national park, now, is not just a hub of one-horn rhinos and a plethora of flora and fauna but also the source of geopolitik.

Ballad of Kaziranga, with 26 chapters, sings a tune which is happy, intriguing and sad but never for a moment allows the reader to lose hope.

That is the beauty of Chandan’s narratives, which blend facts seamlessly with fiction, making Kaziranga very real, very contemporary, very relatable.

Chandan told The Shillong Times that there is no protagonist in the story and nature is an important character.

“What I wanted portray is that there are many people, including several government officials, who are working towards bettering the situation and save Kaziranga. Hence the positivity in the story,” the author said when asked why he is so hopeful about a solution in the long run.

But when it comes to ground reality, the award-winning author said none of the governments has so far taken this issue up seriously. “This is a national park and Assam’s pride. So there has to be a proper strategy to save it. The problems, like poaching, can be tackled through correct measures,” the author said.

The story unfolds with Guwahati-based builder AmalDuara planning to open a resort in Kaziranga. He

includes his cousin Arunabh, a journalist by profession and Arunabh’s childhood friend Rishi, a musician, in his mission. He has one more person to see him through his venture, his best friend from college Hridayanada, who is a range officer with the Forest Department and posted in Kaziranga.

As the four diverse characters get united with the sole aim to build the resort, events happen; stories unfold. Rhinoceros poaching, internal politics, illegal encroachment of forest land, problems of the villagers in and around, attack on the wild and attack by the wild, natural calamities, daring raids by forest guards, political intervention and amidst all this chaos, germinates a beautiful love story.

Chandan said the book is a humble attempt to make people aware of the problems in Kaziranga. “A novel is another way to getting people’s attention a particular issue. I have also tried to do the same. I hope the book attracts more young readers so that they too know about the goings-on. I also feel that more books should be written on Kaziranga as well as other environmental issues,” he added.

Chandan is a popular novelist and writer in Assamese language. Till now he has published 18 books on various facets of society and the North East. Among them one is a biography and another collection of essays on his experiences in journalism.

For his latest novel *Kaziranga Ballad*, he has been awarded with the Sayed Abdul Malik Literary Award in Assam.

His first novel was on ‘Majuli’ which went into third editions with several thousand copies. This novel deals with the problems of the biggest river-island in the world. His other novels are based on issues that have been plaguing North-east, including insurgency and history. Another novel of his, ‘JanosaPahori Gola’, which is based on the archaeological history of Assam has been well received. He is now busy with research work for his next novel.

~ By Our Reporter

Should we go to temples

Sadhguru. Isha Foundation



No other culture has looked at life with as much depth and profoundness as Indian culture has. Here, God is not the ultimate focus of life. Liberation or mukti is the ultimate goal. Liberation is about becoming free — not just from the devil but from god and heaven too! For this, we created many tools in the form of deities, mantras, rituals, practices and processes — both inward and outward. Nowhere else on the planet have people looked at these things as profoundly as we have. Gods and goddesses were created by us. This is the only culture that has given you the freedom to create your own god. This is the highest level of freedom.

Temples were not places of worship or prayer. They were energy centres that you are supposed to make use of. Temples were built according to what is referred to as Agama Shastra — the five fundamental principles through which you can generate a certain dimension of energy. This is the science of consecration. If you convert mud into food, that is called agriculture. If you make food into flesh and bone, that is called digestion. If you make this flesh and bone into mud once again, that is called cremation. Simi-

larly, if you can make a stone or even an empty space into a divine process, if you can make it reverberate with the highest level of intensity, that is consecration. A consecrated space is of immense value because it is an incubation for a human being to flower into greater possibilities.

In southern India, traditionally, when you went to a temple, no one told you to pray or appeal to God about your business, family or whatever else. When you go to a temple, you are supposed to sit there for some time. Nowadays, a whole lot of people just touch their bottom to the floor and go. That’s not the idea. The idea is it is a public battery-charging place.

The nature of the world is such that there is a conflict in every transaction — what is my profit is your loss, what is your profit is my loss. If this is not lubricated with grace, every transaction — whether it is within the family or outside, in the marketplace — will become frictious. So, the first thing you did in the morning was to imbibe a certain energy before you went out into the world. At the same time, the instructions also said that if you are on the spiritual path, you need not go to the temple because now you have a self-charging system. You don’t have to go to the public battery charger.

It is like there was a time when there used to be a public tap. Everyone would go and stand there. But once you got your own tap at home, you

did not go to the public tap anymore. So, the most important thing is to turn inward because once you turn inward, you will not need any outside help. It is all right to create a supportive atmosphere and an incubating climate so that everyone can get it. But for an individual person, whatever the outside situation, once you turn inward, it does not need any outside support. If you have turned inward, you don’t have to go and stand in a queue. But if you have not turned inward, someone created a place that you can experience.

These places are generally known as teerthas. Teertha means a consecrated or energised space, water body or whatever else. Those who create these are known as teerthankars. Powerful teerthas have been created in this land, which one can definitely make use of. But the best thing is to turn inward because ultimately, that which is the source of life – whether you call that the Creator or whatever other name — is within you. When the source of creation is within you, you should not be consulting anyone else. If you want to know life, you must turn inward. But till then, you can make use of the external supports that have been created.

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



Pexels

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Moon trine Uranus on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. The coming 12 months are very good for you. There will be a lot of hard work, but you will surely get success. You may start a new business. There can be increased tussles in your family, which can be overcome if you remain patience. There may also be increased emotional issues like fight with someone, anxiety due to the person you are in love with, being saddened due to the sadness of someone close to you. You will confidently overcome any problems caused by people who dislike you.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will take action, plan ahead and seize opportunities. You would eagerly throw yourself into learning and gathering information. A travel, publishing, creative, or educational opportunity falls into your lap. Personal relationships are in focus. A tussle between time spent with loved one or children, and time spent with friends or group activities, is likely to pull you in different directions. Your responsibilities may interfere with your social life. Responsibilities on the home front are likely to conflict with career matters. A career or reputation matter also needs attention. You would be able to find a way to strike a balance between self-gratification and the obligations of daily life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This is an excellent phase for budget-making, asking for a raise, and discovering new ways to boost your income. You would organize your personal finances. It's an excellent time to present your ideas, state your case and get up to date with your emails, phone calls and communication. Career offers come now, and money owed to you could also arrive suddenly. A balanced approach to life, in terms of realistic expectations, is the best approach for maximizing success. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus help you to achieve what you set out to do in domestic and professional life during the coming phase.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This planetary configuration is an excellent combination for negotiations, marriage, and business partnerships. Expansion, confidence, and hopefulness are keywords at this time. People are bound to recognize your leadership skills and talents. It is a friendly time, when it is easy to enjoy life and the company of others. Focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends and exploration. A new project begun has a good chance of being successful and long-lasting. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. You have to get yourself organized, work to build your resources and keep busy. A loved one is paying a lot of attention to you, and it feels fabulous.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The position of stars indicates that you are feeling good about yourself and confident about your future. You're more likely to enjoy your increased exposure and recognition on a professional level. Increased responsibilities continue to be an issue in your life, but you feel more in control. The way you present your ideas, certainly helping to smooth over differences in your personal relationships. You are thinking more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion and warmth. You possess strong artistic sensitivity, and you are able to express your feelings openly and candidly this week. You may visit relatives and family friends. Meditation and inner focus lift you to higher levels of consciousness.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is an outstanding period for work, money and career. This is a time for growth and development. Finances, taxes, and intimacy are main themes. You are inspired and could even inspire others with your words. The desire for action and adventure may impel you to travel or to undertake a challenging enterprise. You want your objectives to reflect what you're really about, and you are likely to rid yourself of unsatisfying goals. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. Surprises surrounding intimate matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate and focused.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

As the planetary configuration brings unusualness and curiosity in your relationships you feel they are more important to you now. It's an excellent time for travel, hobbies, higher education, communications, and learning. You are instinctively starting a new phase in your life. It's time to give your life a makeover, a time of

new beginnings and fresh energy. Disputes over shared resources, joint finances, or anything which you hold in common with another are more likely and you are prone to impulsiveness and recklessness regarding such matters. It would be much better for you to go solo right now rather than attempt a cooperative endeavor. Your health and vitality are quite good, and you need physical outlets for your energies now.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You are likely to be actively involved with teamwork and collaboration with others. You are taking on new responsibilities, but generally enjoy the challenges. Concerns about your career, work, long-term goals and life direction, reputation and public image, and professional issues arise now. This is a good time for peaceful meditation and spiritual renewal. You are more perceptive and sensitive and easily affected by what is going on in your environment, particularly the feelings and emotional currents of the people around you. Being at home or in a comfortable, supportive atmosphere feels best.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period brings good financial returns. Your desire for comfort, security and privacy is stronger now and spending some quality time with your family or by yourself at home is satisfying. You will get yourself organized, work to build your resources and keep busy. Channeled positively, you could move mountains when it comes to pushing your projects ahead. If mishandled, however, you could be argumentative, stressed, and hell-bent on having your way. Avoid taking extreme measures to make things happen your way, and avoid people who might be doing same. Also, sharing and comparing your spiritual, religious, or philosophical interests with a friend or loved one may open up a whole new dimension of your relationship.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

New horizons in your romantic and love life open up. You may also wish to enhance your personal appearance in some way, such as getting a new hair style or purchasing clothing, cosmetics, and the like. Social gatherings are also very positive for you now. You also tend to spend money on impulse or whim, especially on something that has more emotional appeal than practical value. You might enjoy favourable outcomes when it comes to legal affairs, education, and travel. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. At this time you are inclined to invest your time and money into making your environment more beautiful and comfortable.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Domestic or family matters are emphasized by the planetary combination. You need not over-analyze personal relationships but rather respond with your heart and deep feelings and a new understanding and maturity with others around you at home and work. This is a time for taking care of your possessions and personal belongings. Simple activities such as washing your car, putting your home in order, maintaining your yard, or attending to your wardrobe give you a sense of satisfaction and security. You are a peacemaker since harmony in your environment seems more important than ever. Loving relationships, giving and receiving affection, and attracting people into your life who are good for you are very likely at this time.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This phase brings mixed results. You feel more comfortable with the way your relationships are right now. You seek out and receive assurance from family, old friends and allies. Also, your emotions are more intense and you may overreact to some encounter. You can emerge from this period with more compassion and sensitivity toward loved ones, once you free yourself from being too dependent upon them. At this time it is easy for you to express yourself boldly and confidently. Concern over health, diet and nutrition, putting your life in order, and self-improvement is also important this week.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your career, social standing, or reputation is favored at this time, especially by making personal contact with superiors or by socializing and making friendly contacts at work. You may make a good friend or meet someone beautiful and charming through your work. Now is also a good time to enhance your public standing and to create good will with the public. Your desire for comfort, security, and privacy is stronger now and spending some quality time with your family or by yourself at home is satisfying. This is a time for going within to replenish yourself in order to meet the challenges and stresses of your usual activities. Domestic and family matters are emphasized at this time.

‘Not bothered about length of role’

Gangs of Wasseypur actor **Sanjay Singh**, who has worked with filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap and RS Prasanna, will be seen in upcoming Hindi film Surgical Strike, that stars young Vicky Kaushal. At a time the topics of nepotism and casting couch are making noise in the Mumbai film industry, Sanjay, in a recent interview, spoke not only about his upcoming projects but also his road to Bollywood. **IBNS-TWF** brings some excerpts...

You have worked with renowned directors like Anurag Kashyap on Gangs of Wasseypur 2 and RS Prasanna on Shubh Mangal Saavdhan. How was your experience?

Anurag Kashyap is just like a child. He is always very excited and eager to get the best out of his actors. I had done a small part in a scene in ‘Gangs of Wasseypur 2’. I remember he was very happy to see the way the scene shaped up and asked Nawaz (Nawazuddin Siddiqui), Manoj sir and the other actors to come and have a look at the scene on the monitor. Working with him was an absolute joy as he was always very excited and jubilant on the sets. On the other hand, Prasanna is calm and humble person. I had a brief role in ‘Shubh Mangal Saavdhan’ but from whatever little interaction I had with him, I could figure out that he was a very grounded human being.

What is the biggest thing or lesson you learnt at the National School of Drama?

The National School of Drama gives you a lot of exposure, not just as an actor but also as a human being. It helps in expanding your horizon and gives one the ability to think beyond all that you have learnt in your life. One finds students coming from different states or from foreign countries. One gets abreast of different kinds of culture and sensibilities and that helps you grow as a person. He will also get to be trained by some of the best faculty members in the country.

You have trained extensively in acting. Apart from studying at the National School of Drama, you have also obtained a Master's degree in acting from the Punjab University. The industry has a mix of trained and untrained actors.

People like me who do not come from a film background, do not get opportunities very easily. Unlike people who are from the industry or come from film families, we have to work really hard to prove ourselves and get that one break which can help us in propelling our career forward. Training is almost like a weapon for actors who



come into the industry without any reference or contact. Being a trained actor helps you in understanding your craft better, so that when you face the camera finally you give a good account of yourself. My training gave me the confidence to take it up as a profession and get into the industry.

People like me who do not come from a film background, do not get opportunities easily. Unlike people who are from the industry or come from film families, we have to work really hard to prove ourselves

You played the lead role in Murari The Mad Gentleman and have done supporting parts in other films. What are the roles you would ideally like to play?
I am not bothered about the length of a role. I am willing to play both lead

roles and supporting parts as long as I feel the character that I am playing is pivotal to the storyline. When I started out, I did some small roles but now, I am more careful about the work I take up and make a conscious effort to play parts that add some value to the film.

Would you like to do something in the digital space?

I am in talks with a few people for a couple of projects in the digital space. As an actor, I just want to be a part of good projects. The medium is not much of an importance to me. If I am offered a good role in a web-series or even a short film, I would love to do it.

Can you share something about your forthcoming projects?

Surgical Strike should be out soon. I have shot for a film called *Iski Uski Sabki* which has Sanjai Mishra, Sahil Vaid, Anjali Patil and Prashant Narayanan in it. I am playing one of the lead parts in the film. I am also doing a film called *Chidi Balla* which co-stars Abhimanyu Singh, Chetan Sharma, Mayur More and Ranjan Raj. There are a bunch of good projects which should come out one by one. All of these are good films but have been made on a small scale. It gets a difficult for smaller films to reach out to a large audience. I hope they all find their audience and get a lot of love from them.

Contribute to rural devp

By Ranjan K Baruah

In our last edition we had published about rural development. There is another similar discipline of studies for people who are interested in social change. Well, today we are talking about rural management as a course.

Rural management is the study of planning, organising, directing and controlling of rural area, co-operatives, agribusiness and allied fields. It merges the knowledge of management studies and applying it in the rural context. Most of the courses are designed in such a way that the concepts taught in the class are applied in real life through training, case studies and interaction with rural people.

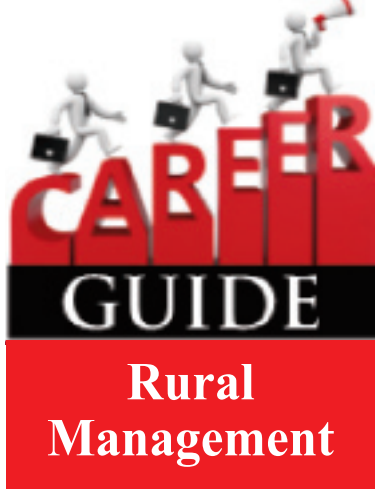
There are many academic institutions within India offering courses on rural management. Notable among them are Institute of Rural Management, Anand. The institutes offer either two-year Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Management or two-year Masters in Business Administration (MBA-Rural Management).

Rural management graduates work in areas like sustainable rural livelihoods, agri-business management, co-operatives, climate change, micro-finance, corporate social responsibility, natural resources management, rural marketing, commodity trading and marketing and social entrepreneurship. As India is still based on rural society as most of its population still resides in rural areas so courses like rural management bring new vistas for young people.

Apart from academic qualification, one should have employability skills and patience as working in urban and rural areas are different. One must be an expert in communication and should possess life skills to sustain in rural areas. There are many opportunities in our region too and young people may take up courses like rural management. It is a discipline which



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helps one to earn name and fame and also contribute to the progress of the society. Aspirants must be ready to work with people and not merely working for the people.

Updates:

Women Scientist Scheme-B (WOS-B) 2018-19 invites applications from women scientists and

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“I don't think necessity is the mother of invention - invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness, possibly also from laziness. To save oneself trouble.”

--- Agatha Christie

The Shillong Times

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DeMonetisation and Rajan

AFTER a long political slugfest, and no celebrations this year to mark the second anniversary of Demonetisation, here comes Raghuram Rajan stating in unmistakable terms that the controversial governmental step has worked to the disadvantage of the national economy. As former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and a highly respected figure at that, he should know. Notably, he has stated the same about another of the Modi government’s step - the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime aimed at unifying the taxation systems across the country – the next logical market intervention step after the economic reforms of the early 1990s. One perceives that Rajan, now gainfully engaged in academic pursuits in the US and straddling the global economic fora, has no axe to grind when he stated as much at a university lecture series in Berkeley. This is unlike the cacophony of criticism of Demonetisation from political heavyweights within the country. Clearly, this step has caused immense problems to not just micro and macro businesses but also people across the board. The original claims that Demonetisation would help eliminate black money has proven to be hogwash. Almost the entire crop of currency returned to the banks and the black was converted to white money through ingenious ways. This is both curious and surprising. It shows how the systems are open to aggressive manipulations. Prime Minister Modi clearly failed to grasp the potential for mischief when he announced the step out of the blue and obviously without proper preparations.

Banking institutions themselves – not excluding RBI – came out in a bad light amid their perceived acts of omissions and commissions in relation to handling this situation. It is safe to suspect that lots of mischief had been played out as is also evident from reports that rackets are still operating to collect demonetised notes in exchange for new notes – for a cut. At the same time, the entire lot of currency in circulation has, for now at least, become taxable money and the exchequer would stand to benefit. GST, originally conceived by the UPA and taken forward by the Modi government, was the calling of the times. In its implementation, there were too many glitches, and these were only to be expected. Markets have been badly shaken. Rectifications are a normal process and would take time. Be that as it may, it would be curious to watch how these two steps would impact on PM Modi’s future and the General Elections 2019.

Coal and Crime a Dangerous Concoction

By H H Mohrmen

Whenever concerned citizens raise their voices against illegal mining and transportation of coal they are called ‘ba bishni, ba lushia ya ka ja kpoh kiwei’ which means that they are jealous of other’s fortunes or that they interfere with the livelihoods of other. This is a common complaint by those who are engaged in mining, but the point is that mining of coal and transporting of the same is illegal after the NGT has banned the activities in 2014. So, how can one say that it is one’s livelihood when the activity is illegal in the first place? The drugs cartel or dealers can make the same argument that one cannot interfere in their activity because it is their livelihood.

This is not the first time that people were attacked by mob or the truck drivers for daring to stand against the mining activities. Two journalists with an electronic media were similarly attacked (and the same recorded on live video) which was wildly reported in the press during that time. In November of the year 2014 two media persons were attacked while they were performing their duties and the two were only recording the violation of the National Green Tribunal order by the trucks when it was first implemented. The perpetrator of the crime who instigated the mob to attack the journalists was none other than the President of the Jaiñtia Hills Truck Owners and Drivers’ Association then.

Although the criminal act occurred in the area which is under the jurisdiction of the West Jaiñtia Hills, but the incident is similar to what has happened last Thursday on Agnes Kharshiing. The alleged perpetrators of the crime are also a group of the same people and it happened on the same National Highway 44. The crime also happened in 2014 when the Congress-led government was in power, so one government cannot blame the other because when it comes to the interests of the coal mining barons they are all but different sides of the same coin. The mining lobby is one group that they cannot ignore.

When another RTI activist and pressure group leader Poipynhun Majaw was murdered close to the office of the Deputy Commissioner East Jaiñtia Hills, Khliehriat, the Home minister promised to bring

the culprits to book, but what has happened till date? Did the Home Minister even make any enquiries on the progress of the case? Or did he just make the promise for the heck of it and forgot it the very same moment he made that commitment. There is no report of police arresting the main culprit involved in the murder of Poipynhun Majaw, or the case is yet to reach its logical conclusion. And people need to know what happened to the case? This lackadaisical attitude on the part of the police only shows the lack of seriousness in the way the Government handles the law and order situation in the state.

The criminals are emboldened by the ineffective law enforcement machinery which has miserably failed to help curb crime in the area. There were also reports of a woman being murdered in her own rented house. This

The Police should deal with this kind of issue with iron fists so that criminals are punished as per the law of the land. Nobody should be treated with velvet gloves. More importantly the Police needs to come out clean on the allegations against some of the police personnel.

case too still hangs fire. The Police in the East Jaiñtia Hills need to roll up their sleeves and help deliver justice to the deserving members of society. They cannot remain complacent because it will only encourage criminal elements in the area to raise their ugly heads and take the law in their own hands.

Many will assume that this attack on Agnes Kharshiing too will meet the same fate and will slip from public memory very soon but the truth is that she is a different breed of activist. Agnes is the only face in the state who takes the rights of women in distress seriously. Many rape cases or cases of domestic violence would not have been reported if it is not for her for initiative. I know many cases which she took up and ensured that the perpetrator(s) of the crime are punished and the case brought to its logical conclusion. She is not only an RTI activist but she is

of their Organisation have committed a heinous crime. If they are leaders of the Association they should be responsible for any action committed by the members particularly when not one, but a group of 30 to 40 drivers were involved in the crime.

The Government should also take to task those who encourage and instigate crimes on social media. Right now there are plenty of posts on Facebook and WhatsApp which have crossed the limits of arguing with decency and instead encourage people to engage in violent activities. From the thread on the debate on social media it is obvious that there are people who are all out to attack those who are against their interests even if it means breaking the law. It is in the minds of such people that the seeds of hatred is sowed which later manifests itself into violent acts. Social media is where the elements can be identified and the evil nipped in the bud.

The dangerous trend that is growing in the state is the increasing number of cases where people take the law in their own hands. The question is what makes people think that they can take the law in their own hands? Is it because the Government is too soft in the way it handles crime? Or is it because of the lack of civic sense amongst the citizens to respect the law? Or it is because people don’t care about the law anyway? Whatever be the reason this is a very serious issue that the government has to take immediate action to solve this problem. The Police should deal with this kind of issue with iron fists so that criminals are punished as per the law of the land. Nobody should be treated with velvet gloves. More importantly the Police needs to come out clean on the allegations against some of the police personnel.

This incident also raises another pertinent question as to what has happened to ‘ka Ri tipbriew tip Blei,’ when two women were mercilessly attacked by the goons who belong to the same community. The society which prides itself of its values of respecting fellow human beings as much as it respects God, is now seeing its moral values sliding downhill. Who can save the community from sliding down the moral precipice? That is the question that is crying out for an answer.

Mind, matter and AI

By Prem Chandran

With China introducing AI in TV news reading, Artificial Intelligence is set to make bigger waves and power the Fourth Industrial Revolution in surprisingly new ways. India, though, is just making baby-steps.

The 20th Century ended with chimes of the spread of a new revolution. Information Technology (IT) and Internet took control of the world. Immense possibilities opened up, a sense of new perfection came to the workplaces, there’s speedy resolution of complex mathematical and other problems, and excellence remained as the byword for fresh forays by IT into various new and unexplored fields. With this as the base, a stage is set wherein Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the new tech mantra.

Artificial Intelligence, in short, is a scientific way of programming computers to do what human mind does, like having the power to think and take decisions quickly. Making machines have a mind of their own is a scientific task involving use of simple algorithms and pre-defined patterns. Its successes, though long-awaited and hard-earned, are for real. AI is today increasingly being used in myriad applications, and they are certified to perform better and faster than the human mind.

China, a late entrant into the field, has made a major mark. It has both surprised and mesmerised the world with introduction of AI in news presentation at television studios. Qiu Hao, the digital version of a news anchor, presented news for Xinhua from studio, wearing a predictable red tie, presenting the right emotions and laying emphasis at right places of news-reading, making it an impressive experience for the audience. More than aspects like saving costs, technology is overtaking man in surprisingly new ways. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, guided largely by AI, will be worth a watch.

Decades of efforts went into the evolution of Artificial Intelligence – initially also raising ethical questions and comparisons of a Dr Frankenstein Monster being in the making. Year 1997 was a turning point. After the initial pessimism that marked the evolution of AI, its effect came in a spectacular manner. A computer-induced chess playing system by name Deep Blue floored reigning world chess champion, Garry Kasparov – marking a major victory of artificial intelligence over human intelligence.

The path to AI’s success was paved with thorns. Funding for Artificial Intelligence – which first came from the US Defence some 70 years ago and then from some others including the UK – dried up often as the initial enthusiasm could not be sustained. Not much headway was made by researchers who faced technical hitches. Researchers didn’t give up their efforts. though. Minor breakthroughs now and then kept their spirits high. The first spectacular success was Deep Blue. Funding got revived and the research got a new fillip thereafter. By year 2011, more remarkable successes of the kind were reported. For one, IBM’s Watson AI system floored two human wizards in the Jeopardy quiz show that year.

Small strides were being made in research into AI for the past couple of decades. AI algorithms are in use in large computer systems for years. Between years 2011 and 2015, much more has happened on the AI front. The number of software

projects under Google which used AI rose from a handful to as high as about 3,000. Alongside, Microsoft developed a Skype system that used AI to automatically translate words and sentences from one language to another. Facebook used AI to come up with a program that helped blind people decipher and understand images put before them. By 2017, one in five software firms were using AI in one or other form in their products.

While the US has set the ball rolling vis-a-vis research into AI as early as the 1950s, China that entered the scene recently is seen to be taking faster strides. According to one estimate, China is spending upwards of \$12billion a year with an obvious intent to have the upper hand in this critical technological field. This spending is also expected to rise to \$70billion in a few years. The stated aim is to make China the global leader in AI in another 10 years. By now, China already holds the most global patents relating to AI.

What of India? India, still taking baby steps, is cited to be among the top 15 nations in the global pursuit of AI and related research. A recent visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Japan saw the two nations agreeing for joint research in the field. A similar pact has been signed with the UAE too. Several universities in India have curricula linked to AI. Plans are afoot to use AI in weather forecast, farm-related activities, the automobiles sector etc. An investment of \$15million in AI is reported to have been made in over 400 companies in India in the past five years – a small foray compared to the rise in AI investments worldwide from \$860million in 2012 to \$6.4billion by 2017. Israel’s investment in AI itself was of the order of \$1.8billion.

Worldwide, major AI strides were reported in the field of consumer electronics in recent times. Top Japanese car firm, Toyota, is investing heavily in AI for use in its vehicles. Driverless vehicles run by AI are already in the market. Deep learning techniques, part of AI, help vehicles see objects in the street just as a driver would see, and this includes AI-assisted vehicles acquiring intuitive skills as well in leading the vehicles through the right track without hindrance. Several smartphone chips have built-in AI. Dating Apps that used human mind are now in a mood to shift to AI, to enable seekers find perfect matches. AI is used also in finding look-alikes from millions of faces, with just the press of a button. Deep Neural Networks are increasingly used in image scanning and pattern search. And, AI is used in word processing – in applications that check grammar and spellings. It might make a major mark in the way the health care systems functions. Doctors would still be wanted.

While AI’s use is large-scale in consumer electronics, this was just the start. The use of AI in defence-related matters can change the way wars are fought. This will be over and above the major shift to hi-tech wars, wars from the skies, as was witnessed in the US engagement in Iraq in the early 2000s. Ethical questions could arise, too. For one, a worry is about job losses if machines take over fields of human action. Optimists say every new system, like computer, creates more jobs than it cuts. It works both ways. Pessimists also have a poser: Well, you can build brain into machines, but can AI ever provide attributes like emotions – the key characteristic of human behaviour?

TO THE EDITOR

High Court enquiry imperative

Editor,

The dastardly and horrendous attack on Ms. Agnes Kharshiing and her friend Ms. Amita Sangma, have transgressed all norms of civilized behavior. There are no words strong enough to condemn such a despicable act which has lost all compassion even for unarmed women. The conscience of a section of our society has already gone to the dogs. Money and only money rules their hearts. Kong Agnes, as she is fondly called, is a renowned social activist and a champion of the downtrodden. Her sacrifice will go in vain if we do not rise up and root out the rot that has pervaded all layers of our society. Mere arrest and police enquiry will not help. This is a multi-dimensional problem as it involves multiple stake holders, the Coal Mafia, the Police, the Politicians, the Bureaucrats. The NGT ban on coal mining was spat on

its face. The nexus is so entrenched that it needs a thorough, independent enquiry. We need to investigate all the circumstances that led to this episode which symbolizes the degeneration of a society which stand on ‘Kamai ia ka Hok’. I would suggest that nothing less than a judicial enquiry by a High Court Judge will suffice and bring back the much needed trust of the public on the Govt., its governance and that of the law enforcement machineries. The terms of reference may be decided with a view to unearth this filth and it should be a time bound enquiry otherwise as we have experienced, public memory is very short.

Yours etc
Torist Mark,
Shillong -6

Bloodthirsty coal mafia

Editor,
Banning of coal mining in Meghalaya by NGT has

turned out to be a big hoax because this ban is violated left and right and with impunity. There is no effective, powerful authority that can implement the ban. Actually the immediate authority to implement the ban is the Meghalaya Government through its law enforcing authorities viz the District Authorities and the Police. But they have not only failed miserably but have closed their eyes and have allowed rampant illegal coal mining, transporting and sale of coal to the logical destinations. This has been going on almost immediately after the ban in 2014. The lacuna in the order of the NGT was that it also allowed transportation and sale of the already extracted coal, after the ban was imposed. The ban should have also included a ban on transportation and sale of the already extracted coal because in the name of the "already extracted coal" illegal coal mining was still carrying on and fresh stocks of coal is

replenished in the depots and got the tag of coal already extracted before the ban. In fact, most of the coal miners take refuge in this in theyears preceding the ban. However, even after the ban on extraction, sale and transportation of coal, the coal mafia took advantage of the rider in the ban that allowed coal extracted before April 2014 to be transported but only after the officially appointed by the Supreme Court had taken stock of the exsiting stocks of coal. Hence illegal coal mining, transporting and sale was continued unabated. Even as I write these few lines, illegal coal mining, transporting and sale of coal is still continuing with no one to put a stop to this illegality; not even the Supreme Court which took over the coal issue from the NGT. The fact is that there is no competent authority to put a stop to the illegal mining, transporting and sale of coal in Meghalaya. Perhaps it is better to lift the ban on coal mining and allow it to resume by following the coal working plan and

working scheme to ensure that the environment is not destroyed and by restoring the already destroyed environment.

Now, the bare fact of why illegal mining, transporting and sale of coal is still continuing despite NGT ban is that there is a deep collusion and nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, police and the coal mafia. This is indeed a deadly and carefully knit web which is difficult to dislodge or break. Hence what can the lowly magistrates and police do except to allow the system to flow smoothly as they also have their own cuts from the coal transactions. Hence, ayone trying to put a hindrance to the system will be eliminated forthwith just like what the coal mafia did to Kong Agnes Kharshiing and Amita Sangma of CSWO, Poipynhun Majaw, RTI Activist, and Marshall Biam another activist of North East Indigenous People Federation. These horrific acts should be roundly condemned and the perpetrators must be

arrested.

Yours etc
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Coal mining and violence

Editor,

The attack on the social activists by the coal mafia is systemic! For systemic problem and how to solve it, it must start at the top and not the bottom otherwise one will never be able to bring solution!

Every right thinking citizen must raise the voice against the menace and we send our empathy to the hurt persons! No words can be string enough against such dastardly cowardice when women are violently attacked!

D Kibok Ryntathiang,
Camp: Pathum Thani, Thailand

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

“If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams - the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.”
--- Robert Southey

The Shillong Times
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Meghalaya’s mysterious coal story

It’s only a few months short of five years since the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned the mining of coal in April 2014. The NGT had constituted a Committee to assess the quantum of extracted coal and permitted that coal to be transported. Shockingly, the Government counsel stated in the Supreme Court on Monday that the quantum of extracted coal is 1,76,000 MT. Clearly the NGT has been amiss in its understanding of the coal conundrum here and whoever is briefing the Tribunal is doing great disservice to the state, its environment and its people. When the NGT first got into the process of assessing the quantum of extracted coal, the task was left to two senior Government officials. They in turn activated the Deputy Commissioners to do the work by taking stock of the entire coal mines in Jaintia Hills. The assessment of extracted coal quantity was done in Metric Tonnes (MT) adopting a volumetric method – volume of stock in cubic metres x 0.88 being the standard conversion rate for Meghalaya coal (dry) as notified in Rule 10 (2) of the Meghalaya Mineral and Cess Rules, 1989. The total quantity declared by the owners initially was 120,94,634 MT. The fresh stock found on inspection was 15, 38, 214 MT. Hence the total coal declared was 136, 37,707 MT. Ironically, the assessment made by the Committee in September 2014 found the quantum to be only 65,81,147 MT. This quantum should have been transported in a single year.

There are a total of over 6000 coal mine owners in Meghalaya with the largest number of 3823 being in East Jaintia Hills while East and West Garo hills have the least with just 46 and 34 respectively. The official report given by the NGT appointed Committee says that large number of mine owners have made false declarations without having any coal stock. Some have grossly over-declared. The Committee had also laid out clear guidance on how royalty for the extracted coal is to be paid and also specified how the coal is to be transported without exceeding the Supreme Court order of 9MT per truck. Each truck carrying this extracted coal had to have a sticker in the front windshield stating, “Coal Transported Under NGT Order.” Of course none of this was adhered to and there was no strict supervision on the illegal transportation. Constable Marbaniang in Ri Bhoi district paid with his life for sticking his neck out. His killers are still at large. So the real story of illegal mining and transportation of coal is a web of deceit, collusion and crime.

LOOKING BACK
June 9, 1989

ACKSA Ultimatum on University site

The All Cachar Karimganj Students Association (ACKSA) today issued an ultimatum to the Assam government to announce the site for the proposed central university in Barak Valley within a month and withdraw the resolution passed in the Assembly. In the resolution the state government had urged the Centre to set up the university at Ma-Pam in Tezpur and withdraw the bill passed in Parliament to set up the university at Barak Valley which was done without consulting the State Government. In a memorandum to the Chief Minister through the Chief Secretary, the ACKSA opposed the resolution and said if this kind of feeling prevailed then they would pressurize the Centre for a separate homeland to safeguard the rights of the people of Barak Valley. The ACKSA president told newsmen here that on an invitation from the state

government a delegation led by him was assured by the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary that the state government would not oppose the bill passed by Parliament. But they were surprised when the next day a resolution was passed in the assembly opposing the bill he said. In a separate memorandum to the Governor, the ACKSA said though the Chief Minister had assured the people that the AGP Government would not oppose, if the Union Government agreed to set up the university in Barak Valley, it had actually done so. "The action of the AGP Government was unprecedented. Its opposition to the establishment of the university has endorsed its hollow claim that it did not differentiate between Brahmaputra and Barak Valley", the memorandum said.

2019: War of Positions
Can opposition unite?

