

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

— Albert Einstein

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Singer gunned down

THE gunning down of prominent singer Sukhdeep Singh Sidhu Moosewala in Punjab on Sunday was shocking and painful. In this context, it must be stated that the withdrawal of security cover for 424 so-called "VIPs" in the state was among the widely welcomed actions of new Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann. Now, the Opposition parties are blaming him for the untimely death of the singer. The police say the killing was done in the context of a gang-rivalry involving criminal gangs. However, Moosewala's political links and his contesting as a Congress nominee in the last February assembly polls added another dimension to the murder. The ordering of a judicial inquiry and the arrest of some gangsters in connection with the cruel act might give the AAP government in the state some reprieve for now.

The larger issue is the peculiar situation that exists in Punjab and by extension the Union Territory of Chandigarh -- the common capital for Punjab and Haryana. A curious sight there was the omnipresence of gun-holding security guards that accompanied not only senior politicians or ministers but even the Tom, Dick and Harry, who had sought police protection on patently flimsy grounds. Those who wanted to show their importance in public created situations of "threat" to their lives via manipulated means and sought police cover. Even some journalists had been moving around there with the accompaniment of gun-wielding, uniformed cops. A justification held out by the previous governments there was that "a lot of youths" were getting government employment as security guards. The common man's disgust at such situations formed the backdrop for the CM's decision.

Notably, an SAD politician had been shot down in Punjab in August last year. There are bound to be more attacks in Punjab and Chandigarh. The Khalistani movement is in revival mode and the central government is mindful of such moves. The Khalistanis were, from the very beginning, being patronized by the Pakistani military intelligence, the ISI. Creating law and order problems in Punjab is part of their agenda. They are also behind the drug mafia. All things considered, it is important for political parties there to avoid playing into the hands of such divisive elements. The AAP government is on the right track and there is no pressing need for a review of the withdrawal of security cover for unworthy elements there. When the common man in this country lives with no security, there is no justification for extension of a VIP culture in such a vulgar form as Punjab did for the past many years.

Letters to the Editor

Poor show by Govt of Meghalaya

Editor
As a retired government employee who has worked with Mr MS Rao even before he became Chief Secretary of Meghalaya I can vouch for his sincerity to promote the State of Meghalaya. And he did that when he was posted at Delhi in the Department of Information Technology as President and CEO National e-Governance Division, Digital India Corporation in 2019. Later Rao supervised the project personally when it was launched in Meghalaya in September 2021. Hence the news that a project that he had personally initiated for Meghalaya is being awarded by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Geneva, Switzerland and that he was left out of the group that was going to receive the award is shocking. But what is more shocking is that some underlings of the Planning Department who perhaps have no clue what the project is all about were taken as part of the entourage. But

this is common for Meghalaya. Jaunts at the expense of the public exchequer are common. Covid had slowed down this philandering the foreign soil a wee bit but now it seems to have started again.
Some of us may not be vocal while in service but we see many things wrong that are happening today. As one from the old school of thought I find this appalling. We would look up to senior officers for their exemplary conduct. But the fact that the Chief Secretary did not consider Rao's presence important shows the pettiness of it all. Why would any officer want to work with passion and dedication if credit due to them can be snatched away on flimsy grounds? After all, for those who work with honesty, due recognition is the biggest award. Should it not be the responsibility of senior bureaucrats to go out of their way to ensure that the person who envisioned this project is included in the delegation?
The argument that retired people cannot be included in the delegation is absurd. Surprising, what is even more inexcusable is that the

Eight Years in North East – A Model for Good Governance

By G. Kishan Reddy

Across cultures the Number 8 is held as a symbol of victory, prosperity and overcoming. It also represents infinite perfection, balance and harmony. Ashta, in Sanskrit, is the number of wealth and abundance and one can draw a fascinating correlation between the 8 years of governance led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the magical transformation of the eight north eastern states. It is an inspiring lesson in governance, of a region neglected over a protracted period of time, shooting to prominence as the Ashtalakshmi of the nation.

After the huge mandate in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his conviction to usher in a new dawn of progress in the region. He called the North-east region 'India's Natural Economic Zone' and made it a priority to tap into it. Today, firmly on the agenda, he calls it the 'New Growth engine of India'

In spite of being endowed with extraordinary natural wealth, strategic advantage as the gateway to Southeast Asia and unrivalled economic potential, the eight states of the North East never got the attention that they deserved. Unwilling to expend serious political capital, successive governments harped on insurgency, difficult terrain, cultural distinctiveness, as excuses for their political apathy. However, winning the public mandate in 2014, the Prime Minister started articulating solutions ingrained in the governance philosophy of Sewa, Sushasan and Gareeb Kalyan.

Eight years hence, we are seeing visible differences in every aspect and the numbers speak for themselves. Since 2014, militancy incidents have reduced by 74%, deaths of civilians has come down by 84% and with more than an 800% increase in surrenders by extremists, AFSPA has been lifted from some districts for the first time in decades. With sheer political will and leadership, decades old standoffs are nearing resolution – the Naga Framework Agreement and the tripartite agreement on the rehabilitation of the Bru-Reangs, to name a few. The intent of this government to resolve such long standing issues is clearly visible in the case of the resettlement of Bru-Reangs. In May 2012, the Government at that time planned for the repatriation of about 669 Reang families but was able to repatriate only 7 Bru families. The UPA Government blamed resistance and misinformation campaign by a section of Bru leaders for this. On the other hand, in the recently finalised agreement, the Government will provide

an assistance of close to Rs.600 crores for the rehabilitation of Reangs, and ensure all-round development of Reangs including providing a plot of land, assisting in the construction of a house, provide rations and access to public welfare schemes of the state and central governments. It is this 360-degree thinking that has allowed the Government to provide compelling solutions.

While ushering in peace, foundations for prosperity were simultaneously laid with massive financial outlays: The North East has seen a huge jump from Rs 36,108 crores in 2014 to Rs. 76,040 crores in 2022 (110%) in the budgetary support by Government of India. Cumulatively, since 2014, over 3 lakh crores have been spent



in the region.

The pinnacle of Sewa to the people of North East has been to impart them the power of mobility and connectivity. In 2014, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya were put up on the railway map

projects worth 75,000 crores are currently ongoing in the North East. Today there are 15 new airports in North East, from just 6 in 2014. Making sure that, like the rest of India, aam naagrik of North East also receives help from improved air connectivity, the region is a priority area under the UDAN scheme with 46 operational routes.

The tele-density (number of phones per 100 people), especially rural tele-density, in the Northeast has significantly improved. In April 2014, rural tele-density at 42.68% was below the national average (43.96%). Today, at 61.36%, rural tele-density is above the national average (58.50%). The recent commissioning of 20 Gbps international bandwidth for Northeast through Cox's Ba-

age the inherent strengths of the region in sectors like agriculture, tourism, textiles, handicrafts. Recent cabinet initiatives such as the revival of the Northeast Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) and the National Mission for Edible Oil for palm oils aim to leverage the Northeast region's potential. The Edible Oil Mission aims to increase cultivation from 40 thousand hectares to 3.4 lakh hectares (700%) in the Northeast and more than 50% of the Mission's 9,000 crore outlay will accrue to the Northeast region. The formation of a joint Agri-Task force to provide strategic direction to these initiatives will ensure speedy resolution and implementation of the various agri and agri sector allied schemes. Today, we are working closely than ever and building consensus on development of the North East like never before. An upcoming workshop of Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries of North Eastern States along with Union Ministers and Secretaries on developmental issues of the North East, is likely to break the ground for a tradition of cooperative federalism and collective responsibility for development of North East.