By Poonam I Kaushish

Political India is resounding to the sounds of mere saath rahogay to aish karoge as Parties slug it out in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram. On the sidelines, history is repeating itself whereby Opposition Parties are trying to band together to form a grand alliance against a formidable BJP for Battle 2019. The kursi and power at all cost. Undoubtedly, the Karnataka by-polls results where the Congress-JD(S) came up trumps in four of the five Lok Sabha and Assembly seats underscored that though the combine represent different social groups they can be mobilised to vote for a common candidate. Besides, not only has it proved naysayers wrong that the ‘unholy’ alliance for power was doomed but also disturbed the BJP and could upset its appercart in the near future. Specially, as it comes against the backdrop of the NDA winning just three of 15 Lok Sabha and Assembly seats spanning 11 States in June which spelt bad news for the BJP and signaled to the Opposition that local-level unity could defeat it. Example, UP’s Kairana where Ajit Singh’s RLD candidate supported by Mayawati’s BSP, Akhilesh’s SP and Rahul’s Congress defeated the BJP. Perhaps, what is agitating and worrying the Saffron Sangh is that not only did these Parties submerge their mutual conflicts but won. Adding insult to injury, despite being in a minority in the Lok Sabha the Opposition is rubbing in a reverse message: They might not have the numbers but are successfully putting the Government on the mat. The obverse holds true in the Rajya Sabha where the Parties are using their numerical strength to hold the house to ransom. In fact, the out-of-the-blue alliance between arch enemies Congress and TDP along-with the CPI in Telangana to trump the TRS has completely upturned political equations in the State

where the Party was widely expected to clinch the battle. In Chhattisgarh the BSP is allying with Ajit Jogi’s and giving a tough fight to overthrow the BJP Government. However, the biggest takeaway of this nascent Opposition unity is that Southern regional chieftain TDP’s Chandrababu Naidu is clearly positioning himself for leading the Opposition charge against the BJP in 2019, dethroning Trinimool’s Mamata. He has not only emerged as a key strategist but also honed his political acumen post is break with the BJP recently. He has shrewdly, banded the Congress, JD(S) and Left together, kept his ears to the ground conniving on what should be there next move. Further, by reaching out to bête noir Congress to join his anti-Modi bandwagon he has demonstrated that if the cause is important he is willing to bury the decades-long hatchet and join forces for the collective good. Naidu also has a good equation with NCP’s Sharad Pawar, Trinamool’s Mamata, Samajwadi’s Mulayam and AAP’s Kejriwal. He and Congress President Rahul have started on a clean slate. Additionally, realizing that not a few regional satraps are lily-livered cowards whose expertise lies in deal-making with the Government and switching sides at the ninth hour he has got Sharad Yadav and Abdullah’s NC to join him. Undeniably, it is early days but his Partymen and rivals nickname him as a ‘quite and smooth operator’. Naidu like Modi seems to have the same skill set: is pro-development, tech savvy, ‘connects’ with people, has an risk appetite and is like Teflon, no scandal or negative feature sticks to him. Is Opposition unity ephemeral? Will Naidu be able to stitch and hold it together remains to be seen. Would it only hold during the States Assembly polls? Given that other than the BJP, Congress, TDP, TRS and BSP neither the Samajwadi, Trinimool, the two Tamilian rivals DMK

and AIDMK and Odesha BJD have any stake in MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram. Certainly, Opposition unity will not be easy, given the disparate aims and agendas of various Parties that will have to pull together. For any credible and proper Opposition unity, if not perfect, to survive and lead, it should be headed by the largest, second or major Party leader. With Congress’s Rahul being dismissed as a non-serious political player sans respect by others and Trinimool Mamata’s Mahagadhbhandhan ending in a pipedream, TDP’s Naidu, the seventh largest Party in Parliament has taken it upon himself to lead from the front. Questionably, is the BJP’s invincibility dying? Is the Hindutva card past its expiry date? Is a combination of gathering anti-incumbency and Opposition’s electoral arithmetic of unity putting brakes on BJP’s much vaunted electoral machine? Clearly, the BJP has only itself to blame for the mess it is in. Modi’s Government has fallen short on promises: Economy has performed below expectations, the rural belt is dissatisfied and there is urban apathy and disinterest in voting. The youth is angry at Government’s inability to generate jobs and communal polarisation might not pay electoral dividends. Moreover, there is erosion in its vote-share. However, these reverses open up new options for the BJP. One, a large victory highly probable a year back is less certain now. The losses indicate it cannot take Opposition unity lightly and will have to chalk out an out-of-the-box strategy for another term. It has lost a total of ten Lok Sabha seats and is down to a simple majority of 272 MPs. Consequently, it is now increasingly reliant on its allies to prove its majority. This could go down further in 2019. But the BJP is a strong player, Modi has no

competitor and Amit Shah has turned BJP into an electoral machine which reaps rich dividends, 21 States including terrains that are not too friendly as Tripura showed recently. Add to it the TINA factor. What next? It is too early to say whether Opposition unity will hold. The Karnataka, Telangana and UP experiments has given the “khul ja sim sim” code to the Opposition for entering the Alibaba cave in 2019. After Bihar, UP and now Karnataka by-polls have conclusively proven that the Modi juggernaut can be finally stopped if the Opposition joins hands and replicates Bihar-UP-Karnataka type grand alliances in key States. True, the Parties know that it’s only in rethinking their old rivalries and laying their differences aside to fight the BJP together that they stand even a ghost of a chance. They would need astute political moves combined with election management to counter BJP’s superior war machinery. The elephant in the room is whether the Congress is willing to reinvent itself and take this experiment, of playing second fiddle to a regional Party, as the model for a grand coalition to face NaMo’s BJP in 2019? In the ultimate the slew of defeats highlights that Modi-Shah will have to rectify the internal fault-lines, set its house in order, tweak its States’ leadership to retain an edge. The BJP would need to take urgent corrective steps as any rift in the family could result in the entire edifice of political support collapsing. Moreover, Modi’s gambit will first be put to test in the States and next year during the General Elections, so the Party still has time to evolve. With the BJP at the helm, the Government has a huge capacity to dole out patronage, win over enemies and influence people. However, either which way it is good for India’s democracy to have the Opposition finally playing its part: Constructive opposition with the winner taking it all! -----INFA

Institutional Independence steadily eroding

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Recent developments have put a big question mark on whether the government is seriously interested in retaining the institutional integrity and autonomy of organisations such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) etc. The autonomy of these institutions is vital for a healthy democratic order. Not just these institutions, but autonomy of institutes of higher learning and universities too has been steadily eroded. There is need to understand the recent controversy which has been generated over the RBI’s independence with the Government threatening to invoke Section 7(1) of the RBI Act. One may mention here that talk of invoking the Section first arose in August when the Government was trying to nudge the RBI to relax debt default recognition norms in the case of troubled power plants run by the Adanis, the Essar group and the Tatas. At that time there was serious disagreement between the Government and the Central bank over the move to relax lending restrictions on 11 State-owned banks that had run a huge stack of bad loans that severely constrained their capital requirements. Meanwhile, the Government’s move to create a separate regulator for the payments system was seen by the RBI as a direct attempt to curtail its legitimate regulating domain and standing. In fact, the reported rift on the prompt corrective action (PCA) has been the most contentious. Recently, the reported rumours of a threat by RBI Governor Urjit Patel to resign from the top post as also the strongly-worded speech of the Deputy Governor Viral Acharya, alluding to Government’s interference added to the controversy. Acharya wanted to draw an analogy between the circumstances that have engulfed the RBI and the situation that erupted in Argentina way back in January 2010. These developments come in the wake of defining the Central bank’s autonomy “within the framework of the RBI Act” as opposed to unbridled autonomy that the Government has the power, under law, to interfere should it feel necessary. However, pushed to crisis situation, the Union Finance Ministry issued a statement that stated: “Autonomy for the Central bank, within the framework of the RBI Act, is an essential and accepted governance requirement”. It added that only through consultations, the Government places its assessment on issues and suggests possible solutions. However, the statement cannot be taken at face value as the Government has not only curbed the powers of the Central bank but has also been interfering in its functioning. The RBI controversy has been handled by an expert administrator and lawyer Arun Jaitley, but that of CBI has reached more serious proportions. It is surprising that people occupying the two top positions of the CBI were publicly voicing charges and counter charges against each other until they were directed to proceed on leave. But even after that when a junior official was given charge as interim director, several baseless transfers were made. In fact, the developments in the organisation reduced it to a laughing stock in the public eye. The Special Director of the CBI, who is very close to the highest political bigwigs, may be responsible for the crisis situation in the organisation. How can one expect that the CBI would henceforth carry out investigations in a neutral

and judicious manner in the coming years? While both the organisations have lost their credibility, the public too is left wondering about the state of governance in the country, which has been steadily declining. These organisations, which have over the years been known for their autonomy, have according to analysts, sadly lost their position and independence. These developments are undoubtedly a very disturbing trend and clearly reveal loss of values. Not just these two top organisations but even institutes of higher learning have witnessed interference by the Government on various matters, thereby reducing the position and place of Vice Chancellors and Directors, who are well known academic scholars. During the last few years, the Vice Chancellors have lost their dignity and appointments to the coveted post, which are mostly under political considerations in most States. Meanwhile, several universities are modifying their service rules to prevent teachers from criticising the Government and even barring their families from taking part in ‘subversive’ activities, nudged by a circular of the University Grants Commission (UGC). Most academicians have condemned this directive, specially involving their families, who are not part of the university and may have different thinking in various spheres. Already the Central University of Gujarat has adopted the new rules, pending a nod from its court, while the Jawaharlal Nehru University has passed these at its Academic Council. Academicians have also pointed out that financial and administrative autonomy of private universities is no defence against the minions of a “bullying State”. But though private universities are known for encouraging freedom of speech, it is feared that this may not last long as the Government machinery is trying to subtly curb their autonomy and what should be ideal functioning. The centralisation that is manifest in the functioning of the Government and with it the institutions that are working with it, obviously calls for some serious rethinking at this juncture. This trend is an offshoot of the political process where centralisation of power and authority is very much manifest. Obviously, this indicates a lack of plurality as a result of which governance also suffers. Thus, it is only through autonomy that institutions can carry out their work without fear and favour, like that of the higher judiciary. One may mention here that former President Pranab Mukherjee recently emphasised the plurality of India at a time when politics of polarisation is threatening the democratic set-up of the country. “Diversity need not affect our limited action. Let us celebrate diversity, let us enjoy it, let us nurse and nourish it”, he observed at a meeting in Kolkata. But centralisation cannot ensure better governance and leaders who boast of democracy and the power of a strong civil society have to change their style of functioning. Autonomy comes from true decentralisation, which Mahatma Gandhi had emphasised again and again but our leaders are not willing to share power with the people. It is difficult to change the system, but one has to be optimistic and make use of the intrinsic power of civil society to force the administrative machinery to involve them in the decision-making process through transparency. More importantly, the Government’s much-touted commitment of “Minimum Government but Maximum Governance” mustn’t be a mere slogan, even at this late a stage.---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Govt must give priority to Education

Editor, Apropos the news item "Garo body demands repair of Schools" (ST Nov.12,2018), according to my experience I dare to state here that thousands of school buildings in Meghalaya are in tattered conditions in almost all eleven districts of the state. These schools remain unattended by the private school managing committees or by Government in the Education Department. The worst are the government schools. We spend time in talking about the Education Policy and how to improve education in the state but we do nothing for the school buildings and other infrastructural facilities for school children. What is going on here? Whenever we are on tour to many parts of Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills we notice many school buildings, especially LP and UP school buildings in a state of disrepair and in dilapidated conditions. The worst part is that school children are left to fend for themselves even during rainy seasons or inclement weather. This keeps on happening and there is no proper attention by the school authorities. This is the unkindest cut of all. We appeal to the

Government and the school authorities to give our school children the best of school education and to maintain the school buildings, wherever they exist even if it involves heavy expenditure because this is investment in human capital. The above news item has mentioned the school buildings at Garobhita and Kuchiasora the Garo villages under South West Khasi Hills District that were devastated by natural calamities in May last year and remained unrepaired till date, thereby leaving the school children high and dry. It was also reported in the news item that the schools remained non-functional or closed for more than one year. What on earth is happening? This is not only gross but it is a crime. Perhaps some money might have been sanctioned for the said school buildings of the two villages but how that money was utilised only the local people there know the truth. The very fact that the President of the United Achik Youth Federation, Mr. Sanggra Marak, has filed a complaint to the Director of School Education and Literacy, shows that the money sanctioned for repairs of the school buildings was not utilised for that purpose or was misutilised by the school authorities. This is blatant corruption. We

appeal to the DSEL and the Education Department to set up an inquiry into this and punish those responsible for the act. Further we must laud and appreciate the President and members of the Federation for bringing the matter to the notice of the Education Department and we hope the DSEL will take appropriate action.

Yours etc Philip Marwein, Viaemail

Shift Medical College to Laitkor

Editor, The Government of Meghalaya has been scouting for land for shifting the Shillong Medical College cum Hospital from Mawprem (Shillong) to some other site which is spacious and free from any type of congestion unlike in Mawprem. It is learnt that the Government is now planning to shift the Shillong Medical College cum Hospital to Umsawli area (New Shillong Township) near NEIGRIHMS where there are many other national institutes or projects like NEIGRIHMS, NEIAH, NIFT, IIM, IHMCT&AN etc. Where is the need of another Medical College cum Hospital to be set up here as this facility is

already being provided by two big medical institutes - NEIGRIHMS and NEIAH. Besides, this area will be congested and hazardous later due to the accumulation of many mega projects. Under the circumstance, we the members of Rural & Urban Development Society (RUDS), located at Khliehriat hereby suggest a good location at Laitkor which is well connected to many districts like East and West Jaintia Hills, East Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi etc. The people of this area too will be benefitted by this mega Medical College cum Hospital as there is no other institution of this nature in the nearby districts. Moreover, the place is still very spacious, open, free from any type of environmental hazards and the topography is very much construction friendly. More importantly, if the Western By-Pass comes up as per the Government plan then areas like Myllem, Sohra, Pynursla, Mawkyrwat, Nongstoin etc. will be nearer to this place and the congestion and traffic jam of Shillong city will be greatly reduced. Yours etc., Deibormi Syad, Viaemail

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“ To join in the industrial revolution, you needed to open a factory; in the Internet revolution, you need to open a laptop.”

-- Alexis Ohanian

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Fate of the Internet

IT appears that the march of the internet worldwide is slowing down. A new report from Internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee’s World Wide Web Foundation has found that the growth rate of internet access has dropped across the world. India is an exception as it has cut prices of the internet considerably. Cheaper access to Cat videos is available in India. There is healthy market competition, growth in infrastructure, good policy making and the role of TRAI which has created an open access system to measure quality of service. India had an advantage over developed countries as it started from scratch and moved straight into the mobile internet boom. Reliance Jio made a disruptive entry but it resulted in a fall in access prices and toning up maintenance of quality of service. Voice had a different performance and did not contribute to growth of the Internet in India.

On the Affordability Drivers Index (ADI) India has risen from the 23rd rank to 8th in 2018, recording the sharpest climb among all the nations listed in the top 10 category in the running year. In order to measure internet affordability, the report uses ADI – a tool to evaluate how a country is positioned to make internet cheaper and increase its affordability. Malaysia tops the top 10 list while Dominican Republic stands last. Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Mexico, Turkey and Argentina follow Malaysia. The annual percentage increase in the global number of people coming online has decreased from 12 percent between 2005 and 2014 to 6.5 percent between 2015 and 2017, the report said.

In terms of internet pricing India is outmatched by Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Vietnam as the price of 1GB mobile prepaid broadband data as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) per capita reduced sharply in India in the last two years. This was 1.53 percent in 2017, higher than in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Myanmar. In 2015, the price was 3.55 percent in India. According to the International Telecommunication Union data, the number of internet users in India has risen from 92 million in 2010 to 390 million in 2016. The WWW’s study takes into account purchasing power relative to average household income. India has a consistent rise in net affordability. Global communications have expanded but as many as 50% are offline. The majority of those disconnected from the internet are in developing countries. The digital divide is indicative of international inequalities. Affordability of access should be a global target. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s drive for Digital India deserves a salute.

TO THE EDITOR

Is NEHUSU a democratic entity?

Editor,

I’ve studied (been) in the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and seen lots of things that have provoked me to think whether whatever is going on in the University, especially when it comes to empowering the students justifies its existence in this present time. Talking about the NEHUSU (North Eastern Hill University Students’ Union) and the mode of election must be questioned here. Why does NEHUSU exist in the first place? It is there to represent the students of the University; to be the voice of the students, etc. In short, NEHUSU should represent the welfare of all students in NEHU. So if NEHUSU is for the welfare of all students then why has it become a communal Union? Since the University is open for each and every person who wants to study here it also means that every student has equal rights and opportunities, be they locals or non-locals.

But in every election of NEHUSU I could sense bias because I do not see the opportunity of equal represen-

tation. If we check the records of the past five years of the NEHUSU (Shillong Campus) elections, the candidates are all locals and by local I mean only the Khasis and the Jaintias, whereas NEHU has students from all the North Eastern states, from other parts of India and even from outside India.

We speak of diversities in our nation so why can’t we see the same in the NEHUSU election? Why are the non-locals discouraged from contesting these elections? There have been instances when non-locals wanted to contest but they were beaten up and threatened and told to withdraw their names from the election, especially by the KSU, NEHU. Some might argue that the non-locals are new to the University and don’t know much about it and that is why they should not contest elections. But in departments like Law, B. tech., Architecture, etc. the students study for eight to ten semesters which is more than enough to understand about students welfare and that of the University as a whole. If the local students in their 1st semester can contest the election then why can’t the non-local

Money, says the proverb, makes money. When you have got a little, it is often easy to get more. The great difficulty is to get that little-- Adam Smith

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emerged as the foremost champion of financial inclusion. The latest milestone in his journey towards eradicating financial apartheid is the launching of the Fintech Festival at Singapore of APIX, a banking technology designed to reach two billion people worldwide, who are still without bank accounts. APIX will support banks to reach out to those without bank accounts in 23 countries including the 10 ASEAN members as well as major markets such as India.

Finance is the glue that holds all pieces of our life together. Ideal financial societies are those which provide safe and convenient ways of managing these simple monetary affairs. This philosophy is known as financial inclusion. It is providing financial tools to people -- tools they can afford, are safe and properly regulated, can be accessed conveniently from formal institutions. These tools enable people to save, insure and to responsibly borrow -- allowing them to build their assets and improve their well-being and financial prospects.

The term most buzzed in this respect is “the unbanked” -- usually defined as people who don’t have a traditional savings account. These are the people who have to be brought into the orbit of formal finance. Ideal financial societies are those that provide safe, affordable and convenient ways of managing their everyday monetary affairs.

Access to financial services has a critical role in reducing extreme poverty, boosting shared prosperity, and supporting inclusive and sustainable development it is the key element of financial health. It can provide an opportunity to move out of poverty or absorb a shock without being pushed deeper into debt. The poor need to set aside money in times of plenty and draw it out in lean times.

Financial inclusion has been recognised as a key building block which will form the foundation for achieving several of UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. In the absence of proper formal financial systems they have to rely on informal means of managing money, like cash-on-hand, family and friends, money-

Financial inclusion

India leads the way

By Moin Qazi

lenders, pawn-brokers or keeping it under the mattress. These choices are expensive, insufficient, risky, and unpredictable. Without access to affordable credit, it is difficult to get a business idea off the ground or to acquire an asset like a house or higher education. Without insurance, all your security can be wiped out by one misfortune.

Enhancing financial inclusion can improve resistance to shocks, boost productivity of business, facilitate empowerment of marginalised groups, such as women and rural residents, and help reduce poverty Life is one long risk for them as they are just a tragic event away from a financial catastrophe. It allows people to insure for health care, save for children’s education, and borrow for wedding or funeral costs.

These people as such require a safe reliable and affordable line of credit, so they can reach their most important goals, like setting up a house or buying improved tools for their business. Insurance can help them to cope better with risks. Managing money is hard, and it’s harder when you live on an earning that makes you plan your life on a day to day basis. Limited access to finance is seen as a major contributor to persistent poverty.

Macroeconomic evidence suggests that economies with deeper financial intermediation tend to grow faster and reduce income inequality. Financial inclusion -- defined in certain societies as the proportion of individuals and groups owning accounts and using a basket of basic formal financial products and services available through them -- has been evoking considerable interest among governments, policy makers, academicians, financial institutions and other stakeholders.

Better financial tools can help accelerate the rate at which people move out of poverty and help them hold on to economic gains. Access to financial services is also key to equitable growth, for the government to derive the benefits of social security schemes and for bringing savings of the poor into the system and investing them

Financial inclusion

enables people to have safe place to save money, affordable and appropriately designed and affordably priced credit and trusted risk management services, a state managed pension to gain better control over their own lives and that of their families People are striving hard to improve their financial health .They want to save money, after meeting their everyday needs, so that they can recover quickly when faced with an emergency.

When more people have access to affordable and good quality financial services, they have more opportunities to thrive. This is especially true for women, who are often underserved by traditional financial institutions. In all societies, however oppressed or illiterate women their women are, they remain the stewards of household savings. They require financial products and services that appreciate their experience and perspective.

Financial inclusion of women enhances their self-confidence and places financial decision-making power in their hands resulting in large development payoffs. It is often cited as an essential tool in helping women in particular rise from poverty. The theory goes that when you empower women financially they’re able to secure their families’ welfare and create pathways toward education and improved quality of life for their children.

Women’s participation in the financial system can have significant benefits in terms of economic growth, greater equality and societal well-being. Access and usage of financial services are levers for increasing women’s participation in the economy.

The President and CEO, Women’s World Banking, Mary Ellen Iskenderun has set the right tone for more women -- enabling financial inclusion agenda: “There is a strong connection between women’s access to financial products and services and greater opportunity not only for that woman herself, her family and her community, but really for the nation as a whole. Women are far more likely than men to spend money they have under their discretion on the education of their children, the health care for their family and improving their housing. And those are the kinds of developmental changes that can really have long-term

intergenerational impact.”

We do not necessarily need gender-specific policies, but rather policies that work for women. We need an enabling environment that incorporates the women perspective. We must understand that financially empowering women generates a multiplier effect in having a substantial impact on the well being of future generations. Thus, an enabling financial landscape with a blend of a favourable regulatory regime, innovative women-centric products/schemes, enhanced mobility, robust customer protection framework and reformed attitudes towards women will increasingly stimulate women’s foray into the workforce and yield success for the Indian economy.

Overlaying all these needs and objectives will be the need for increasingly enhancing financial literacy across society. This needs to be achieved across all age groups. A financially literate society makes the job of financial inclusion that much easier. Financial education is an essential prerequisite for financial inclusion .providing access to financial services is just the first step on the ladder, but for climbing the ladder to explore the larger horizons of finance requires skills.

Merely opening physical accounts as flag posts of financial identity won’t help unless they are actively used by people for managing their money. To make this possible people have to be imparted an ability to understand and execute matters of personal finance, including basic numeracy and literacy, budgeting, investing, and risk diversification. This skill is known as financial literacy. It is a combination of financial awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviours necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve individual financial well-being.

Without greater and consistent usage of bank accounts, the promises of financial inclusion-- equitable economic growth growing and successful businesses, and improving financial security and prosperity-- will remain elusive. ---INFA

Chopper-lifting Trupti Desai to the tiger’s lair

What’s so special about january 2019?

By Aditya Aamir

That sense of déjà vu. Tuck it in the front pocket. What else? Ask, is there a streak of sadism in the Supreme Court? Can it explain “hearing of 49 review petitions in open court on January 22, 2019” while making it “clear there is no stay on the judgment of September 28, 2018”? Why, in the face of the oncoming invading horde, insist that the fort gates remain open?

The Supreme Court has willy-nilly set the stage for a confrontation at Sabarimala. Rights activist Trupti Desai wrote to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Wednesday that she’s on her way, with her band, the 41-day fast and Irumudikettu be damned! Nothing and nobody can stop us, she told media November 14. To which Ayyappa activist Rahul Easwar retorted, “The Supreme Court has refused stay, but we will stay at Sabarimala for 66 days.”

Back to the Supreme Court. Why this fetish with New Year, 2019, the month of January, specifically.

The point is – with January 22, open court and no stay – the Supreme Court has erected a smokescreen around the chess table, challenging the players to play blindfolded. The apex court’s math simply does not add up. Either the learned justices have no engineering in arithmetic or they read logic from an alien book, probably one that originates in Galaxy Andromeda, light years away from Milky Way, which is a familiar and comforting sight, though.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is the closest to an authoritarian Kerala has seen. In an interview to actor/filmmaker Sreenivasan in 2016, Pinarayi says that growing up he was “terrified” of ghosts but overcame the fear with stiff doses of atheism. Simply put, Pinarayi doesn’t believe in god, temple, traditions customs and rituals. Now, he has a last chance to deliver on his devil incarnate image. Last heard he was working on it – 10,000 cops and if required a chopper to drop Trupti Desai on the

“ Now, there are 64 days of Mandala puja starting November 16, and the chessboard is back on the table with all the pieces arranged ”

Whether it be the Ayodhya Ram Mandir or the Swami Ayyappa Sabarimala shrine, the top court pushed both to the pale of January 2019, and beyond. The uncertainty in the two directives jumps and bites. That’s the déjà vu tucked in the pocket.

Now, to the “stay” embedded. November 14, CJI Gogoi doubled down on the “stay”, asking a review counsel to stay put till January 22, when counsel reiterated that the apex court stay the September 28 order. That settled, if the hoi polloi cannot make sense of the logic behind the order, there is reason. Who is the apex court testing, the state government or the Ayyappa devotees? The answer to that is the top court is directly indicting the Pinarayi Vijayan government for its failure to implement the September 28 order, make sure women in the age group 10-50 were allowed a glimpse of the celibate god. There were opportunities plenty, but the state government failed while Pinarayi Vijayan himself was wooing sheikhs in UAE. The January 22 deadline is the last chance to Pinarayi to deliver on his boast.

Justices Chandrachud, Khanvilkar and Nariman, who wrote the 4-1 majority judgment along with ex-CJI Dipak Misra, must have been keeping an eye on happenings in Sabarimala.

Now, there are 64 days of Mandala puja starting November 16, and the chessboard is back on the table with all the pieces arranged for a replay. This time, it better be check and mate! Besides, don’t forget the chessboard has 64 squares! And there’s a neat total of 64 days for Trupti Desai and her sort to breach the male barrier.

It will be a crush, but the Supreme Court has given a helping hand to Pinarayi and Trupti. The devotees and sundry others have been lulled into inaction till January 22, the Queen’s gambit to be helped by the King’s gambit because the Queen’s gambit is not considered a true gambit. Rahul Easwar, his brain constricted by his ‘Save Sabarimala’ headband, will have to resort to some aggressive Sicilian defence!

Sannidanam helipad. Most important, the “entry pass” – issue it only those who will help him execute the King’s gambit!

The Supreme Court, of course, wouldn’t bother about the nitty-gritty as long as the law prevails. It’s a given, the justices must not have read all the 49 review petitions and the “interventions”, there just wasn’t time enough. But “interventions” contain knowledge. For example, the one by a senior editor in which he lays out 10 points to throw light on the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple and why it’s a standalone, unique.

The one point that will strike even simple minds is about Devi Malikappuram, and Supreme Court justices are not simple minds! “The doctrine of Sabarimala is such that every male devotee is seen as incarnate of Lord Ayyappa and women as incarnate of Devi Malikappuram (who is banished, never to enter the temple). As such a right that is not available to Malikappuram cannot be expected to be granted to ordinary women (Trupti Desai) pilgrims. That is why women, who are counterparts of Malikappuram, are not allowed entry. It is not out of discrimination against women because women out of marriageable age are already allowed,” says the editor’s intervention.

True women devotees respect Ayyappa traditions and empathize with Malikappuram’s plight, but activists like Rehana Fatima and Trupti Desai are not devotees, they want to come only to enforce their right to equality. “The all-important question is why create a right for which there are no takers, when the enforcement of such right as mere symbolism entails huge cost to both the State exchequer as well as (to) the multitudes of genuine Ayyappa devotees,” says the editor with Ayyappa logic. Chopper-lifting Trupti Desai to Swami Ayyappa’s lap is like landing in the tiger’s lair! Beware. (IPA Service)

University such ethnocentricity and communalism exists and non-locals are discriminated then can we imagine a future when one of these NEHUSU members will actually be in power and hold public office? At that level they would they not be more biased and communal? Or what if any of these NEHUSU members become teachers in schools, colleges and universities? Will they not be communicating this same communalism?

Yours etc.,
L. Syiemlieh
Shillong- 19

Arbitrary toll collection at Umling

Editor,

Identity cards of government officials with grades are being issued so that they can identify themselves at strategic places, otherwise they become useless objects if they are not respected by those who check them. It was very strange to note that the toll-gate collectors at Umling along the NH 40, during the morning shift at 6:45 AM on November 12, 2018 ruthlessly rejected my bio-metric identity card is-

sued by our PWD authorities, while they accepted the same respectfully during other times in the past. Would that be because of the oddness of the new rules or is it because the non-local collectors at the gate are untrained, disrespectful and rude with the PWD officials? That created in me a feeling of unease because the toll is high and also because I use the road frequently. If IDs belonging to government officials of all categories are not considered legitimate at the toll-gate then that should be made public so that we are aware of the rules. But strangely, the toll-collectors in the said toll-gate accepted other identity cards belonging to other government departments and honoured even those belonging to petty officials. It is high time the NHAI toll-gate operators of our state take serious note of displaying a signboard stating what category of government officers are exempted from paying toll at such check gates.

Yours etc.,
P E Hynniewta,
Shillong - 2

“If you watch a game, it's fun. If you play at it, it's recreation. If you work at it, it's golf.”
--- Bob Hope

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.96 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2018

Lanka conundrum

THE bluff of Sri Lanka’s crafty politician and former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, has been called for now. India has temporary relief that the pro-China, suspected anti-India strongman in the neighbouring nation has been edged out in a trial of strength in Parliament. Meanwhile politics and governance in the island nation remain badly shattered by an attempt by Rajapaksa to grab power with clear backing from President Maithripala Sirisena. With the parliament passing a no-confidence motion against a week-long government headed by Rajapaksa in his new avatar as Prime Minister, there is no guarantee that the recently ousted government of Ranil Wikremesinghe could automatically get back to power. It is up to the President to play his cards again as to who would step in as Prime Minister, after the passing of the no-trust vote. Chances are also that Speaker Karu Jayasuriya could replace Rajapaksa who formed the government on October 26 last. The President’s controversial acts have only added to the troubles on the political front in Sri Lanka. His abrupt dismissal of Wikeremesinghe and his government in late October was aimed principally at opening a window of opportunity to Rajapaksa, who lost the 2015 parliament polls, to return to power. With the Sri Lankan Supreme Court overturning the President’s subsequent decision to dissolve parliament and hold fresh elections on January 5, even as it had a life until 2020, the tide began turning against the Sirisena-Rajapaksa combine. The passing of the no-trust vote came a day later.

In recent years, India’s relations with Sri Lanka had undergone serious strains due to the perceived support that the separatist LTTE got from this side in the past. Having annihilated the Tamil Tigers, Rajapaksa had not only kept a distance from India but also took the nation closer to China in multiple ways. This gave an added opportunity to China to undercut India’s interests in this region. Wickremesinghe by contrast, tried furthering ties with India and looked at loans offered to the island nation from China as a kind of a bait. Problem however is Wickremesinghe and his party, as also the ruling alliance, is fast losing popularity due to his “failure” to lift the economy to satisfactory levels. The recent local body polls saw his side losing heavily, with the Rajapaksa side registering massive wins. Having gauged the people’s mood, both Sirisena and Rajapaksa thought it was time to pull down the government and facilitate an early return of the former president to power. India is understandably, concerned.

TO THE EDITOR

Mafia! What mafia?

Editor,
The reported statement of Khliehriat MLA and Cabinet MDA Minister, Kyrmen Shylla that there is no illegal mining of coal in the Khliehriat area is definitely news to most of us. The 3-member NGT team enquiring into the matter on the other hand seems to have divergent views, or should I say findings. They have literally found a smoking gun; freshly dug coal and heaps of it together with well maintained lubricated earth moving machines and regular seizure of illegally transported coal, does seem to clinch the universal belief that open defiance of the NGT ban on coal mining and transport is a common defiant practice in East Jaintia Hills. Whether the Minister is a coal miner or not is something this writer has no knowledge of but his apparent ignorance of what takes place in his own backyard is pathetic, to say the least.

Doubts were also raised by the Minister over the existence of a coal mafia. For the general information of all concerned, a mafia is a

criminal organisation that makes money illegally, especially through threats, intimidation and violence. Violation of the NGT ban is illegal and money was certainly being made through this illegal activity in an organised way. Persons and individuals raising their voices over such activities have been intimidated and threatened. We cannot deny this. Others like Kong Agnes Kharshing who was brutally attacked and critically injured; the Police officer Bah Marbaniang, who lost his life in Ri Bhoi district for stopping illegal transportation of coal; the activist Bah Majaw murdered because he sniffed too close to the illegal coal mining activities in EJs; all of the above and maybe unknown others are victims of an organisation indulging in illegal mining of coal. There can be no doubt of the existence of a coal mafia however vehement the denials might be.

We all acknowledge the existence of a livelihood crisis due to the NGT ban on coal mining. The fact remains however that the Govt, this one and the one before it, have failed to come up with alternate relief livelihood

proposals to lighten the burden of the common man in the coal mining areas. It's not that options don't exist. It's just that we have not been serious about the problem. Perhaps because of the fact that the problem is a political cow that can still be milked for votes! In the meanwhile statements by Cabinet Ministers that hint at Government's willingness to connive with the illegal activities arising out of the NGT ban, can only add to the complexity of the problem. The creditability of this MDA Govt will depend on how it demonstrates its willingness and seriousness to confront the growing crime rate arising out of illegal coal mining. An early effort to apprehend and arrest the attackers on Kong Agnes will perhaps be an assuring step towards such seriousness of the Government.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Harness the Youth Power

Editor,
In the past Meghalaya

experienced violence, fighting and bloodshed amongst various communities due to the differences in culture, religion, language etc. This has affected development in the state and especially the young people who have dreams to be successful in life. The violence had led us to nowhere. Let us focus our interest to another way of looking at things which is by respecting differences and allowing unity to be the stronghold of our beautiful society. The time is too short for communal disharmony which is the result of differences amongst communities.

Let us love our own Jaitbynriew and promote each other's progress, happiness and development and simultaneously let us not spread hatred, extreme dislike of others who love their own communities. Just as we have the right to love our own community, they too have the right to do so. Very often we talk about the Jaitbynriew as “ka ban sa duh jait noh” (A community which will disappeared soon), and “ka ban sa long ki nong rah um jong no re jong no” (A community

which will be carrying water for others). These sayings are a slavish way of thinking. Such sayings dwell only in the minds of the weak, not the strong. I say to you my young friends, these pessimistic thoughts have engaged the minds of many of our young people. Let us revolutionize our thoughts and look at Jaitbynriew from the positive perspective.

It is necessary to stop speaking negative things about the Jaitbynriew. The time is still there for us to be constructive for ourselves and the society. Do not tolerate others who poison our minds. We cannot change the circumstances and the situations; perhaps we can change our own minds. It is a must for young people to put all our hard work, effort, strength and energy to unlock our own potentials. The young people of the state have their own inner potentials and capacity to widen and develop themselves. We are born with different talents and gifts that our creator has given us. There are no problems too big for us to find a solution. Time

residing in 206 villages? Don't all these people have equal claim to clean water, clean air and the right to also claim what their ancestors left behind?

These coal mine owners may be tribals but their mindsets and methods are as greedy and vicious as any mercenary carrying out extractive mining anywhere in the world and without the basic corporate social responsibility. How many of those millionaire mine owners have set up a school or a hospital for their own people? What have they ploughed back to the environment? Will they be tasked with cleaning up the toxic rivers? All they have thought about are to swell up their private pockets and their bank accounts so they can send their kids to the best schools outside the poisonous hell they have created for others. I can't think of any other more selfish enterprise than the coal mining happening in Meghalaya which has created a nouveau-riche, unthinking class whose lives begin and end with how much coal to extract and how much money will come in. This class has no allegiance to tribe or tribal values. Hence they don't even cringe when attacking a woman and leaving her to the elements! And they have bought over so many individuals and groups who echo their evil chant that, “those who intrude into their private affairs deserve to die.”

Meanwhile, if there is a next generation beyond 2050 their future is as bleak and black as the coal that fires up the evil imagination of the people who claim ownership over it and over this earth. What a cataclysmic future that would be! Meanwhile, those not subscribing to coal or limestone mining (which is equally horrific) are doomed to be “outliers.” As for repairing the criminal justice system I see no hope at the end of the tunnel, only more wretchedness as some policemen turn rogues. What else do you call policemen who instead of booking wrongdoers who illegally transport coal instead let them pass, on payment of an agreed sum! If this is not the last straw then I wonder what is!

is so precious, let us discover the champion, the greatness, the lion in each one of us.

We should not permit excuses to smash up, spoil and mess up our lives. Yes we know that our state lacks opportunities. The government is sitting idle, and our leaders are only active for themselves. We should change our mindsets and tell ourselves we are not the victims of the system and that we can be victors. I strongly believe that every young person has a dream and a goal to be successful in life. So let us not give up easily on the problems we are facing. These are temporary setbacks. If we are strong, courageous and daring there will be a time when we will become winners in whatever we do. We cannot change society but we can change our perspectives of looking at it differently.

Yours etc.
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong-2

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

Round The States

By Insaf

Sabiramala Entry All eyes on Kerala

Nagging suspense on women’s entry into the Sabiramala continues to haunt Kerala. In fact, all eyes will be on the temple on November 16 as it opens again for the next three months. With the Supreme Court refusing to stay its earlier verdict lifting the age restriction on women’s entry to the temple, women activists are gearing up to enter the temple, defying Opposition parties, Hindu organisations and believers, who continue to demand that the entry of young women not be allowed during the pilgrim season. In a conundrum, the Pinarayi Vijayan government has said with SC verdict remaining as it is, it would “look into the legal aspects.” While that is hardly saying anything, it’s a big test for the administration to ensure law and order and not have a repeat of the recent two separate occasions, when violent protests stopped women in the age of 10 and 50 years from entering the Lord Ayappa shrine.

Undeniably, it is a tough call as the shrine attracts lakhs of devotees mainly from neighbouring States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. In particular it is worth watching whether the government would provide security as requested to Maharashtra-based ‘right to pray’ campaigner Trupti Desai and her team of six women to ‘exercise their right to pray guaranteed by the Constitution.’ Recall two years ago Desai successfully led women to enter the 400-year-Shani Shingnapur temple in Maharashtra, where entry of menstruating women too was barred for centuries. She has resolved not to leave Kerala till they are allowed to offer worship. Other NGOs will too make their bid. Will God’s own country be marred yet again?

Chhattisgarh Hopeful Start

Chhattisgarh gives democracy reason to celebrate. Polling in 18 constituencies of the 90, in the first phase on Monday last had an encouraging turnout—70 per cent. It went beyond expectations as these constituencies in over eight districts have been marked with the worst Maoist violence in the country. This time too there have been Naxal attacks, wherein in the past two weeks at least 14 people were killed! But despite this there is hope. The voter said a big no to the Maoists call for a poll boycott and the threat issued of physical violence against those who went out to vote. In the badlands of Bastar and Dandewada the voter turnout was fairly good-- between 48-58 per cent. Obviously, winds of change seem to be blowing and what is now more important is that the political dispensation reward them for their courage and give them a better tomorrow of real time development. The Congress, BJP and the alliance of CPI-BSP-Janata Congress Chhattisgarh have been campaigning aggressively for the throne. Whoever emerges the winner must ensure the voters’ that their stand up against the Naxals was worth it.