The ultimate object of Sewa with the spirit of Sewa is the welfare of our citizens across economic backgrounds, which makes Gareeb Kalyan the fountainhead of it all.

The government is determined to ensure that welfare schemes reach every corner of the region. Towards this goal, in the past 8 years, under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY), amount more than Rs 10,000 crores and more than Rs 64,000 crores under National Food Security Act (NFSA) have been spent. More than 4 crore accounts are opened under Jandhan, and over Rs. 39,000 crores were spent under MGNREGA and the coverage of these central flagship schemes for Gareeb Kalyan is being improved every passing day.

This comprehensive approach of good governance is instilling hope and aspirations in the people of the region like never before. Today there is an ambition of making North East the hub of sports in the world, a leading exporter of exotic horticultural products and a hotbed of Startups while fast becoming the most attractive tourist destination in India.

Wrapping up the eight years of transformation, it is now time to brace for the Amrit Kaal and herald a glorious chapter of growth for the North East Region.

The writer is Minister for Culture, Tourism and DoNER, Government of India.

"The intent of this government to resolve such long standing issues is clearly visible in the case of the resettlement of Bru-Reangs. In May 2012, the Government at that time planned for the repatriation of about 669 Reang families but was able to repatriate only 7 Bru families."

for the first time. Before 2014, only Assam's capital Guwahati was connected. Today, Arunachal's Itanagar, Tripura's Agartala and Manipur have already been connected and remaining 5 capital connectivity projects worth Rs. 45,016 crores are nearing completion. Government of India has also spent over Rs 41,000 crores on road connectivity with over 38,000 kms of rural roads have been completed since 2014 while

and IT industry with the establishment of software parks and high speed Data centers for business purposes in North Eastern States.

To ensure that Sewa of the North East continues unrelentingly, Sushasan has been adopted as the key enabler: Working hand-in-hand with the dynamic and committed State Governments of the North East, we are moving ahead with a concrete plan of action working to lever-

Addressing the shortage of specialist doctors in Meghalaya

By Sandra Albert

In the recently concluded Meghalaya Medical Services Association (MMSA) conference, the less than ideal doctor-patient ratio in Meghalaya was a topic of discussion. It was stated that the public/government sector has over 600 doctors, and when this number was extrapolated to the population the gap was considerable. And indeed, we need to improve the health care personnel to people ratio. But perhaps it is worth spending some time to unpack this issue and look at the when, where, who, what, why and how questions facing the health system. The truth is we probably have adequate doctor numbers in Shillong city, if one takes into account for instance the over 200 doctors employed at NEIGRIHMS, about 100 at charitable empanelled hospitals like Nazareth Hospital and more at other private facilities. The private sector is concentrated in Shillong city with many doctors and specialists. But the Primary Health Centres (PHC) and the Community Health Centres (CHC) of the government remain the main recourse for people in the rest of the 10 districts.

Considerable gaps exist in our rural areas in the government sector. So how many additional MBBS doctors does Meghalaya's health system need? If you pose this question to senior health authorities, they will likely tell you, 'We don't really need more MBBS doctors in our PHCs' i.e. most positions are filled and there are hardly any vacancies in our PHCs.



But change the question to what is the deficit of specialist doctors at the CHCs and the answer will be a significant number! This deficit in specialist doctors holds true for most states in India.

When policy makers are asked how this problem could be solved, the answer often is 'start medical colleges'. Sadly, that approach has not really worked even in states that have multiple medical colleges. In India a medical college could take anywhere between 15-20 years of existence before the first specialist doctor is produced.

Let's look at NEIGRIHMS as a case study: this centrally funded tertiary care hospital in Shillong is rather well resourced – costs are subsidised by the central government and both capital costs and operational costs are provided for. It started functioning in 1998 and was able to start its first MD/MS postgraduate (PG) course for doctors in 2009-2010. So, PG courses were initiated after regulatory approvals over a decade after it started functioning and the first few specialist doctors would have passed out about 15 years after the institute started seeing patients. NEIGRIHMS currently offers PG courses (2-3 seats) per speciality in the following 12 specialities: Anaesthesiology, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Microbiology, Pathology, Radiodiagnosis, Surgery, Anatomy, General Medicine, ENT, Skin, Forensics and Ophthalmology. Annually a total of 27 seats are available based on marks secured in the screening NEET exams. Of the 27 seats 7 are reserved under 'open northeast' category. At the CHC the key specialist doctors needed are in Obstetrics, Anaesthesia and Paediatrics. Even if we open a few medical colleges, clearly this approach is not going to address our deficit in specialist doctors in the next 30 years. Hence,

we need alternative models to be looked at. A possible solution was to make our large district hospitals as PG teaching institutes of the National Board (DNB) of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW). Way back in 2015 this option was presented to the Health Dept. GoM, but after initial interest not much happened.

Recognizing that alternate models were desperately needed to be looked into, the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) took this up and initiated a programme in select states through the 'Design and Adoption of Alternate models for Responding to address Shortage of Medical Specialists' (ADARSH project). The Orissa government was one of the first to adopt this scheme. In fact, the Orissa government went a step further and insisted that they would prefer to offer only the two year Diploma courses (DCH, DGO, DA etc) rather than the three year MS/MD courses. The rationale being that as soon as the three-year degrees are completed, doctors will tend to move out into tertiary care hospitals and AIIMS like institutes thus defeating the purpose. It may be noted that the clinical training in a Diploma (2 year) or a MD/MS (3 year) is essentially the same – the difference being that MD/MS candidates get an additional year to complete a research study. This is expected to prepare them for a teaching/research career as well. In the primary healthcare system, clinical competencies are paramount and hence doctors

with Diploma qualifications are able to provide services quite well.

The degree granting bodies for the alternate models are the National Board of the MOHFW and the College of Physicians & Surgeons of India (CPS); an examination body with power to confer qualifications to practice Medicine and Surgery by the Indian Medical Degree Act 1916. In Orissa two batches of 39 specialist doctors have graduated through the scheme and the third batch of 27 are awaiting results.

In Meghalaya an MoU was signed with the state government on Dec 8, 2018. Through the ADARSH project the Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong (IIPH) with IIPH Delhi have been supporting the Government of Meghalaya to get approval for PG courses in the public sector hospitals. First a gap analysis of eight districts was done. The number of doctors available, specialist doctor shortages, potential faculty, equipment and infrastructure requirements as per guidelines were mapped out and gaps identified. There were 145 vacancies (53%) against the 276 sanctioned posts for specialist doctors. Subsequently three hospitals namely Civil Hospital Shillong, Ganesh Das and Tura Civil Hospital were identified for upgradation to PG teaching institutes. Following cabinet approval, filing of applications, back and forth correspondences with the NBE and CPS offices and much problem solving things culminated in site inspections by the National Board and CPS teams. In 2022 accreditation of Diploma courses with approval of a total of 22 seats in Obstetrics, Paediatrics, Anaesthesiology and Radiology was obtained. Meghalaya is now poised to start specialist doctors training!