Telangana Gamble

A big question mark hangs over Telangana polls: whether TRS Chief and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao’s gamble will pay off? Remember, he dissolved the Assembly nearly six months ahead of the election schedule to what capitalise believing his party would capitalize on ‘tremendous goodwill’ and would give the Opposition less time to form a formidable force. Reports emanating from election trails, however, suggest the TRS is in a shaky position. More so, as not only is the

anti-incumbency factor playing up, but with the Congress having an understanding with Chandrababu Naidu’s TDP, the going will be tough. On top of that Telangana Jana Samithi and the CPI too have joined in the seat-sharing formula. For starters, the tickets have been given to candidates to balance out key sections of the society and the caste card kept in sharp focus. Further, there is a good section of the minority community which is having second thoughts on KCR, given his proximity to the BJP, which is no hidden secret. Then there is a known factor of ‘inaccessibility of KCR’, even to his ministers and cadres, which at this moment does not seem to change. And while the TRS is confident of a comeback, political pundits are doubtful. Will his stars oblige?

Karnataka Goof-Up

Karnataka is in a soup. Its high tech city and capital, Bengaluru, has had a major glitch, wherein election authorities are reported to have rejected ‘voter IDs’ to thousands of people after listing them as ‘not Indian citizens’. Could this southern State have so many foreigners applying for voter ID was a baffling question, which prompted an analyst to dig into the improbability. This forced the State election authority to re-open the cases of rejected applications. Alas, there was a major goof-up. Apparently, during summary revision of the electoral rolls in October 2017, a total of 2.14 lakh applications for voter IDs were received. Of these 22,737 were rejected and 3,240 of these in Bengaluru alone were rejected on grounds they were ‘not Indian citizens’. This raised eyebrows where even an American think tank suggested in an article that an ‘unusually large number of Muslim adults were missing from the voters list in Karnataka as of March.’ But in a fresh batch of February, 48,692 applications were rejected of which 6,204 were again listed as ‘not Indian citizens’, suggesting there was no clear pattern to target Muslims. More digging took place and it now emerges that during data entry officers concerned chose ‘not Indian citizen’ instead of ‘non-resident’ option. The authorities are now rectifying the blunder. Sooner the better!

MPs Versus MLAs

MPs needn’t feel guilty when it comes to attendance for they are doing one better than the MLAs. It’s not their claim but an analysis following a study carried out by PRS Legislative Research at two different levels. It revealed low performance of Legislative Assemblies across States, with their MLAs working much lesser number of days in a year than the Parliamentarians. An analysis undertaken of 26 States/UT in six year period (2011 to 2016) showed that the Assemblies on an average sat for just 28 days in a year, whereas both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members sat on an average of 70 days. A big divide, but one aspect was common -- majority of the sittings were during the Budget session. Of the States analysed, 13 including Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Haryana and West Bengal sat on an average for 28 days, whereas some others like Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Maharashtra sat between 42-46 days. Delhi, Sikkim and Nagaland were at the bottom of the rung. While the legislatures can debate their performance, the statistics no doubt should make people seethe. In 365 days, their issues and that too of public importance appear to be of little value among their elected representatives!--- INFA

“ *The coal mining industry is very destructive and it doesn't have to be.*”

-- Kevin Richardson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No. 97SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2018

Illegal coal mining a reality

CHIEF Minister Conrad Sangma’s stout denial on the reality of illegal coal mining activities that are still carrying on in Meghalaya, are bizarre to say the least. His colleague, Kyrmen Shylla echoed the same views days ago. It appears that the MDA Government wants to sit out this allegation for as long as it can, until some external agency brings solid evidence that coal is indeed mined illegally in Meghalaya and regularly transported outside the state. However, when the allegations are levelled by the Opposition Congress then it is in bad taste because illegal mining and transportation of coal did not resume in 2018. It was carrying on since April 2014 when the Congress was in power and trucks were carrying both the NGT permitted coal which had been mined earlier and also freshly mined coal. So for the pot to call the kettle black is completely uncalled for. It is more of a political charade by a Party waiting to wrest power at an opportune moment. Politics has become a game of one-upmanship rather than an opportunity to govern and govern well.

The Congress is least qualified to rave and rant at this nine month old Government because the first criminal act of killing a police constable who was checking illegal transportation of coal in Ri Bhoi district happened during its tenure. That the killers of Constable PJ Marbaniang who was murdered after he resisted the release of as many as 32 seized trucks which had violated NGT ban on transportation of coal, have not been apprehended leaves so many unanswered questions about the deep nexus between the police, politicians and the coal mafia. Marbaniang died of gunshots in his quarters. The post crime scenario seems well orchestrated to make look like a case of suicide even while all evidence was cleaned up. It is unfortunate that such cases fall off the media radar and are quietly forgotten. Actually the police should be grilled on the slow progress of the case. RTI activist Poipynhun Majaw too seems to have died in vain since his killers are still at large.

Politicians on both sides of the divide therefore must stop pointing fingers at each other and behave like mature public representative. The public is not fooled by this blame game. All politicians are prone to serving the interests of the moneyed class and coal certainly pays for votes.

TO THE EDITOR

Expedite MHIS implementation

Editor,
The Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS) is a unique scheme for the benefit of the poor. This scheme expired on September 25 thereby causing in unimaginable agony to sick people with limited income. For example a person in need of kidney dialysis twice a week requires about Rs 50000 a month. So is the case with cancer patients and those suffering from other other chronic diseases. I, therefore, request the Health Minister specifically and the higher ups of the Health Department to kindly finalise the matter as early as possible for the sake of those non-government employees of the state. Personally, I know of people who at risk of losing their lives because they cannot afford regular medication for obvious reason.

Yours etc.,
A L Thangkiew
Shillong- 5

Delighting in anglicised surnames

Editor,
Apropos the report, "KHADC mulls Bill to stop Anglicised Surnames" (ST Nov.14,2018), the use of Anglicised surnames by the Khasis dates back to the

1850s or 1860s after the Khasis embraced Christianity. We don’t know why the Khasis love to adopt the English names Anglicised surnames. I presume that it might have been the influence of the foreign rulers or the influence of certain religious denominations. There is no other reason why the Khasis take great delight in adopting Anglicised surnames. As of today there are surnames that have been distorted or Anglicised right from the time of their forefathers and we cannot blame those who adopt the same at later stages. The common Anglicised surnames which continue even today are Dykes in place of Dkhar, Kyndykes for Kyndiah, Cunville for Khongwir, Fancan for Phankon, Laitflang for Laitphlang, Sootinck for Suting, De Cruz for Dohkrut, Chyne for Khain, Soanes for Sun etc., Why do we feel shy or inferior to use, adopt our original surnames? Will this not lead to loss of indigeneity?

Then there are people who use common surnames like Lyngdoh and Syiem which are actually social positions and hence a loosely held title. Hence, as Khasis we should use and write the correct surnames of the clan we belong to so that there is no mistake about who we are or else people will mistake us to be of foreign origin. Let us be write our original surnames and feel proud to be Khasis.

The Move of the KHADC, especially that of HS Shylla in this direction, must be lauded.

Yours etc....
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Negative versus positive externality

Editor,
I was traveling by public transport the other day when the driver did something out of the blue which brought an unexpected smile to my face. As soon as I board the maxi cab, the driver turn on the music player and a song which I used to love as a kid was the first song on the playlist. This song was one of my favorite songs growing up and I haven't heard this song in ages. In Economics jargon this was one of those rare occasions when I can say that I had a firsthand experience and the effects of “positive externality”. I think a few of the passengers might have noticed a smile on my face as soon as the song started playing and they may have been wondering what triggered that emotional response in me. On the flipside, if the rest of the passengers disliked the song then this will be a case of negative externality and on the whole negative externality will be far greater than positive externality since I'm the lone

person who likes the song. Thus if the rest of the passengers unanimously decide to tell the driver to stop playing the song, the driver will have to listen to them since the greatest good for the greatest number will come into play in this case.

And this brings me to the hawkers’s problem in the city of Shillong. Lately I've been seeing hawkers set up their store in hitherto hawkers free zones. And this begs the question? Which one is greater, positive externality or negative externality. For example I've seen a vegetable vendor set up her shop in the Umsohsun-GS Road junction. If the vegetables vendor does not affect the flow of traffic and pedestrians walking on the footpath, then this will be a case of positive externality outweighing negative externality. Passers-by and the residents of Umsohsun and Wahingdoh in particular will save themselves the trouble of going all the way to Lewduh to purchase their daily needs of vegetables. On the other hand the vegetable vendors in the centre of Motphran are a hindrance to the flow of traffic and pedestrians who have to pass through Motphran in the evening rush hour are affected enormously by the scores of vegetable vendors who sit on the roadside. In this case our policy makers have to weigh whether negative externality is greater than positive

externality and take assertive measures to redress the situation if it so warrants. On a positive note, indigenous hawkers always add a sort of charm to any town or city. For instance if hawkers selling traditional handicrafts set up their stores at the entry gates of major tourist destinations in the state, then this will be a positive externality for visiting domestic and foreign tourists since they may not have time to visit markets selling traditional handicrafts. At the end of the day, our policy makers needs to act according to the situation and if a particular situation demands stringent measures to curb illegal activities, then the government should act assertively but if a particular situation demands relaxed policies, then the government should try to accommodate hawkers belonging to the indigenous communities since the charm of Shillong city will be magnified.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Coal pit politics

Editor,
The recent unprovoked attack on Agnes Kharshiing and Amita Sangma by a bunch of hoodlums has brought into focus how social and environmental activists are prone to being attacked in Meghalaya. Though nothing much can

the government. There is no denying the fact that the Congress in the state is suffering from lack of leadership of the stature of Raman Singh or Ajit Jogi, who have been the key persons during the whole election process in the state. Ajit Jogi was the first chief minister of the state after its formation in 2000. At that time he was in the Congress, which he left in 2016 after being side-lined. Later, he formed his own Janata Congress Chhattisgarh, which is now contesting in alliance with Mayawati's BSP. Jogi's real political strength without Congress will be revealed after the election results are out on December 11. He is the chief ministerial candidate of the alliance while Raman Singh is BJP's. Congress has not declared its chief ministerial candidate. The northwest areas of the state are dominated by Scheduled Castes and, therefore, BSP has a considerable support base. The BJP has an edge in the area over Congress. In the northeast districts both the parties are pitted against each other in a neck and neck fight. The BJP is clearly ahead in central districts while the Congress has an upper hand in the southern areas.

The freebies promised by BJP, the Congress, and the JCC-BSP are attractive, but only the results will reveal their impact. We don't have any indication of their influence so far. The heavy voter turnout seems to be in favour of Congress, while a divided opposition is to the advantage of BJP. No clear chief minister candidate and no leader of the matching status of the present chief minister Raman Singh go against Congress; but anti-incumbency, farm distress and , joblessness go against the BJP. In brief, surprises are in store. (IPA Service)

be said about the duo's mission that led to the unfortunate attack with no help coming forth from anyone, the role of the Police, East Jaintia Hills is suspect and their tardy attitude in pursuing those behind the incident is suspect. People are not blind nor deaf. Those who pass through coal mining areas know that everyone is involved in the illegal mining and transportation of coal. However, what is questionable is the role of the Opposition in criticizing the current dispensation. The criticism is absolutely baseless. Rather than blaming the Government, political parties across the divide should work towards a solution and condemn in no uncertain terms the assault on such activists. Illegal transportation of coal had happened during the Congress-led MUA Government's tenure and continues till date. Therefore it will be prudent for both sides to introspect into their own acts of omission and commission and work for the greater good.

Yours etc..
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong:3

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.

Chhattisgarh election results to spring surprises

Even a small swing may make or mar political fortunes

By Gyan Pathak

age was only 7 per cent more than that of the Congress. It resulted in the defeat of Congress, which could get only 39 seats. This time, if only one per cent of swing in the anti-

when it got only 38 per cent of votes against the BJP's 49 per cent. However, the panchayat elections of 2016 showed an increase of eight per cent for the Congress as against a decrease

“*The alliance of Ajit Jogi’s Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (JCC) and Mayawati’s Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is mostly seen as denting into the Congress’s vote bank but may not be able to win more than a couple of seats. But, even a couple of seats may place them in a position to play an important role in formation of government in case of a hung assembly.*”

BJP votes goes in favour of Congress, both parties may get 44 seats each. A 1.5 per cent of swing in favour of the Congress may enable them to win 47 seats, and they could form the government on their own. But the same percentage of swing in favour of BJP may put 53 seats in the party's kitty.

of 11 per cent for the BJP, indicating anti-incumbency against the ruling BJP. The others are most likely to get less than five seats this time, making them most vulnerable to horse trading, apart from the JCC-BSP combine. In case of the BJP and the Congress getting less than

“*It is almost a certainty that there is anti-incumbency against the 15 years of BJP rule under the leadership of Raman Singh, which is also reflected in all the poll surveys predicting a loss of seats for the party compared to the general election of 2013 when they won 49 seats. In that election the BJP’s vote percentage was only 7 per cent more than that of the Congress.*”

Nevertheless, there is no way one can assess the level of swing this time because political winds have been blowing in different directions all along the election campaign.

The support base of the Congress shrunk in Lok Sabha election 2014,

Digital technology : Hits poor, profits big firms

By Shivaji Sarkar

The most coveted digitalisation and hyper-globalisation has come in for severe criticism by the United Nations. It helps big firms, big countries and leads to concentration of financial and economic power. The worst sufferers are the poor emerging economies.

Trade wars, monopolisation of markets are creating mammoths and distorting markets. Digital technology is prying into the smaller economies and tearing these apart. Digitalisation leads to decline in demand for physical goods, ongoing decline in their price, long-term decline in the demand fixed capital formation as a share of GDP and jobless growth, says the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its 2018 report.

Global trade war is running towards a “deeper economic malaise”, at a time when many countries are growing below potential, even as BRICS nations are doing better because of domestic demand. Among them Russia is doing better than others because of rising oil prices. The US and China have indulged in a bitter trade war, with both the countries slapping higher tariffs on each other's imports. This year is unlikely to see a change of gear, the report said. The US government will gain \$280 billion in tariff revenues.

Digitisation affects production through computer-aided design or any other 3-D software or artificial intelligence that creates digital models. Digital technologies are playing havoc in developing economies. Jobs are being outsourced to low-wage regions. This has caused stagnation of wages and majorly hit job creation. The report says the world economy is under stress. The immediate pressures are building around escalating tariffs and volatile financial flows. Behind these threats to global stability is a wider failure, since 2008, to address the inequities and imbalances of our hyper-globalised world.

After the global financial crisis, according to the report, the five largest exporting firms, on an average, accounted for 30 per cent of a country's total exports, and the 10 largest exporting firms for 42 per cent. Since 2008, global debt has soared from \$142 trillion to \$250 trillion, which is three times the combined income of every nation. This situation is worse than expected after global incomes failed to keep pace with rising debt levels.

The situation looks so familiar in Indian conditions though the nation has yet to realise that digitalisation is not a solution. The stress, says UNCTAD, is misplaced despite according to the report India is to have 7 per cent growth. The report even quotes IMF 2018 observation that says that available evidence suggests the digital sector is still less than 10 per cent of most economies if measured by value added income or employment.

The report found that the ratio of global debt to GDP is one third higher than before the 2008 crash. And the situation was much worse in the developed-world countries that had borrowed heavily in recent years from western banks offering ultra-cheap short-term loans. It quotes another estimate of digital economy being just 5 per cent of global output and 3 per cent of global employment.

The growing mountain of debt, more than three times the size of global output, is symbolic of that failure. “Private debt has exploded, especially in emerging markets and developing countries, whose share of global debt stock increased from 7 per

cent in 2007 to 26 per cent in 2017,” it says. Over the same period, the ratio of debts racked up by non-financial businesses in emerging markets increased from 56 per cent in 2008 to 105 per cent.

While the public sector in advanced economies has been obliged to borrow, possibly like Air India or recent busting of IL&FS, more since the crisis, it is the rapid growth of private indebtedness, particularly in the corporate sector, which needs to be monitored closely; this has, in the past, been a harbinger of crisis.

What a prophetic observation! Is not India suffering from the same syndrome that gigantic NPA of banks represent? The growing corporate debt syndrome has almost bust into a political crisis. It calls also for rethinking on bankisation of the society. The UNCTAD says developing countries will not be able to digitally leapfrog on their own. “While many developing countries are striving to develop their national e-commerce policies for linking their domestic producers and consumers to e-commerce platforms, there is a need to recognise the associated risks, especially these platforms are international.”

It reduces the domestic markets and poor economies lose out on valuable data. This forces flooding of goods from mighty powers. It helps thrive unethical corporate. The UNCTAD is also critical of WhatsApp and Google. It cited how the European Commission fined Google Euro 2.42 billion for abusing its market dominance as a search engine by demoting shopping service of its competitors and denied European consumers a genuine choice of service and benefits of innovation. Is not India also becoming a Google prey and monopolisation of groups like Amazon?

Further, corporate rent seeking is leading to market concentration. The UNCTAD wants a breakup of the large firms to prevent the concentration. The US had applied the anti-trust law to break monopolies, including the giant AT&T.

The UN wants a check on national data transfer – as is it targeting digital identity system -- and wants that WTO restrict governments' outflow of the data of their producers and consumers. It is propagating for a strong regulatory regime as the lack of it is creating global disparity. The rich nations like the US and China are cornering global business and giving rise to trade wars.

Gains from e-commerce for developing countries can become a reality only if they protect national e-commerce platforms. This would improve the domestic and international market access of their producers. A Chinese e-commerce platform KiKUU operates in six African countries selling only Chinese goods.

The UN also does not support robotics and artificial intelligence. Robots are concentrated in very few countries, including China, but it does not invalidate role of industrialisation as a development strategy. The use of computers and telecom is estimated to be less than 1 per cent for most countries between 2000 and 2014.

Strong regulations are needed in a digital world to create anti-trust laws. Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines have introduced regulations. But such regulations are not wide enough. This is leading to a global crisis in productivity, market monopolies and high debt. A supposed game changer in reality is bestowing the world with untold difficulties.--- INFNA

The longing to become one

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



What-ever people generally call as “love” right now tends to be between man and woman because nature has created a certain attraction between man and woman. This attraction is crucial for the survival of the race.

If you look at this physical urge that you refer to as sexuality, you will see the urge is to become one with something. It is not just about doing this or that. Somewhere, there is a longing in you that being yourself is not sufficient. You want to include another person as a part of yourself. So, sexuality is just a longing to become one with something more than that which you call as yourself — the basic longing is just to seek oneness.

Oneness means yoga. You are seeking to become one with something but if you become one with a woman or a man, it is not sufficient. Initially, you may have really believed it was sufficient. But once you go through that, you will see it is not. A fool will think he wants to become one with more and more people in that way but still it will not fulfil you. If you go through a whole lifetime of that, it does not get you anywhere.

Equally, your desire to have more money, more property, more power, more pleasure, more love is simply your spiritual longing, but without awareness. Whether you desire sex, money, pleasure, property, power, whatever, your desire is right, but you are not giving it the right direction, that is all.

Your desire is still wanting to become one with something more than yourself, but you need to understand that getting one woman or one man, or one this or one that is not going to fulfil you. It seeks more and more. What is it that your desire is finally seeking? It is seeking unboundedness. It wants to become one with everything.

In life, it does not matter what you include as a part of yourself, whether you include a man or a woman or one dozen children, still your life is not fulfilled. When you are young, you think “Oh, if I got married to this particular person, my life will be complete.” It may bring some happiness and comfort into your life, but it does not fulfil you.

Once you realise that, you think “Oh, we don’t have children. That is why we are like this. If I bear a child, everything will be okay.” You could have one or one dozen, but nothing happens. We produced one billion people in this country. Do you think everybody is realised and fulfilled? We go on bearing children without limit, but still, where is fulfilment? Do you see fulfilment on people’s faces? It is not happening.

So, either you go through all these experiences at the cost of a whole lifetime or you look at all these people and see. They have done all these things, it has not gotten them anywhere. It is very obvious. You look at a 60-year-old man who has gone through every process of life: of ambition, of power, of sex, of children, of love. If you look at his face and see, is it a face of fulfilment? No. If you have the intelligence to understand this from other people’s experience of life, you will see these things will not get you anywhere. This is why the yoga sutras start this way, “And now Yoga.”

The most basic instinct in you is always to become one with something or somebody. This is a spiritual instinct. It is just that you give expression to your spiritual instinct in a materialistic way. If you bring awareness to whatever you refer to as the most basic instincts, you will see, you will start on a spiritual journey. Right now, you are doing it without awareness and that is why it is remaining a limited process.

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

Arsenic chicken curry anyone?

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

We have guests for dinner. Wife, please make them delicious chicken curry with arsenic in it. No? Then let’s take them out to have tandoori chicken – with arsenic.”

These are not lines from the latest Bollywood murder mystery script. This is reality. Arsenic is that deadly element which has killed many a character in plays, movies and novels. What is hidden is the arsenic in our daily consumption.

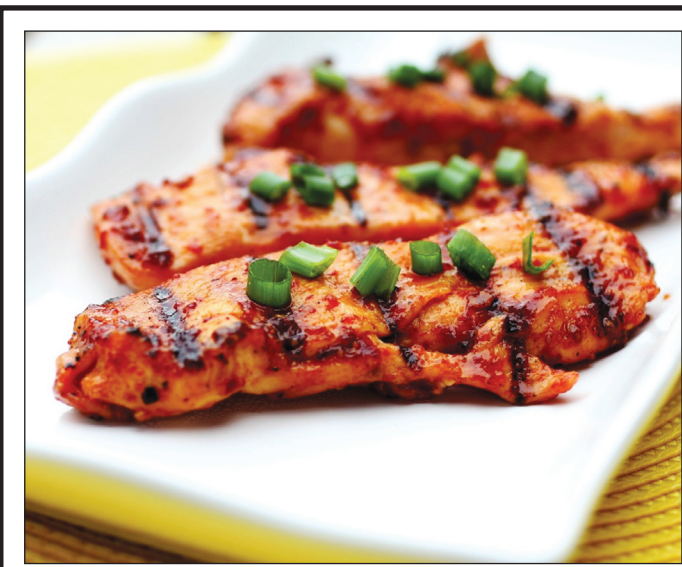
Arsenic is of two kinds — organic and inorganic. Inorganic arsenic compounds are more harmful for humans than the organic kind (which is also harmful). They react with the cells in the body, displace elements from the cells, and change the cells’ function.

For example, cells use phosphate for energy generation and signalling but one form of arsenic, known as arsenate, can imitate and replace the phosphate in the cell. This impairs the ability of the cell to generate energy and communicate with other cells. It changes the functioning of 200 + enzymes, which means that it becomes a deadly poison. The toxicity of arsenic has been described as far back as 1500 BC in the Ebers Papyrus.

Acute arsenic poisoning can lead to vomiting, abdominal pain, watery diarrhoea containing blood, cardiac problems, destruction of red blood cells, vertigo, delirium, shock, coma and death.

But it is the long-term exposure of low amounts of arsenic you should really worry about. (The rest of the world has banned arsenic as a chemical to prevent the insect infestation of wood used in building. However it is still used in India for wood preservation.) We are exposed to it through milk, apple juice and wine (the FDA found high levels of inorganic arsenic in 83 brands of wine).

But most of all, it is present in the many types of meat that we consume, especially fish, shellfish and chicken. Low doses of



Chicken faeces are commonly used as fertiliser on croplands. The bacteria present in chicken litter, and in the soil, converts the excreted organic arsenic into its inorganic form

arsenic cause far less severe symptoms. But that doesn’t mean that the body is not being slowly and systematically destroyed by chronic poisoning, even if the compound is weakly toxic.

Arsenic is related to Vitamin A deficiency, heart disease, stroke, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, lung, bladder and skin cancers and kidney/liver disease. Long-term exposure to arsenic can lead to skin changes (darkening or discoloration, redness, swelling and skin bumps that resemble corns or warts).

Whitish lines may appear in the fingernails. Both sensory and motor nerve defects can develop. Other problems are lactic acidosis. Arsenic blocks potassium going into the cells and low potassium increases the risk of experiencing a life-threatening heart rhythm problem, neurological disturbances, high blood pressure, central nervous system dysfunction, anaemia.

Epidemiological studies have suggested a correlation between chronic consumption of arsenic and the incidence of Type 2-diabetes. Pregnant women who eat arsenic may have babies with low birth weight and size. Early signs are headaches, confusion and drowsiness.

You are eating it every time you eat chicken.

Since the 1940s, chickens

have been fed arsenic to promote growth and weight gain with lower feed. It means that you can feed the battery cage chicken less food and the chicken will grow just as big. This saves money for the poultry owner. The drugs Roxarsone and Nitarsone make the chickens grow bigger at a fast rate and give their unhealthy and diseased grey battery cage skin an artificial pink colour to make them look healthy.

The makers of Roxarsone, Nitarsone and the American Food and Drug Administration justified and allowed its use on the grounds that the arsenic used was organic. However, they were proved wrong by a 2011 study at Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future which analyzed hundreds of chicken breasts sold in grocery stores in 10 cities across the USA. The study showed that Roxarsone turned immediately into carcinogenic inorganic arsenic in chicken bodies.

Further, when this chicken was killed and cooked, the levels of inorganic arsenic increased to dangerous levels.

While animal feed, with arsenic-containing compounds, was always banned in the 25 countries of Europe, UK, Japan. Many countries in Asia, Canada and Australia continue to allow it in animal feed.

Roxarsone and Nitarsone are used massively by Indian poultry

said the senior researcher at WBUFAS.

It is not just chicken eaters who are at risk, but each one of us. Chicken faeces are commonly used as fertiliser on croplands.

The bacteria present in chicken litter, and in the soil, converts the excreted organic arsenic into its inorganic form. Research from the University of Alberta, published in Science of the Total Environment, found that arsenic from the feed transferred easily from chicken bodies to poultry litter. Because poultry litter is commonly used to fertilise soil, it can lead to increased concentration of arsenic in plants grown in soil fertilised with chicken manure, generating public health issues (Rutherford et al., 2003).

Arsenic use promotes antibiotic resistance. Infectious disease concerns are heightened by the fact that poultry producers routinely use feed additives that include both antibiotics and arsenic compounds.

Doctors, and the entire medical fraternity, need to take a lead in this campaign demanding poultry raised without the use of arsenic. The FSSAI and the Drug Controller must withdraw its approval of arsenic feed additives as an unnecessary public health risk. Europe shows us it is possible to raise poultry without arsenic.

The only possible method for control is to ban farm feeds and other products with arsenic. This should cover not just the hugely popular Roxarsone and Nitarsone but Arsanilic Acid, Carbarosone and other related compounds.

Ensuring compliance to such a ban is possible through stringent monitoring standards, by regularly testing chicken meat and eggs and inspecting pharmaceutical factories. There cannot be negotiation on how much, or which kind, of arsenic humans can consume, when we need not consume arsenic at all.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 18, 2018

Moon trine Sun on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. This is a year of relative contentment. It is a time when love is the easiest to attract, and partnerships formed under this vibration have a better chance for longevity. You are able to attract others, and material things as well, this year. This is a good year for establishing harmony in the family and in the home. Advice - develop existing relationships, be positive and receptive because these kinds of energies help you to attract what you desire.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This period brings mixed results. Concentrate on truly listening to those close to you, and on playing a supportive role. Perhaps it's a time to make a presentation or to face the world boldly. Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you ahead and in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity with good chances of foreign collaborations. You are drawn to objects and material comforts - possessions that give a boost to your status. Your creative abilities are reflected in your outlook on life and love and romance are life experiences you strongly identify with. Children may be a stronger focus as well.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This week brings harmonious relations in friendship, love, family and children. You are thinking more creatively, and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You will be able to make good use of your talents, work experience and would use your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You are more sensitive artistically, your imagination is stirred, and you have an increased appreciation for subtleties. Your social life too is stimulated, and plenty of opportunities to express yourself uniquely and creatively will present themselves. Pleasure-seeking activities, recreation, and amusement are more. You are far less inhibited when it comes to expressing yourself creatively, and you are a lot more fun to be around.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Good fortune, spirituality, trips, and communications are the highlights of this week. Your communication skills are stronger than usual. You would participate in discussions and share views; ideas and feelings with people around, this also opens up opportunities and enhances monetary gains. It's a great time to improve flexibility of your mind and to promote harmony and good will on the job front. This is a rather happy and goal-oriented time. A lively agenda is promised, you're attracting quite a bit of interest and your energy for making contact with others is strong. You get more organized and use your resources to aim high.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, and dependable side in your personal and professional relations. New beginnings are in store, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. You work in association and with experienced professionals and motivated people and this enhances your confidence and talent to attract business opportunities. Moreover you are well organized and keep alternate plans handy. The flowing, expressive, and spontaneous energy surrounding you attracts like-minded people. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The planetary configuration boosts your morale and self-confidence and you meet difficult tasks head on and resolve work related issues. You enjoy collaboration and participation at work and at home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you. Study business offers and professional opportunities in detail before taking a decision. Your boss or superior might seek impossible goals and you need to apprise him of the real picture. Money matters take priority, as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. Friendships are something you can rely upon as you encounter a dilemma. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, and fitness needs.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively. This is altogether a happy and relaxed period for you. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Be guarded especially when you make

important decisions. Looking within at your values and beliefs gives you insight and direction that would help. There is beauty in emotional and family relationships. The love support of family is indeed a blessing; remember to be thankful for your blessings. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Love, romance and excitement in personal relations are foretold. Personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get closer and on the other hand limited relationships are likely to fall apart. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine ideas and good management. Your contribution stands out. Personal relations are packed with emotions and feelings. You are loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You might also spend a lot of time in physical activities like sports and games.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The planetary configuration brings mastery in your field of activities. Some associations can be competitive in business as you shine and work well in your field of activity. You impress people with your talent and charisma and invite fresh opportunities. You may also build your image in keeping with your work with novel communications, presentations and styles, and grooming. People at work could swing from one mood to another. Personal relations are difficult and sensitive at times as both partners seek freedom, independence and space. Listen to your intuition and guard against over indulgence in food, drink or work. It is time to reject old habits and patterns.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Professional situations and matters come to the fore and there would no element of illusion about these matters. This is the time for professional stability and good financial returns too as you impress people with your talent and charisma. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. Physical energy and good health enable you balance a busy schedule and work commitments. A personal meeting will lead to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program. It is time to heal old friendships with tender, love, care and move into new relationships with love and sensitivity.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration enables you to restructure and reorganize activities at work and analyze the situations at home. Your daily routine and business dealings need to be restructured for better gains and productivity. You tend to be a perfectionist while completing business projects and campaigns. You are ambitious and ready to achieve professional goals and targets at any cost. Your heart tends to over react emotionally in personal relationships, look at things from a balanced and positive perspective. Your perceptions are sometimes clouded by your emotions and you create hazy images of people and situations that present you from seeing reality or the truth. It is here that your analytical powers take over and help in seeing through the haze.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

As mixed results come you would maintain balance, strength at your place of work but go through a rather emotional time in personal relationships. Restructuring business schedules and dealings would be productive and favorable. You impress people with your skills and invite fresh opportunities. Personal relations are difficult and sensitive at times there are a number of emotions to be dealt with here. Rather than control others, take time to transform and heal yourself. You would initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. Yoga and meditation are recommended.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There is cooperation and harmony professionally as you organize and marshal your emotions and thoughts. A professional collaboration comes together when you given up all the hopes of it. Creative and professional plans are set to actualize and it is best to work towards them persistently. Your business plans have a quality of perfection and completion. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and successfully interact with seniors. This is a good time to build on your skills, and to attend to your health and well being. You have to pay attention to your image and process your emotions and avoid conflicts.

Know about life & beyond

By Ranjan K Baruah

Ecology is not synonymous with environment, environmentalism, natural history or environmental science. It is closely related to evolutionary biology, genetics and ethology.

An important focus for ecologists is to improve the understanding of how biodiversity affects ecological function. Ecologists seek to explain life processes, interactions and adaptations; the movement of materials and energy through living communities; the abundance and distribution of organisms and biodiversity in the context of the environment.

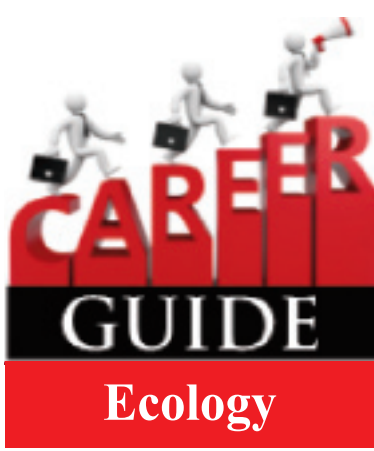
It is the scientific analysis and study of interactions among organisms and their environment. It is an interdisciplinary field that includes biology, geography, earth science etc.

Ecology includes the study of interactions organisms have with each other, other organisms, and with abiotic components of their environment. Topics of interest to ecologists include the diversity, distribution, amount (biomass), and number (population) of particular organisms, as well as cooperation and competition between organisms, both within and among ecosystems.

Ecosystem processes, such as primary production, pedogenesis, nutrient cycling and various niche construction activities, regulate the flux of energy and matter through an environment. These processes are sustained by organisms with specific life history traits, and the variety of organisms is called biodiversity. Biodiversity, which refers to the varieties of species, genes, and ecosystems, enhances certain ecosystem services.

It is a human science as well. There are many practical applications of ecology in conservation biology, wetland management, natural resource management (agro ecology, agriculture, forestry, agro forestry, fisheries), city planning (urban ecology), community health, economics, basic and applied science, and human social interaction (human ecology).

Students who take this subject are called ecologists. Ecologists have a lot of task to do. Some of them are to conduct research outdoors and in the laboratory; teach students and the general public — in universities or colleges as well as at high schools,



search to outreach campaign or programmes. It depends on the students what s/he would like to choose out of different roles and responsibilities. We shall publish more in next edition.

Update:

CDS Exam: Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released the official notification of Combined Defence Service (CDS). Aspirants willing to apply for CDS Exam 2019 can apply through the official site of UPSC at upsc.gov.in. Individuals would be selected for Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force. The last date to apply for the posts is set till November 26.

The examination will be conducted on February 3, 2019, across the country. The aspirant will have to be a graduate from recognised University/College/Institute to apply for the same.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“Maybe because it's entirely an artist's eye, patience and skill that makes an image and not his tools.”

--- Ken Rockwell

The Shillong Times

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Power-shift in Maldives

CURTAINS are up hopefully for a season of political stability in Maldives, the islands republic to the south-west of India. The swearing in of newly elected President Ibrahim Solih, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi among other dignitaries Saturday, is expected to open a new era of hope and economic development for the nation set in the Indian Ocean archipelago. This is despite the fact that seasons of political instability, and overt and covert attempts by Pakistan and China to wean the small nation to their side and away from India’s influence, marked the events there in recent years. Ibrahim Solih’s election as head of state, endorsed also by court amid attempts to challenge people’s verdict in polls, meant the island nation has evolved and has solid mechanisms in place to ward off machinations within and from outside to create instability there. It was clear to one and all that Abdullah Yameen, ousted from power in the new polls, had exceeded his brief. As he began losing public support, he turned more authoritarian, jailed political opponents, and went berserk. In all these, he obviously took advice and inspiration from Pakistan. Pakistan helped China court Yameen, to jointly push and promote their vested interests and agenda to isolate India in the geopolitical region. Yameen was willing to play along. His recklessness only resulted in his own unceremonious exit from power.

The politics and governance in Maldives remained disrupted off and on ever since 1988, when a coup d’ etat was foiled by timely airlifting of over 1,600 Indian troops to Maldives by then PM Rajiv Gandhi. This was in response to an urgent request (SOS), from then head of state Maummon Abdul Gayoom. Gayoom luckily survived that attempt. His exit from power in later years, and the political slugfest and disruptions in governance that followed, had exposed how foreign powers, including Pakistan and China, tried to meddle in Maldives’ internal affairs. They have achieved some successes in the past, also as Pakistan played the Muslim card, but these are now things of the past. Be that as it may, it is time now for Maldives to gain lost ground in terms of economic growth and zealously guard against future disruptions by these alien interests. India remains Maldives’ strongest ally; and PM Modi has, in specific terms promised support to by way of creating educational and health infrastructure and other development needs. For now, it’s time to cheer.

TO THE EDITOR

CM in denial mode

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Conrad in denial mode on illegal mining" (ST Nov 16, 2018), one wonders how the Chief Minister can keep on denying that illegal coal mining is going on in the state. He and his Government might not have carried out illegal coal mining but others have done and are still doing it. This is proved by the fact that every now and again the police have seized coal laden trucks at various parts of the state which are also regularly reported in the media. Even the CSWO members, who were assaulted on November 8 last, witnessed that illegal mining is still being carried out by the miners at Tuber Sohshrieh. Even Justice Katoki and team who went to inspect the coal mine areas of Jaintia Hills on behalf of the NGT found freshly extracted coal. Then on Nov 15 at around 3.30 am police seized four coal laden trucks at Lad Umsaw, Ri Bhoi District. Earlier the CSWO leader, Agnes Kharshiing and her colleagues found five coal laden trucks parked at Mawiong from which they got valuable inputs about coal being illegally mined.