(Dr Sandra Albert is MD, DNB, DrPH and the Director, IIPH Shillong)

Great news for Meghalaya

Editor,
Meghalaya's very own Ankur Das secured the 52nd rank in the recently declared UPSC exams. After nine long years someone from Meghalaya has cleared the exam? Are we genuinely happy? If not, may I ask why? Why shouldn't we be happy about it? It's just been hours since the news went viral that we have someone who cleared the UPSC this time from Meghalaya. Nine years is a long period, and indeed a long wait too. I thought Meghalaya would never be able to see its name again in the UPSC records, but Ankur Das made it a point to prove us wrong. I take this opportunity to thank him because we had lost hope and have regained it. Meghalayans let us join with the others in celebrating Ankur's tremendous achievement.

Ankur Das may not be from the tribal community of the state, but he definitely is the son of Meghalaya, and we should be happy for his achievement. We should bestow blessings on him.

Das' success is not only his success but a hope he indirectly instills in all of us and in future aspirants of Meghalaya. Let us change our perceptions and encourage our young boys and girls to aim for the stars. If Das can do it, why not others?

The last time Meghalaya had a name in the UPSC records was when the present Deputy Commissioner of East Khasi Hills District, Isawanda Laloo, cleared the CSE in 2013. What happened after that? There was an icy silence from Meghalaya for nine years as it failed to produce its own officers. Nine years later we have another Meghalayan in the UPSC list. It is a moment of celebration, probably not for the entire state but for the Government and UPSC aspirants, including me.

Who says it is a herculean task to get through this examination? I am sure Ankur Das will tell us that when consistency, determination, and hard work become our priorities we can conquer the world.

As to who is happy and who is not, people who have envisioned that someone from the state would clear the examinations are happy.

The government and its officers are happy, whereas aspiring candidates are the happiest. A section of the population may not be happy that someone from the indigenous community could not clear the UPSC while Ankur, a non-tribal, could. There will be thousands of questions in the minds of such people. Comments everywhere will be very communal, but it's best if we turn our deaf ears to them.

Meghalaya doesn't have enough coaching centres, but I'm looking at the brighter side; we will in the future. Ankur's success proves that coaching classes can help us but self-study can do wonders. If we persist with hard work, Meghalaya can get at least one if not two UPSC aspirants carrying the trophy but the State has to buck up its coaching centre and make it more dynamic and interactive.

Yours etc.,
Emidao Shylla,
Via email

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"Disappointment builds character and strength."

— Nafessa Williams

The Shillong Times

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Health Department fracas unhealthy
THE trading of charges currently on between the Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH) Shillong and the Director Health Services have exposed the underbelly of a system steeped in intrigues and machinations difficult for the ordinary citizen looking for health treatment to comprehend. The IIPH Shillong was established by the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) in collaboration with the Government of Meghalaya (GoM). The primary aim of the Institute is to redress the limited institutional and systems capacity in public health in the northeast region of India. In other words IIPH is meant to train different batches of public health personnel and to conduct research on important health challenges affecting large sections of the public such as Tuberculosis, Malaria amongst other public health concerns. The IIPH Shillong is training doctors from different states of the North East. It has within it a dedicated faculty of international renown, some of whom could easily be employed in the best institutions of the country and abroad. Any State Government with a modicum of wisdom and vision would have assisted the IIPH by providing it with physical infrastructure. In terms of other resources the IIPH has managed to procure grants from several international bodies which have enough faith that the institution would do a good job with research and training of young public health professionals.

The foundation for the IIPH Shillong was laid by then Minister in the UPA Government, Jairam Ramesh. Even at that time Ramesh had stated that Assam was very keen to get the IIPH located in that state and was ready to offer land and other facilities. Any other state would have welcomed the IIPH with open arms. Unfortunately, in Meghalaya the Institute is facing several hurdles and is being frustrated at every step of the way by a coterie in the Health Department. This is a very unhealthy trend and the government of the day should take this up as a challenge to defend an institution of national importance.

IIPH has a long term vision of scaling itself into a University provided there is adequate collaboration from the State to provide it with the required infrastructure. It is unethical on the part of the Director of Health Services to launch into a tirade against the Director of the Institute by labelling her a 'self-proclaimed' director. The director has the necessary credentials from a renowned institution in the UK. This humiliation should not be tolerated by the Government. No one in the Government should side with bad behaviour. Several youths from Meghalaya are studying at IIPH Shillong and will soon get jobs at different government or private health facilities. Does Meghalaya not want this? Does it want to throw away even this opportunity because of petty politics? The MDA Government should show that it actually runs the government and is not being run by vested interest groups.

On corruption, charity begins at home

By Albert Thyrianiang

The humiliating collapse of the dome of Rs 177.7 crore newly constructed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building at the new site in Mawdiangdiang on May 21 night has triggered everyone to train their gun at the NPP, the leader in MDA government. The present government is branded as corrupt. The accusations are not only from outside but even from within the coalition. The BJP is ready to exit from the government if seconded by the central leadership. The UDP is clinging on to the marriage ostensibly to avoid President's Rule in the state. Leaders of these parties are playing to the gallery with a brazen attempt to shirk responsibility. Both the parties claimed to be the architect of the MDA government four years ago. Let them not take people for a ride. Let them not fool the voters. The UDP runs the Legislative Assembly through its president who is the Speaker of the House. He 'oversees' to whole construction. The BJP turned the swearing in ceremony into a saffron affair. Their bigwigs were proudly present at the venue. Let them not escape accountability.

The shameful fall is seen as a symbolic collapse of morality in the government. The present dispensation is tainted. It is perceived as a corrupt administration. Instances are numerous to back the claim. The ISTB leaks soon after inauguration due to its shoddy construction. The MeECL is dogged with corruption charges for shady deals. The illegal gates are still in operation. The bridge on the Shillong by-pass cracked due to the overloaded trucks ferrying illegitimate coal. The illegal mining and transportation of coal are facilitated by those at the helm of affairs. The latest revelation is the involvement of the minister and brother of the Chief minister, James Sangma. One expects a robust rejection from elder Sangma with warning of legal action against the Guwahati-based news channel which did the expose. Instead, the reaction was a tame and sober. Does his indifferent response make the suspicion stronger? Obviously the TV channel in Assam ran the shocking story with 'proofs'?

The crashing down of the dome is seen only as the latest and biggest fallout of corruption. The government is under fire. The designing and construction firms are under suspicion. Quality is feared to have been compromised. The work of the 70 tonne dome of the Rs 177.7 crore building is alleged to have been sub-contracted. If the Assembly campus is sub-contracted then certainly the other government buildings and roads might warrant similar scrutiny! No wonder the standard outcomes everywhere. As sub-contracts are carried out elsewhere, teachers too 'appoint' someone else in their place in village schools. Hence the deteriorating quality of education!

The Opposition views the dome collapse as precursor of doomsday for the MDA government. The roof collapse is a prophecy for the downfall of the term-ending alliance. No wonder the partners want to insulate themselves by blaming the NPP. Hope the voters see through the tricks of these parties and hold them responsible for the disappointed term in office letting down the aspirations of the people of the state. They were part and parcel of the spoils. The NPP alone is not to be held answerable.

Perhaps, surrounded by public sentiments, the Church has come out of its closet to meet political parties calling upon them to install a corruption-free government. The initiative of the Khasi Jaintia Church Leaders Forum (KJCLF) is welcome, but the Church will have to pass the credibility test before it can preach to clean the political system. The editorial of May 28 rightly questions whether the Church has the moral force to confront corruption. Is the Church willing to put in place mechanism to ensure transparency and accountability?

It is no secret that different Churches receive donations from politicians for their Sobhas, Jingsiang Synods, Processions, Ordinations and other religious assemblies. Politicians attend these gatherings in strength. They pray devotedly and sing enthusiastically not because they are religious but be-

cause they have contributed to the expenses. Are these contributions made public? Are these large functions, involving lakhs, audited? Where do politicians get this money from? Is it white or black money? Is this money not public money? Is God pleased with these donations? Will the Churches have a policy regarding donation for such kinds of religious conventions?

Whenever and wherever these religious congresses take place, roads are repaired or new ones are made, water is supplied and electricity is connected for free, using government resources. Even officials are directed to carry out the tasks promptly. The Church is happy. But it does not remember that the people have lived in those places for years together without road, water and electricity. It says nothing for the thousands of inhabitants and villagers who suffer day in and day out because of absence of these and other basic amenities. Leaders rejoice for the success of these grand celebrations with the support of politicians but their heart for the plight of the commoners remains lukewarm. They are proud of their clout in the government but voice no concern when the poor are neglected.

By the way, the NPP says the party was not invited to the interaction session. The Church has not clarified on the matter. Is the Church campaigning for a government sans the NPP in 2023?

In 2018, prior to the Assembly elections, the central government offered money to churches in Meghalaya under the guise of creating tourist facilities. I know for sure that many top leaders were in favour of grabbing the funds. They saw nothing wrong in the intention of the Party that is ill-disposed towards Christians. The attraction for money blinded the clear objective of the party to 'buy' the churches in the state. They were upset with this writer for raising his voice against the dangerous move. Had the Churches pocketed the offer they would not be able to speak against that party. Similarly, since churches accept funds from politicians for purely reli-

gious purposes they can only keep their mouths shut even if they engage in corrupt practices.

Corruption is not a recent phenomenon. Why has the Church been silent for so long? Why nothing has been said on illegal mining and the large and continuous movement of this black diamond in thousands of trucks before everybody's eyes? The late realisation of the Church is excused but will it have the credibility to sustain its efforts? The other day a friend of mine who is also in the media texted me saying that a high ranking Church leader called him and scolded him for preaching a sermon on corruption. He had to delete the content from the internet thereafter. Then why is that Church part of KJCLF delegation in meeting political leaders? What is the point in installing a clean government if priests can't speak on corruption?

I don't know about other churches but I can speak about my own. In parishes finance is practically in the hands of one man. He handles it practically alone. He decides the spending. There is an ambience of secrecy about it. There is suspicion on how the money is utilised. With money there are no saints. Misuse does take place. People do not feel at ease to question these pastors or the higher ups. They just tolerate though they murmur among themselves. This unchecked and arbitrary method leads to misappropriation. There are many church leaders who have large sums of black money.

An aggrieved individual complained to this writer recently, "My salary is Rs. 10,000, but I get only Rs. 8,000 in hand. Rs 2000 is kept for 'church funds'. I sign in the register for Rs. 10,000" (The figures are not real). The teacher then asks, "Why is such a thing done to me and my colleagues? We have families to manage. If the Church wants the Rs. 2000, let it give us only Rs. 8000 and we sign for the amount in the register. Is this not corruption?"

The Church has to set its house in order first. Charity always begins at home.

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'Ecclesiae et civitatis'

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

On Tuesday, 31 May, the Shillong Times editorial page carried an article, 'Church finally steps out of the purdah,' which criticized the Church in Meghalaya for being silent over the issue of corruption in government and its perceived proximity to politicians. On the same editorial page was a strong letter "Church and politicians," accusing church leaders of being "abettors and collaborators of corruption." Newspaper content shapes public perception; it is therefore impossible for a churchman to remain silent amidst such negative characterization in the media.

While we acknowledge the two writers as experts in their own fields, we cannot accept their blanket generalization of the Church as actively colluding with the political order. This article is however not a rejoinder but seeks to explain the position of the church which Mr. Toki Blah calls, although I respectfully disagree, "the most powerful institution in our state." Many church members will accept the truth in many of the points raised by the two writings, and that we ought to introspect and change where our flaws and failings have been identified.

However the framing of the argument on church and state is fallacious on three counts: the assumption that the church is a monolithic whole; that there is widespread and systemic collaboration with political personages; that there is no internal resistance to the supposed collusion between church and state.

'Ecclesiae et civitatis,' which is Latin for 'Church and state,' was the vexed question of the 4th century when Emperor Constantine unexpectedly became a Christian. This was the turning point when the persecuted church of the Crucified One suddenly became the state religion of Constantine's re-united Roman Empire. Now that persecution had been replaced by patronage, the church had to answer some difficult questions:

Was the church now formally identified with the state, so that their interests converge and eventually merge? Or does the state continue to be the demonic empire of Nero and Diocletian, with coercion being replaced by enticement, so that the faithful ought to remain suspicious of the state? Or should the church acknowledge the state but maintain polite distance? ... cooperation without collaboration, consenting but also criticizing.

The above three questions are a journalistic simplification of the three basic positions on church-state relations in church history: Collaboration, Confrontation and Conditional acceptance. The article and the letter assume the Collaboration model based on the actions, or inaction, of certain members of the hierarchy. My experience however is that there are many individual church members who strongly adhere to the Confrontation model - witness the recent opposition to COVID restrictions and conspiracy theories about the vaccine.

However, I would argue that the majority of Christians across various churches follow the model of Conditional acceptance of the state. While this is usually the silent majority, their aversion to mixing religion with politics is evident from regular conversations and from voting patterns where candidates from majority groups and denominations are not always guaranteed election from majority-dominated constituencies.

Our readers must also be made aware that the Church in Meghalaya is not a monolithic whole, with a common platform for social and political issues. There are two large denominations, the Presbyterian Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and the smaller Church of God in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills; the two large churches, Baptist and Roman Catholic, in the Garo Hills; plus many small, non-denominational churches and groups across the state.

Yes, churches do receive government schemes and financial assistance for their schools, playgrounds, institutions and social-service projects. However, other religious groups and village and locality institutions are

also beneficiaries of similar schemes and assistance. No, there is generally no demand made or assurance given that allocation of schemes should translate into votes. Just natural gratitude. Yes, there may be cases where individual leaders "abdicate their responsibilities" as Mr. Philip Marwein says, but such conduct is certainly not approved behaviour in our churches.