Even in West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills media have frequently reported of trucks carrying coal to Assam. Now, where do the trucks get coal to carry if not from illegal mining? For how long can the CM keep on denying this fact when circumstantial evidence proves the point? Is the CM not making a fool of himself by denying an undeniable fact? Is he not lying to the public? What he should have said was that his Government would deal strictly with anyone found violating the NGT ban on coal mining. Again, what he should have said was that the state which are also regularly reported in the media. Even the CSWO members, who were assaulted on November 8 last, witnessed that illegal mining is still being carried out by the miners at Tuber Sohshrieh. Even Justice Katoki and team who went to inspect the coal mine areas of Jaintia Hills on behalf of the NGT found freshly extracted coal. Then on Nov 15 at around 3.30 am police seized four coal laden trucks at Lad Umsaw, Ri Bhoi District. Earlier the CSWO leader, Agnes Kharshiing and her colleagues found five coal laden trucks parked at Mawiong from which they got valuable inputs about coal being illegally mined.

Why Rahul Gandhi is not acceptable as PM?

Editor,

What is common between Rajiv Gandhi and his son Rahul Gandhi is

Cultural Syndrome in Khasi Pnar Society

When our kids were young we consulted our family physician about the need to administer local medicines to our kids, particularly ‘dawai khniang sohpet’ (medication related to the umbilical cord and causes colic in babies) which is popular among the Khasi Pnar community. The doctor questioned us on the need to administer the medicine and also said that he had studied medical science and had not found anything like ‘khniang sohpet’ throughout his medical studies. He also asked us why God would be so cruel as to curse us with a disease which is not found elsewhere.

It was Dr Glenn Kharkongor the Chancellor of Martin Luther University who during my research told me that such ailments are classified under ‘Cultural Syndrome,’ because it is unique only to a specific culture. Therefore ‘khniang sohpet, u Thlen and other disorders fall under such categories. We have heard about U Thlen and the story of how the demon came to live with humans, but there are other health disorders particularly those which affect the mental wellbeing of the individual in the society. Some of those are ‘ka Taro,’ ‘ka sabuit,’ ‘ka bih, ka kymbat’ etc.

Unlike u Thlen, in the case of ‘ka Taro’ which is prevalent amongst the Pnars, it is believed that humans are possessed by spirits, but it is mostly the female victim would be in delirium. In such cases it is believed that the victim takes on the personality of the Taro keeper, speaks in her voice and behaves like the keeper too. The Shaman using his charm and magic would try to extract as much information from the victim this possessed by the Taro. The spirit would reluctantly identify herself and reveal the keeper’s identity and would also cite reasons as to why she came to possess the victim. The victim throughout the ordeal will not only take on the personality of the keeper but she would replicate the keeper’s traits and even speak in her voice. The victim who is possessed becomes just

the body in which the spirit of the Taro keeper temporarily lives.

I guess this is called split personality or Schizophrenia but the victim would only heal if and when the keeper accepts that the Taro belongs to him/her and welcomes the spirit back. The moment the Taro keeper accepts the spirit and welcomes it back the spirit leaves the body of the victim and he/she is released of the possession and falls. This is a sign that the spirit has left the victim. ‘Shah bat Taro’ or being possessed by the Taro used to be one of the health problems prevalent in the society. It also became a social problem which affects the relationship between the family of the victim and the keepers.

Then another tradition which has some psychological element to it is; “Ka lai blai or ka hiar blai.” Lai blai or hiar blai literally means when the Gods visit. Ka blai is a person who is believed to possess special powers to communicate with the gods. It is believed that the women (ka blai) can also act as an intermediary between those in the physical world and those in the world of the spirit. The women who can ‘hiar blai’ or become possessed by the spirit can transcend from the material to the spiritual world to help the people who come to seek her help.

People would visit the woman when they have problems such as a sickness or family problem. She would get into a trance and communicate with the spirit and then reveal the causes of the problem. She would even suggest remedial measures to cure the sickness or to get rid of the problem from the victim, but she is not a Shaman although she prescribes medicines.

‘Sabuit’ or what they call ‘ka Ske’ in Pnar is a kind of a curse that is cast on others by those with an evil spell. Sometimes it is unintended may be because person who has the spell casts an evil eye on someone. One would see a

plates erected by farmers in their garden with words ‘phuit ka sabuit’ in Khasi hills or ‘phui ske’ in Jaintia hills inscribed in them. These are not scarecrows meant to scare birds from infesting the garden, but are meant to protect the plants from the evil spell cast by those with an evil eye. These were erected to drive away evil spells which could also fall on the fruits and vegetables in the garden and not on humans only.

People with the power to cast a spell (chong ske) can badly affect plants in the garden. If they cast their spell on a person he/she can fall ill. Only some people have the power to cast the spell (em ske), while some people have a lighter version of the spell which is not harmful and it is called ‘ka ske-khmat’. Ske mostly cause sicknesses which are related to food or stomach ailments. It is believed that it can also cause the plants in the garden to wither and die instead before they can flower or fruit.

‘Ai Ksuid or leh/e stad’ in Pnar means casting evil spirits on a person that one hates or one’s enemy and unlike in the case of ‘Sabuit/ske’ when the evil spirits is called on a victim, he/she suffers and in some cases can even die. When two or more people are in a dire and uncompromising relationship, they would visit the Shaman and pay him to cast an evil spirit on their enemy. Similarly people would visit the Shaman if they feel that something is not right and the Shaman will call on his patron to find if somebody has cast an evil spell on them. The evil spell will cause ill health and ill fortune and the affected person or family will have to rid itself of the evil spell and hence has to engage a shaman to do the job.

There are places which are considered to be bad and evil and people avoid visiting or would even refrain from passing through the place (i thaw wa sang). People avoid the places because it is believed that evil spirits or

ghosts dwell in the area and if anybody happens to pass through the area, then the evil spirit would cast its spell on the person (rap ka ksuid) and he/she would fall sick. The ghost or the evil spirit can only be cast away by the Shaman who can summon a spirit much more powerful than of the one that caused the illness.

Apart from places which people consider as cursed or as dwelling places of the dark spirits there are also places which only some clans are forbidden to walk on or visit. Different clans have different places which are considered to be a taboo for the member of the clan to visit or even pass through the area. It could be a water body, a place or any natural phenomena and the evil spirit will be upon those members of the clan who violate the taboo. In some cases even sacred groves can cast evil spirits on those who oppose and violate the conventions maintained by the community.

‘Ka Bih’ or what is known as ‘ka Kymbad’ in Jaintia hills is another evil phenomenon which is caused by people who keep this kind of evil spirit. Like Taro and Thlen, it is believed that certain family keep the Kymbad or the Bih. It is believed that those who keep ka Bih or Kypad can lay evil their spell on the food that a person eats and make those who consume the food to suffer and sometimes even die. Therefore people avoid eating from people they suspect of keeping the Kymbad for fear of getting affected by the food they are served. Amongst the Pnar there is an ordinary Kymbad and there is a very potent one known as ‘Kymbad Khangtlein’ and Cancer is now considered as Kymbad Khangtlein.

‘U Symputh or u Suid Tynjang’ is a good spirit which only plays trick with its victims. The power of its spirit is only temporary and it seldom causes any harm or injury to its victims. These are some of the health issues that people face and medical science has no cure if one suffers from the spell because it is unique only to the culture of the Khasi Pnars only.

Importance of specialisation in transforming the economy of Meghalaya

By Gary Marbaniang

If some music enthusiast in the city would have said twelve years ago that the Shillong Chamber Choir would one day sing for the President of the USA, everyone would have ridiculed him and say he is out of his mind and living in a fool’s paradise. Today look how far the Choir has come! Credit must go to Mr Neil Nongkynrih for handpicking talented and dedicated singers from all around the city and the region creating a close knit group that seems to be enjoying every minute of the ride. The Choir has managed to break barriers and foster unity by singing in different languages. We should feel truly blessed to be living in the most diverse country in the world and kudos to the Choir for managing to grab hold of the golden opportunity to build a bridge between the people of Meghalaya and the rest of the Country and dispelling the negative image of the North Eastern Region as whole. The Choir has literally gone places and there is no boundary or limit to what they can achieve.

The valuable lesson that young people in the State can learn from their achievement is that there is no short cut to success. Hard work is the only way to success. Talent without hard work is meaningless. If one doesn't polish one's skills then the talent that one possesses will rust and lose its shine. That's why it is important for young people to concentrate on the things they're good at and refine it so that it becomes presentable to the whole world. And support, yes support, is very important if not the most important thing in the world. Most parents are good at throwing cold water and thwarting their children's ambitions. Khasi parents should realize that the days of wanting all their children to be either government officers, doctors and engineers are long gone. Every person in this world possess some kind of God given talent but in today's world if young people don't put in any real effort to hone their skills and the talent they possess doesn't reach acceptable standards then that talent will not be appreciated.

I don't consider myself an exceptional writer but I kind of knew that I possess some writing skills way back when I was in Class 9. There was a history test on the Egyptian Civilization and I didn't study at all for the test. I opened the history textbook at the eleventh hour but realized that my last ditch effort at saving face was too little too late. My last resort was to rely totally on my saving grace to save me from the impending crisis - a technique which students lovingly call in khasi, "Thaw hi" meaning 'Make up.' Thaw hi has probably saved many students from humiliation and failure whenever they're not able to study by rote. Rote learning sadly is still the right way or the only way to study in our country even today if students want to pass their exams with flying colours. So I decided to intelligently make up the answer and to my surprise our History teacher, Miss Palmer gave me the highest marks and asked everyone in the Class to read my answer script.

My University Professor, Sir Umdor also showered the same kind of praise on me when I reviewed a book by Indian Economist , Gurcharan Das. But when a University friend asked me to express our collective outrage in The Shillong Times for publishing a front page news report about what a former local politician in our State said about U Tirot Sing, I simply couldn't

pick up the pen and come out with the words to express myself. I later won the first prize in an essay competition conducted at the University but it took me a few years to finally muster the courage and confidence to write my first article for “The Shillong Times.” I therefore encourage our young people to continue to hone their skills and perfect their craft and to never give up and lose hope because you never know where life is going to take you or who you'll end up to be.

I've been saying really nice things about the Shillong Chamber Choir but if I do not support them in a way that will enable them to reap the rewards of their talent then my praises will only be empty words. If the Choir release a music album either in Khasi or English, I'll be the first one to purchase it. When Desmond Rimaki Sunn, a leading musician in our city released his path breaking Khasi music album a few years ago, I had no second thoughts in spending a few hundred bucks to purchase that music album. If we really admire exceptional talent then we must support them financially. There is a term in Economics called, "Free Rider" which means that a person enjoys the benefits of resources, mostly public goods, without spending money on it. If the world mostly consists of free riders even when it comes to the use of private resources then the whole modern economy will collapse. What sustained the barter system in olden times and the modern economy in a developed country today is the support system and the exchange of goods for goods. In the barter system, every good has some sort of imputed value and having a utility is the main quality that a particular good should possess in order to be accepted in exchange for another good. Likewise in a developed economy, every good that comes out of any of the three main sectors of the economy possesses some sort of monetary value. The moment people try to get something for free the economy suffers. This is how corruption destroys the economy too.

In the U.S.A, even a bicycle rider can make a living by becoming a bike stunt professional. People in the U.S.A usually pay good money to watch a bike stunt professional perform. India has grown by leaps and bounds since it liberalized its economy in 1991 and is on course to becoming a global superpower in the next decade or so. But it still has a long way to go in it's quest of transforming itself into a sustainable fast growing economy. Small States like Meghalaya must do their bit to contribute to the growth story of the country. A big chunk of the population in the State is still engaged in agriculture and disguised unemployment is still prevalent. Specialisation remains a distant dream for many of our youths especially those employed in Agriculture.

The people of Meghalaya need to embrace Specialisation and our policy makers need to empower our youth by formulating and implementing skill development programmes on a large scale. We should also support our talented young people monetarily which will also be the best incentive to enable them to be independent minded and instil in them the belief that they can stand on their own two feet and support themselves financially. In this way the economy of an underdeveloped state like Meghalaya will grow in a sustainable way and reach new heights.

experience, and both were given the privilege in a silver platter. They are pampered by media, their flaws have been overlooked, and their achievements overstated and hyperboled. It is on record that Rahul Gandhi stated that the “Nehru family” alone brought freedom to India. Recently he said that Congress party had no hand in the Sikh genocide of 1984. Such expressions laid bare Rahul Gandhi's gross political immaturity, limited intellect and lack of knowledge, history and culture of the country. It is pathetic that P Chidambaram and a few others of the Congress continue to make excuses for Rahul Gandhi.

Rajiv Gandhi had disrupted the very fabric of India in ways unfathomable, and India cannot afford to have another Rajiv Gandhi in the name of Rahul Gandhi as Prime Minister.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay, Advocate, Kolkata High Court

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minorities of minorities. A poor 62-year-old Muslim woman went to the court seeking Rs. 200 as monthly allowance from her husband, to support her 5 children after he triple talaq-ed her. Even the Supreme Court ruled in her favour. Rajiv Gandhi passed an ordinance which was ratified in Parliament by a retrogressive amendment of the Constitution to appease the conservative clergy. The infamous Shah Bano case is the classic text book example of vote-bank appeasement and anti women-empowerment mind-set.

If clergy appeasement wasn't enough, Rajiv went ahead and became the architect of the worst Hindu- Muslim clashes this country ever witnessed. He was instrumental in opening the locks of the disputed Babri Masjid which was shut down since 1949. The event was telecast live on Doordarshan. This was perhaps his trick to win Hindu votes. The decision led to widespread protests, and later in 1992 the Babri Masjid was demolished and eventual riots happened in Mumbai in 1993. The 1984 state-sponsored anti-Sikh riots was the biggest

pogrom in the history of India under Rajiv's leadership. Official government reports said that 2,800 Sikhs were killed across India, including 2,100 in Delhi. And, some independent sources estimate the number of deaths at about 8,000. The Sikh genocide sinisterly designed and perpetrated by Jagdish Tytler, Ajay Maken, and Sajjan Kumar was an inhuman, unpardonable act. And yet Rajiv Gandhi was decorated with “Bharat Ratna” posthumously. Rajiv Gandhi's political immaturity is the sole reason behind the Kashmir fiasco. Against popular belief that Kashmir issue started right after India's partition, the truth is that it was a fairly peaceful state till as late as 1987. The Congress party under his leadership reportedly rigged the 1987 Assembly elections to favour its ally- National Conference. This led to the rise of Mujahideen and the beginning of the violent phase in the Valley.

Rahul Gandhi is the exact replica of his father. Both father and son are drop-outs of foreign universities, both of them have limited political

that both have powerful mothers? Indira Gandhi had made the biggest blunder by conducting “Operation Blue Star” by invading and desecrating the ‘Golden Temple’ that alienated the Sikh community in gross violation of Article 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice of and propagation of religion) of the Constitution of India). She had created Bhindranwale, who slipped out of her grip and boomeranged as a Frankenstein. Scared of loosing vote bank of the major minority community she did not have the political will to conduct “Operation Green Star” and the country is now threatened by separatists and terrorists for another partition and re-enactment/ action replay of great Calcutta killings. Rajiv Gandhi made bigger blunders than Indira and Sanjay combined. Although Indira Gandhi was called a dictator the media couldn't whitewash her doings. Even Sanjay Gandhi had given enough reasons to be called out. But Rajiv Gandhi's blunders trump theirs by a wide margin. He destroyed the social fabric of India.

Rajiv Gandhi was against

“*The thing to remember is that that the future comes one day at a time.*”
--- Dean Acheson

The Shillong Times

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Of Politician and Dustbins

It’s been a while since the dustbin has evolved into the trash can and is now the garbage bin. Normally garbage bins are kept outside the house because they tend to collect flies and stink. Words and phrases and indeed language itself reflects a person’s feelings at a particular point in time. At the moment, former President of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), DD Lapang who resigned from the Party some weeks ago and kept people guessing if he would join the National Peoples’ Party (NPP), is expressing his deepest hurt. He feels the Congress had dumped him into the dustbin of history thinking he would not rise again and that his time was up. But the octogenarian is not to be put down so easily. As the former Chief Minister of Meghalaya and the creator of Ri Bhoi district he still commands clout in his constituency and beyond. It was expected that Lapang would join the NPP as a quid pro quo for being appointed Chief Advisor to the Government of Meghalaya. In Government parlance the word “Advisor” is pregnant with meaning and metaphor. It simply is a title given to the person so that he legitimately draws his pay and perks from the public exchequer. And since the public is silent it is presumed that silence is consent and the public is complicit in that decision.

The political class is not known to be judicious in the use of public funds. Meghalaya is facing serious funds crunch. There is not enough money for road construction and repairs. So much so, the Government has to be pushed by the High Court to complete even the road to NEIGHRIMS. Superfluous political appointments are a case of throwing good money after bad. This is not an option at all except that when it comes to spending on the creature comforts of the political class there is no dearth of funds. Many wonder how an octogenarian can advise a Government with 35-40 year olds at the helm. Lapang held the same post during the MUA-2 but he never gave a single piece of advice to the then Government. The MDA Government will face a major embarrassment if it keeps pacifying all political wannabes with superfluous appointments merely because they promise to bring members to the NPP. Is the NPP buying camp followers with public money? This is something that the new Lokayukta needs to examine.

TO THE EDITOR

Lapang still a force to reckon with

Editor,
Apropos the lead story, "Lapang supporters give shape to leader's NPP Plan" (ST Nov.19, 2018), Mr DD Lapang is making a louder noise this time around than he did at the time of his resignation from the Congress. He minced no words that he would join the NPP while addressing a public meeting at Nongpoh (Pahamsohthri) on Saturday last. Repeating his favourite mantra ('for the service of my people') during the meeting he reiterated that he and his family would continue to serve the people, "whether the Congress likes it or not." He also made it amply clear that he would not be alone but would work with a like-minded party (NPP) and would continue to serve the public (my people). Being a father figure of Ri Bhoi District the meeting was largely attended by people from across the District who approvingly and unanimously endorsed him to join NPP with a raising of hands, while he smilingly nodded in response to their wishes.

That Lapang would join NPP was clear from day one after he left the Congress and was lavishly blessed by his appointment as Chief Adviser to the MDA government. He reiterated this clear when he said, "The present government picked me up from the dustbin and appointed me as the ‘Chief

Adviser to the Government’ to serve the people after considering my experience and contributions." Many people had written off Mr Lapang, saying he is old; a spent force and that no longer a force to reckon with any longer in politics. But that does not seem to be the case. Lapang may not participate in electoral politics as an active candidate but who knows, if he contests as MLA candidate from Nongpoh today he may still win. The people still look up to him as a father figure and they respond overwhelmingly to his call. This cannot be underestimated. Lapang is still a leader with mass following not only in Nongpoh Constituency but across Ri Bhoi and elsewhere too. Now that the MP and MDC elections are round the corner his voice will still count and his unmatched electoral oratory skills during canvassing cannot be underestimated either. Lapang is expected to have great influence in swinging votes during elections for the NPP and for MDA candidates.

Yours etc...
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Misconceptions about Puja celebration

Editor,
Any auspicious day in

Hinduism is expected to be observed with complete purity of action and thought. The same holds true for other religions too. As per the Hindu scriptures, the believers are required to stay away from any kind of sense gratification, particularly when the specific days are dedicated to Gods and Goddess such as Navratri, Laxmi Puja, Krishna Janmashtami, Shivaratri, to name a few. The pathway to devotion and spiritualism should not be “desecrated” by the blot of brazen entertainment. The scriptures logically explain why it is antithetical, and its adverse consequences. But what an irony, nay blasphemy that many people these days have started to choose such auspicious occasions to satisfy their base senses. Without a wee bit of regret, a certain class of people holds almost every auspicious day as the most “unmissable” occasion to booze with friends, and stagger back home. Such bizarre practices are fast catching up now than ever. Sadly, hardly any conscious people and spiritual organizations stand up and take the right measures to check such obvious deviations.

What is unpleasant is that such unholy practices are often being facilitated by certain Hindu institutions as well. On this past Laxmi Puja, the “propitious time” to perform

the ritual had fallen between 6.00 - to 7.53 PM. Yours truly decided to use that time for meditation. But all hell broke loose. Apart from the noise of fireworks, Bollywood songs at high decibels burst forth from a certain Hindu institution with a seemingly frustrated mission. A senior citizen lamented, “Nothing could be more irreligious than that a favorable time for “puja” is also being used for wrongful purposes. We rather expect the “Hindu institutions” to teach our children Bhajan, Kirtan and other spiritual activities, not the loud and feverish parties that disturb others.”

Another college student adds, “Having been disturbed by the noise pollution, I have persuaded my parents to shift our place of residence elsewhere, not at least near holy places with an unholy mission. I have started to look at such institutions with suspicion these days.” Is it that our institutions are unable to use their “discretion”, and as a result they fail to differentiate between right and wrong? One is deeply apprehensive that Bollywood songs and vulgar dances might as well be included as a part of the “puja ritual” as we have long accepted the fun of fireworks bursting as an integral part of Laxmi Puja which in fact is just an e n t r e n c h e d “misconception”.

Needless to say, our quest for consumerism has almost drowned the whisper

of inherent spiritualism. We are sending out the wrong messages. I’m afraid the whole culture itself might be looked down with derision by other faiths. It might just become a subject of ridicule! It is no exaggeration but such negative notions against “wrong practices” are all that we read about these days in several newspapers and social media. Do we want others to demean our profound spiritual heritage thus? I believe this calls for serious soul-searching. Incidentally, the Bhagavad Gita describes such situations as the rise of “tamasic vibes”. It warns in the strongest terms that mankind should be careful not to fall under the influence of any short-lived sense gratification lest our endeavor to “practice and preserve” the sanctity of religion/ spiritualism will be a futile exercise.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong -2

Salute to a hero

Editor,
Apropos the news report captioned “Hero of Battle of Longewala no more” (ST November 18, 2018), There are no words to describe a loss as tragic as this . Brig. Kuldip Singh Chandpuri , MVC , the legend is no more but his valour will always be etched in the annals of the

intensive’ or business-as-usual’ scenario.

It is quite discernible that, climate change is projected to be a ‘poverty multiplier’ through food insecurity, higher food prices, income losses, lost livelihood opportunities, adverse health impacts and population displacements.

Meanwhile, the Centre for Science & Environment (CSE) made certain recommendations. It said: “if the world insists on sticking to the 20 C target, in all probability it will overshoot it. However, if the world agrees to keep warning warming within 1.50 C, it can contain it well within 20 C, adding that developed countries must take the lead by rapidly decarbonising their economies as well as reducing consumption through adoption of low carbon growth.

“A fossil fuel free energy system and investments in energy efficiency will help grow the economy in most scenarios”, as rightly pointed out by Director of CSE Dr Sunita Narain. Thus, it is quite obvious that emerging economies like India, China and the like must seize the opportunity. However, without positive overtures from industrial economies, nothing much may be accomplished and, as such, these countries have to come forward, the prospect of which will depend on the action by these countries in the coming years.

Thus, there remains very little time to act. But affluent, influential economies -- the US is an example -- are not much interested to fight the looming crises. This is particularly worrisome given that the world, the report estimated, would require \$2.4 trillion annually between 2016 and 2035 -- 2.5 per cent of the present GDP -- to transform the energy sector alone in its bid to stall rising temperatures. If the imminent threat is not countered by collaborative action and sensitising the global political discourse and adopting the right technologies, the consequences would be disastrous for India and the world. ---INFA

Indian Military history for all times to come. He was decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra for the heroic stand –off on December 5, 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. Chandpuri was a Major in 23rd Battalion of the Punjab regiment when the Pakistan Army attacked the Longewala post in Rajasthan. Chandpuri lived up to the reputation of the Regiment when he and his company of 120 soldiers defended the post, facing considerable odds against the strong assault force of the Pakistani 51st Infantry Brigade and backed by the advancing Pakistani Patton tanks of the 22nd Armoured Regiment . Chandpuri and his company held the Pakistanis at bay for a full night until the Indian Air Force arrived to provide air support at dawn and destroyed enemy tanks with precision attacks. The feat of Brig. Chandpuri and his men later became celluloid history through the JP Dutta –directed Bollywood blockbuster movie, “Border. “ With his death the nation has lost a great son of the soil. May his soul rest in peace the nation will always remember him. JAI HIND.

Yours etc.,
M Haque,
Shillong-6

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India’s GDP growing, jobs shrinking

Little impact of economic growth on employment

By Nantoo Banerjee

It may sound rather odd that India’s high rate of economic growth has practically no net contribution to the country’s job market. The net domestic headcount of full-time employees may be actually shrinking though the economy is growing above seven percent. It is a paradox which few economic researchers are ready to explain. If the latest report of the Teamlease Employment Outlook is to be taken seriously, India's net employment outlook is likely to decrease by 3 per cent to 92 per cent in the two quarters (October 2018 – March 2019) as compared to 95 per cent for the preceding half-year. The Teamlease report is based on a survey of 750 employers and 2500 employees of small, medium and large companies across 19 sectors and 14 cities to gauge the hiring sentiments in the country.

The employment outlook looks really bad. The alarmingly high demand-supply mismatch in the job market came to light in April when Indian Railways received a staggering 23 million applications for just 90,000 vacancies. The result of a sample survey report of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed that the number of formally employed Indians may have declined marginally by 0.1 percent in 2017-18. It suggests that no jobs were added in FY 2018. This is certainly bad news for Asia's third largest economy. This also contradicts the government's claim ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election that 3.11 million jobs were added between September 2017 and February 2018, based on the employee payroll data. The CMIE had contested the data. Yet, such a government claim is in stark contrast to the ruling BJP's 2014 poll promise of creating 10 million jobs every year if the party came to power. What has gone wrong?

The job push in a developing economy normally comes from new large projects and manufacturing expansion. Unfortunately, in the last several years, the country hardly witnessed many large new projects and manufacturing ventures. Instead, several of the existing ventures fell sick and referred to the country's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board. Public sector banks lost billions in bad loans turned non-performing assets. The wrong economic policies and a deliberate attempt to weaken large public sector understandings and an overwhelming focus on primarily import-based digitisation — without creating a local m a n u f a c t u r i n g infrastructure of hardware and instruments, including memory chips, and education levels of users — appear to be primarily responsible for India's highly job-starved economic growth.

The fear that increasing imports of manufactured goods and components may eat up more domestic jobs has now started haunting even many central government departments. That may explain why so many ministries recently flagged concerns over ongoing negotiations for the regional comprehensive economic partnership (RCEP) agreement. Rising cheap imports from China is causing the biggest fear. The ministries are believed to have conveyed their concerns to the union

commerce ministry as well as the prime minister's office (PMO). At least three union ministries are still not convinced about the usefulness of an urgent RCEP agreement, which is now postponed to 2019. “We have more convincing to do within the government. The ministries of steel, heavy industry and textiles continue to be apprehensive as they feel their sectors are not ready to face competition from China and some others,” said a government official. Even the finance ministry is reported to be worried, though for a different reason, as it may annually lose some Rs. 25,000 crore in customs duty collection the moment such an agreement comes into force. The amount of duty losses could only go up in the following years. An all pervasive RCEP agreement, fear these ministries, will see the end of the much-touted ‘Make-in-India’ programme.

The country's make-in-India has failed to take off in the face of growing import-led economic expansion and an unprepared focus on digitisation. The domestic as well as foreign direct investment (FDI) in projects are shrinking. A substantial part of FDI is taking place not in new projects, but in domestic corporate take-overs as in the case of Walmart’s majority Flipkart acquisition deal, or growing “promoters’ equity” in Indian companies by the likes of Alibaba and Softbank. Some cellphone companies are setting up assembly plants. But, they don’t create many permanent jobs. The so-called ‘make-in-India’ hype may face the same fate as former US president Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign — Let’s Make America Great Again — against the growing Japanese and Chinese import lobbies, then. Using the country's economic distress as a springboard for his campaign, Reagan used the slogan to stir a sense of patriotism among electorates. Under the RCEP agreement, 90 percent of goods from Asean countries, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand will enter duty-free into India. In case of China, 75-80 percent of all goods will enter the country without duty. It may further push up India's trade deficit with China to \$100 billion or more and make India's unemployment situation even more acute.

It’s a common knowledge that import of goods also means import of labour that go into the manufacturing of those goods. The massive imports of manufactured products in the recent years are contributing substantially to India’s services sector growth. Imports are creating jobs in manufacturer-supplier countries and hardly any in India. Going by last year's data from the programme implementation ministry, India's GDP from the industry sector was only \$495.62 billion. In the services sector, its GDP was \$1.186 trillion. This is unusual for a developing economy of India's size. It needs to be substantially reversed if the country's employment growth has to keep pace with economic growth. Even a World Bank report, published earlier this year, says that India needs to create over eight million jobs annually to keep its employment rate constant, as its working-age population (above 15 years) is increasing by 1.3 million every month. (IPA Service)

“Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories.”
--- Walter Benjamin

The Shillong Times

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BJP on the defensive

THE ‘semi-finals’ for the Lok Sabha polls 2019 is, as per initial reckoning, an uphill task for the ruling BJP and its captain Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For one, not a single state among the five up for polls gives it a guarantee to success – even as three of them are currently under the party’s diktat. Its implications for the Lok Sabha polls next year are serious to be ignored by the saffron side. The Congress party is making a serious bid for power in Madhya Pradesh, where a rare unity has been crafted this time between warring factions in the state party apparatus. Leading the Congress charge is former Union minister Kamal Nath, ably backed by old war horse Digvijaya Singh and the young Jyotiraditya Scindia. Their unity of purpose is bound to help the Congress this time. Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is feeling the heat of an all-too-spectacular anti-incumbency wave. In Rajasthan, the anti-incumbency wave is stronger. Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje is being checkmated by the Congress stalwarts Sachin Pilot and Ashok Gehlot through a well-oiled campaign machinery. Of them, who would become chief minister if the Congress floors the BJP this time is a big question, though.

The recent assembly and parliamentary by-polls in the state had put the BJP on alert, having lost most of it one after another. If the BJP loses both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh – the two major north Indian states – that could be interpreted as the beginning of the end of the saffron surge in the country after Modi stormed to power in Delhi in 2014. Chief minister Raman Singh is facing a formidable challenge in Chhattisgarh from first chief minister Ajit Jogi who had turned his back on the Congress and is fighting the polls in association with the BSP of Mayawati. The Congress, it looks like, has little hope to affect a turnaround there. In Mizoram too the regional entity - Mizo National Front (MNF), is all set to give the ruling Congress a run for its money. Strange things are happening in Telangana, as popular chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and his TRS are caught in a bitter struggle for power. There, the Congress and the TDP are fighting the polls together, and the BJP is not much in the reckoning. Notably, the BJP is now bereft of the gains it made from the Modi magic of the 2014 polls. It has to fight every inch of the way to retain its bases.

LOOKING BACK
June 9, 1989

Tea Tribe’s Demands

The Adivasi Council of Assam, which recently submitted a memorandum to the State Chief Minister on a number of its long standing demands, need not to be considered as a non-descript body because it has not yet chosen to be boisterous and noisy. Its greater contribution is that it has brought the numerous tribes, commonly known as tea garden tribes, under one common banner. This is consistent with the spirit of the times since individual tribes in isolation with the others settled in the tea areas of Assam could not expect to achieve much in spheres of their socio-cultural improvement and advancement. Thanks to the care of the Tea industry, the tea tribes compared to others outside the industry at almost the same level of development have been fairly well off so far as their economic needs are concerned. But man cannot live by bread alone, as they say, and hence have come up the other needs of the socio-cultural plane which the Adivasi Council has appropriately thought fit to espouse. It is sad to think, however, that it has hardly been successful in achieving much in these directions despite its career. Even an elementary demand such as recognition for these tribes the status of Scheduled

Tribe has not so far been conceded. The Council in its memorandum, for instance, has remained that although the State government had as early as in 1978 recommended nine among a long list of tea tribes for this recognition, no tangible action had let been initiate. This is a lapse more on the part of the Union Ministry, but the State government, and no less then Adivasi Council itself, can also be faulted for not having pursued the matter more doggedly and vigorously. The Council has since added a few move to the tea tribes demands which have been fitted into the requirements of changing times. One such is formation of tea tribes development Boards at sub-divisional level which is well worth considering favourable, along with appointment of welfare offices for them in suitable places. Another very pertinent demand is provincialisation of all schools in Adivasi areas of the tea belt, which the Industry fostered, but need now the care of the government at higher levels of their growth for the obvious reason of an uniform educational control.

What is it about the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) that has the Opposition seeing red? That raises the hackles of netas who accuse it of hit-ins and false cases at the behest of its political mai baaps to settle scores with opponents. But has the CBI’s fatal attraction for playing political hand maiden blown up in its face? Has the arch enemy finally caught up with it?

Questions which come to mind post two extraordinary and unprecedented order of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee who withdrew ‘general consent’ to the CBI to exercise its powers and jurisdiction in the State conferred by Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946. Succinctly the agency stands banished from the States to investigate Central Government officials, public undertakings and private persons under various laws, including the Prevention of Corruption Act as it derives its authority from the Act.

The orders come in the wake of a running battle between Naidu-Mamata and the Central Government (post his exit from the NDA in March and Mamata’s ambition to lead the anti-Modi opposition) whereby they have accused the latter of using the CBI to target them and their Ministers. The recent raids by Income Tax authorities on some business establishments, run by those close to the TDP have left Naidu red-faced. Add to this, he is projecting himself as the key in Opposition unity to take on Prime Minister Modi. Mamata is bristling from the CBI zeroing in on Trinamool Party leaders in the Sharda scam and various other scandals and avers that the agency has ‘lost its credibility.’

The genesis of Naidu’s order is the vortex of internal war between CBI Director Alok Verma and Special Director Rakesh Asthana wherein Andhra controversial businessman Satish Babu Sana, is at its heart over an alleged bribery case within the agency, along-with another

Two States Ban CBI
Is the tide turning?

By Poonam I Kaushish

TDP MP and close associate of Naidu industrialist CM Ramesh among many more.

Remember, Sana is the pivotal figure in the sordid drama who reportedly bribed both CBI Director and Special Director by turn. It was his complaint that he paid a bribe of Rs two crores to Asthana to be “spared” in the case against meat exporter Moin Qureshi the CBI was investigating.

The agency registered an FIR against Asthana who complained to the Cabinet Secretariat that Sana had paid Rs two crores to the CBI Director to avoid his arrest through TDP MP and CM Ramesh. Sana has now complained again against Asthana and accused him of getting his statement “falsified” by a Deputy SP to “frame” the CBI Director in the Moin Qureshi case. Both officers were sent packing by the Government last month.

The plot gets murkier with Asthana alleging that Ramesh mediated on behalf of Sana and Ramesh has alleged that there was a high-level conspiracy hatched by BJP President Amit Shah to frame him. He alleged the Income Tax and Enforcement Directorate carried out raids against his companies and claimed financial irregularities in his record. For the record, three more TDP politicians are under the CBI scanner in the Qureshi case.

Either which way it holds out dangerous portends. It is the first time two States have cocked a snook at the Central Government albeit indirectly through its agency.

They have a point. As it open secret that the CBI’s trustworthiness has reached the lowest ebb wherein political interference and its working style is being sharply questioned. If during the UPA the BJP had called it Congress Bureau of Investigation and a caged parrot vis-à-vis the coal scam in 2013, now the boot is on the other foot with the Congress calling it the BJP Bureau of Investigation. BJP Karnataka strongman Yeddyurappa convicted for

taking money from mining companies in 2011 is acquitted by the CBI.

Sadly, it is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black. Both Parties have used, misused and abused the CBI for political gains. During the UPA Government the Congress allegedly kept BSP’s Mayawati and SP’s Mulayam Singh in check by showing the threat of the CBI cases against them. Similar accusation is now being leveled against Modi and the BJP who are being accused of selective targeting of political opponents. Reportedly, the CBI is examining ways to reopen Mayawati’s cases as she is charting a separate course in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan in the ongoing assembly polls.

Indeed, the CBI has always served as a hand maiden to successive Governments to dance to its tune. A toothless tiger to help friends settle political scores with opponents! This therefore raising serious doubts about its honesty and integrity of purpose to weed out the corrupt. Consequently, the system becomes self-perpetuating whereby a threatened political elite have given more and more powers to the CBI to get their way and have their say.

The CBI too has adopted a brazenly opportunistic policy of playing safe with Governments of the day and its willingness and commitment to serve their mai baaps interest for post retirement lollipops.

Alas, in the messy marsh of accusations everyone seems to have forgotten that the authority of any law enforcement agency rests not so much on its legal powers but on the mystique that surrounds it in the minds of offenders of law. With the intractable damage to that mystique by the current controversy, the CBI now is no longer that premier investigation agency but a self-destructive and calamitous monster.

This raises a moot point: What clout will it wield in the minds of offenders of different hues? What will

be the fate of CBI cases in courts? With what face will a CBI prosecutor or an investigating officer face a court of law? Which IPS officer would wish to join the CBI on deputation?

It remains to be seen whether Naidu-Mamata’s action would result in a showdown with the Centre and a renewed debate on the CBI’s independence, autonomy and its accountability. What should be the balance between the two along with the terms of Executive management or control? How do we enable the agency to perform its functions with speed and prudence?

Pertinently, a Parliamentary Standing Committee report on the “Working of the CBI” in 2011, which continues to gather dust, recommended it be made an “enforcement agency” and be given “independent and autonomous” status to prevent political interference in its functioning.

It also mooted that it be granted power to investigate and prosecute through a separate statute called the Central Bureau of Intelligence and Investigation Act and given the same status as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the US to allow it to independently take up cases of high-tech crime.

In all western democracies, investigative agencies have undergone huge and numerous makeovers and evolved over a period of time. Therefore, we need simply to set CBI free.