While there are individual cases of what he calls "hobnobbing" with political leaders, our esteemed readers must recognize that there is also an inbuilt inner resistance to the conflation of interests of church and state. Actually, some of the popular preachers often criticize the government, to the extent that the congregation is sometimes left squirming in their pews. In general, most church leaders try to maintain a respectful distance between church and politics, being careful that we do not become identified with any political party or personage.

There is theological depth in the words of Jesus: "Render unto Caesar, and unto God what belongs to God." If the coin bore the image of Tiberius Caesar, the implication is that the human heart bears the image and likeness of God. Justin Martyr in the 2nd century interpreted this teaching on paying taxes as also approving cooperation with the government. The great Augustine of Hippo, respected by both Catholics and Protestants, wrote in the early 5th century that both the 'City of God' and the 'City of Man' have been instituted by God, and that both serve his will and purpose.

Martin Luther in the 16th century explained it thus: "We must divide all the children of Adam into two classes; the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. ... These two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain; the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other." From Luther's 'two-kingdom doctrine,' John Calvin further developed and systematized his teaching on 'separatio ecclesiae et civitatis.' 'Separation of church and state' remains the official Reformed position, as well as of other denominations and groups.

The Book of Acts portrays the early church as obedient to the government and respectful of authority. Calvin taught that since civil government is divinely instituted, Christians ought to obey the law, pay their taxes, and honour the government. The 16th century Reformers viewed rebellion and anarchy as far greater dangers than government incompetence.

This however does not imply subservience to the government and meek acquiescence to its agenda. The Apostle Paul protested against his ill-treatment, and as a Roman citizen appealed directly to Caesar. John Calvin was expelled from Geneva from 1538 till 1541 because his reforms were considered too strict and impartial towards commoners and aristocrats. But Geneva descended into chaos and the city council recalled Calvin for his second, definitive tenure from 1541 until his death in 1564.

Christians are therefore not taught slavish obedience to the official narrative. The Church in Meghalaya has not surrendered to political patronage and remains committed to combating injustice and corruption. However, the manner of the Church's intervention is not that of pressure groups on the streets and constant public criticism on the media. It effects change not by polarization between people and the government; polarization is an easy but ultimately destructive path. Our church membership includes both political leaders and common people, bureaucrats and blue-collar workers. Therefore the church's preferred mode of intervention is bridge-building, private counsel of egregious offenders and advocacy. Such activities do not make front page news but rest assured of our commitment to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.

Letters to the Editor

Apex Court sentence on Sidhu

Editor,
Cricketer turned politician Navjot Singh Sidhu was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment on Thursday (19th May 2022) in a 1988 road rage case in which a person (about double the age of Sidhu) had died from fist-blow injuries inflicted by Sidhu. Admitting that the March 15, 2018 judgement by Justice J Chelameswar (since retired) was unduly lenient/indulgent in letting off Sidhu and with a mere fine of Rs.1000 in a case under Section 323 of IPC (voluntarily causing hurt) a bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar and Sanjay K. Kaul remedied the error by imposing punishment of one year's rigorous imprisonment on the former cricketer in addition to the fine.

However, the bench refused to expand the scope of offence to culpable homicide not amounting to murder under Section 304-Para II as a reprieve, although Navjot Singh Sidhu was tried for charges under Section 302 IPC and Section 323 read with Section 34 of IPC and was sentenced to 3 year's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. one lakh.

"In the given circumstances, tempers may have been lost but then the consequences of the loss of temper must be borne," the bench added. The top court emphasized maintaining a reason-

able proportion between the seriousness of the crime and the light punishment that humiliates and frustrates a victim of crime". But an act of criminality is a crime and a criminal is a criminal whoever he may be. No individual or for that matter no citizen of the country, is above the laws of the land.

While awarding the punishment the justices had not recommended for a light job for Sidhu while serving the rigorous imprisonment jail term. At the same time Section 323 of IPC also does not provide any leniency to a convict sentenced for serving a rigorous imprisonment jail term.

It is inexplicable as to why Sidhu is being trained for a clerk's job in Patiala Central jail and is being treated as a VIP, high-profile and celebrity prisoner while other prisoners are treated differently for their criminal acts and are serving rigorous imprisonment jail terms! Sidhu is being served with food, drink and beverages of the standard and quality of a 5-star hotel on the plea of medical grounds. Is similar meticulous care on health grounds taken for convicted criminals serving rigorous imprisonment jail terms in Patiala Central Prison?

Such discrimination between prisoners serving rigorous imprisonment jail terms constitutes gross violation of the Articles 14 as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay,
Advocate Kolkata High Court

Was India ready for democracy

Editor,
I thank you once again for bringing forth a news edition that one finds useful as an indication of responsible reportage. I greatly appreciate your editorial page and the issue over examining the Church as redeemer was an invigorating read. One also read the article on the Congress and followed it with a Rahul Gandhi news article on Jawaharlal Nehru - the first Prime Minister of India.

Needless to say what struck one is the ludicrousness of imagining an India in the absence of educating and empowering it's masses about themselves or their country. The subject matter for all intrigues remain the "people of India" who have had their self-descriptions thrust upon them (of a secular, socialist, democratic, republic) by those at the helm and receiving the handouts by an exiting British. They possibly lived in London and confused it's residents for the average Indian populace that easily could have been of as many countries as the Indian state imagines it's provinces to be without doing a mite of injustice to anyone.

Obviously a Nehru's Discovery of India highlights this possibility more than it does of assuring one of a Nehru being politically aware of both the idea of the state,

and governance. The book does establish his status as an author of some talent. But literary skills do not make one qualified to be a political leader. He already would have a Rabindra Nath Tagore mortally challenge him upon that aspect. One doubts if Rahul Gandhi shares Nehru's literary skills but he may easily have shared the political ignorance and incapacity of a Nehru.

The individual at the core of any democracy who is cumulatively called the 'people' imagines an individual who is both politically aware and has the agency to demand his/her rights and recognize his/her attendant obligations. In other words, an individual in a democracy must be aware of both the Hobbesian state of nature as well as the nature of the state in Hobbes' world to be able to appreciate democracy. It definitely isn't about the Shudras, and their synonym of crime-terror. In other words, the terms of the pre-civil, civil, and the uncivil adequately describe the distinctions, with the uncivil (Shudras or crime-terror) meriting the penal code, that also acts as the guiding light for the pre-civil to make their way to the civil, and not the uncivil.

The pre-civil is also pre-political. The uncivil of necessity is anti-political. The civil forms the political and thereby the people of any democracy. The failure to recognize this basic distinction amongst themselves, and also amongst the people they sought to constitute via

their Constitution is problematic. Only the monkey (with all due apologies to the simians) emerges in comparison to those at the helms of affairs who received from a departing British all the paraphernalia of colonialism. Ostensibly the same monkeys also constituted the Indian populace via their Constitution.

Unless an Indian republic first comprehends itself in merely the terms it so likes to describe itself - the curse upon humanity cannot be lessened and religion scarcely finds its foothold against the Vedic Ages to imagine itself as the avenging angels for some God, in making the population and the areas it imagines to be of it (?) to be such a curse upon humanity. Becoming the Chimpanzee could be a sign of hope for the monkeys, but the pearl necklace isn't theirs to begin with! That is what any state and governance is all about, and indicative of human achievements - of human civilizations since ancient Greece and perhaps even before!