What next? The time has come to make the investigation body a top-class outfit. Our leaders have to desist from subjecting the CBI to bureaucratic prescriptions of effecting economy in administration. India needs a sleek CBI that acts without favours and prejudice.

At the end of the day, the powers-that-be must desist from playing havoc with the CBI. They need to answer two pointed questions: Will the CBI be guided by the law of the land only or by the Government of the day? Questionably, who will cast the first stone? Kiski laathi aur kiski bhains? ---- INFA

Irresponsible statements

Editor,
In his recent statement, Haryana Chief Minister, Monohar Lal Khattar tried to downplay the rising incidents of rape and eve-teasing cases in his state by saying that in 80 - 90 per cent of such cases the accused and the victim know each other. Without questioning whether this data is true or not, it must be pointed out that the proximity can never be used as a defence of the accused. Indeed, such a defence is just another example of bad logic. Many parents kill their own children at the altar of infanticide and honour killings. There are many incidents of crime in the domain of close relations as a result of property disputes. More importantly, many girls have to face sexual harassment at the hands of their close relatives. The fact of the matter is that proximity does not act as a deterrent to crime. Rather, it enhances the scope of the predators. Yours etc., Sujit De, Kolkata

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

Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Via email.

Govt-RBI understanding is a positive development
Economy needs vigorous joint push to steer investment

By Anjan Roy

It all ended in a whimper. The government and the Reserve Bank had been publicly disagreeing on a number of issues which were thought to be so serious as to bring forth resignation of the Reserve Bank governor Urjit Patel. The battle was to be fought out at the board meeting of the governors on November 19.

In the end, nothing happened. The issues were sorted out, rather in a give-and-take mode. RBI agreed to climb down from its hard-line approach that there was no dearth of liquidity. Government did not press on for a share of what it had felt was excess money with the RBI.

There were no dearth of well-wishers who had bargained for the face-off, so that in its aftermath the whole could be turned into a political controversy over capture of RBI by the Union Government. Since last morning none else than Rahul Gandhi, the Congress President had been leading this campaign and crowing and urging the RBI governor to demonstrate “he had spine” and confront the prime minister in his attempt to control the RBI. Dr Patel did not comply with Gandhi and his ilk. Disappointing the Congress president, Urjit Patel, rolled out perfectly sensible solutions to the points of disagreement.

There were three issues of disagreement between the Reserve Bank and the government. First, the government had contended that following the defaults of the IL&FS, India’s largest non-banking finance company, credit flows had got frozen and the NBFC were no longer lending money. This was affecting the working of the small and medium sector units. RBI had maintained there was enough liquidity in the system.

Secondly, a related issue was the RBI restrictions on banks having large portfolio of bad debts from extending further loans. This was further aggravating the liquidity crisis and in effect impounded large amounts of funds.

Thirdly, and hugely bloated, differences between the RBI and government on apportioning of the large reserves held by the central bank. The union government had contended that the RBI was holding disproportionately large amounts of funds in its reserves and a part of that hoard —some Rs3.5 lakh crore— should be handed over to the government.

Of the three issues what mattered most was liquidity, that is, RBI lubricating the system with fresh infusion of credit. Credit is important, because that is buying power, providing the productive system with the means to carry on.

On the Reserve Bank’s own assessments, “systemic liquidity”—that is availability of credit for the productive active activities—was alternating between surplus and deficit during the two-month period August to September. Thereafter, liquidity was under pressure as the uncertainty increased following IL&FS imbroglio.

In fact, a credit freeze now would have throttled the industrial sector badly, when these were showing signs of life again. At the October monetary policy statement RBI had noted that industrial production had accelerated in June-July on the back of strong uptick in consumer durables., auto components and spares and several others. But high frequency

indicators were showing signals of a slack in pace.

Moreover, the issue was not only scarcity of funds as such. But more, it was a crisis of confidence among non-banking finance companies and other intermediaries in taking up fresh lending. This was impinging upon the ability of these set of borrowers – mainly MSMEs-- to carry on their normal levels of activity. All that was needed was an expression of assurance from the RBI that genuine credit needs would be met.

Once the RBI piped down from its hardline approach to credit, it was not too much for the government to accept that its point about sharing what was considered to be excess funds in RBI free reserves should not be decided on an ad hoc basis but on the recommendations of an expert group.

In a way, that pushes back the question of division of the accumulated reserves for the time being. In all likelihood it will not be the present government, but some future government which could get the benefit of that bonanza. For all one knows, the BJP might then oppose any such squandering of hard-own RBI assets.

But for those who were following these contentious issues, the third point about claims on funds was actually made up and the government was at no point seriously demanding immediate handing over of a large stash of RBI cash.

Now that we the advantage of hind-sight, the so-called fracas between the RBI and the government was the result of a misconceived public speech delivered by Viral Acharya, Deputy Governor, who somewhat dramatically described the differences in points of views as comparable to breaking down of relations and government attempts at eating away RBI autonomy.

He had stated that government attempts to control the RBI were fraught with serious consequences and the financial markets would punish the efforts, including, as he stated sharp erosion in the value of the rupee.

Instead of the financial markets punishing, their behaviour has been rather rewarding. Contrary to the prediction of Dr Acharya that the rupee will severely depreciate any attempts at eroding RBI independence, it has appreciated substantially since and could possibly re-enter the Rs 60 plus zone to the dollar. Following the speech by Dr Acharya, it was speculated either the RBI governor will resign in protest along with Dr Acharya or else the RBI will dig in further and refuse to budge from its standpoint and concede any of the government demands.

Now that none of that fireworks happened, and the two so-called warring sides agreed to accommodate the other’s points of new, there is relief. A lingering question however remains. What will happen to deputy governor Viral Acharya. Given his strident criticism of the government and open assertion that the government was denting RBI autonomy, the policy fine-tuning agreed at the board remains a loud rejection of his central thesis. The question is: Will Dr Acharya stomach all that and remain in RBI or he would prefer to go back to groves of his academy? (IPA Service)

“As long as I retain my feeling and my passion for Nature, I can partly soften or subdue my other passions and resist or endure those of others.”
--- George Gordon Noel Byron

The Shillong Times

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Brexit and India

BRITISH Prime Minister Theresa May has assured that Brexit, if it comes through, will not allow migrants from EU countries to get ahead of immigrants coming from countries like India. The immigration system will be based on the criterion of skills. Expertise will count first in allowing entry. Under the current system, migrant workers from EU countries get work in the UK without hindrance. Those from India have to comply with rigorous visa requirements. May has talked of a change in the system. Western countries intend to erect barriers to immigration and Brexit is proof of that. But the economy in the UK is comparatively backward and needs skilled migrant workers. Indians enjoy a demographic dividend in that respect. The job market in India cannot absorb all of its skilled work force. There are also caste prompted agitations for government jobs in India.

India should invest heavily in skills development to enable its youth to find jobs in the UK with which it has a long link. That will also partially meet the challenge of automation in India. As a result of Automation, certain categories of jobs will become redundant. Prime minister May has shown understanding by revising British Attitude to immigration of Indian skilled workers. India should reciprocate by offering skills. The racial prejudice in the UK, an imperial legacy, is now all but gone. However, Indian companies investing in the UK are worried about the tighter Visa regime which might make it expensive to bring in skilled manpower for their companies. Some have considered reduced investments in the UK and of moving their staff and offices to other cities within the European Union for easier operation. Brexit has already impacted the 800-odd Indian companies that have set up shop in Britain and now employ some 110,000 people. They had earlier flocked to Britain for the ease in accessing the European market but post Brexit, the UK has become unattractive as an investment destination. Political compulsions and vote bank politics was the engine that drove the Brexit vote. Theresa May is today struggling to keep her position and will soon face a vote of confidence in a climate where her Government is perceived to be losing ground. Meanwhile, the people of Britain are still grappling with the harsh realities following the Brexit referendum of 2016. Immediately after the Brexit vote where 51.9 % of British citizens voted to leave the European Union there have been loud clamours for a fresh referendum.

TO THE EDITOR

Celebration at what cost?

Editor,
Cherry blossoms the beautiful pink flowers were previously seen and admired. We did not have to ruminate on its blooming date. But now appreciation is not enough. Everything demands a celebration and how. Well let me give you a quick look at the celebrations. It's a four days long affair (Nov 14-17) So you go to the Wards Lake; there's no time limit. You enter and exit at will. Then at Polo Ground, Dalang Stage, 5th Ground. All the merry making happens. What do you want? Just name it wine... dine... and Oh my dear its DJ's nite every night from 9 PM there's music to lure the mind and soul of the young ones. And nobody can deny that it really makes you forget everything. You just want to swing to the beat. As the saying goes, "Music is the strongest form of magic." But does all this come for free? If not, then at whose cost is all this fanfare?
In my opinion this celebration goes against what the NGO's and drug rehabilitation centres are propagating which is awareness on drug abuse, child marriage, school dropout, broken homes to

name a few. Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." It is the young people, the future generation of our state and of the nation as a whole that is at stake here. Why blame the youth for drug addiction, alcoholism, teenage pregnancies, and for dropping out of school/college? And I can assure all that a year before the next celebration, tiny cherry blossoms will bloom in most of the homes in and around Meghalaya. It really pains me to see this degenerate form of celebration.
From Day1 of the celebration I saw young people throng into the venue with two legs and crawling back home on all four. Only they can explain how. Talking about the sound, its mind blowing! No one can really underestimate the organizers. Hats off to you guys! Good job done; that too for four consecutive nights. Venue well chosen, with wine stores all around! It's difficult to keep track of the total number starting from Polo till 4th Furlong bridge or the venue's main

entrance. Dates? Perfect timing! It's just about time for the annual exams of our kids. Who cares if it's hampering the kids studies, or if it's corrupting our youth and polluting the environment too?

Do you think we really need to celebrate in such a manner in the name of a flower? Actually this celebration is just another attempt to destroy our youth. Yes they are lost in celebration and cannot differentiate between good and bad. Temptation in the name of a flower! Oh for goodness sakes why celebrate at the cost of our youth?

Yours etc.,
I Skhemlon
Via email

Of guiding stars in politics

Editor,
Politicians and their cheerless political wit are all in bad taste. For instance turning DD Lapang as the, "Guiding Star" of the NPP led- government who makes use of his 'extraordinary' political skills to aid and advice the government," is overloaded hyperbole. Funny it is to note that every successive government and

even this one suffers from the syndrome of appointing a string of 'unproductive' and 'extra-ordinary experts' from outside and within the State. Even the Congress led-MUA government was no better. Therefore politicians across the divide should stop the blame game and of shedding crocodile tears over public money being wasted. Till date the various sectoral indicators from major areas such as PWD, Health, PHE, Electricity, PDS, Transport etc., are in a pathetic state. It is disgraceful that those in authority try to trumpet their short-lived success in front of a galaxy of audience in the national capital when nothing of substance is happening back home. Surprisingly, this Government has not even taken any move to redress the grievances of retired government employees and even those in-service in respect of their postings, promotions, payment of pension etc. The files pertaining to these issues are languishing somewhere. Some may even have been lost in the confusion. So how can we the people expect to see outcomes from the above

departments and their staff when their work culture remains unchanged? Add to this the present Government's lack of seriousness to address these and other more immediate issues. Perhaps with the entry of more such political 'guiding stars' the Chief Minister could deploy these 'stars' to guide the ailing departments and also shed some light upon them.

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

Bringing HNLC on board

Editor,
Much publicity was given in the media when the General Secretary of HNLC, Cheristarfield Thangkhiw came over ground and the government made elaborate arrangements for his reception. Among other things that Thangkhiw offered to the Government was to be mediator between it and the HNLC to ensure that they come over ground lock stock and barrel. But the Government has since remained quiet and we are unsure if the Government is still

Court can direct the CBI to probe any case in a State.

The very existence of the CBI came under judicial verdict when the High Court of Guwahati in November 2013, disposing of a writ petition on the validity of the CBI, declared the Resolution that created the CBI in 1963 as unconstitutional. It said the CBI was neither an organ nor a part of the DSPE and could not be treated as a police force. The court pointed out that the Resolution had not received the President's assent to be treated as a decision of the government.

The Supreme Court had stayed the judgment and the CBI continued to function as before. But, there has been an opinion in some circles that this agency should be made a statutory body with functional autonomy. Interestingly, this rootless agency celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2013.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), established in 1908, the principal investigative agency of the federal government of the US, is responsible for conducting investigations in cases where federal laws may have been violated unless another federal agency is delegated that function by law or executive order. It has jurisdiction throughout the country and need not take the permission of State Governments for conducting investigations. However, responsibility for law enforcement rests with States.

The action of both the governments of AP and WB apparently pushed in the interest of State autonomy is in fact a blow to unity of the nation. Unified Central investigations are required in many offences that threaten the unity and security of the nation.

The real issue today is to seek ways of promoting autonomy of the CBI in actual investigations while retaining its place under the Union government. To present this as a Union-State jurisdictional issue will not help strengthen policing. A law for constitution of the CBI and for its functional autonomy is necessary in the interest of unity and integrity of the nation, which cannot come without an effective agency to investigate certain serious offences with adequate powers.-INFA

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

Judging Alok Verma guilty for Supreme Court
A part of Media ‘completes’ trial of CBI Chief

By Sushil Kutty

Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi Tuesday spoke of a 'platform' some people are using to air their views and that not every Tom, Dick or Harry should be given one to use or misuse. Most people who commute by the Metro do use the platform but the Supreme Court was talking of a stage or an opportunity given to someone to make a stand. "None of you deserve a hearing," he told petitioners in the Alok Verma reinstatement case.

The CJJ was incensed that somebody had leaked the contents of the sealed CVC letter submitted to the Supreme Court by the government regarding CBI Director Alok Verma's leave. The top court in its wisdom gave a copy of the sealed letter to the counsel of Verma and the next thing you know the contents were wired and splashed all over a net news portal for every Tom, Dick and Harry to comment, accept or rip apart.

Somewhat like Dr Ford's letter on Judge Kavanaugh's appointment to the United States Supreme Court to Senator Diane Feinstein, which was leaked to the Washington

have been hearing a lot about this "lobby" and how its sole task is to see the back of Prime Minister Modi ASAP. This "lobby" is different from the platform in that it comprises of people with eyes and ears and leaks like a sieve. It's a media creation. When CJI Ranjan Gogoi was not CJI and four senior-most judges had held a presser, they were alleged to be part of the "lobby". Today, the same "lobby" is allegedly working against the CJI!

Is it a gotcha moment? We don't know but if you watch two television news channels, chances are both will have a different view on any subject for the simple reason that one toes the government line and the other bats for the opposition. Both, of course, are accusing different lobbies. In the instant case of CVC-Verma, the impression being spread by a section of the media is that the Supreme Court bench hearing the case will most likely rule against the sent-on-leave CBI Director.

And some in the media have already judged against Verma and are asking the top

The CJJ was incensed that somebody had leaked the contents of the sealed CVC letter submitted to the Supreme Court by the government regarding CBI Director Alok Verma's leave. The top court in its wisdom gave a copy of the sealed letter to the counsel of Verma and the next thing you know the contents were wired and splashed all over a net news portal for every Tom, Dick and Harry to comment, accept or rip apart.

Post. "Who?" asked the Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Senator Chuck Grassley and Senator Feinstein replied, "Don't know!" Nobody believed her but, what the hell, nothing could be done. The CVC letter leak can be pinpointed to the exact person; you need look no further than to Verma's counsel's office.

CJI Gogoi was not amused and he made it plain to senior counsel Fali Nariman, stating to his face, "None of you deserve a hearing." And then saying, "Next date hearing, November 29." Whether that is going to discipline those given charge of politically sensitive documents by the top court is anybody's guess, but the news portal cannot be taken to task nor asked to reveal the source though a United States court had sent a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist to jail for refusing to reveal source.

So, if CJI Gogoi wrings the wire around the news portal's neck, the sordid leaker will be forced to come up for air, i.e., come clean. So, just you wait and see. A journalist, who turned politician and is now neither of the two, told a normally nonplussed but this one time an excited anchor, "Nothing doing, the Supreme Court is not a holy cow." That made BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra bob his head in furious denial. However, he stopped short of calling it blasphemy, the correct word being contempt!

The leak has been laid at the door of a "lobby" and the lobby is like the platform though not quite. Citizens

court to send him packing with "disgrace" for allegedly failing to protect the integrity of the CBI, which was why he was appointed in the first place, his sworn duty. "Verma should be allowed to retire in disgrace rather than retake office. In fact, it might be quite in order for the collegium to convene and dismiss him for the simple fact of allowing himself to be leader of one vicious faction of the CBI against another rather be leader of the entire institution," wrote a news portal.

According to the news portal, "Alok Verma should not be allowed to set foot in the CBI headquarters ever again." Doesn't matter which way the Supreme Court ruled on November 29. "Verma has simply lost the moral authority to run the CBI, an institution of public trust. As the head of the country's federal investigation agency it is his job to preserve the integrity of the institution. He has instead participated fully in achieving the opposite: besmirching the image of the institution further."

Compared to Verma, Special Director Rakesh Asthana gets a long rope. The portal acknowledged that the Special Director was also "responsible for betraying the trust of the public", but there was a difference: "It's only the CBI Director who has a fixed two-year tenure and the Supreme Court has given this 'suraksha kavach' only to him. The bottom-line is some media has already judged the CBI Director Alok Verma guilty, ahead of the Supreme Court taking a decision. (IPA Service)

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

“*He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.*”

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

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Kashmir -- a work in progress

JAMMU and Kashmir was witness to a day-long drama Wednesday, culminating in the dissolution of the state assembly. All things considered, this was the best course open to Governor Satyapal Malik, apparently taking advice from the top political establishment at the Centre. Kashmir is simply not another state. Considering the sensitivity involved in the goings-on there, the Centre and the Governor as its representative answerable to the President cannot be mere spectators and must be promoting national interests. It was out of the blue that the PDP of Mehbooba Mufti and her arch rival in politics Omar Abdulla of the National Conference let bygones be bygones and took the Congress party's outside support to cobble a "majority" in the state assembly and staked claim for forming a ministry. Mufti, whose government collapsed after alliance partner BJP pulled the rug from under her feet in June, was obviously waiting for a chance to return to power. Rather than being in the wilderness, it should suit Abdullah as well, even if this meant making compromises with his main rival, especially in the Kashmir region. So too with the Congress, which along with Abdullah was left out in the cold ever since the last assembly polls about four years ago.

Admittedly, Mufti had not acquitted herself well when she headed the government as chief minister. Among other things, she was instrumental in giving a long rope to the stone-pelting youths, and it was essentially a case of misplaced sympathy. Her police failed to act firmly against such law-violators, militants and anti-national forces. Clearly, the BJP was embarrassed on several matters like this, even granted that this coalition's longevity was suspect from Day One. The saving grace was the involvement of the security forces under the command of the Centre to restore a modicum of law and order, though there yet was no full-stop to violence. The home-grown militants in Kashmir colluding with terrorists infiltrating from across Pakistan and playing mayhem in the Valley and elsewhere was a situation that required strong counter-steps. Mufti's kid-glove treatment was unacceptable. What however is a matter of concern is that the overall scenario in Kashmir leaves much to be desired despite the Modi government claiming to turn things for the better there in the past nearly five years of its rule. Admittedly, no miracles are expected in Kashmir. It is, at best, a work in progress.

TO THE EDITOR

Why do Police go soft on criminals?

Editor,

In connection with the inquiry into the deadly assault on the CSWO activists, Agnes Kharshiing and Amita Sangma, the police have been going too soft and extremely slow in nabbing the culprits. The police have not only the inputs but also the evidences leading to the culprits provided by one of the victims to the SB, CID. In fact they also have the photos of the kingpins behind the assault in their WhatsApp but we do not know why they are reluctant or why they shy away from arresting them. In fact, even the police from Lad Rymbai have all the necessary evidences so why the delay? According to media reports only five persons were picked up in this connection out of the many who are still at large. We do not know whether the five are the actual persons who attacked the duo or if this is just to show to the world that the police are doing something to apprehend the criminals. If this is the case then can we

finally conclude that the police are hands in glove with the perpetrators and the illegal miners as is widely suspected? If that is the case, how can the police investigate into the acts of their colleagues? Hence this lends more credence to the demand for an independent inquiry to get into the bottom of the criminal attack.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

Justice at last!

Editor,

October 31 and November 20, 2018 will go down in history as days of great significance and redemption, not just in Indian Judicial history but also in the country's rocky moral journey as a secular and just land. After more than three decades, justice at long last is being delivered in the 1987 Hashimpura massacre in cold blood of 42 men belonging to India's largest minority community, by policemen belonging to the UP Provincial Armed Constabulary. What is noteworthy is that the Delhi High Court has overturned the trial court's acquittal of

It is evident from the daily rants emanating from the Khasi Hills District Council chief, HS Shylla that the Council is no longer happy playing second fiddle to a duly elected State Government, which incidentally includes all citizens of Meghalaya and not just the tribes. It appears to onlookers that the KHADC (and I am only mentioning one Council here because the other two are silent on onlookers too) that the KHADC wants to become a mini Government which will look after the rights and privileges of the Khasi tribals of Meghalaya, who it is repeatedly being asserted, are under threat of becoming a minority in their homeland and finally disappearing from the face of the earth. In fact, it is even suggested that the KHADC would call on the United Nations to intervene in the matter since the Indian Government is found incapable of protecting indigenous people. Perhaps the next and final step would be a demand for a sovereign nation for the Khasi people. The demand now for inserting the word United Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is a precursor to the sovereignty demand.

From sniping at Khasi women as being incapable of guarding their chastity and therefore not fit to be custodians of society, to the use of caustic vocabulary at dissenting voices, Mr HS Shylla has done it all. He detects a storm brewing on the societal radar but his ideas about making the storm clouds disappear appear bizarre to say the least. As any weatherman will tell us, the ability to predict trouble is not the same as the ability to prevent it. Interestingly, the Khasi society is one that believes in stoic silence in the midst of the storm clouds that threaten to redefine us as a society. Yes we are all silent observers biding our time as if societal debates on these issues thrown up by the KHADC on a daily basis would result in us being ostracised from the society that has embraced us thus far. Aren't we an interesting people?

In the midst of these looming threats to the

the policemen in 2015 and 16 of them have been sentenced to life term in prison. This is quite a departure from what has become the norm over the years thereby perpetuating the reprehensible culture of impunity. On November 20, Delhi Court awarded the first death sentence in a case related to the anti-Sikh riots by convicting Yashpal Singh and ordering life imprisonment to another, Naresh Sherawat, for killing two men during the riots. The court's judgment on the Hashimpura massacre and anti -Sikh riots is most welcome as it sets a positive precedent in curbing communal and mob violence characterized by lynching. The judgment, even if belated has the potential to disprove the old adage, "Justice Delayed is Justice Denied" .

Yours etc.,
M Haque,
Advocate
Shillong-6

Where do we go from here?

Editor,

These days newspapers

By Patricia Mukhim

Jaidbyrniew Khasi from external and extraneous factors, this writer decided to do some fact checking into the internal affairs of the KHADC. In a report given by the Enquiry Committee constituted by the Council on the alleged misappropriation of funds (Dated Oct 20, 2016), there are interesting accounts of how public funds are (mis)utilised. I wonder if this is not a moral threat since the very people tasked with protecting our culture and identity are actually siphoning off even the meagre funds available to the Council. When the Monolith Festival was to be held at Mawphlang, money from the bank account of KHADC were regularly transferred to the personal account of the then Secretary of the Council, W Syiemlieh. When questioned by the Enquiry Committee, Syiemlieh said that he was acting on the verbal instructions of the then Executive Members of the KHADC. The total amount transferred in this manner was Rs 1.52 crore. Syiemlieh in his statement said, "When there is urgent need to release financial aid or loan to any parties it should have been processed through the office but during that time when the Monolith Festival was held the matter was so urgent hence all the financial transactions done for that purpose could not be processed through office procedures. All the amounts that were asked to transfer from the account of the KHADC to my personal account has not been regularized till date."

Then there is a transaction involving purchase of land at Mawkyrwat in 2015, where the same Secretary to the Executive Committee, directed the Meghalaya Rural Bank to transfer a sum of Rs 12 lakh from the KHADC account to his personal account and the money was paid to one Noliptstar Lyngdoh for purchase of his land at Mawkyrwat. When the Enquiry Committee called for records to ascertain whether there are any receipts for the money paid or land documents,

the reply given was that here are no records for such transaction in the KHADC office. The Deputy Secretary to the Executive Committee in charge Finance said, "Even though the letter dated February 4, 2015, registered No DC.XXI/ Accts/148/2004-2015/ did appear in the said letter, yet in the office register the sanction of such bill did not reflect in the Accounts Department, hence there is nothing to show that any process has been followed in this regard." Since there are no records and no land documents or receipts are available in the office there is no proof to show that the amount of Rs 12 lakh has actually been paid to Noliptstar Lyngdoh.

On October 19, 2013, Syiemlieh directed the Bank to once again transfer Rs 50 lakh to his personal account for payment as loan to Anderson Structural Construction. Here too the sanctioning of the loan had not gone through the Accounts Department. The Secretary in his reply to the Enquiry Committee said that the loan sanctioned to Anderson Structural Construction has been refunded and the same has been adjusted with other liabilities in the Office.

Then there is the case of appointment of 11 casual employees. Syiemlieh said he had been instructed to appoint them without any budget being sanctioned. He said the salaries paid to these employees came from his personal account. The Enquiry Committee is flummoxed by the answer of the Secretary and asked how he got the money to pay staff salaries from his own pocket.

The Committee recommended that W Syiemlieh the Secretary be punished under Sections 406/408/409/420 IPC or as the Executive Committee deemed fit. It also recommended that "in order to prevent further misappropriation of fund, each and every fund received by the District Council should

be entered and reflected in the Books of Accounts of the Office and each and every financial transaction should be passed by the Executive Committee as per the procedures of the office."

These are glaring acts of corruption. The KHADC has to answer (1) Who the land purchased out of the Council's accounts at Mawkyrwat at a sum of Rs 12 lakh belongs to? (2)Did that transaction actually happen? If not where has the Rs 12 lakh gone? (3) How can an amount of Rs 50 lakh be adjusted to other liabilities of the office by violating all procedures of financial propriety?

The terms of reference of the Enquiry Committee was to only look into the allegations of fund misappropriation during the Monolith Festival. If an enquiry is

commissioned to go into the books of accounts of the KHADC for the past 20 years then I am sure many skeletons will tumble out of the cupboard. With so many irregularities occurring internally and with no checks and balances in place, it is obvious that respective Executive Committees have been using public funds without any semblance of accountability. And the same Council speaks of addressing the threats to an entire society when it cannot even set its own house in order? Heaven alone knows how much money has been misappropriated till date.

The propensity of the KHADC to appoint or dismiss the syiems (chieftains) who don't fall in line with the ruling dispensations is legendary. Syiems are dismissed for not sharing the amounts demanded by the Council out of the cess collected by the Syiemship from forest products, markets and other sources. Everything in the Council is about money and power. All the humbug about protecting the Jaidbyrniew is a cover up for all the money making strategies.

It is high time that RTI on funds utilisation of the KHADC over a decade at least, are sought for and made public.

We feel sad and ashamed that the State Government does not recognize Mental Health Professionals and does not create any posts for them. If the Government does not think about the well being of society then there is no need to talk about mental health and to pretend to show care and concern and observe all the important awareness programmes that the whole world observes.

If the Government is serious about addressing the growing mental health problems in Meghalaya then it should create posts for the MHPs in Government Hospitals such as Civil Hospital Nongpoh, Civil Hospital Nongstoin and also a very hectic hospital MIMHANS for the well being of mental health patients.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Unemployed Mental Health Professionals
Meghalaya

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

Round The States

By Insaif

J&K Shenanigans
Coup New Delhi?

Wonders never cease in Jammu & Kashmir. It was an eventful Wednesday last. The three rival parties, the PDP, the NC and Congress did the unthinkable - joined hands to give the people a government in the State, which has been under Governor's rule since June 19 and the Assembly under animated suspension. Armed with "56 MLAs" following the new alliance, former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti staked claim to form the government to "safeguard J&K's special status as there are moves to remove Article 35A, polarise the population ... and to save democracy." Ditto for both the NC and Congress. However, Governor Satya Pal Malik stole the mandate, predictably on New Delhi's advice and dissolved the Assembly late at night claiming the parties were indulging in "horse-trading and money was changing hands" and worse it would have "been impossible for parties with opposing political ideologies" to form a stable government!

What he failed to elaborate was who was indulging in horse-trading? Note that Mehbooba has accused erstwhile partner, the BJP, of using "every possible means to coerce and intimidate her MLAs so that they leave the party...or spending money to buy loyalties." Why also, did the Governor not ask for a floor test for the alliance to prove its majority, as is done in the normal course? After all there was another contender -- the People's Conference leader Sajjad Lone, who too staked claim to form the government with the help of the 25-member BJP. Many an observer would take his statement of "acting in the State's interest and according to its Constitution," with a pinch of salt. This new experiment offered by the threesome may have worked. But perhaps it didn't fall into place with New Delhi's strategy and its ruling party, BJP. Central rule will take over after December 18 when the Governor's rule comes to an end. Simply put, an unusual Coup d'état.

Punjab Attack

Not Punjab's headache alone! The grenade attack on a Nirankari sect congregation at Adliwala village, outskirts of Amritsar on Sunday afternoon killing three persons and injuring 21 others should have the Union Home Ministry worried too. Chief Minister Amarinder Singh is firm the attack involved the hand of ISI-backed Khalistani/ Kashmiri terror groups and that the accused was associated with the banned outfit Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF). Recall, the KLF is a terrorist organisation active in the 80s and was revived in 2009 in Malaysia under pressure from ISI, in the belief that it can revive the waning Khalistan movement by targeting members of specific communities to polarise Punjab's society on communal lines. The NIA, which obviously is involved in the probe, is too conscious the group targets all those whose ideology is opposed to Bhindranwale's ideology and keeps 'a close watch on postings on social media and choose targets which hold anti-Sikh views.' With both the State and Centre on the same page, it is hoped the investigating agencies would work in tandem. That Punjab is a Congress-ruled State must not have North Block trying to score brownie points.

Maharashtra's Quota Snag?

It is a tight rope walk for Maharashtra's BJP-Shiv Sena government. While the Cabinet has cleared reservation for Marathas under an independent category of 'Socially and Educationally Backward Class' (SEBC), it has triggered an unease amongst the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However, Chief Minister Fadnavis is confident the approval will not face legal hurdles as the percentage of Marathas below poverty line is 37.28%, higher than the 25% base and there is

adequate provision in the 'Constitution to extend reservation to a community provided its social, educational and financial backwardness is established.' His confidence emanates from the State Backward Class Commission's recent report saying the Maratha community falls in this very category and will not be in conflict with the OBCs. But OBC leaders don't buy the argument and fear their entitled quota 'may be reduced, as reservation in the State is already 52 % -- over Supreme Court's mandated 50%'. Thus, the OBCs, divided into 300 castes, propose to come together to oppose the decision. The big question is whether Fadnavis will be able to ensure the Cabinet decision and give the Marathas their share of quota in government education or jobs a demand pending for past two decades.

Bengal-AP Goal Post

Will West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh be able to become the saviours of "the country and democracy"? While Chief Ministers Mamata Banerjee and Chandrababu Naidu respectively seem to take on the mantle, all is not going as planned. The proposal to call a meeting of all anti-BJP parties on Thursday last has had to be shelved. The reason cited is that almost all parties are busy with ongoing elections in five States and so the meeting is put off till December but before the forthcoming Parliament winter session! However, the grapevine has it that the duo have realised it's not wise to act in a hurry as efforts to get the BSP and the SP on board have so far not been fruitful. The daggers are drawn between Mayawati and Congress is no secret. Further, her tying up with Congress rebel Ajit Jogi in Chhattisgarh has made matters worse, at least for now. Results of how successful the alliance pans out would give a hint whether there would be a change of heart. Likewise, Akhilesh Yadav is peeved with the Congress' dilly-dallying over a tie-up for the Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan polls. He finally had to go it alone with Godwana Gantantra Party. Plus, there is the additional question mark of how the TMC and TDP would help each other in their respective States, as neither has a presence in the others. All eyes would be on the winner in the five Assembly elections, but for Naidu and Mamata the results may lead to re-thinking their role for the elusive mahagathbandhan.

Andaman & Nicobar Tragedy

Adventure tourism in Andaman and Nicobar Islands can turn tragic. More so if the tourist chooses to say boo to restrictive and protected zones and worse when the Union Territory authorities' turn lackadaisical. Apparently, the Islands topped the 'must-do adventure list', of an American national as "there's so much to see and do there!" He hired fishermen to take him clandestinely to the North Sentinel Island, inhabited by the Sentinelese tribe, notwithstanding the Island and its buffer zones are strictly restricted under Protection of Aboriginal Tribe (Regulation), 1956 and Regulations under Indian Forest Act, 1927. He never returned. His body was found on the shore by the fishermen who were to pick him up later. The authorities say he was reportedly killed by the tribe, all seven persons, who helped him to the shore, were arrested for violating the Regulations and a case of murder registered against 'anonymous persons'. However, Survival International, a global movement for tribal peoples' rights blames Indian authorities for the tragedy as the North Sentinel Island and 28 others in the UT are excluded from the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime. This is crucial for safety of tribes and outsiders. Will it act now? Remember 'a stitch in time saves nine.' ---INFA

“It hurts to find out that what you wanted doesn't match what you dreamed it would be.”

--- Randy K. Millholland

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R & D key to progress

CHINA'S Tsinghua University is all set to produce the most cited papers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in the next five years. This means that Tsinghua will overtake the world renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which has held this honour for years. Today, the top 1% of the most cited papers in STEM are produced by universities in the US and China. While Indian science and engineering institutes have achieved much, when it comes to research citations, India is nowhere in the reckoning. The US is still the destination of choice for anyone wishing to do innovative research. India has to take stock of the tardy performance of its universities and technological institutes. Lack of support for quality research in India is what pushes ambitious technocrats and scholars to migrate abroad. This has to change as the path to prosperity lies in the creation and ownership of knowledge. Tsinghua's rise has been facilitated by the Chinese government's Projects 211 and 985, which preferentially funded 155 of a total of 2,553 institutions in the country. Rather than follow the Chinese model, which focused on STEM to the exclusion of the social sciences and humanities, India must promote broad-based research excellence. Tsinghua's success has been made possible by the Chinese Government's projects. Research should prompt professional advance. Researchers and academics should make their mark in international journals. But there should be opportunity for junior faculty members as well. Academic workload should be rationalised to facilitate research.

Industry should be aware that its contribution to research in academia should not be just job-oriented. Laboratories, private facilities and think tanks should supplement university inputs. English has to be the medium of communication and the language of research papers. Interaction between institutions should be promoted. India should stress the fact that extension of the frontiers of knowledge is the key to socio-economic development. Tsinghua University was one of the first Chinese universities enrolling international students. In 1950, 14 students from Eastern Europe were admitted into Tsinghua. More than 30,000 international students have studied at this historical institution and have been making distinctive contributions to societies and industries worldwide. Tsinghua has brought in distinguished professors from around the world including the Nobel prize winners, Chinese Science Academy members, and Chinese Engineering Academy members. All of them take active roles in teaching and mentoring. India needs to take a hard look at the way its universities and technical institutions are performing in this globally competitive environment.

TO THE EDITOR

Lok Sabha Polls & the Congress

Editor, News appearing in Shillong Times (Tura Edition, Nov 19, 2018) regarding nomination to Lok Sabha Polls is quite amusing. Even before the AICC/MPCC could call for application from the intending candidates, the working president of the Meghalaya Congress, James Lyngdoh has already announced the result. The first step is to call for applications from the intending candidates who are willing to contest the forth coming LS Polls. Then the applications are to be scrutinized by the respective Block Congress Committees (BCC) and District Congress Commitees (DCCs) and only then will the application/s be forwarded to the MPCC for further scrutiny and on the recommendations of the DCCs. Selection of the candidate should be on the basis of his/her reputation, winnability factor and acceptance by the masses. Then the application is forwarded to the AICC with critical assessments by the

State Congress. The procedure is same for both Shillong and Tura seats. And further, without inviting applications how can MPCC say there are several candidates for the Tura seat? Another thing I wish to point out to MPCC is that they should not say that CLP leader, Dr Mukul Sangma is going to decide the Tura seat. Dr Mukul Sangma is a highly respected leader but the statement implies that the existence of DCCs, BCCs, PCCs and Mahila Congress is meaningless. It is true that Dr Sangma must be in the process of feeling the pulse of the people, not as the CLP leader but as a leader from the Garo Hills districts. His experience, advice and leadership mean a lot to the Congress Party in the districts. What I mean to say is that the use of certain words is incorrect and could even lead to the disintegration of the Party at the grass roots level as was the quick reaction from John Kharshiing. There is no doubt Mr Pala might be the best choice but please declare the results only after

“To Be or Not To Be” : Mixed Feelings induced by the nominated Mixed Site

Am I bi-polar, to have alternating episodes of intense joy and depressive lows? It fits the definition, but this "mixed feeling" was induced by the proposal that came out in February last year, to nominate Garo Hills Conservation Area (GHCA) in Meghalaya, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the "Mixed-Category." The news was an ear-candy for naturalists, environmentalists, conservationists, and other bio-files. It also triggered a sense of pride in the Garo tribe and indeed it should. The Garos must be proud of their natural and cultural heritage. If it does get the tag of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, then it will be the second site under the mixed category, the only one in the country at present being Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim. Whoever thought that there would be a 337.48Km2 of area in Garo Hills that would one day make it to the tentative list of the nomination process to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List? Of course, many have admired the richness and unique biodiversity of Garo Hills, but did you ever think that the place would have such, "Outstanding Universal Values" (OUVs) which are so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries? Notwithstanding the OUVs, there is always a 'but' and hence the mixed feelings. Looting and Plundering of Natural Heritage Reality is cruel and ignorance is bliss. Is the GHCA getting nominated to UNESCO's list of World Heritage Site or to the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger - a step away from getting delisted? With the current trend in illegal coal mining in and around the proposed site and some within it, despite the supposed "NGT Ban" (Sometimes people get confused with the Green in National Green Tribunal, whether it is the colour symbolising nature or the colour of the dollar); poaching inside the protected areas (It is always an open season.); illegal felling of timber and the inter-state smuggling business (the irony of Protected Areas); threats from invasive alien species; deforestation, habitat destruction and

getting the nod from the AICC. Here the MPCC is only a recommending body and not the deciding factor. Yours etc., Dev Areng, Tura

Of avoidable road accidents

Editor, The number of deaths caused by road accidents is on the increase. Just a few days ago a Class XI girl lost her life in a hit and run case in Nongpoh and a student of English Department of USTM in Baridua, Khanapara may never be able to live a normal life after his right hand was run over by a Dumper. Whose fault is it? The victims? The roads? Or the drivers? No one can say for sure whose fault it is, but the Government should take cognizance of all of these occurrences and take measures to prevent them. Lives are lost daily and most of the times its the innocent ones who die. The horrible condition of the Baridua road is the prime

fragmentation, all with the connivance, consent, ignorance or under the noses of the concerned departments, to be delisted after getting listed could be the fate of GHCA. Gieve Patel's epic poem, "On Killing A Tree," aptly describes how to completely kill a tree. In it, the Mumbai based poet ironically narrates man's onslaught of nature, which is symbolised in the poem by a tree. The poet tells us that it is not easy to kill a tree, that "the mere act of hacking and chopping is not sufficient to kill a tree." In a nutshell, the poet is sympathising with nature against the cruelty of man. That although nature is resilient against accidents and minor blows, a continuous and deliberate act of man, driven by the spirit of greed and selfishness can and will totally annihilate nature. How then will the International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), which is the Advisory Body mandated by the World Heritage Convention to evaluate the natural aspects of the nominated site, approve of its induction? How can IUCN evaluate, when there is nothing left to evaluate?

Let me romanticise poaching so that its horror stays in your mind. Let this send a sense of urgency to immediately curb the menace of poaching. This is my experience, during one of my hiking expeditions to the Nokrek National Park. An ominous crack heralding death and destruction pierced through the thick foliage and broke the slumbering music of nightfall. Petrified as I was, I gaped at my three companions, demanding answers from their expressions lit by the dim sliver of twilight filtering through the canopy. Before I could utter a word, frantic calls of a Barking deer resonated through the woods, preventing me from making any conjecture and true to my anticipation, another gunshot cracked, sending a chill down my spine. With one last frail note, the deer was hushed, and along with it, the forest which was seconds ago teeming with courtship songs of insects and frogs. All fell into silence. The

poor animal was probably dead before the second gunshot reached our ears. Under such circumstances, can we still hope that GHCA will fare well in IUCN's evaluation? Not to mention the make-shift camps of the poachers that we stumbled across inside the core area of the national park! In the camp's premises, there was a skin (probably of a palm civet) impaled on a stick, and partly scorched feathers of birds, scattered where they had conjured their fire. Such audacity of the poachers clearly sends a message that there is no law in the jungle. It was a complete mockery of the authorities who have been tasked to protect the wild dwellers of the so called protected areas. Also another infuriating encounter in the periphery of the national park, were the number of illegally constructed sawing platforms and the scores of aged trees felled for timber. Given the foregoing discussion, the last four categories under which the OUVs will be evaluated by IUCN appears to be at a rather weak stance. Disappearing Cultural Heritage - The elephant in the room. "I'm clothed, yet I still feel naked." This was what one elderly lady from the village of Kemragrein West Garo Hills had to say. She felt naked in the sense that she missed wearing the ornaments like earrings, bangles, necklaces and other personal adornments that she used to wear before converting to Christianity. It is the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. It is not a mere identity crisis. Our culture and our indigenous traditional knowledge (ITK), that has since time immemorial guided our way of life, is disappearing in the fast pace of life and disregarded as folklore. The dominant Christian community has stigmatised the way of life of the Songsareks, which has a history of living intimately with nature. The word Songsarek now has a negative connotation attached to it. The word when used in many contexts is derogatory and often expresses the discontinued way of life in the forgotten past. The threat to the cultural

heritage of the Garos is not one external but is from within. Nature is resilient. It can bounce back through the process of succession. But the indigenous traditional knowledge once lost will be a folklore and a relic of the past. So how can we nominate something that is non-existent? How can we nominate the traditional values that we ourselves do not value? The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the two Advisory Bodies which respectively provides evaluation of the cultural criteria and provide expert advice on the conservation of the cultural sites, will not have much substance to work on. Way Forward Not only did modernisation in its myriad ways caused the extinction of many floral and fauna species, but its effects have also impacted the survival of indigenous knowledge and practices. The Garos already have a history of losing their own script as relayed in the book "The Folk-Tales of the Garos," authored by Dewan Sing Rongmuthu, in the first content of the book, titled, "The A'chik Script." Let us all be wary of our diminishing traditional values and preserve what is significant. Let us not leave behind another history of loss. Let us pass on our rich natural and cultural heritage to the next generation. On the bright side and enough of the vice, I firmly believe that GHCA will soon be in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. The future is not that bleak, provided our existing and surviving natural and cultural heritages are insulated from abrupt and detrimental change to the environmental conditions, intrusion of religion, mainstream developmental activities, policies that undermine the traditional authorities and regenerative capacity of the environment. (The writer is an alumnus of Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies, TISS, Mumbai and an environmental conservation enthusiast who is deeply worried over the present reality of socio-environmental mess in which Meghalaya is in)

Unity is the world's tallest statue built in memory of freedom fighter Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. There have been many debates going on since the time of its announcement as to whether it is wise of the Government to be spending such a huge amount on a statue whereas there are places in the country that are poverty-stricken and starving. It is indeed debatable as the statue will no doubt attract tourism and bring income but there are places like Kerala and Assam where floods bring destruction every year but still no preventive measures are being taken. People have different views regarding the statue. Some agree that it is a good investment and will soon yield results but there are some who question the fact that the amount spent on building the statue would have fed many hungry mouths, provided a home to many homeless or even medically treated many poor patients who do not have the resources. Living

Mirroring '#Me Too' On Stage

By Samhita Barooah

I got a message from Mary Therese Kurkalang about the play 'Foreign body' by Imogen Butler-Cole. She said she would be speaking after the play. My first response was that the tickets were too expensive for us to afford the seats in the front rows. Minimum rates were Rs 500 and the rest were higher than that. I tried my luck and found friends Alpana and Diganta who could arrange for the tickets, free of cost and we managed to go for it. As we entered the auditorium, I could see unique props on stage. A wooden chair and seven mirrors facing the chair with spotlights placed on the floor. As soon as the anchor - famous Assamese actor, Kapil Bora introduced the play and left the stage to the artist, I saw Imogen walking into the stage towards the chair. She picked up the chair and started making subtle and soft movements along with the chair. Imogen and the chair were inseparable

process which a person goes through pre-post and during any form of sexual assault within or outside homes. All the testimonies were in English. Some striking features were more than real to move the audience to reflect deeply into the issues of sexual assault. After the show for 90 minutes a panel discussion was opened up for the audience to listen and participate. Two prominent activists, Mary Therese Kurkalang from Khublei, Delhi and Banamallika Choudhury from Nething in Assam spoke about their struggles and engagement with addressing the context of sexual assault in Guwahati particularly and also in the region at large. Mary focused on her own #me too testimony, healing and finding survivor collectives to resist such crimes and Banamallika spoke about nuances within our context of facing and

I wondered what if the testimonies were of perpetrators alone with their names, designations and social positions instead of the survivors and also if the play was done in local language. Even local props with a tinge of North East crafts other than mirrors and chair could be used. I kept thinking whether sexual assault was a topic to make the audience open up in this part of the country like #me too when professionals, families and legal proceedings were bound to maintain confidentiality during pending cases. In fact many realities kept propping up amongst the members of the audience.

for a large part of the play. It was a solo act with vigorous body movements and a stage setting meant for a psychotherapy session. Recently I had watched an Estonian film on psychotherapy where the therapist used the 'Talk to the Chair,' concept very skillfully. I could relate to the same approach in this play where the chair was used at the centre of the stage and the actor moved from one mirror to the other with very swift and steady movements depicting the stories of the voices who spoke through the mirrors. It was almost like the mirrors came alive and the stories of the actor and those of the voices merged through the mirror reflections and created a ripple which connected each story with one element of 'Sexual Assault'. Imogene's analogies of the chair and the body movements around it left the audience spell bound. I could see the audience gripped into the act and even the slight cough or sigh seemed to have disturbed people around me. Some people were also trying to figure out what was happening with soft whispers about the mirrors. The mirror frames were either black or white and they had different heights which depicted the personalities of the background voices. Black and white frames could depict the colours of the survivors of sexual assault or they could depict the colour of the perpetrators as well. It was left to audience for interpretations. Imogen shared the seven testimonies of the survivors, confession of some of the perpetrators and the healing

understanding sexual assault, younger women's resistance and support services available in the city. Then the panel opened up the discussion towards the audience to find some intriguing responses filled with admiration, hope and anguish about the realities of sexual assault. I kept thinking what if some of the members of the audience could actually walk up to the stage and stood in front of each mirror and completed the performance. That would have been a perfect finale to the #me too campaign which was the soul of this performance. My mind was stuck to the setting of the play and I kept thinking how to contextualise it in the 8 north eastern states. I wondered what if the testimonies were of perpetrators alone with their names, designations and social positions instead of the survivors and also if the play was done in local language. Even local props with a tinge of North East crafts other than mirrors and chair could be used. I kept thinking whether sexual assault was a topic to make the audience open up in this part of the country like #me too when professionals, families and legal proceedings were bound to maintain confidentiality during pending cases. In fact many realities kept propping up amongst the members of the audience. But it was an interesting presentation which was more of a mirrored reflection rather than an entertainment gimmick. It was really encouraging to see a matured audience with active participation and patient viewing.

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.

‘Violence affected art, education in our state’

Adhikarimayum Radhamanabi Devi, the renowned Manipuri dancer, performed in the city recently at an event organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi. Born on January 13, 1979, Radhamanabi started dancing at the age of seven and had been immensely influenced by the Hindu culture and dance forms in the state. She was trained in Manipuri dance at Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy in Imphal and later obtained PG Diploma in Ras Leela and Lai Haraoba, two forms of traditional Manipuri dances. At present, she is an assistant professor at Manipur University.

Radhamanabi's formal education in dance started when she was in Class VII. She did her Masters in Manipuri literature and later PhD. The subject of her research was Manipuri Dance in the 20th century. The 39-year-old dancer told **The Shillong Times** on phone from Imphal — it was difficult to reach her on phone or through email as there was ban on internet in the state after trouble broke out in September — that most of the people do not know that Manipur has many forms of dances, besides Ras and Lai Haraoba. “Even I did not know before I started my research,” she confessed.

Radhamanabi has travelled across the country, carrying with her the culture and



TALKING POINT
ADHIKARIMAYUM RADHAMANABI DEVI



Radhamanabi receiving an award from Tathagata Roy

dance tradition of Manipur, which is otherwise known to most citizens as a conflict zone and from Sharmila, besides Mary Kom.

The dancer, who was apologetic about not being able to reply to calls or emails, talked about the violence in Manipur and its impact on art and culture. She also expressed her keenness to experiment with contemporary

RAS LEELA & LAI HARAوبا: A highly evolved dance drama, choreographed on Vaishnav Padavali, is an artistic expression of devotion to Radha-Krishna by Manipuris. The invention of ‘Ras Lila’ dance and spreading Vaishnavism in the state of Manipur is attributed to Ningthou Ching-Thang Khomba, the 18th century monarch. There are five types of Ras Leela like Kunja Ras, Basanta Ras & Maha Ras. Lai Haraoba is dedicated to Manipuri deity Umang Lai. Its mention can be found in Natya Shashtra

dance. Excerpts from an interview.

Who influenced you to become a dancer? Who would you like to thank for the achievements?

No one in my family was a dancer. However, we are Brahmins and our ancestral house had a temple of Radha-Krishna where we celebrated Jhulon every year. During the celebrations we would sing and dance. So I was really influenced by that. Also, the influence was there at our village school, which followed Hinduism. We hardly had a Catholic school in the village. During Saraswati puja, we would have cultural programmes and I was encouraged to participate. To be honest, I never like dancing when I was a child (laughs) but my parents pushed me to continue dancing and they appreciated my talent. They encouraged me to participate in competitions. So all the credit goes to my parents

Manipuri dance has always been known to the mainland despite NE’s distance from the rest of India. Why do you think it has been possible?

No doubt there are some internal similarities between Manipuri dances and other Indian classical dances. Also, religion plays a major role and the influence of Hinduism can be seen in our dances as well as the classical dances. Manipuri dances are based on bhakti. For example, Lai Haraoba comes from the Meiteis.

Have you ever felt that the conflict in the state is stunting your growth as an artist?

Yes, the violence has affected not only art and culture but also education to a great extent. The continuous bandhs have created hurdles for artists. Our children are also leaving the state for safer pastures.

Have you ever thought of expressing your angst through your art form?

The two forms of dance that I have specialised in are traditional and I cannot experiment with them. I like Ras Leela and train students in this dance form. However, I want to experiment with contemporary dance that will allow me use a different language through the art. Creative dance is also needed.

How was your experience in Shillong? How is the feedback usually in other northeastern states? (Radhamanabi was in Shillong in September to receive the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar 2017)

In Shillong, the crowd was not big because the city is more influenced by western culture (laughs). But I had been to Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh where the audience is always impressive.

How is the influence of western culture in Manipur?

Yes, yes, the influence is increasing there too but I can say it is a 50-50 mix of western and traditional dances. However, if you ask me about Manipuri dances, they are still popular among youths. Earlier, we had only diploma in dance but now there are proper dance courses in colleges and the university. We have many students from Manipur studying in Rabindra Bharati University and Santiniketan. Dance has many prospects now unlike in our times.

What are your other likings?

I like singing too but am not a professional. I sing occasionally. I have also published a book recently.

How does your family support?

I am married with two children, one a baby. I get a lot of support from my husband and mother-in-law. We do not have the trend of keeping maids in Manipur so we have to do all by ourselves. It is difficult when you have a job. But everyone at my in-laws’ place come forward to help me in every way they can.

Breathing life into wilted flowers

By Siddhi Jain

Giving a new lease of life to wilted flowers through his pressed flower art, 80-year-old Hari Tandon imbues them with a charm and beauty. Forty exhibits were on display recently in Delhi, show how his hands, although shaking because of old age, are firm when it comes to rendering an artful after-life to the pressed flowers.

The three-day solo show displayed selected artworks created by Tandon over the past 20 years as his passion for gardening blossomed into an intimate affair with art. “I have always loved plants. I used to do a lot of gardening. The entire process from planting, weeding, waiting for the plant to grow and the first buds appear, taking pleasure in the flowers, taking out the seeds, drying them and storing them for the next year fills me with excitement. “My familiarity with all parts of flowers and plants — petals, leaves, tendrils, seeds, stamens — was instrumental to my taking up this art,” Tandon, whose tryst with art began at 50, said.

Despite the trials of a full-time job, Tandon’s appreciation of nature’s beauty and a desire to see nature in new light led him to a chance encounter with the art form.

“I started creating pressed flower art by chance. One day I came across a patch of wild grass that had flowered and finding it interesting, I pressed it in a newspaper,” he said.

About a month later, when Tandon looked at it again they had turned dry and were no longer green. But it was beautiful, he recalled. And so he stuck it on paper and, thanks to its distinct artistic

appeal, put it up in the house. This is how the art began and then there was no looking back ever since.

How does he preserve and arrange the flowers?

“I sometimes use fallen flowers and leaves or on occasion pick them, or use seeds. Sometimes I take them from flowers received as gifts, or a used in garlands. I use whatever catches my eye, preserve them in a book or between newspaper sheets and put something heavy on top of it so as to get rid of all the moisture.

“I keep checking them and when the colours, textures, shapes seem right I arrange them on a sheet. Once I have decided the general composition I start moving smaller parts into place. I see which flowers can go with which leaves, tendrils etc, shift them into place and stick them with craft glue,” he explained.

Asked if pressed flower art has a shelf-life, Tandon responded in the affirmative and estimated the duration to be about 20 years. “Though an essential part of the experience is also seeing the colours, shapes and textures change with time,” he said, adding that the pressed plants are extremely delicate and need to be handled with great care. Tandon, who hopes to see growth in the market and art education around pressed flower art, is happy to simply exhibit his works to more people, outside his circles of family, friends and acquaintances, to whom he regularly gifts his works.

“The idea is to show the beauty of nature, give an after-life to plants, and look at nature from a new point of view.” (LANS)



Miniature artist, mural painter add to fete surprises

Rupankar Bhattacharjee (in picture, left) and Rahul Saikia were sitting at their stall at Metropolis Urban Winter Festival with a collection of their creations. A visitor may not find the works unusual at first but a closer look at the creations can be overwhelming.

The young artists from Guwahati said they are self-taught and did not get a chance to go to an art college. In fact, Bhattacharjee said he is a student of Commerce.

Saikia was busy making a wall decoration with twigs and rope when this correspondent met the duo. The finished products, complete with colourful threads and feathers, were lazily swinging in the winter afternoon breeze.

There were rows of notebooks lying on the table — each a sheaf of white pages bound by hand-painted hard covers — waiting to be explored. Saikia, an artist who specialises in street art and murals, unthinkingly said the notebooks and the wall-hangers were his creations. His Instagram page says he is a dropout and self-taught artist.

There were miniature structures of motorbikes encased in glass boxes on the other side of the table. They looked ordinary but the right eyes can detect the intricacies of the structures. All these miniatures were made from metal scraps.

Bhattacharjee, the creator, is a miniature artist and has keen interest in Cosplay and installation

art. “I have made two installations for the festival one of which is a bike. Besides these on display, I have other miniatures too, one less than 1.3 cm,” the young artist said as he pointed at a small glass cylinder mounted on a tiny plywood platform. A toothpick with a black “something” on top could be visible to the naked eyes. But Bhattacharjee encouraged to look deep into the cylinder and before doing that, gave a pair of special spectacles. The glasses made the picture clear.

It was a hoolock gibbon sitting on a toothpick, a less than 1.3 cm miniature. “I am not sure whether mine is the smallest miniature art so I am apprehensive about approaching the Guinness Book of World Records. I make the miniatures with naked eyes and the glasses are for others,” said Bhattacharjee, who was participating in a festival for the first time.

When asked how he managed art with studies, he said with a mischievous smile, “B.Com students do not study so much.”

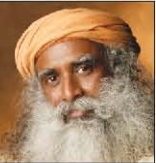
Surprises like Bhattacharjee and Saikia were part of the festival where paper masse figurines, hand-painted gamosas, 3D photography exhibition and local handicrafts could be an experience. The youth fiesta, which came to Shillong for the first time this year, concluded on Saturday.

~ NM



Saturday night feverParadise in Meghalaya

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



The whole world is going through a unique kind of neurosis, which was not there in the past. This is simply because modern man has stopped using his body to a large extent. In the past, when you intensely involved yourself in physical activity, a lot of your neurosis was worked out. Your nervous energy got spent. I know many people, especially young people, who had psychological problems. They just started swimming or playing some sport daily and then everything became okay. Because of enough activity, the energy was expended.

Today, man has become physically inactive like never before. He could not afford to be so physically inactive before, he had to do so many things physically, just to survive. He has become more neurotic than in the past. As a general phenomenon, there were neurotic people then also, but not in these numbers. Today, it has become a common phenomenon in society that everybody is in some level of neurosis.

This is simply because your energy is not worked out. It is trapped. You have not transcended your madness and at the same time, you are not working it out. The therapy also is not there. If you went out and chopped wood for the whole day — if you chopped a hundred logs a day — a lot of your energy would be spent, and life would be peaceful. But today it is not like that. You are not using your body the way it used to be used, so you go on generating all kinds of diseases, like never before.

This builds up into your system over a period of time. Then your physical and emotional energy needs some outlet. That is how bars, clubs and discotheques have come into place. People have to work out their neurosis somewhere, somehow. These discos look like madness, you cannot even breathe inside. They are full of smoke and sweat but people are just going wild. You cannot even dance, everybody is bumping into everybody else, but it does not matter, you have to work it out. Otherwise you will go crazy. So on Saturday, you go work out your neurosis for the week. Then the piling up starts

once more and once again the Saturday night fever comes.

There is another way to drop this madness and go ahead. Completely leaving it behind and going ahead where you are no more a part of it. This is what meditation is all about. Now, if you dance, you simply dance for the joy of it, and not because there is something to work out. If you are dancing to work out something, maybe it is therapeutic. It is good therapy alright, but there is a certain ugliness about it. It is lusty. You cannot dance out of love. You can only dance out of lust.

Do you know the difference between love and lust? Lust is a strong need. Love is not a need. When you love, you settle down, nothing more is needed. You can just sit here for a lifetime. With lust you cannot sit anywhere. You either get into some mad action, or you are bound to go crazy. When there is a certain neurosis, a certain madness within yourself, you can only be in lust. Your lust can be for sex, for food or for some particular activity or some hobby, it does not matter what it is, but you develop lust for something. Without that lust you cannot live. Even your work is an effective way of throwing out your lust. It is just that it is the most popular

When you love, you settle down, nothing more is needed. You can just sit here for a lifetime. With lust you cannot sit anywhere

and accepted way in the world. Today people just go on working, working and working. Not because they are creating something fantastic, but simply because they have to work. Otherwise they don't know what to do with themselves.

You have to guard that madness cautiously. Nobody ever knows that you have this within yourself and you yourself would like to forget it. You do everything possible to forget it. All the entertainment in the world has come just to hide your madness. If you were perfectly sane, you would not need entertainment. You need entertainment just to cover your madness. If we take away your entertainment, you will go crazy. Man needs entertainment simply to hide his madness. If he was perfectly sane, he would not need entertainment. He could just sit and watch the bamboo grow. He would not really need entertainment..

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

By Saptarshi Majumder

It all started with a holiday. It was Diwali holidays followed by a Saturday and Sunday. So ample time to see a new place. The first time I came to know about Krang Suri Waterfalls was in a photography exhibition at Rabindra Bhavan, Guwahati, in 2001. I wanted to visit the place.

I planned on November 10 to visit the falls. I called my friend, Anwar Hussain Majumder, Vice Principal, Army School Shillong, and we decided to go there. Anwar took his family along with him, and one of his colleagues and his wife on a different car. My wife accompanied me.

It was a beautiful drive to the waterfall. The scenery, the greenery, the curves, the twists and the turns, the ups and downs and the world rolling by as I comfortably cruised through it all was like meeting an old friend.

The falls was pure magic. After parking the car, we began to climb down a narrow pavement made of concrete blocks and hugging the mountain as a snake by its side. We walked for about five minutes and then arrived at a viewing point. The falls was visible a few hundred feet below through a break in the dense canopy. It looked so beautiful that we were all infused by its awesome appearance and all excited to meet it at the base of the mountain. The tiredness of the long drive simply vanished for there was a rush of adrenalin as that view of the falls unfolded a magic world of picturesque dreamscape made by the creator who created us all.

The climbing down was comfortable, and the slope was gradual. Then we arrived at the stage to get front row seats of that mesmerising magic show. The clear blue pool, the water rolling down in a relentless flow, the gigantic rocks lying in abandon, the azure sky, the dense hue of all shades of green all added up to create a magic far beyond the inventory of human words. It was paradise.

Of course, there were other tourists and marks of human civilization like ropes and plastic pipes which effectively spoiled the pristine charm but still the beauty rose above all and its sheen was bright enough to dissolve all these artefacts of human presence. It is beautiful and as you stand there at its temple you realise that that is



God in all his/ her splendour. The blue pool, the white spray, the grey rocks, the green trees all dance together to give shape to a drama of life that has been and will be for an eternity and you realize how we are mere miniscule parts of that elaborate pattern and tapestry called life.

At the venue construction work was going on to make it more accessible. May be after a few months it

from trying something new.

The best thing about the falls was that you can walk right below it. The way to the exact below part is barricaded by a motley arrangement of dried branches and that spoiled the photographer's delight by the way of its ugly display. I strongly felt that the place could be arranged in a better way. It is no doubt beautiful, but the human efforts seems to work in

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contradiction to that. May be in time things will become better as tourists' foot fall increases and things be-

come more systematic. For the time being the effort seems haphazard and incongruous to the aesthetic appeal of the mesmerizing falls.

The hours spent at the falls were full of awesome clicks. The water felt good to the feet. It was refreshingly clean. It was a fountain of youth for it washed away all the tiredness of the journey and infused us with youthful vitality of happy thoughts and contented emotions. We could not go for boating as time was running out and we planned to leave that place before dark. We spent around two hours there, but it was not enough to soak in its exquisite beauty.

We needed a few hours more to at least accept fully the intoxicating impact and we decided to visit that place again for one trip for just two hours is not enough to experience the place in all its totality. I parted ways with Anwar and decided to meet on the highway. The climbing up took our breath away for we city dwellers are accustomed to use escalators and elevators. The heart beat fast and the ravishing charm of that fairyland resonated in the beat.

I met Anwar on the highway and then we had a small picnic near an ancient bridge made of stone blocks. The food was good as it effectively controlled our hunger pangs. We didn't get time for a proper breakfast and till then there was no lunch. But the beauty of the land fed our heart and we forgot about the bile in our belly till we smelt that tantalizing food lovingly made my Parvin, Anwar's wife and also by the wife of AK Singh, Anwar's colleague.

It was dusk, and the evening sun brought to a beautiful close an eventful day. The night drive was in ways better than the day drive for the headlamps of the vehicles made those vehicles visible long before they announced their physical presence and that was an immense help while dealing with the blind curves of the hilly terrain. But then the night drive was more firing for there was no scenery to paint our heart. The headlamp lighted up the road and the beautiful countryside dreamscape was lost in the darkness of the night.

The sickle moon shone above suspended a little above the horizon. The outside temperature was between 12°C to 14°C and the ride was comfortable. We arrived home at 11 pm and the head and the heart were full of the exotic day.

My cell phone capturing moments of that trip was just the tip of the iceberg that floated in the deep ocean of my heart. That iceberg will eventually melt to merge with my being and this experience will make me wonder a little more at the fact of being alive in this wonderful world of painted dreams, in this melodious music of the duet of Gaia and God dancing together with grace and grandeur.

(The author is a teacher at Kendriya Vidyalaya, CRPF Amerigog, Guwahati)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOVEMBER 25, 2018

Moon trine Venus on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. This is a fortunate aspect that helps boost optimism and confidence, and you are able to attract fortunate circumstances into your life as a result. Problems are easier to resolve. Matters related to universities, higher education, religion, publishing, legal affairs, and/or foreign interests can be especially strong. It's an excellent time to further your education. You are likely to enjoy a larger perspective on matters that keeps you from getting lost in details or overly frustrated by everyday stresses.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You would enjoy doing things with others at work and at home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you. You would most successfully perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. After dealing with tough people and complicated issues you feel much stronger and clearer about priorities. You have mental clarity and a logical approach to resolve matters. Study business offers and professional opportunities in detail. Instead of feeling hurt and suffering mentally, be patient and positive, as things are likely to turn around in a positive direction in a few days.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

There will be fabulous results for domestic and work related matters. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. Think about long term gain as opposed to quick fix solutions. Media and the arts involve you in creative pastimes. You enjoy love and admiration of the family. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through writing or some forms of art. A strong desire for companionship and sociability dominates during this period. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at work. Sports people also benefit from the planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This phase brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. You are bold and adventurous right now and you cannot tolerate delays, restrictions, or any form of authority that prevents you from behaving exactly the way you want to. Your drive for personal freedom and insistence on your rights is pressing, and a confrontation in which you have to stand up for yourself is likely. You will be needed to provide inputs and your presence may also be required at home and work and you will have to divide your attention according to priorities. This is good time to achieve balance between the head and the heart, and that too in all relationships.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

There will be mixed results as success and good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion and travel. Some changes in the business set up are on the cards. You bring stability and order in business and professional projects with a dynamic and assertive approach. You come up with original and creative ideas that surprise other in the professional arena. You support people with loyalty and zeal. A person makes an impact on you and it is hard to stop thinking of this strange connection. Your relationship with your partner is rather tenacious at the moment and requires extra attention and care. Emotive issues arise with family members. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

An excellent time awaits you especially regarding money and career. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now. Money matters move smoothly even as expenses rise. It is time to get serious about other aspects of life management too. You work towards happiness and solidarity in friendship and love and this helps you get your health and relationships back on track. You reconnect with friends and focus your attention on your relationships with your family including children. The unattached are likely to meet someone who stimulates them mentally and a great period of togetherness could ensue.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

An excellent time awaits you especially regarding money and career. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now. Money matters move smoothly even as expenses rise. It is time to get serious about other aspects of life management too. You work towards happiness and solidarity in friendship and

love and this helps you get your health and relationships back on track. You reconnect with friends and focus your attention on your relationships with your family including children. The unattached are likely to meet someone who stimulates them mentally and a great period of togetherness could ensue.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This is a positive period that brings sincerity, cooperation and harmony in relationships. This is an excellent time under which to work on resolving differences in values or problems with joint finances in a close relationship. Old friends and close family communicate good news and remain in touch when you need to share views and feelings. This is a great time to present your ideas and to make your mark at your place of work. Your innovative ideas elicit a favourable response from peers and seniors alike. Be objective as prejudices and notions could color your view on how you tackle a given situation. Health needs the attention it deserves.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are likely to swing to extremes this week, sometimes being happy, celebratory and at other times low, serious and depressed. Professional situations and personal relations are sensitive and tend to go through ups and downs. Finances and material effects need to be evaluated, do not make investments or speculate heavily. You are involved in multiple activities and need to avoid mental stress. It is the right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills as your workload too increases. You have to develop more energy for work and your daily routine tends to speed up now. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Financial gains and profits from business are on the cards. This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or reaching out to more people is possible now. There could be a promotion or new job opportunities. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your position. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not, and the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are at your most visible during this week.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This phase brings excellent opportunities for love and fun. A love affair may become a little more serious. Spending time with someone special is a focus. You pour more energy into self-promotion activities. It is a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This is a time of profitable productivity. Your mind is clear, decisive and organized in professional matters. You keep things in perspective and handle many issues and facets with ease and speed. You may feel professional unstable and emotionally insecure for a short while. You tend to apply too much force suddenly it's better to take one steady step at a time to climb the ladder of success. Your heart is with your home and family, if you happen to be traveling during this week, a romantic adventure may be on the cards. A focused effort in any direction brings success.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Work issues are emphasized as well as mental and physical health. You are called upon to deal with the details and practicalities of everyday life, to become more organized, and to take charge of your routines. It is time to formulate some clear goals and plans. Circumstances are such that you need to develop some healthy habits, routines, and schedules. Believing in a grand plan is fine, but practical concerns need to be dealt with as well. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. A business venture could be fruitful if you are willing to lend it some energy. A relaxed and light attitude would help you overcome negative thoughts.



Animals too have rights

By Sherry Carelyne Marwein & Preyoshi Barbie B Marak

“There is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental facilities,” — Charles Darwin

Animal abuse is a deliberate harm, neglect or misuse of animals by humans resulting in the animals’ suffering, physically or emotionally. It can occur anywhere at any time when humans and animals interact.

Animals, like humans, do have the right to live a happy and free life on Earth. Everyday countless animals die and suffer at the hands of few people who continuously abuse them either physically or emotionally. A large number of animals are abused on daily basis just to meet the daily requirements of human life. For example: entertaining purposes, unnecessary scientific experiment and inhumane method of slaughtering animals.

Animals do have feelings like us but sometimes we don't understand what they are going through because they cannot express and tell their feelings in the language we speak in.

People sometimes abuse animals by thinking it is the only way to treat them or they see animals as an object, forgetting they too have a family of their own.

Animal abuse is a common topic in

every household and we as humans can act and speak, stand up for them because by taking small steps we can bring about a lot of changes not only to our society but to the whole world.

Humane Society International, India, has given 15 Animal laws that every citizen of India should know.

1. It is the fundamental duty of every citizen of India to have compassion for all living creatures.
2. It is a punishable offence to kill or maim any animals, including stray animals.
3. Abandoning a pet animal is an offence punishable by law.
4. No animal (including chickens) can be slaughtered in any place other than a slaughter house. Sick or pregnant animals shall not be slaughtered.
5. Stray dogs cannot be relocated by any person or authority. Only specified groups may capture them for sterilization and release.
6. Denying any animal food, shelter, water and exercise or confining him for long periods is neglect and is punishable by law.
7. It is illegal and punishable to own monkeys and parakeets.
8. Bear, monkeys, tigers, panthers, lions and bulls are prohibited from being trained and used for entertainment purposes, either in circuses or streets.
9. Animal sacrifice is illegal in every part of the country.

10. Organizing of a participatory in or inciting any animal fight is a cognizable offense.

11. Cosmetic tested on animals and the import of cosmetics tested on animals is banned.

12. Teasing, feeding or distributing animals in zoo and littering in the zoo are punishable offense.

13. Capturing, trapping, poisoning or baiting a wild animal is punishable by law.

14. Disturbing or destroying eggs or nests of birds and reptiles or chopping a tree having a nest of such birds and reptiles or even attempting to do so constitutes to hunting is illegal and punishable.

15. Transporting animals in any manner that causes discomfort, pain or suffering is a punishable offense. Confining hens in battery cages is a violation.

Saving one animal might not change the world but surely the world will change for that one animal. So, we should all try and report immediately in case we come across any animal being abused. Also, because people who abuse animals are more likely to abuse other people in the near future. In this way, it will not only help the animal but will help the world to be a better and safer place to live in for everyone.

(The authors are associated with College of Veterinary Science & Animal Husbandry, Selesih, Aizawl)

“There is nothing like dream to create the future. Utopia to-day, flesh and blood tomorrow.”
--- Victor Hugo

The Shillong Times

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Failing systems

FORMER Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh is among the few erudite politicians. He also has to his side the experiences that went with governance of the nation from its apex, apart from being the governor of RBI, academician and IMF functionary. Above all, he’s a well-meaning and patriotic citizen. When he speaks, the nation listens despite the series of scams that clouded his tenure as PM. His latest take, in sum, is that key institutions of the nation are losing their sheen and robustness due to large-scale governmental interferences on the one side and gross malpractices on the other. Dr Singh’s reference was mainly to the situations in which RBI and CBI have fallen into. RBI is seen to be dictated to by the Modi government, and the CBI as a “caged parrot” has lost its veneer of dignity long ago. To which were added recent scandalous situations. Two of its top functionaries are facing probe into allegations of bribe-taking, acts of scheming against each other etc, all of which have happened during the term of the present NDA government. These are shameful situations that will have adverse bearing on the well-being of the nation. RBI is in the docks for allowing situations that led to lakhs of crores of funds from public sector and other banks to be siphoned away by a bunch of unscrupulous businessmen. Many of them are refusing to pay back their loans even as they have the proven capacity to repay -- thereby forming themselves into a gang of willful defaulters. Clearly, institutions are losing their strengths due principally to interferences into their functioning by the political class that wields power at the Centre and in states too. They also showed a lack of courage to stem the rot.

The governmental machinery as a whole is found wanting in maintaining their institutional strengths – with the spectre of corruption growing by the day. While the Congress-led UPA periods were the worst, the scenario has only marginally changed during the present NDA period. Dr Manmohan Singh himself cannot escape the blame for what’s a denouement of the UPA era. Much of the bad loans, or non-performing assets the public sector banks have loaded themselves with were disbursed during the NDA period. The Modi government has not done a good job in speeding up investigations and getting back the lost money. It’s high time for effective and speedy remedial actions.

TO THE EDITOR

Why the desperation about MR Vaccination?

Editor,
I was absolutely shocked to read the order dated Nov 24, 2018 of the East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner instructing that the report cards of all those students who refused to take the MR vaccinations should be withheld, and this should also be applied to new admissions. Never in the history of Meghalaya have I come across such a display of arrogance! This is so disgusting and the act, to me, is so undemocratic and authoritarian in nature! Have we gone mad or is it that power has gone to our heads! What right has the district administration to order me or anyone to take this medicine or that vaccination? Is a plague sweeping through our district? If not, then why such a desperate move? Please don't play with the rights of the citizens and students just to pep up your government statistics!
The State Government would do well to order the withdrawal of this most repulsive order ASAP!
Yours etc.,
Eugene D. Thomas
Shillong - 6.