Because for any democracy to define itself as "We the people..." it needs to be able to describe "who or what can be the people..."! Obviously neither the Shudras nor the monkeys can be given that status. It is such a political issue but of global import - given so many similar ones have emerged since the end of the European colonial period!

Yours etc.,
Lawrence Michael,
Via email

A moment of pride!

Editor,

I would like to congratulate Mr Ankur Das a resident of Meghalaya for his determination and hard work in clearing the IAS Examination. As I was browsing through the pages of the reputed Shillong Times dated May 31, 2022, besides the unattractive news relating to the different political backbiting, blame games, corruption etc, something else attractive caught my eyes. Seeing Mr Ankur Das clearing the IAS Examination and reading how he prepared to reach the top is really inspiring not only to me but to the entire residents of Meghalaya. A moment to celebrate knowing the fact that after eight to ten years, finally a resident of the State cleared the most difficult exam. On behalf of the future IAS aspirants and all the residents of Meghalaya, we are proud of you Mr Ankur Das and we wish you all the best in life.

Thank you for making Meghalaya proud!

Yours etc.,
Andy TG Lyngdoh
Assistant Professor,
Via email

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

"It is impossible to go through life without trust: that is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself."

— Graham Greene

The Shillong Times

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Education, quality

INDIA is "growing and growing", but this is not getting reflected in global rankings. At the same time, China's growth in all fields is getting adequately reflected in such evaluations. The latest instance is of the ranking of universities and institutions of higher education done by a reputed UK-based tracking agency as an annual exercise. The top two 'best' universities are from Beijing, while Singapore and Hong Kong occupy the next three slots. India emerged with a listing of 17 of its institutions in Asia's Best 200, our best performer being Indian Institute of Science, yet it claiming only the 42-nd rank.

What this goes to show is India's failure to strengthen its higher education sector in terms of quality. Some 20 years ago, China was growing faster but feelings were that at least in the higher education and knowledge sector, it could never beat India. Reports came later that China was having more English-learning people than the whole population of the US. Such was the vigour and dedication with which China pursued its goals. India, walking slowly like an elephant, is reaching nowhere. There has been a loud cry for reforms in the Indian education system. All that happened, as is often pointed out, was a phenomenal rise in the salaries of lecturers and professors in what is labelled as UGC scales — the height of which had at its start surprised even the campus community.

The Modi government's obsession limits itself to injecting Hindutva into the curriculum or re-writing history. Analysts have noted that the huge salary hike led to a new "love for life" among the academicians, the downside of it being they have progressively lost interest in learning, a prerequisite to good teaching. Complaints are widespread about nepotism and favouritism in recruitments to universities. Merit, often, is secondary; a recipe for the creation of a society by mediocre people. If China had to learn from India in the past, today the reverse should be the norm. Where India has established itself as a strong entity are the IT and pharmaceutical sectors, where private initiatives centered around Pune, Bengaluru and Hyderabad worked wonders. The failure of India is principally the failure of the leadership. This is reflected also in the Olympics or Asian Games, in a symbolic way, where the nation ends up with a Silver or two while nations like China harvest a mine of Gold. 'Welfarism' is the new mantra for leaders, a euphemism for vote bank politics. Many sectors of India are ailing. Lack of leadership is India's main curse.

Breach of conflict of Interests concerns Meghalaya's electorate

By Kit Shangliang

This is about the well-being of Meghalaya, therefore, the well-being of India entirely. With 2023 fast approaching and the state heading towards the election trail soon, many political aspirants are on the move. Public information has it, that some prominent government employees, serving now as we speak, will toss their hats into the electoral ring too. The question is: Is this legit? Is this right for us? Or is the breaking of rules acceptable by the electorate here in Meghalaya? Most of all, is the general public aware of the parameters of the 'Conflict of Interests'? All these apolitical concerns are what this write-up will attempt to provide clarity on.

After the ISBT cracks, the by-pass bridge let down and especially the debacle of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly dome, such public discourse is the need of the hour. It is both unfortunate and revealing that the dome debacle had to happen under the watch of the present PWD executive engineer-cum-political aspirant. While the engineer was supposed to act as the accounts manager on behalf of the State Government, could it be that his political construction caused him to neglect his official duties? Hence, the fallout of a conflict of interests?

Interestingly, another government servant, Director of Health Services crossing the line, allegedly behaving rudely with the students and faculty members of the Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH) is unbecoming of a professional, more so and ironically, a political aspirant. Media reports that his behavior violated the sacredness of the institution and a complaint was lodged to the Principal Secretary (Health), Government of Meghalaya.

The Meghalaya Services (Conduct) Rules 2019, published by the Gazette of Meghalaya, part II A, Rule 20 spelled as clear as day, "No Government employee shall be a member of or otherwise, be associated with any political party, or with any organisation which takes part in politics, or whose activities have political bearing, nor shall he take part in, subscribe in aid of, or assist in any other manner, any political movement or activity." Which on record says "Published by Authority" officialized by the recorded statement of the 'Gazette of Meghalaya', November 14, 2019.

That's a non-negotiable ruling going by the November 6, 2019 notification, approved by the very government that believes in progressive leadership, a thing they preach and perhaps practise. Such direct and indirect political engagement reflects the blatant breaking of the government service rules by its own officers and employees. All said, let's break this into pieces, for the sake of inclusive clarity. This write-up may hopefully spark some culture of integ-

riety and call upon the public as accountability partners, to look carefully at the basic ideas of 'Conflict of Interests' and how to appropriate and connect such values with the already existing socio-cultural & religious ethics of the indigenous communities of the state.

A number of prominent members of the electorate and key citizens have expressed that the political career for government servants turned political aspirants in Meghalaya is a mere retirement plan, if not a hobby. Come to think of it, they have a point, simply, because such a retirement plan could potentially fetch more benefits and social relevance in their old age. Imagine how would a retirement plan add value to the economic and political well-being of Meghalaya with unmet challenges that we have on all fronts. Such progressive awareness among the electorate around a similar notion is gradually gaining speed pan-Meghalaya, especially among the youth who form a sizeable voters' population.

We have heard time and again that our State Government aspires to be like governments of other developed countries in terms of focused services and innovations backed by strategized branding. Great ideas, but how do we get there, if we have missed the basics? Of fair-play and nipping of conflict of interests' issues in the bud. In most progressive countries there are increasing expectations from each and every valued citizen, business leader and civil society member that systems should deliver higher standards of integrity in the public services, civil services, public institutions, government-controlled corporations and government itself. In this context, conflict of interests in its various forms should become a significant consideration in the day-to-day work of those who occupy any position of trust.

Sadly, by the drill of the day in Meghalaya, that's the integrity of the past assumingly embedded in a citizen's conscience. Today, for all wrong political purposes, misplaced aspirants come along and play their part. These are things barely discussed, because they either prick our conscience or they can be wrapped under the carpet because of the political class's perception, that there is lack of public awareness. However, what the political pundits seem to overlook is that, now, the public, especially of urban constituencies that may be impacted by such opportunism, are increasingly aware of the sad implications of 'Conflict of Interests'. They may not be aware of every letter of it, but surely they are aware of the spirit of this notion, which is enough to turn the tables around.