UCC Road in a pathetic condition

Editor,
I would like to draw attention of the local MDC, MLA and the concerned departments through the columns of your newspaper. The UCC Road which is only 15 kms approximately from Shillong has been in a pathetic condition for nearly two years now. The road is badly damaged and has been neglected. The road serves a large number of residents in the area. The road in the area is broken at many places. There is no smooth run for the transport from Dykes (Lad Umsaw) to UCC. This has badly affected people in many localities, Umsaw, Umniuh, Umbir, Mawlyndep and many others.
This road is so bad that the sick, students, traders, farmers, tourists and others who have to pass through it are likely to suffer from a broken spine. Come to think of it, there are health centres, educational institutions and resorts, etc in the area but no one bothers to make common cause. The taxi drivers from Dykes to UCC and vice-versa have no options other than charging more money

Mushroom Mission and lessons from the Green Revolution

By H H Mohrmen

In addition to the long list of Missions that are listed in Meghalaya the Government recently launched another Mission to help the farmers and hopefully help improve the economy of Meghalaya too. The Mushroom Mission was announced with much fanfare but without almost any concrete plans to achieve the goals. As of now the Mission is an empty rhetoric without a proper road map to take it forward to make it a successful enterprise.

Of course this is not the first time that the government introduced mushroom cultivation to the farmers. ICAR Umiam and the State Agriculture Department had introduced this activity to enhance the income of the farmers. Recently our NGOs have sent more than hundred famers for training on mushroom cultivation at ICAR and the report we received from them is very positive. Fresh mushrooms are sold at Rs 200 per kilogram in Jowai, and the farmers are also optimistic because it sells like hot cakes. Add to that the fact that it can be dried and sold as dry products too, but the major problem that our farmers’ encounter is the supply of spores.

At the moment there are only two institutes in the state which produce mushroom seeds; one in ICAR Umiam and the State Agriculture unit in Upper Shillong and the feedback we have from the trained farmers is that the two units cannot supply the demand of seeds by the farmers. This is one major challenge for the Mission; if the state continues to depend on these two institutions to supply the much needed seeds then this Mission is doomed to fail.

The other issue is that of the two types of mushroom that are introduced to the farmers only oyster mushroom is popular because it is much easier to cultivate. Although pricewise button mushrooms fetch a much better price but because of the various challenges involved in cultivating the same, farmers have abandoned its cultivation. This is another challenge that the Government needs

to address if the mission is to succeed because only limited species of two have been introduced of which one is popular.

A study by Bioversity International and partners brought to light the astounding fact that vegetables sold around the world in grocery shops, super markets and open air markets are surprisingly similar everywhere. The same commercial vegetables like tomato, potato, eggplant, onion, carrot, beet, lettuce and broccoli can be found in the markets around the world. In such a situation the diets of people across the world are becoming more similar and are based on fewer crops. Recent studies conducted by the scientists of Bioversity International in collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UNO found that there are more than 1,097 vegetable species consumed by the people the world over, yet we are familiar with less than 7% of these species.

Now even in our state we find less and less variety of food items on our plates and most of them are all foreign crops introduced to our land. Coming back to mushrooms, a young lady in her project which was submitted in partial fulfilment of the course she studied for a Bachelors Degree in Science on Environment Science from St. Edmunds College came up with a list of more than 10 varieties of wild edible mushrooms which are consumed by the people in Jaintia Hills. Now the question is: Does the Mission have any scope for including wild edible mushrooms in the grand project?

Is it true that in spite of the state having innumerable varieties of wild mushrooms, the Mission will only concentrate on imported varieties of button and oyster mushrooms which are not endemic to the State? Why are no efforts made to do tissue-culturing of our own wild mushrooms and start cultivation of the same if possible?

Mushroom which can be commercially cultivated fetch a good price in the market, but wild mushrooms are a niche product which are in great demand the world over. If the Mission misses this element then it is but a replication of what has been done elsewhere, and a small version of the Green Revolution with the only difference being that it is about mushrooms only. Mushroom Mission will be unique and become Meghalaya specific only if wild edible mushrooms endemic to the State are incorporated in the Mission.

With the benefit of a hindsight, the three lessons we learn from the Green Revolution are (a) loss of crop diversity (b) its impact on the soil and the health of the people and (c) the gradual diminishing of numbers of food item from our plates which also affect the health and nutrition of the people. The loss of crop diversity is evident from the disappearance of indigenous seeds from collection of the farmers. In our effort to increase production, the traditional seeds are at stake and more often than not, local seeds are replaced by high yielding varieties. Our penchant for high yielding varieties of crops and fancy foreign crops which are easy to produce and grow quickly has resulted in our abandoning our own indigenous seeds and in the process losing crop diversity.

The other lesson from the Green Revolution is that the overuse of chemical fertilizers has resulted in loss of soil fertility and decrease in crop production. The harmful effects of chemical fertilizers, chemical insecticides and herbicides on the health of the soil and the health of the people are beginning to show now. The pesticides and herbicides used had an affect not only on the produce and the soil but even on the health of the consumers. Tomatoes are one such example where people now peel the skin before eating the same.

In our endeavour to achieve progress we put on a great effort to increase production but at the cost of crop diversity. Indigenous food systems which are a store house of crop diversity are gradually giving way to the culture of fancy fast food now. There is no interest in the local food anymore. The irony is that now even local chickens are being replaced by Broilers and Kroilers on the dining table, and in the pens at home by Kroilers. Very soon local chicken will be lost forever and if that happens then with it our folk stories about the rooster will also disappear.

For the state government’s ambitious Mushroom Mission to happen; it needs to increase production of seeds because training can be done at the district level by the office of the District Agriculture, Horticulture offices, the KVKs, ICAR and even NGOs which has trained manpower. Unlike the other agriculture produce which are greatly affected by market fluctuations, markets for mushrooms are readily available and add to the marketability of products as it can be dried and sold as a packaged product.

The other advantage of mushroom cultivation is it attracts educated youths to engage in this livelihood activity which does not only involve cultivation but packaging too. We have few such cases where educated youths are engaged in this activity now. Like keeping poultry, piggery, cattle, goats and beekeeping, mushroom can also be a side livelihood activity which can help enhance the income of the farmers.

There is a scope that this Mission will not only help farmers to enhance their incomes but it can draw educated youth to farming. However, for the Mission to have an edge, it needs to produce niche product and that will only happen if we can produce and market wild edible mushrooms. In doing so we will help conserve mushroom diversity and also help protect forests because wild mushrooms only grow in the forest.

and strengthened - democracy, secularism, socialism and our unity in diversity - the four pillars of our Constitution. His death even made a young leader in the opposition, Atal Bihari Vajpayee say, “The loss to Parliament is irreparable. Such a resident may never grace Teen Murti again. That vibrant personality, that attitude of taking even the opposition along, that refined gentlemanliness, the greatness we may not again see in the near future.”

Indeed, Nehru has become more relevant now as a model democratic leader in a parliamentary democracy. When democratic institutions are unfortunately being undermined, we need to follow the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru instead of undermining his contributions. This is necessary to restore these institutions to their former glory which they enjoyed in the days of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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

Assembly Elections trends omimous for BJP Anti-incumbency favours Congress in three States

By Harihar Swarup

What does about 72 per cent polling in Chhattisgarh indicate? This includes Maoist-infested areas. High percentage of voting is generally considered anti-establishment. Of other two Hindi speaking states—Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh—BJP’s chances seem to be better in Chhattisgarh. But at the end of polling, it doesn’t appear so. Raman Singh is a three-term chief minister and there is powerful anti-incumbency against him, besides charges of corruption. His hope that Ajit Jogi-Mayawati combine will divide Congress votes did not fructify. Reports say that Ajit Jogi-Mayawai combine has damaged both the BJP and the Congress.

Pre-poll situation in Telangana is turning out to be interesting. Reports say that Congress-TDP alliance has been gaining ground over Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao. Chandra Babu Naidu’s is a mass-based leader and in truncated Andhra Pradesh he is, perhaps, the tallest

but taken scarce notice by newspapers. It is only northeastern state that the Congress rules. It is also the final frontier for the BJP which is ruling, alone or in coalition, all the other states in the region. The BJP did not have a party office in Christian dominated Mizoram five years ago, but will now contest almost all 40 seats in the assembly election on November 28.

However, all is not well for the BJP. The people of Mizoram are furious at the Narendra Modi government’s efforts to bring back Bru tribals to the state. Brus are considered non-Mizos. Thousands of them had left the state in the 1970s after alleged persecution by the Mizos. The neighbouring state of Tripura built relief camps for them in Kanchanpura, 20kms from the border. A much larger exodus followed ethnic riots in 1997. Now about 46,000 Brus live in Tripura.

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government tried to bring

The community, however, does not want to return to Mizoram until it gets its own autonomous district council, like the persecuted Chakmas did in 1970s. The Brus also want free ration and security cover till they are resettled in Mizoram. Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla, a Congress veteran agreed to accept the Brus but turned down the demand for autonomous council.

leader. Even though Telangana region has separated, Naidu’s following in the new state remains intact.

The Congress acted very stupidly by dividing Andhra Pradesh and carving out the new state of Telangana. The result was that the party lost its strongest bastion in South. Both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka stood by Indira Gandhi, in post-Emergency election, when the Congress was wiped out in the country. Even though Congress has been badly mauled in Telangana and Andhra, its deep roots in the two states remain intact. This will play an important role in the Telangana election. Therefore, KCR does not seem as invincible as before and faces a grave threat from Congress-TDP alliance.

The latest is the resignation of TRS MP Konda Vishweshwara Reddy. This development has given ammunition to political rivals of KCR to target him. Reddy met Congress leaders in Delhi and is likely to join the party soon. An MP from Cevella, Reddy wrote in his letter addressed to KCR that TRS has moved away from the people. “Regretfully, based on multiple incidents, I began to feel especially in the last two years that we, as a party, were becoming more and more distant from the very people whom we had represented extremely well. We, as government, were becoming inaccessible to the people.”

Congress leaders latched on to this, saying there is resentment against TRS in the state due to the reasons that Reddy listed in his resignation letter. “TRS will lose because it is not connected with the people any more. There will be a big blast within TRS on December 11 (counting day), they say.

Mizoram is another state going to poll along with Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana

back Brus back to Mizoram but could not do so. In 2014 Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh took several steps to repatriate the Brus.

The community, however, does not want to return to Mizoram until it gets its own autonomous district council, like the persecuted Chakmas did in 1970s. The Brus also want free ration and security cover till they are resettled in Mizoram. Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla, a Congress veteran agreed to accept the Brus but turned down the demand for autonomous council. The church and the young Mizo Association, both highly influential in the state, had pressed Lal Thanhawla to reject the demand. The 1986 Mizo Accord signed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Mizo leader Laldenga, which had given Mizoram almost Kashmir like autonomy, and also given a lot of powers to Church and civil society organization.

Elections in Mizoram will be held in this background. The BJP is eyeing a goof haul in the election, especially as a couple of Congress leaders had recently jumped ship, one of them a former speaker of the assembly. “The Congress did not have any respect for me” and “under Narendra Modi India has become an economic super power. So I have decided to strength BJP in Mizoram”, the ex-speaker said. The BJP is also likely to have support of the lakh strong Chakmas, which could translate at least seven seats. The party has several Christian candidates this time.

The only Congress Chief Minister in Northeast, Lal Thanhawla is the party’s best chance to retain Mizoram. The five-time chief minister has been in power since 2008. At 76, this is probably his last election. He is confident that the double digit growth in the past five years will fetch him another term and he vows to continue with pro-poor schemes. (IPA Service)

“ *Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might endanger the morals of an individual, the former invariably endangers the morals of the entire country.*”

-- Karl Kraus

The Shillong Times

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Corruption in Health Dept

CORRUPTION in the Health Department is not new to Meghalaya. Essential medical equipments like X-Ray or CT- Scan machines are purchased without adequate insurance coverage and tend to become unserviceable and idle assets after being used on a few patients. After the machines have packed up, patients are referred to private clinics for diagnostic services. Most patients and their families feel they are too inconsequential to complain. Hence the problems persist. The same is the case with procurement of medicinal drugs. There have been cases where medicines on the verge of expiry were purchased at throwaway prices. Such deals are regularly made between Health Ministers or the higher-ups in the Health Department. The recent allegations made by a consortium of drug suppliers about a non-transparent drug procurement process in the present MDA Government is a cause of great concern because the end sufferers are poor patients.

Why is the e-tendering process not observed by the Meghalaya Health Department? Isn't this the most fair and transparent process for getting value for money from drugs manufacturers and suppliers? The Health Minister should be aware that healthcare is a fundamental human right Medicines are fundamental inputs in any public health system and often the most costly. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that public spending on pharmaceuticals in developing countries represents the largest health expenditure, after staff salary. India is a developing country with a very high population that lives below poverty line. The same is true of Meghalaya. Governments in developing countries need to have good medicine procurement policies to enable them to purchase quality medicines at a reasonable cost to make such medicines available to the poorest. In fact, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Target 8 E is to provide access to affordable essential medicines in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies. Sadly in India this is far happening. Pharmaceutical companies are in league with government health practitioners to push sub-standard or over-priced branded medicines. In Meghalaya the drug procurement procedure has always been inefficient, non-transparent, and corrupt because of non-accountability. Some drugs suppliers have controlled the Health Department for years and made brisk business out of peoples' sufferings. This is possible because of a system of collusion between the drugs suppliers and officials in the Department.

Transparency and accountability are the main constituents of good governance and in no other sector is good governance more needed than the health sector.

Washington-based watchdog Freedom House recently concluded that "liberal democracy is under severe threat, even peril, all over the globe," as its President Michael Abramowitz said in a briefing announcing the group's annual "Freedom in the World" report. The report found that India's democracy, meanwhile, had remained stable over the previous year, even as Venezuela sank to "military dictatorship" and the United States experienced democratic "retreat."

Democratic values embedded in liberty, equality and freedom have taken the shape of coercion and the autonomous individual's right to resist unjust authority eroded. The role of government was to be minimal and its legitimacy based on consent and trust; mutual toleration and pluralism should prevail. But the tragedy is that the individual has been threatened by the tyranny of the majority - the tension between majority rights and individualism with liberalism found to be in conflict with democracy.

Meanwhile, centralisation of authority has dominated society today where democratic attitudes, as understood in the professional sense, have been on the wane. The fate of our rights and the creativity of public spaces is being destroyed by the institutions that are asserting their dominance. It is well known that pluralism of democracy cannot be substituted for by populism, majoritarianism or the lynch mob.

The absence of decentralisation in the political and economic process has vitiated the democratic system. But unfortunately there has been a tendency to concentrate powers in the hands of a few politicians, who are not willing to allow citizen participation in the planning and governance process. If democracy means just the right to voting by citizens - most of whom being ignorant about the reason for their selection of a candidate or the agenda and past performance of the political party he represents - then, of course, we could continue to boost about it. But this is not at all tenable and justified.

The voter has become a denuded entity without any sense of the deeper embeddedness of politics. It is a well known fact that politics today demands a more inventiveness from the citizen as a political person. Otherwise, citizenship will disappear into a few rudimentary roles like voter and consumer and lose the deeper holism of politics as

a process.

The democracy that we are witnessing today has narrowed down to bullying by the majority without the creativity by civil society. Without true participation by civil society, without the public becoming active from the grass-root levels, democracy can be said to be in real peril. Thus, elections may be considered to be an almost anti-democratic exercise.

Political activism and involvement in the decision-making process are vital elements of a thriving democratic system. Criticism and dissent are vital for democracy to thrive. However, it is distressing to note that in present day opposition and dissent are miscon-

wrecked by the poor.

Glaring disparities have been found to spawn discontentment and disaffection and in their desperate bid to secure their wealth and their place in society, the rich have been found to conspire to establish some form of authoritarian regime, may be a rightist fascist regime. Such disparities lead to social and economic oppression and may lead to destruction of democracy and this has possibly what has happened in India.

As is universally recognized of all the forms of government humanity has worked so far, democracy is accepted to be the most civilized as it is based on certain principles and not on improvised rules. Politicians in

“ The role of government was to be minimal and its legitimacy based on consent and trust; mutual toleration and pluralism should prevail. But the tragedy is that the individual has been threatened by the tyranny of the majority - the tension between majority rights and individualism with liberalism found to be in conflict with democracy. ”

strued. These have lost their polysemy and started marching in official uniforms enacting official definitions. Though it is well known that dissent promotes healthy democracy as it keeps alive the power of voicing alternative possibilities, this is now not appreciated. Moreover, dissent has been distorted as anti-national.

If secularism and promotion of free thought and expression are the basics of a plural democratic society, socio-economic justice is an indispensable requirement. Thus, from the economic standpoint, one may refer to Prof. Harold Laski whose dictum that 'without economic equality every democracy is a sham' may be difficult to believe in India and in many Third World countries. However, what is true is that economic equality to the optimum limit possible within the framework of democracy ought to be achieved as history is littered with examples of democracy being ruined by the rich and

democracies not only indulge in reckless rhetoric but have also been found to brazenly deviate from the norm and standard of behaviour expected of them. History is replete with examples of democracies behaving as badly and as outrageously as dictatorships.

It has been found that obsession with power in democracies is no less than in dictatorships but since democracies have some built-in accountability mechanism and a method of smooth changes of government, power can neither be held, exercised and monopolised for long.

It cannot be denied that deviation from principles take most regrettable forms even when mature democracies deal with lesser mortals belonging to backward regions like Asia, and Africa. This has been the case with India in present times and political analysts are of the opinion that the basic values of democracy are being eroded.

The question of socio-economic justice remains a

far cry and the minorities and lower castes are made to suffer due to flawed policies of the government. The true democratic spirit is missing and the concentration of power at the top does not allow participation of the people from the grass-root levels in the development process. In spite of panchayati raj system being in operation, these bodies have very little say in programmes to be adopted for the socio-economic development of their areas.

It is indeed difficult to formulate any theory of how to revitalize democracy in the true sense at least in this country. The foremost thing that is needed at this juncture is true cooperative spirit and genuine fellow feeling for our brethren who languish due to backwardness, poverty and squalor. Ideas and theoretical propositions are there but the lack of political will is the biggest hurdle. The question then arises how do we change the mindset of the political elite?

It must be done by focussing on development and their will to work towards it. It is generally agreed that our resources are being virtually looted by the powerful few and not geared in the right direction. The crux is the lack of accountability and transparency as also involvement of the masses.

Society has to become a little more vigilant and exert pressure on the political class through organised mass movements, thereby creating what Mahatma Gandhi called ashrams of the mind so that no one is immobile, vulnerable and lacking in spirit. One may have to rise above party politics and work towards ushering in social change that is sustainable, judicious and transparent. Unfortunately, we talk about this but the accomplishments are far from encouraging.

Achieving this may be quite arduous and would entail an alternative socio-economic path of development. Pessimists may think that with the society we have and the manner it has succeeded in crushing opposition of every kind, including the human spirit, the chances are not very reassuring. But then the human spirit has always triumphed in spite of heaviest odds and there is no reason why democracy should not overcome and vanquish the perils that appear to be insurmountable.---INFA

How about a statue for Advani?

Katju shoots another wild arrow

By Aditya Aamir

Justice (ret'd) Markandey Katju wants a statue of LK Advani at the centre of Connaught Place in New Delhi "with this line from the Ramcharitmanas inscribed on it in gold 'Taat Laat Ravan Mohe Maar.'" Katju says this on his Facebook page. But he spells "statue" as "statute" and then implies in replies to comments that the "laat" Advani gets is that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Katju doesn't like Modi and has called him a "fraud"; once also stating that Modi cannot be exonerated of a role in the Gujarat riots. Katju is a gadfly, a facet of his personality he kept undercover for so long as he was a Supreme Court judge. The other day, he reiterated in another Facebook post that Mahatma Gandhi was a "British agent"; that Gandhi never failed to inject "Hindu religion" in all that he did and said, thus furthering the British project to divide and rule India.

Justice Katju is a former chairman of the Press Council of India and gives the impression that if he wasn't justice, he would have been journalist. That is said not in jest though many of Katju's public comments do draw laughs. Very recently he said Indian media is nowhere like the US media, is incapable of doing to Modi what the US media does to Trump, i.e., keep at Modi till a frustrated Modi gets hot under the collar and labels Indian media "enemy of the people!"

In his Gandhi post, Katju asks, "By constantly injecting religion into politics for several decades, was Gandhi not objectively acting as a British agent?" Then, to add to Gandhi's sins, he says, "Gandhi successfully diverted the freedom struggle from this revolutionary (Chandrashekhar Azad, Ramprasad Bismil, Bhagat Singh) direction to a harmless nonsensical channel called Satyagrah(a). This also served British interests." Besides, Gandhi's economic ideas repelled Katju - "all nonsense and an act of deceiving people."

Making his displeasure of Gandhi known, what does Katju want? That Katju doesn't make public, but coming at a time when politics without religion is impossible, Katju seems to be either warning Indians or muddying the water further to further his own political agenda. The retired Supreme Court justice may not like that imputation, but it is hard to imagine Katju may not

have goals other than shaping public opinion. Ask, so close to general elections, does Katju have political ambitions?

Maybe yes, maybe not. But the timing does leave people, especially journalists, guessing, including the fact that Katju has made it clear that he doesn't like Modi and he feels the Indian media is too effete to take on Modi. Justice Katju believes public opinion lacks maturity and independence to stand up to authority. Two, media barons don't want to rile government and readily surrender because they have other business interests and are keenly aware of how vengeful government can get.

Justice Katju might be right as far as public opinion, still incapable of standing up to political pressure, but even that is not wholly true. In fact, the ruling party and its allies are using the power of public opinion to forward their agenda in the face of judicial rulings. Like in the case of the Ram temple issue. Also, on the flip side, farmers marching to Mumbai show that public opinion is not wholly subjugated to authority. In Kerala, an entire segment of public opinion is building up against the LDF government on the Sabarimala issue.

The contention that Indian journalists compared to American counterparts succumb to government pressure because they are financially not secure and risk losing jobs if they take an anti-government line is also not completely the truth. Indians journalists in positions to shape opinion, pressurize government are not paupers. Almost all the so-called 'celeb journalists' are well-off and many of them live in palatial South Delhi residences, some in exclusive farmhouses. These are not all kowtowing to government.

Justice Katju does raise several questions but because he makes many outrageous statements leaves him outside the pale of serious discourse. His demand that an Advani statue be built in the middle of Connaught Place cannot be taken seriously; he's just being sarcastic or funny. The comments that he receives in reply are equally frivolous. Mostly anti-Modi, they only go to stiffen the support for Modi further, something Katju was not aiming to begin with.

Statues are a waste of money and Katju never gets to that point.(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Evils of coal mining

Editor,

The day after the assault on the two activists in Jaintia Hills, the number of trucks transporting coal to Assam has increased exponentially. There are hundreds of trucks heading towards Guwahati as black widows which looked like the ban on mining and transportation of coal has been suddenly lifted and we are back to the good old days when coal ruled the roost with regard to our lives, traffic, economy et al. It seems that a signal is being sent out by the coal mafia that 'come what may, we are determined to carry on mining and transportation of coal even if it requires greasing some palms and bumping off a few whistle blowers.' Such damn care attitude can only come about when the Government, District Administration and Police are complicit in the matter and are perhaps also beneficiaries in the process.

It appears that the working plan and measurement of the stock of extracted coal was a big bogey and pur-

posely left as a loophole for this activity to continue. One has to understand that coal mining is not the solution to our economy. Unless coal is scientifically and rationally mined, it is more detrimental and damaging to the economy and environment in the long run as compared to the benefits accruing to a handful of coal merchant. People who say that coal is the base of the State's economy and that it is generating employment have to realise that this is bogus and except for a few truck drivers and a small subsidiary service industry and the mine owners we are only generating employment for migrant labourers. One has to go to the mining areas to see the reality. Not only has coal mining attracted undesirable elements leading to shady activities; it has also completely desecrated the beautiful environment that we had inherited. There is not a single industry worth its name which processes the coal and generates employment. Everything is just exported for the benefit of a few. There was sufficient

time for the government in the interim to have explored and promoted alternate employment avenues but Government seems to have waited with bated breath for the ban to be lifted.

The reasons are known to all. It is now high time both for the NGT and Hon'ble Supreme Court, looking at the stand taken by the coal mafia in adopting violence and illegality, to completely ban the mining and transportation of coal in the State for good. No loopholes should be left for these merchants of death to illegally carry on with these nefarious activities in future. This bogey of Sixth Schedule and tribal rights over land should not in any way supersede the benefit and safety of the larger community and future generations to come. I am marking a copy of this letter to the Hon'ble NGT and Hon'ble Supreme Court so that the voices of the silent majority are also taken into consideration while passing judgment on the vexed issue of coal mining in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
B. Mawlong

Shillong-3

Hawkers obstruct pedestrian space

Editor,

The news item, "City needs to be sensitive to PwDs" (ST Nov 24, 2018) is thought provoking and is a reminder to all especially the Government and private sectors that we need to be more sensitive towards the daily problems that people with disabilities come across. Alongside the need for Government offices to install wheelchair ramps in their buildings, hospital and public transports too one is reminded of the article, "Hawkers create hurdles for PwDs" in (ST Oct 30, 2018). I, for one, had time and again voiced my concern through this forum over the growing menace of hawkers in almost every part of the city as they capture and set up shops on footpaths and just about any place and

space they deem fit. It is difficult for us common people with no disability to squeeze our way through footpaths and sidewalks that are occupied by the hawkers. I can well imagine the plight and predicament of my fellow brethren with disabilities. It is common experience that many of us who chance to step on to the goods of the hawkers are shouted at by them, the least that is expected from them is to be sensitive and sympathetic towards their fellow citizens with disabilities. The footpaths are for all. No one has the right to hijack and bar anyone from using them.

The footpath at the entry/exit gate of Civil Hospital, Shillong is occupied by the hawkers selling eatables so much so, that it is impossible for passersby to use it. Is this fair? Pedestrians are forced to rub shoulders with vehicles. Imagine what a person with disability would do in such circumstances and on such footpaths. Granted that these hawkers are earning their livelihoods but should they be allowed to do so at the expense of creating discomfort and inconven-

ience to others. Once more, I wish to reiterate that the Government should take immediate steps to allot a designated space for the hawkers so that they can do business without creating nuisance for others and that we the people can also use the footpaths peacefully without any disturbance and discomfort. Once a designated space is allotted to them, laws can be formulated whereby stern action would be taken against any hawker who spreads his/her wares just about anywhere other than the designated space.

Our representatives don't have to face the inconveniences caused by hawkers as they do not have to use footpaths and sidewalks, yet it is imperative that they step down from their comfort zones and place themselves in the shoes of the ordinary person, especially the PwDs to understand the plight of the general public. It is high time that the Government put its foot down and legally sorts out this matter. It is also time

for pressure groups to realise the ground realities in Shillong and irrespective of the fact that it touches the livelihoods of the hawkers, they cannot be allowed to occupy the footpaths. The Government exists for the greater common good.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Of Civic Polls

Editor,

Recently the Urban Affairs Minister has categorically stated that he would call the stakeholders to have wide consultations and discussions on the issue of holding Civic Polls for Shillong City in order to resolve the issue that has been pending for a long time, once and for all. But nearly two months have lapsed since the Minister made that statement but there is no sign of holding the meeting with them. We do not know the reasons behind this but I surmise that either he has not sought opinion from his higher ups on holding such

meeting or has not instructed his officers in the Department to prepare the grounds for holding such a meeting. Or perhaps, some higher- up might have developed cold feet. Personally, I feel that the Minister should have gone ahead with the proposal as it would be of immense interest to know what would be the stand of the stakeholders on this. Whether their stand will remain the same as was held in earlier years or they have developed progressive ideas on this important issue will be revealed at the discussion. It is my considered opinion that there is nothing wrong in holding the civic polls under democratically viable conditions.

Yours etc..
Philip Marwein,
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.

“*Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.*”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

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Act East Policy in Limbo

WHEN Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014, he gave a clarion call for the speedy development of the North Eastern Region. In Modi's perception the North Eastern Region which shares a mere 4% of its borders with the rest of India and 96% with other countries is best suited to look towards South East Asia and Bangladesh for its economic growth. Hence the static Look East Policy of the Congress regime was renamed the Act East Policy by Modi. But this change in nomenclature has hardly added any traction to the Policy. Within the region, communication is extremely poor and hazardous. The national highway connecting Nagaland to Manipur is subjected to frequent mud slides, landslides and hill slides making the journey a horrendous experience. And yet this is the only way for goods to be transported to Manipur from the rest of the country.

The Act East Policy lacks pragmatism. At best it is an academic exercise. Ironically, no one has critiqued this Policy because most academicians stand to gain from the discussions around it. To succeed, any policy has to involve people who have to know what's in it for them. The North Eastern States have to first identify their strengths and their niche products to export to the rest of the world through South East Asia and Bangladesh. In this respect, the entrepreneurs of Nagaland seem to have moved ahead of the other states although they are not invested in the Act East Policy. Their unique crafts and furniture and their weaves which are exclusively designed have reached the world markets. None of the other states have managed to brand their products. Meghalaya's turmeric with its curcumin content of 7.94% - the highest in the world - is a potential anti-carcinogenic and anti-inflammatory agent. But so far it has not fetched the desired price. Border trade is an essential element of the Act East Policy. Till date we have more informal than formal trade across the borders with Myanmar, China and Bangladesh. Our Land Custom Stations (LCS) are yet to reach a scale where states can earn adequate revenues from border trade. Now the Modi Government is on its last leg but the Act East Policy is yet to receive the traction it should. The Policy now needs to be reconfigured looking at the strengths and weaknesses of each state and greater public participation is a must.

TO THE EDITOR

Ban coal mining indefinitely

Editor,
The mining mafia has struck yet again and this time a woman activist and her aide are lucky to be alive. The mining mafia with ill-gotten wealth has been ruling the politics of this State and there was a need to stop these forces. What is most tragic is that governments both present and past seem to be on the side of those who have been perpetrators of illegal mining. Without state patronage, the criminal elements would not have mustered up the gumption to murder or attack a person. As we are aware the coal mafia consists of politicians, bureaucrats, police and the miners and this is a dangerous cocktail. What is more pathetic is that the MDA and MUA is turning this issue into a game of 'tu tu - main main,' though both are responsible and have turned a blind eye to illegal mining. What is more amusing is that the governments (both MDA and MUA) are also spending crores of rupees in promoting the natural beauty of the state by organising festival after festival (autumn fest, cherry blossom fest, metropolis etc), while on the other hand they encourage and promote mining (coal, stone, limestone, sand) and environment degradation. It's like taking medication for liver

in the morning and binge drinking at night and loading the system with whisky while knowing that eventually whisky will triumph. I wholeheartedly agree with B Mawlong's letter to the editor, 'Evils of coal mining' (ST Nov 27, 2018) that the NGT and the Hon'ble Supreme Court should stop coal mining for good in Meghalaya . The earlier the better!

Yours etc
Manuel Carey Lymba
Shillong- 08

Constitution Day

Editor,
Our country celebrated Constitution Day on November 26. It was on that day in 1949, that we enacted, adopted and gave to ourselves the Constitution of India. After India became independent, the Constituent Assembly entrusted the job of drafting the Constitution to a Committee with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. Dr. Ambedkar completed the draft of the Constitution and presented it in the Constituent Assembly. This draft was adopted on November 26, 1949. It marked a new era in our country as the Constitution which was going to come into effect from January 26, 1950

Election time, for politicians, is time when the proverbial chickens come home to roost. Time for the deeds of the past to catch up with the present. Time for public memory to sharpen. Prime Minister Narendra Modi whipped up the public mood against corruption in 2014 by promising he would end the scourge if his party was given a majority of its own in Parliament. The people listened, and gave him and the BJP a comfortable majority. The wheel is turning full circle. Modi has just four more months before the next polls are called. Juxtapose his promises with what happened to one of his own council of ministers, YS Chowdary -- who quit government just recently.

Chowdary, a close chum of Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu and a TDP member of Rajya Sabha, was subjected to a raid by the Income Tax department and the Enforcement Directorate the other day, not very long after he left the Modi government. He is facing fraud charges of Rs 57,000 crore. Chowdary is a controversial figure and heads the Sujana business group, he having had recorded assets of over Rs 100 crore in 2010, it having doubled by year 2014. He is also seen as a front for Naidu, who claims Chowdary is the main financier for his party. Despite expression of reservations by PM Modi, Chowdary was inducted as minister of state for the department of science and technology etc. How he qualified to lead this department was itself a big question. Naidu had insisted that his chum be made a minister. Modi compromised on his stand and took Chowdary in.

At this late hour too, Naidu has tried to protect Chowdary - and himself, one must surmise. A week ago, the CM invoked a legal provision and ordered that the CBI is barred from entering the state. CBI on its own can investigate matters in capital Delhi, but requires "general" nod from a state government when it goes to investigate matters there. Instead, the IT and

(Republic Day), upheld the sovereignty of all the people of our country for the first time in Indian history. Unfortunately, some people believe that India was a land of justice and fair play in the epic age and was a far better place to live in than the present-day India. They strongly recommend Mahabharata as a better guide than the Constitution of India. India cannot progress so long as we have such a backward pull in our mindsets.

Our Constitution is a result of thousands of years of evolutionary progress of humankind since the days of Mahabharata. So, it is quite natural that the spirit of Mahabharata will come into conflict with our Constitution which is based on the ideals of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Dronacharya, a great figure of Mahabharata, should have been arrested in the Republic of India for cutting off the right thumb of Eklavya as tuition fees. The brightest and the humblest student, Eklavya, was devilishly, made into a cripple so that he could never use his education in archery. Our pining for such an unequal society made a bright student of modern India, Vemula, write in his suicide note, ~ "My birth is my fatal accident".

Devil is in the details

Modi’s promises and performance

By Prem Chandran

ED held the probe. Likely, Naidu is cornered by Modi and the Centre for the Telugu Desam's break-up from the NDA and the CM's effort to cobble anti-BJP front at the national level. One can only imagine this: if Naidu has more clout at the Centre after the next polls, what more could happen to this nation!

Back to the central point, what of Modi's promise to root out corruption? What message goes out, now that one of his own in the council of ministers is belatedly caught - that too, after he quit government? Inference is that if he had not quit, and if Naidu had not parted ways with the BJP and NDA, Chowdary would still have continued in Modi's government. If this was one case of a bad apple in Modi's basket, what of the rest?

Modi failed on some other fronts too. See how the RBI story unfolds. See how the CBI is fighting a battle within itself, with corruption and exchange of crores as bribes further denting its image of being a "caged parrot." No institution of governance is now above board; and even the judiciary no more retains the halo it once held. The graph of corruption is on the ascendant in every sphere of governance and public administration. Modi, like his predecessor, too sat watching the scenario. Whether he was amused or bewildered, one does not know. More importantly, there now is the Rafale story.

Demonetisation was a well-intentioned decision, but things went terribly wrong due to lack of proper planning and execution. GST, a unique market reform measure aimed at the goal of "one nation, one tax", has been rolled out despite irresponsible blockade of its passage for many months by the Congress-led Opposition. It showed how politics should not be played - to the detriment of national interests. GST would take time to stabilize markets and plug its loopholes. It has helped in raising the tax revenue for the nation, and much more

could come out of it for national good in due course of time.

Several sectors under the Modi government are ailing, just as some of his ministers themselves were. The minister for Railways has been changed repeatedly; and the lack of continuity has affected its functioning. It is another Eldorado for those who are bent on looting public funds and wealth. The big talk about bullet trains of the Japanese style, and other high-speed trains matching the Chinese rail service, are still a far cry. Long years of neglect of the Railways has had a telling effect on the functioning of what came as a great gift to this country from the British Raj. It will take years of concerted efforts to get the nation's top mass transport and freight service back on its legs. Not many new trains have come in; railway services remain worse; and this is true of its catering services as well. More of track length, yes, but this happens in normal course. What difference did Modi make to the Railways?

Or, take the aviation scene. Air India is in deep debt and ailing for long. The likes of Praful Patel -- of what Modi once called the Nationalist Corruption Party (NCP) -- left it in a mess. Modi, thus, had a point when he pleaded with the voters in the 2014 campaign that he wanted a majority of his own for the BJP, so that he could keep the corrupt regional and other satraps under check. Expectations were that Modi would effect a major turnaround. It would now appear that, despite his initiatives to clean up the system, the system turned its head on him. The systems undercut Modi's efforts because it, over the years, acquired an evil clout of its own. Take the NPAs, for instance. Non-performing assets of banks is a euphemism for bad loans - loans not repaid by big sharks, mostly businessmen, and this includes a large number of those wilful defaulters. These are mostly those who have the capacity to

repay the huge loans they have taken, but will not. Why? Because, they can go on fighting such cases for years and for decades, and in the end get away with their act without paying back a penny. India's judicial systems and company laws would ensure as much. They would function with the speed of a snail.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's stand is that much of these bad loans, running into some 10 lakh crore by now, interest included, "were taken during the UPA periods." The mischievous businessmen managed to fool banks and got money without sufficient guarantees for repayment. It happened because those in the ruling dispensation were there to push banking honchos to relax rules for these crooks. They took the money and scooted from the scene, reaching the ill-gotten funds to tax havens abroad and foreign banks with rare frenzy. Again, what did Modi do to get back this money, something he had promised during his 2014 campaign? What did he do to speed up recovery?

Modi might have understood by now that there are limits to what a Prime Minister can do even if he has the best of intentions. The rotten system will block every such effort. India cannot carry on in this fashion for long. See how China functions. At the height of its economic prosperity and military might, China has granted more powers to its leader, Xi Jinping, by making him President for Life - a rare distinction once held by Mao. With a free hand, he can concentrate on nation-building. An Indian PM, or its elected leader, instead, would be booted at every turn, blamed for every step he takes, and pilloried for even the best efforts he takes for the nation's well-being. Fighting is what Indian politicians excel at, though the days of freedom fighters are over long ago. When someone else steps into Modi's shoes, he would face the same charade. India has a large breed of wayward, undisciplined politicians.