Let us delve into why 'Conflict of Interests' is a thing that would be of equal or utmost concern for the

opportunistic orientations. That in itself, is an obvious threat to the structure of political management. In the world of political spin-doctors, there are three or more ways that a political opportunist of this kind can scheme this:

1. To slyly take advantage of their official positions by introducing or officially propagating schemes during their tenure and politically claim such endeavors by proxy
2. To donate part or most of their resources (in question) to community aids so as to influence the politically naive, the economically poor and the emotionally driven, with a target to convert such feelings into votes.
3. To camouflage this, under that notion of 'love for their own kind' and what not.
4. This political plunge tends to normalize the culture of corruption, abuse of power and pretend that everything is okay without the knowledge of the public and their specific electorates.

Looking at the present public servanthood vis-à-vis government officers transiting into mainstream politics from where they are now, be it an engineer, doctor, cop, chowkidar or bureaucrat — timing is key. The lacuna lies in the convergence and reconciliation of the two systems.

The open-ended nature of the service rules of the state government and the bending and breaking of the very same rules

The absence of definitive directions derived from the systems of the Election Commission of India

To check such breach of conflict of interests, there is need to plug the service rules gaps at the state level and for the ECI to consider firming its rules around cut-off year vis-à-vis government servants entering into mainstream politics. What this submission means, is that, the ECI may make it mandatory for any government servant who intends to join politics to have a cooling off period of 6 years, after he or she resigns or retires from the government job, after which, the government employee is free to engage or join mainstream politics.

Evidently, this opinion piece does not intend to loosely discourage political aspirants who are contributing government servants. It is intended to revamp the culture of integrity and to halt government officers, para-government officers and even army officers from exploiting their positions, subsequently and potentially leading to any quantum of corruption. It is imperative that a clear notification of cutoff year, hopefully based on constitutional provisions will have to be issued for electoral clarity.

Such pragmatic steps should also help ECI to augment their mandate and stance to uphold free, fair and ethical elections. Unless these steps are taken, the opportunistic affluents with political luring will strike at the right moment for more wrong than right reasons. And, evidently, there is no concept of allegiance whatsoever based on their op-

portunistic orientations. That in itself, is an obvious threat to the structure of political management. In the world of political spin-doctors, there are three or more ways that a political opportunist of this kind can scheme this:

1. To slyly take advantage of their official positions by introducing or officially propagating schemes during their tenure and politically claim such endeavors by proxy

2. To donate part or most of their resources (in question) to community aids so as to influence the politically naive, the economically poor and the emotionally driven, with a target to convert such feelings into votes.

3. To camouflage this, under that notion of 'love for their own kind' and what not.

4. This political plunge tends to normalize the culture of corruption, abuse of power and pretend that everything is okay without the knowledge of the public and their specific electorates.

Way forward:

To stick to its own rules, State Government should spell out clearly on what kind of disciplinary actions are to be taken if any of its employees are found breaking those service rules vis-à-vis political engagements. Perhaps, the disciplinary actions all these years have been non-existent, minimal or well within the fiscal reach of the violator, hence, normalizing the government-servants turned political-opportunists to ignore rules and laws.

In working towards its own mandates, ECI could consider making it mandatory for any government servant who intends to join politics to wait for a gap of 6 years, after he or she resigns or retires from the job, whether state or central, after which, the government employee is free to join mainstream politics. We leave that to the wisdom of the Commission.

If better political sense prevails over political egos and money, the concerned political organizations should exercise restraint in batting for the candidatures of such breed of opportunists. While the public know that some constituencies like the 17-North Shillong are up for grabs, many pointed out that this is due to the growing unpopularity of the present legislators, suffering from emotions over-dose syndromes. Only time will tell, if the debacles and the erratic moves of politically aspiring government servants may alter political preferences to pave way once again for emotionally driven leaders to get reelected.

Lastly, hope still prevails in the fact that prominent citizens, electorates and political parties could exercise wisdom to root their candidates wisely and strategically, because in urban Meghalaya, integrity is still one of the integral factors of one's winnability. Money is short-sighted, integrity is not. If you get it wrong in the minors of those basics, you got it all wrong.

(The writer is Social Communicator & Artiste)

Who's afraid of President's Rule?

By Patricia Mukhim

The public of Meghalaya is being constantly entertained by the political class inhabiting this terra firma. The BJP is hemming and hawing about whether to quit the MDA Government or to hang on to its apron strings. Not that the BJP has too many squeaky clean politicians to showcase to the world. Frankly speaking, after the demise of Late TH Rangad the BJP has not had a face they can be proud of. Another reason why BJP has not attracted good leaders here is because it has been painted as an anti-Christian Party. The NPP has taken advantage of this perception and asks people to join it because it is not like the BJP. Alas! The NPP is the younger brother of the BJP and is surviving as long as it implements the BJP agenda and does not dig in its heels on any issue. The central BJP leadership is happy for this marriage of convenience to continue. So as Rancho (Amir Khan) sings in 3-Idiots, "All izz well!" Except that in Meghalaya there are over 30 lakh idiots and 1 top the list! And this rather romantic partnership between the BJP and NPP looks like it will continue beyond 2024.

So confident is Conrad Sangma of his government's survival that he constantly taunts the BJP to leave the coalition but the BJP tamely continues because as long as they are in the Government there are the crumbs of office they can enjoy. Once out they will be in the dog-house and it would be difficult to woo people without money power when they have already fed the constituents on an easy diet of freebies. The comic reaction is that of the UDP which says it cannot divorce the NPP at this juncture because the Government would topple and Meghalaya would then have President's Rule. As if President's Rule is some fire-breathing dragon that would swallow us all and get us roasted in its innards. But that the UDP and its leadership would consider us idiots with no political brain is an insult we should not tolerate.

Meghalaya is no stranger to President's Rule. We have had them in the past when Governor MM Jacob ran the Government. We also had a brief stint of President's Rule during Governor RS Mooshahary's tenure. On both occasions the Governor's office ran the administration and during the tenure of the latter I recall that he visited the Civil Hospital to oversee what is actually happening there and how the Hospital was being run. At that time, we all felt that President's Rule should continue, for when did the Chief Minister of Meghalaya last visit the Civil Hospital for a surprise check? Isn't that what governance is all about? Visiting a health facility when people there have prepared bouquets and cleaned up the mess is not governance. It is what used to happen in the days of the Rajahs and Maharajahs. But perhaps it's our fault for forgetting that these present set of politicians/ministers are children of privilege who are unused to the notion of simple living. So no, UDP leaders, President's Rule is not bad at all. Ask us citizens how we feel; don't assume!

Now let me explain why politicians are worried and insecure about the collapse of the MDA. It was Walter Lippman who famously said, "Successful politicians are insecure and intimidated men. They advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in

their constituencies." How religiously our politicians seem to have followed this strange trajectory! So, the most insecure people in Meghalaya today are politicians. Each one is wondering if he/she will return to roost in the newly constructed Assembly building in 2023. Each one is calculating the votes and wondering which are the intransigent voters that need convincing with a sermon on how they represent the best of the legislative traditions and are harbingers of the true spirit of democracy. Big deal! We know at the end of the day that power is the ultimate elixir of life for them.