Responsible tourism

Editor
The recent report of the unfortunate brutal murder of a young American tourist in a remote island in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago (India) at the hands of an isolated primitive tribe is an example of how misadventure and irresponsibility led to the demise of a dream and ended a precious life. The tragic incident should be an eye opener for all around the globe; particularly for young adults who always feel that they could do and achieve anything they want without any connection to the realities of life. Similarly irresponsible tourist behaviour in foreign nations and in completely unknown terrains must be avoided to prevent repetitions of such sad incidents. Furthermore, an individual or a community (particularly isolated primitive tribes) have the complete right to protect their privacy and integrity of their socio-ethnic lifestyles. Possibly the young adventurer was perceived to be an intruder into their territorial domain. Several ancient tribal communities around the planet are facing dangers of extinction. Such isolated tribal members are

extremely vulnerable to diseases and infections from civilized people due to poor immunity and should be left to follow their model of civilisation and should not be disturbed or bothered. Only scientific studies under special circumstances and following international guidelines and protocol should be allowed. Lastly, individual countries must have stringent monitoring and surveillance on forbidden territories. The Andaman and Nicobar administration also cannot avoid their responsibility of a serious failure to provide security to tourists as also failure in protecting the privacy and serenity of ancient tribal communities surviving in remote islands. Each one of us needs to learn from this unfortunate incident and try to be more responsible towards local ethnic and ecological sensitivities as well as government guidelines while visiting another country as a tourist.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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.

Sobering, ominous lessons from Sabarimala

Gross misuse of prohibitory orders

By Aditya Aamir

They do duplicity as part of their job description. That's what people have begun to believe of the police in strife-country Kerala. People can do nothing other than to resort to foul language, which comes easy to those who feel cheated and betrayed. The choice spectrum is limited. So, they stormed the border, what are you going to do? The change agent is not welcome because the change being pushed through is not welcome.

And look at to what extent the change-agents will go. The latest is the proposal to introduce an identity-card for Ayyappa devotees. The hare-brained idea of the Travancore Devaswom Board is actually being discussed. It will not be possible this year, but the proposal is being given urgent thought as if life depends on accomplishment, clearly another move to push through the backdoor controls to contain the flow of the right-sort of 'Ayyappans' into Sabarimala.

Kerala Chief Minister

thugs. The operative part is "assembly of five or more", but in Sabarimala Section 144 is interpreted in a manner to target perceived political opponents of the ruling regime. Section 144 in a temple compound is itself unprecedented. An average of 30,000 Ayyappans have been visiting Sabarimala every day this Mandala season, i.e., 100s of "assembly of five or more" per day.

But who gets picked up for violating Section 144? Only those chanting 'namajapa'. Why? The chanting bhaktas are "confirmed" BJP/RSS. There's a BJP circular out to prove that. But that's not the point. The point is the subversion of Section 144. The point is if today, it's in Kerala, tomorrow it could be in any or all states. Ruling regimes using Section 144 to go after political opponents will become the norm and innocent citizens will be caught in the middle. More so, because the IPS can be manipulated. But even among the IPS, there are those who have refused to

It is hard luck for these people. Usually, police throughout India arrest protestors and let them go free even if public property is vandalized. The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 is used rather injudiciously. But in Kerala it has come in handy wherever 'namajapa' have taken place. Scores are behind bars, bail denied unless damage is paid in full, in many cases up to Rs 13 lakh. The party is not paying. That's a grim reality.

Pinarayi Vijayan is a control freak. The Marxist template perfected by Lenin and Stalin in Soviet Russia, a glimpse of which Malayalis are getting used to and are wary of. Ironically, Malayalis were the first Indians to usher in a communist government. Now, they are getting paid back, with compound interest, for doing the favour.

Whoever would have thought destroying a belief system based on a principle that harms no one will be seen as progressive? The hyperbolic surrounding the total transformation of Sabarimala pinned to 'Navothana' is loud, dismissive and absolutely monstrous. Seems like Pinarayi Vijayan is running short on patience. The controls he has introduced at Sabarimala confounding, to say the least.

So much so, laws have been twisted and "vengeful" is good behaviour, accepted statecraft. There are lessons from Sabarimala. And Indians better take them seriously. The common citizen. Political parties. Activists/party workers. Police behaviour affects everybody. The deliberate mutating of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, for instance!.

And the use of CCTV footage to identify and trace alleged violators and rioters right to their homes, basically opponents of the ruling regime. Today, it could be those of the CPM; tomorrow those of the Congress and the day after those of the BJP. Non-bailable charges are slapped and jail is certain. Section 144 prohibits assembly of five or more people in an area where 144 is imposed. It doesn't matter a fig leaf whether the five or more are staid citizens or confirmed

toe the regime-line. The Kerala cadre of IPS are a divided lot now - 'Malayali-IPS' and 'Outsider IPS'. And every IPS officer posted in Sabarimala is an 'Outsider IPS'. It's not good news to the IPS. The Pinarayi regime is doing immense harm to the IPS but it doesn't seem to care a wee bit.

And it is not just Section 144. CCTV footage showing KSRTC buses being vandalized have come in handy to identify "miscreants" and lookout notices with their pictures have helped police trace them to their homes in districts and villages; hound them to their hideouts. Arrests were made and more than 6,000 have been put behind bars; most of them committed BJP/RSS workers but also quite a few "innocents/common citizens" who took part in 'namajapa' outside police stations.

It is hard luck for these people. Usually, police throughout India arrest protestors and let them go free even if public property is vandalized. The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 is used rather injudiciously. But in Kerala it has come in handy wherever 'namajapa' have taken place. Scores are behind bars, bail denied unless damage is paid in full, in many cases up to Rs 13 lakh. The party is not paying. That's a grim reality.

What's more old cases are being reopened to target party leaders. Fresh warrants against a leader are issued the day bail is allowed in one case. It ensures the leader remains in jail "forever". It will take a regime change to deliver him freedom. And regime-changes don't happen every day. The lessons from Sabarimala are sobering. Also, ominous. (IPA Service)

“ If you find diseases before they've really emerged, you can control them early on, before you get a major epidemic. ”

-- Nathan Wolfe

The Shillong Times

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GHOST OF A SAARC

IT is famously said, tongue in cheek, that “Nations have armies, while in Pakistan, the army has a nation.” This is meant to stress the upper hand the military establishment in the Islamic nation holds in every aspect of governance there while the political establishment is often found wanting in asserting its eminent roles. It also goes to mean that a change of government in Pakistan does not necessarily mean there’s scope for a change in policies, especially on matters relating to ties with India. The stated policy of the Pakistan military, especially the ISI, is to “bleed India with a thousand cuts.”

The present move on the part of the Imran Khan government to “invite” Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a SAARC summit in Pakistan has been pooh-poohed by India; and rightly so. This is seen as nothing more than a publicity stunt. For one, SAARC summit schedules are decided by mutual consultation, and no such talk has taken place so far, to have a meet in Pakistan. If a meeting is decided, no invitation is necessary and the presence of Indian PM happens in the normal course. The last summit was held in Kathmandu in 2014, when PM Modi’s presence alongside his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif demonstrated a widening gulf between the two nations.

The next summit in 2016 was cancelled in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on a military camp in Uri by Pakistani infiltrators. After this, the relationship between the two sides had only worsened in view of the frequent violations by Pakistani soldiers of an existing ceasefire pact and killing of civilians and soldiers on the Indian side without any provocation. The Pakistani interference in Kashmir valley too continues unabated. The only positive action involving the two nations in recent years was the launch of works on the Kartarpur Sahib corridor for passage of Sikh pilgrims to religious places on both sides of the border. Too much optimism is misplaced as there’s every chance of ISI attempting to use this as another front for its evil designs against India.

Regional situations do not permit the holding of a SAARC summit anytime soon. Elections are due in both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, two constituents of SAARC. Also, not much is happening on the SAARC front for years. SAARC is increasingly proving its irrelevance, caught as it is in the machinations of China to create its own sphere of influence in the region.

TO THE EDITOR

Give us our footpaths

Editor,
I totally agree with Jennifer Dkhar's letter, "Hawkers obstruct pedestrian space" (ST Nov 27, 2018) as it has become a daily problem for people with disabilities as well as people who prefer walking over taking cabs for their daily conveyance. It had started with a little space on foot paths getting occupied by hawkers and people selling street food ; it has now reached a point where the entire footpath is being occupied by hawkers selling eatables, vegetables and other items for passers-by. The sole reason why footpaths in the first place are constructed is because people must not walk on roads but use the footpaths for their safety and that of others. But in a parallel world, the footpaths of Shillong are being utilised for purposes which are not half as important as the safety of people. As a result, walking on some footpaths has become so difficult that people need to push each other and squeeze past other people in order to cross. This leads to people avoiding foot- paths and walking on roads which might be fatal.
Apart from the foot-paths of our city, the main attraction, the central market, Po-

lice Bazar, is in a pathetic condition as well. The road between MUDA Complex and Hotel Centre Point is in such a bad plight that I have myself seen people skidding over the items that hawkers have spread on the road. Shoes, clothes, fruits, vegetables, umbrellas, jewellery, eatables, and every other thing is easily available on the roads of the beautiful Police Bazar. Sometimes, beggars also lie down anywhere in the middle of the road allowing whoever is in a hurry, to either bump into them or worse, even fall on them.
The situation is such that most of the time people would not want to cross the road even for important reasons. Conditions like these lead to disorder and imbalance in the daily lives of both the common people and for the people who sit on roads with the expectation of doing business. Hawkens not only obstruct the space meant for pedestrians but also create a lot of chaos and nuisance.
It is the duty and responsibility of the Government to look into this matter and come up with solutions. Police Bazar is where tourists land up first. Government should get the hawkers a new place or create a separate area for them where they can work without af-

flecting and obstructing the passersby. This will benefit every citizen of the city.

Yours etc.,
Avantika Sharma
Via email

Coal mining not the only livelihood

Editor
The illegal transportation of coal that is carried out in full public view with the knowledge of the district administration and those in the present government is known to all. Whether be it in Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills or West Khasi Hills district such violations should be dealt with in accordance with the directives of the NGT and the verdict of the Apex Court. The unsuspecting attack on two civil society activists has been condemned in no uncertain terms and it is admirable that people including political leaders from the Opposition have taken things ahead in putting a check to the activities of the state authorities. There will be many unforeseen developments in the days and weeks to come before the 2019 general elections and the issue of lifting the coal ban will become louder and more aggressive even while other more criti-

cal issues are sidelined. There are many marginalised families that do not depend on coal mining for their livelihoods. But no tears are being shed for them. No wonder this current government has lost a lot from the 14th Finance Commission which is also a great loss to the state's overall development. Hope good sense prevails on the Chief Minister and his Cabinet to set the right priorities for the state.

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

Congress promises the moon in Telengana

Editor,
The grand alliance of four parties led by the Congress managed to put up a huge unified political rally on November 24, 2018 in Medchal to express gratitude to the UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi who was on her maiden trip to the state after its creation in 2014, along with Congress president Rahul Gandhi. It is debatable whether the credit for the Telangana state should go to K Chandrasekhar Rao and his TRS

or to Mrs Gandhi as claimed by Congress leaders who indulge in sycophantic praises of Sonia Gandhi for their survival in the party with prized posts. While addressing the rally Sonia Gandhi accused Telengana Rashtra Samithi and K Chan-drasekhar Rao of duping people and said that through creation of Telengana the only beneficiaries are K C Rao's relatives, friends and family. Rahul Gandhi also in his brief speech echoed the same rhetoric as Sonia Gandhi. One dynasty is accusing another dynasty of deriving political mileage. Should the pot call the kettle black?
As Chairperson of UPA could it not be foreseen by Sonia Gandhi, with all her political maturity and acumen, that creation of Telengana state would result in empowering K C Rao to delude people and reaping dynastic benefits? Perhaps she was helpless because 'divide and rule' was the legacy that Congress party inherited from their British masters and was also in the genes of the Nehru dynasty. In the seven decades of Congress rule the party slogan of "garibi hatao" was implemented as "garibon ko hatao" and the slogan of "gaon ki pragati, des ki pragati" display boards even today bear testimony to the

bodily injury. Also the Mining Plan prepared by CMPDI would definitely incorporate a complete chapter of Environmental Impact Assessment due to coal mining in the block and more importantly the Environment Management Plan which should be adopted by the Mine Management. Legal coal mining therefore involves heavy financial investment. Moreover, according to the Coal Mines National policy, in the case of most states in the country, large coal blocks are being auctioned to industrialists or business organisation; this policy would not be applicable in Meghalaya where land is owned by individuals, not by the government.

The only alternative for coal mining in Meghalaya is by government undertakings like Meghalaya Minerals Development Corporation (MMDC). This means that MMDC will have to take the initiative to contact the individuals who have ownership over a particular coal block which has been identified for opening under the approved Mining Plan. If there are several individuals who have a stake in the coal block by reason of land ownership, pre-estimation of the coal reserves may be determined by MMDC through its geologists and mine surveyor (CMPDI may assist in this). The coal reserves within the plot of each land owner can therefore be recorded and they may be told that the assets and liabilities shall be distributed proportionally among the stake holders. This is only a simple principle proposed but the details will have to be worked out meticulously by the parties. The parties concerned may also have better ideas which may also be considered and agreed by the parties mutually.

With the National Green Tribunal taking keen interest to ensure sustainable mining development in Meghalaya the stake holders should see reason and come to a fair deal so that the exploitation of natural wealth in coal should not result in environmental disaster but rather a better and greener tomorrow for the generations to come.

dismal developments made in the villages of Uttar Pradesh and in the split states of the erstwhile "United Province".
In case the grand alliance led by Congress gets elected in the polls of December 7, the pre-election pronouncements made by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the rally like grant of special category status to Telengana, fulfilment of dreams and aspirations of the people, farmers women and youth will become promises that politicians make for emotional blackmailing of people to place them in a mire of delusion and are seldom fulfilled. Congress party and UPA have miserably failed to make the country "unemployment-mukt" and "hunger-mukt by providing two square meals to the rural people" and implementation of development activities like providing housing and electricity to each house in the rural sector which constitutes the majority population of the country.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

Donald Trump

India’s best friend ever!

By Dr D.K. Giri

The Donald Trump Administration has just warned Pakistan to punish the perpetrators of the horrendous violence in Mumbai, infamously known as 26/11, where 166 innocent people including six Americans were killed and many scarred for life. It has also announced the payment of \$5m under the Reward for Justice Programme for any information or assistance that would lead to arrest of the perpetrators of the crime.

It is no secret that the murderers came from Pakistan by a boat, guided on phone by their handlers in Islamabad. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a terse message to Pakistan, "It is an affront to the families of victims that, after 10 years, those who planned the Mumbai attack have not been convicted for their involvement, namely, Laskar-e-Tayyiba and its affiliates."

Unlike his predecessors, President Trump has taken tough action against Pakistan. He has been tweeting bluntly on the duplicitous deeds of Islamabad in regard to terrorism. He said: "Pakistan gives nothing but lies and deceit." He suspended and then diverted \$300 million in military aid meant for Pakistan. He tweeted on 19 November 2017, "We no longer pay Pakistan billions of dollars because they would take our money, and do nothing for us, like Bin Laden, Afghanistan, etc". He added, "We have given 1.3 billion a year, but they did not do a damn thing for us." Trump Administration accused Pakistan of harbouring dubious policy of nurturing specific jihadist groups in Afghanistan and India.

Furthermore, the US helped put Pakistan on the list of Financial Action Task Force that disallows any country accused of sponsoring terrorism from accessing international financial institutions. That has dealt a crippling blow to Pakistan's tottering economy. Remember, Pakistan politics and military were heavily funded by Americans. As America withdraws this support, Pakistan's economy has tanked and they are desperately looking for alternatives for survival.

As China chokes its support to Pakistan, and there are growing signs of antagonism between Pakistanis and Chinese, as seen recently in the attack on the Chinese consulate by Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), Pakistan is desperate. America's retributive actions against Pakistan will force it to rethink on its policy towards terrorists. India need not then have to spend on countering terrorism.

The second and bigger collateral benefit for India derives from America squeezing China economically, and curbing its expansionism militarily. As of now, India cannot contain or subdue China on its own. So if China is cowed down by USA, it is good for India as it is increasingly being encircled by China.

The Trump Administration has identified China as their biggest geo-political issue. They perceive it to be their biggest long-term strategic threat. Since Xi Jinping got ensconced in leadership 'forever', China has become more communist, oppressive and expansionist. It has moved from a market economy to a command economy. Americans believe China stole their technology, trillions of dollars of intellectual property, Donald Trump declared, "We lost 70,000 factories since China joined the World Trade Organisation. The undue advantages Chinese took of US liberal trade approach is vividly depicted in a film titled "Trump at War".

Americans are fully aware that China is militarising the South China Sea and parts of Indian Ocean. About 5 trillion trade passes through South China Sea annually, China has camouflaged its 500

tonne fishing boats as military boats, and has launched several in South China Sea. Like Mao Tse Tung, Xi Jinping is showing his true colours. He came up in the leadership ladder innocently and harmlessly, but now, he shows his naked ambitions. He has turned China into a totalitarian police State. Past American Presidents failed to see the trade and military ambitions of Beijing as they thought that regular trade with China will have a moderating influence on its behaviour. That proved to be a false notion. Trump is the first President to recognise the threat from China.

Now Americans feel that Chinese believe the future to be theirs. As they prepared for 100 years of People Republic of China in 1949, they seek to overtake USA. Chinese believe that US is a declining power and that the free people and capitalism will explode. China desires to be a superior power to USA. It is encircling India, the other growing power in South Asia, by buying into her neighbours. It is lending money through projects that are not needed, thereby indebting the receiving countries. It has no oil. So it is creeping into the Middle East. It is the only country that claims territories from other countries. China's expansionism is an open secret and a threat to many. But only the US takes it more seriously and determines to counter it.

It may be argued by some in Indian foreign policy circle, that the US is checking China in order to retain its status as solo superpower. That may be the case. But doesn't it help India to see that Chinese wings are clipped and it remains inferior to the US in military and economic terms? The US does not have territorial claims or interest in South Asia, but China has. It has usurped large chunks of Indian territories and is claiming more. It has gone against India's interest in most international fora. It has opposed India's entry into Nuclear Supply Group and the UN Security Council. China has supported Pakistan and shielded the terrorists. In the past, it has declared war on India. It has, in recent years, drawn India into several border skirmishes, the latest being Doklam.

Judging from America's confrontational policy towards China and Pakistan, the axis that poses formidable threat to India, Trump is the best friend of India. New Delhi and Prime Minister Modi have done well to cultivate America's closest allies – Israel and Japan. But Modi has not yet 'charmed' his way to Trump. It is time that New Delhi recognised Trump's contribution, albeit indirectly, to India's security.

True, Trump is transactional, has a business approach and keeps America's interest paramount. But so is Modi. He claims, as a Gujarati, to have business in his blood. So be it. He can deal better with Trump. And Modi's business priority should be India's security and prosperity.

Understandably, there are apprehensions in New Delhi about Trump cooling down on India after the latter signed the deal on S-400, in the face of America's sanctions; for instance, New Delhi's disappointment in Trump's refusal to be the 'guest of honour' at the Republic Day. New Delhi could convince Americans that it was an inescapable deal, although I have argued in this column that India could have foregone this deal with Russians and gone for alternative, nor done it at all. India could have done a different security strategy. At any rate, New Delhi should think afresh on its long term security interest and talk openly to the Americans. -- INFA
(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

“*The man of virtue makes the difficulty to be overcome his first business, and success only a subsequent consideration.*”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

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The Mizo Battle

THE electoral battle in Mizoram went off without a hitch. The incumbent Chief Minister, Lal Thanhawla went all out to retain the last Congress bastion in the north east, He had the CEO of the Election Commission removed so that his party’s position could not be jeopardized. The turn-out at the polls was impressive despite the state experiencing violent insurgency since the 1980s. Mizos have realized that the ballot and not the bullet can bring development and prosperity. All the biggies from Delhi-Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi fought it out on the scene. The issues which ignited the battle at the hustings were the same with variations on the theme. Prohibition and development were the contentious issues. The Congress Government had lifted total prohibition and introduced a permit system. The opposition Mizo National Front demanded total prohibition with the backing of the Church which had an impact in a state with a 87% Christian pollution and high literacy. The Congress laid stress on the economy introducing a new land policy forking out up to Rs 1 lakh to individuals to enable sustainable livelihoods. The MNF focused on agrarian development. The third contestant, Zoram Peoples Movement ruled out doles and asked for the economy to be rejected.

The MNF refuses to be part of the NDA and is not hitched to the BJP. Hindutva will be a minus point in a preponderantly Christian state. And the inevitable bamboo issue is not relevant this time. However, the BJP appears to have caught the imagination of the marginalised Bru (Reangs) people who left the state 21 years ago after a violent conflict with Mizos and have been living in six relief camps. Attempts to resettle the Brus in Mizoram have met with stiff resistance from both sides. Since then the Brus have lived in refugee camps in Tripura but they are eligible to vote in the Mizoram elections. The Bru voters were transported to Kahnmun, a small town in Mizoram bordering Tripura, in 140 buses and over 100 small vehicles by the BJP government in Tripura. The volunteers of the Young Mizo Association (YMA), and officials of the the Election Commission provided the Bru voters with refreshments. The EC had set up 15 polling stations for the displaced Bru voters. In fact, the elections in Mizoram stand out because of the discipline with which they were conducted under the surveillance of Mizo civil society groups.

What’s Meghalaya’s Strength: Mining or Tourism?

A visit to both East and West Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills will reveal the truth about coal mining. It is carrying on big time. In fact it has never stopped. It was carrying on surreptitiously. The problem is that those who are appointed by the NGT to assess the mined coal and to oversee if fresh coal is still being mined apparently cannot make out the difference between freshly mined coal and one that was mined before April 2014. It would require a geologist of repute to give the NGT the exact picture of the situation. But why would anyone want to give an accurate picture to the NGT? Environmental activists are either being murdered, intimidated or assaulted. Those who still feel the pain of watching the large scale environmental degradation are now silent because calling out spells danger. More so when the keepers of the law are themselves involved in the mega cover up. In fact, if one were to scan the transfers and postings in the Police Department and check out the wealth ranking of some of the officers one would see that their wealth has risen exponentially with their postings at strategic mining areas.

But coal is not the only enemy of Meghalaya today. Limestone is another mineral that is rendering our landscapes into barren expanses looking like they huge craters from outer space and where the hills are collapsing one after another even as Bangladesh becomes one of our biggest importer of limestone after coal. How much is too much is the question we need to answer.

And now we hear that the MDA Government has formed a Green Panel to look into the environment and to examine the nature of damage caused by pollution and examine state and central schemes relating to climate change. Climate Change is not a new phenomenon and it’s not just about nature. The human climate has changed as well and it’s that psycho-spiritual

By Patricia Mukhim

climate that is much more difficult to change. The Khasis are called a tribe because the essence of being tribal is not just because we live in the hills but because our histories and legacies are bound by communitarian values. But are those communitarian values still there today? If we are a community should we not own the resources provided by Mother Nature as a community? Should coal mines belong to a few individuals and the benefits from there accrue to a few people even while many others don’t even have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink? I know this sounds idealistic. So if it does and things are no longer what they were then let’s not in the same breath speak as if we are a pristine race not affected by the market and that we are still bound by common values. If that was true Agnes and Amita would not have been attacked because in a matrilineal society we are supposed to respect the woman – the mother – the Iawbei (the mother-ancestress) the giver, not just of birth but of lineage; the fountainhead of all we hold dear; the one who provides continuity to the race; the giver of our identity. Those who attacked the two women have trampled on all that the Khasi society holds dear. Where then is our Khasi underpinning of Tip brier, tip Blei? Have we lost this and are just clinging to the shell of what was once our claim to be a society that called nature – Ka Mei Ramew?

These days we talk a lot about the environment and climate change. The Khasis have lived with and in nature. We are part of nature; not separate from it. But now the same Mei Ramew (Mother Nature) is raped incessantly without listening to her cry for mercy. That dark mineral from the bosom of Ka Mei Ramew has consumed us completely. We just want to get more and more of it; for human greed is never satiated. Do we even think for a moment that Ka Mei

Ramew could also strike back? And that when such calamity visits us, even those who never earned a penny from the black diamond will suffer similar consequences? Just look at the situation today. The Khasi people are divided between those who want to promote tourism and those who want to destroy every vestige of nature. The tourism promoters are trying to sell nature at its best; the coal and limestone mine ‘owners,’ abuse nature by digging into forest land and leaving it stripped to the bones. I fear that a time will soon come when there will be a war between these two sets of communities with their respective interests.

Tourism promotes livelihoods in more equitable ways since the community tends to gain a lot from the ancillary activities and tourism takes away nothing from the environment except what’s left behind as carbon footprints and trailing by irresponsible, noisy tourists. But coal and limestone mining hurt the earth day in and day out. The results are devastating. Coal mining involves digging into the earth where surface water and springs have resided for millennia. Acid Mine Drainage is created when water mixes with coal and other rocks unearthed during mining, taking on toxic levels of minerals and heavy metals. This toxic water leaks out of abandoned mines to contaminate groundwater, streams, soil, plants, animals and humans. As a result an orange colour can blanket the river, killing plants and making surface water unusable as drinking water. Acid Mine Drainage is one of the biggest effects of mining being felt around the world. This is the reason why some of the once pristine rivers of Jaintia Hills are now so toxic and devoid of any life. But are the coal barons worried about this? No they aren’t. They are spreading the lie that the rivers are polluted due to discharge from cement plants.

And no researcher of repute has come up with incontestable facts that Acid Mine Drainage is the reason why the rivers Myntdu and Lukha are today dead rivers. No one is even bothered to suggest that these rivers be allowed to regenerate by putting a moratorium on mining just as the Supreme Court ordered a 10-year ban on cutting of forests for logging and at the end of the ten years the apex court asked the District Councils and State Forest Departments to come up with a working plan on which standing trees can be harvested and why those should be harvested. The timer ban helped regenerate some of our barren lands.

Now that the District Councils are trying to use the Sixth Schedule to claim immunity from the Coal Mines Regulations, 2017, the 280 page document merits meticulous reading. If this Regulation is followed in letter and spirit then mining will not be a hazardous activity. The problem is that our coal mine owners want to do it their way – maximum profit, least safety measures and minimum ploughing back into environmental regeneration. The question that arises is whether the Sixth Schedule can be turned into a tool to allow a few people to devastate the environment which is a community resource and which belongs to no one and to everyone. The Supreme Court would be remiss if it allows the Sixth Schedule to supersede the provisions of the Indian Constitution which are enlightened and inclusive, more so when even now the coal mine owners have violated all environmental protection norms.

And since Meghalaya is currently one of the leading tourist destinations with names like Grand Canyon being given to Laitlum and new nomenclature such as the Garden of Caves and Seven Sisters Falls along with the Living Root bridges drawing heavy footfalls, the tour operators might want to stand in solidarity with the environment. For them it’s now or never; its tourism or mining. Both cannot co-exist. Period.

Punjab In Limelight

By Insaif

Round The States

Blurred by double speak?

The spotlight is on Punjab, though a little blurred. The Congress-ruled State hits headlines this week with both India and Pakistan laying the foundation for the Kartarpur Corridor. In the midst of fanfare, some element of double standards unfortunately have creeped in. Both the State and Central governments have inevitably showcased some element of double speak, casting shadow whether the move will eventually usher in aman (peace), spoken of across either side of the border. It did seem odd to hear on the one hand Chief Minister Amarinder Singh hitting out at Pakistan for its terrorist activities in the State and on the other his Minister Navjot Sidhu praised Prime Minister Imran Khan for the corridor initiative and said when history of Kartarpur is written Khan’s name will be written on the front page. Likewise, New Delhi too acted in a peculiar fashion. Vice President praised the move, but External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj did not go to Kartarpur. But the Centre instead deputed two ministers—Hardeep Singh Puri and Harsimrat Kaur, guess not to have Punjab take the credit. On the same day, Sushma made it amply clear that India will boycott the SAARC summit in Pakistan and there will be no dialogue until and unless Pakistan stops sponsoring terror.’ The contradictory statements and actions seem to suggest that governments strongly believe in the idiom “run with the hare and hunt with the hounds! The question whether it is wise and will pay off is for another time. Till the dust settles in.

‘Dharmadesh’ For Temple

Varanasi issues a ‘d h a r m a d e s h’ (commandment) to Parliament! On Wednesday, the last of the three-day Param Dharma Sansad (religious conclave), the over 1,000-sants’ gathering decided to take the Ram temple row to the doorstep of MPs and Lok Sabha Speaker. The ‘dharmadesh’ asks of Parliament to bring in a constitutional amendment and declare the Ayodhya title dispute as an issue of “national importance.” By this, the Supreme Court will be tied down and shall have to give a verdict within four weeks. If it fails to do so, then the apex Court’s interim stay order will automatically be ineffective,” is what the sants’ feel is their next best step to clear the way for construction of the temple. This way “public money will not be spent on building an “effigy of Ram.” The three-page document also reminded the government of its duty to fulfil public demands as it was the people’s representative in a democracy. With winter session of Parliament beginning 11 December, other than it’s functioning, all eyes will be whether it is brought forth, as desired.

High Voter Turnout

Nirvachan Sadan has reason to be pleased. Polling in the two States of Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram on Wednesday last recorded a high turnout—near-75% and 80% respectively. At the same time, demand for re-polling was insignificant, suggesting that the political parties had little to complain about the arrangements, as in the recent past. In MP, the Congress was upbeat with the people’s participation as it was a sign of the voter having got disenchanted with the BJP’s Shivraj Singh Chouhan’s 15-year rule. On the other hand, the BJP said because it was an ‘organisation-centric party’, it had, right from the start, mobilised the voter at the booth level and this has paid off. While either side is viewing the turnout to its advantage, they will have to wait till December 11 to see who is proved right. Mizoram, on the other hand, has a different reason to be buoyant. Over 56% voters among the displaced people

of the Bru community, who are living in relief camps in Tripura, were able to cast their votes in special booths set up in Manmit district of Mizoram, perhaps for the first time. Obviously, the Bru community yearns for ‘ghar wapsi’, (home coming) as many governments came and went and they weren’t taken back. Hope the new incumbent doesn’t let these voters’ efforts go waste.

Valley of Suspicion

New Delhi’s trust deficit in Kashmir appears to be widening. Norwegian former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik’s recent talks with the Hurriyat leaders in the Valley and Governor Satya Pal Malik disclosure had he ‘looked to Delhi’ he would ‘have had to install a government led by Sajad Lone’, have put the Centre is a spot. Rightly asked by Opposition, Bondevik’s visit wouldn’t have been without New Delhi’s knowledge; what was the agenda, as he held talks with the Hurriyat on the one hand and on the other with people in Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir? Oslo is known to play a role in conflict resolution and the separatists’ claim he has assured of ‘a sustained, result-oriented dialogue between India-Pak for an amicable solution on Kashmir.’ Both North and South Block must come clean. Also, Malik’s reasoning for sudden dissolution of Assembly last week and on Wednesday last saying threat of his transfer remains has heightened the suspicion about Modi government’s intent. Does it want to restore normalcy or muddy the waters further?

‘Inhuman’ Bihar

Bihar government must hang its head in shame. More shelter homes have come under the scanner, with Supreme Court directing the CBI to probe 16 additional homes on Wednesday last, following the Muzaffarpur scandal. Admonishing the Nitish Kumar administration on being ‘soft’ on FIRs, an angry three-member bench said: “What are you doing? It’s very shameful. If a child is being sodomised and you say it’s nothing. How can you do this? It’s inhuman”. The court rejected the government’s request for more time and directed the Bihar police to add charges under Section 377 (sodomy) of the IPC and POCSO Act in the FIRs. It further warned the CBI officers probing these cases cannot be changed without its prior permission and that the State government must extend all logistical support to the Central agency. Recall, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, had blown the lid on Bihar shelter homes, including in Muzaffarpur, where young boys and girls were regularly raped, beaten and terrorised. Will cussed Bihar oblige and ensure the children get justice?

Himachal Indiscretion

Don’t try to be clever by half, could well be a stern message to Himachal Pradesh and the NGT. Regularisation of unauthorised construction by paying a fine is a no-go with the Supreme Court, as on Wednesday last, it stayed a direction of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) which sought to do precisely this in Kasauli. On October 5, the Tribunal had in respect to unauthorised construction said if the ‘authorities consider it appropriate to regularise such structures beyond the sanctioned plan...The same shall not be compounded or regularized without payment of environmental compensation at the rate of ₹5,000 per sq. ft. for exclusive self-occupied residential buildings and ₹10,000 per sq. ft. for commercial or residential-cum-commercial buildings.” But this nullifies the apex court’s directions, even though the NGT advised ‘compensation collected be utilised for development of environment of the area.’ Would these small niceties help change mind?---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Squabble in KHNAM

Editor,
The Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) is in fact a fledgling political party newly floated about ten years ago. Out of 60 MLA seats it won 2 seats in 2008, nil in 2013 and one in 2018. The party is yet to have a large mass following. This party has of late indulged in infighting and squabbling over allotment of MDC tickets for Jaiaw bad Mawkhar-Pynthorukhrah MDC Constituencies. Now, this infighting has reached a point of no return when the President and the Working President are locking horns for the post of President. The matter has reached the Election Commission. It will not be far when this minuscule political party will see its doom.

Yours etc...
Philip Marweñ,
Via-Email.

Lessons from nature

Editor,
Rice plants need high water availability for their growth. This is the reason why they are so vulnerable to drought. However, plant

scientists at the University of California have discovered that a flood tolerant rice plant can cope with a drought. This discovery will benefit rice growers all over the world. This is not just confined to rice plants alone. It is applicable to our real lives as well. Those who can keep their heads cool amidst a flood of success, will also be able to stay calm during a drought or failure. This is the magic of equanimity which is necessary to withstand the ebb and flow of life. Equanimity gives us the power to acclimatize ourselves to the changing situations.

A question may be asked whether we have to tolerate everything in the name of equanimity. We can get the answer from Sri Aurobindo. He said, "But in ordinary life personal feeling and sensitiveness are a constant part of human nature and may be needed there for self-defence, although, I think, even there, a strong, large and equal attitude towards men and things would be a much better line of defence."

Indeed, equanimity can give us a much - needed balance to manage a crisis situation in an objective way without being overawed or swayed by it. It also enables us to see the truth keeping aside our prejudices, mental bias and personal feeling. It helps us look at an event

from a different angle with an uncluttered mind even from the perspective of a person who happens to be hostile to us.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Regulation of private airlines necessary

Editor,
It refers to the biggest private domestic airliner Indigo charging extra fees for web check-in. Evidently this is an anti-consumer step when families or people travelling in a group will be provided separate seats if they do not pay extra for getting seats together. The system of charging extra for preferred seats should be altogether abolished in the economy class. However there may be provision of Business-Class and Premium-Economy-Class as exists in Vistara in case Indigo or other private airlines wish to increase their income.

Most private airlines are involved in many other malpractices also, like selling packaged food at multiple times the market price. Even these airliners get Maximum-Retail-Price MRP printed high for being sold in airlines like rupees

100 against rupees 20 for a famous branded packaged juice. Such an anti-consumer practice needs to be abolished by concerned ministries taking cognizance.

Only recently GoAir on October 29 on flight-number 145 from Delhi to Ranch with seat-number 6A and PNR-number DE164B could not provide pre-booked meal even from amongst the four options available in its menu-card. On lodging a complaint, GoAir simply offered a polished worded apology without even refunding the paid food-cost. There was no response from its Appellate Authority. Even grievances lodged on Nov 1, 2018 with the Union Ministry for Civil Aviation through PG-portal and at websites of President and Prime Minister remain unresolved till date.

Yours etc.,
Subhash Chandra Agrawal (Guinness Record Holder & RTI Consultant)
Delhi – 6

Boosting farmer incomes

Editor,
India is a predominantly agricultural country and is a low income nation with a large and substantial

section of the population living under poverty. Hence, it is quite challenging for small and poor farmers, marginalized communities and several small ethnic groups inhabiting the country to adopt modern agricultural technologies outright due to both socio-cultural as well as socio-economic challenges facing the nation. It is difficult poor local farmers residing in remote interiors of the nation to get bank loans or financial support to buy expensive farm equipment or necessary agricultural chemicals for boosting crop production like pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, weedicides, desiccants, adjuvants, synthetic fertilizers or foliage spray of mineral salts due to logistic and financial reasons. India practices low input agricultural system and hence there is huge potential of developing extensive, low cost organic production system in different suitable parts of the country. The local administration operating in different parts of the country needs to first educate and train the local farmers in the treatment of organic production. Traditional agricultural production system in developing countries like India is in line of modern organic production system.

With a little help and

some economic and technological support of the government, organic production system is indeed a promising reality for India. Once slowly established this will free poor marginal farmers from the socio-economic pressures of money lenders as they will need less inputs in the form of expensive synthetic fertilizers and agro-chemicals. Furthermore, due to the increasing rise and popularity of organic products around the globe; farmers from India will be able to export their organic products to international markets across Middle East, Far East, South and SE Asia, UK, EU, Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada where there is high demand for organic products among health conscious customers. This could bring financial security for the poor and marginalized farming communities as well as help the nation to earn much needed foreign exchange by trading quality organic produce and products with foreign nations.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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.