And then to add to the litany of agonies for Meghalaya we have a set of 'about to retire' government officials with both feet already in different political parties but shamelessly still drawing their salaries and perks from government. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court on this issue is urgently called for because these aggressively ambitious retirees use their office to promote their own image and themselves at public expense and immediately jump into the political fray. For what? To serve people? No to continue to be served even beyond retirement!

And the funniest part is that when these retired types get elected to the Assembly they forget their sordid past and the corruption they happily indulged in and become holier than thou, putting all kinds of questions to belittle the politicians from the rural outback. Like someone said, the dangerous politician is not the one who comes from the grassroots but the one who is air-dropped into a constituency after retirement.

Sadly, despite all these shenanigans and the collapse of the infamous Assembly dome, we don't see people stirring for a public protest. What's wrong with us Meghalayans (Sorry not the newspaper but the people)? Have we been so bamboozled that we have lost the power to protest? Then are we still citizens of a democracy? In fact, the uncanny silence from many of the usual suspects who call for public protests at the drop of an umbrella (that's what we carry now during the rains and we hardly wear hats) and were ready to storm the Raj Bhavan at one time makes me wonder if they have decided to outsource that part of the business. Else why have they all become so tame? Other than some insipid statement in the newspapers/news channels not much was said about that disgraceful 'Dome' catastrophe.

For many of us who have been watching the electoral sport for decades it's a long journey from desire to destination. Often, we become victims of cynicism but realise we cannot give in to such dystopia. Life has to go on and criticism must be our daily fare. And no, we the people are not in the least bit worried about President's Rule. In fact, politicians are most worried about that for they will not have control of the exchequer in the last leg of their five-year roller-coaster ride.

Normally, clever politicians are master-chefs in cooking up a broth of both impression and expression. I am afraid the UDP failed miserably to express and therefore did not impress. We are no longer little kids just introduced to politics. Like our Prime Minister, Modi in 50 years we have acquired degrees in many shades of political studies from the University of Life and of late from WhatsApp University from where we consume news.

Let's have President's Rule in Meghalaya! Hip, hip hurrah!

Letters to the Editor

Scam-ridden MDA Govt

Editor,
There was a huge uproar in the media when the Dome of the new Assembly building at new Shillong township, Mawdiangdiang, crumbled into debris; when the ISBT Building at Mawiong developed cracks at many places and experienced heavy leakages; when newly built roads and bridges by Public Works Department in Ri Bhoi and in Greater Shillong developed big craters and serious engineering faults putting commuters at peril. All these few events have publicly revealed just the tip of the massive deep-rooted rot of corruption perpetrated by the current NPP led coalition Government — the MDA.

The litany of corruption committed by this Government began with the unabated violation of the NGT and Supreme Court orders banning surreptitious and illegal

coal mining and transporting of the natural resource. Then followed the alleged scams in the purchase of electrical goods in MeECL by the Power Department and implementation of power central scheme (Saubhagya) in the state. This was followed by a series of allegations of special favours given to selected contractors of the ruling MLAs in awarding contract works in implementing the famous Jal Jeevan Mission in the state. Similarly for other contract works by other departments the officers concerned have no choice but to toe the line of the concerned ministers because of direction from them.

That is not the end of the litany of allegations. It was openly and popularly alleged that the ruling MLAs controlled and dictated to the officers of the Districts, the Sub-Divisional and Block levels by ensuring that schemes for individuals should be given to their rela-

tives, friends, supporters and party men. Even schemes for development ought to be given on priority bases to their enlisted villages and localities or based on their sectarian preferences. In employment in government District, Sub-Divisional and Blocks levels officers are controlled, dictated and instructed by the ruling MLAs/Ministers to appoint only candidates enlisted by them in job vacancies. Even for casual/temporary appointment officers were specifically asked to induct the candidates of the ruling party MLAs. The situation has reached such a pass, it is terrible, shameful, abhorrent and beyond limits.

Who is to be blamed? The answer is the MDA government. It is the NPP, UDP, BJP, HSPDP, NCP, KHNAM and an Independent. The Opposition also are not free from blame for they have failed to nail the government. Even those 5 MLAs who are supporting

this dispensation must share the blame. Finally, we voters of Meghalaya must own the responsibility for all the ills committed by the ruling dispensation because we elected the perpetrators of these ills and because we never raise our voices, never protest and allow them to have a free run with public resources.

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

UPSC not insurmountable

Editor,
There is no doubt at all that all fellow Meghalayans should rejoice at the success of Ankur Das in securing the 52nd rank in the recently declared UPSC Exams. At least the name of the State of Meghalaya figured in the list of successful candidates after a long gap of 8 years not 9 years as the last two who

cleared the Civil Services Exam is (Allied Services) in 2014 were Spencer Mervin Myllem and Daniel Stone Laitphlang. After 2014 there was dead silence from Meghalaya with nobody clearing the exams from the state. The big question is why? If other IAS aspirants from all over India could crack the exam then why not us, especially the indigenous lot? Where had we gone wrong? Of course, the exam is a very tough one and requires a long and thorough preparation but it is not impossible. One is very sure that along with a goal, matched by sincerity, dedication and hard work the goal can be achieved. Without sincere determination and hard work one will not be able to taste the fruit of one's success. Nothing comes easy in this world, especially now that the world is in cut-throat mode with multiple competitors and challenges. To quote Ankur Das: "Consistency and hard work for one or two years is

the key". Hard work always pays.

One would be immensely overjoyed to see students from the Khasi, Pnar and Garo tribes clear the UPSC exam in the coming years. Their success will help cater to the need to serve the governance of our state.

One does agree with Emidao Shylla in saying that Meghalaya does really lack coaching centres (come to think of it, our state lacks in everything good and positive). However, self-help and hard work will help one realize his/her dream.

To end the letter on a more positive note, let us hope that in the coming years, our State will be able to produce more IAS officers to serve the state.

Yours etc.,
Helen Dkhar,
Shillong-4

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

"At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst."

— Aristotle

The Shillong Times

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Collapse of the social order

THE incident of May 31 last where a father killed two of his children aged 4 and 2 years respectively and left them in a bush nearby is both shocking and outrageous. This action defies the very ideals that society holds dear which is that parents have a natural love and bonding towards their off-springs. Something appears to have collapsed in the carefully constructed Khasi ethical-societal norm and there are many reasons for this erosion of social values in a society that is guided by robust standards of right and wrong. However, in every society there are individuals that retreat from the universal moral standards for a number of reasons. One of the reasons is the rejection of accepted values either because of a person's upbringing or because the person's state of mind is compromised by substance abuse which then pushes the human mind to inflict unspeakable cruelties on another human being because of the state of mind the perpetrator of the crime is in.

Khasi people irrespective of their religious affiliations are known to have a common ethical standard of behaviour. But with time and the clash of civilisations the behaviour of a person is now guided by his/her independent view of the world with society rapidly losing hold on individual behaviour. This is why we have a legal system to assume the role of a moral guardian. Commonly held value systems of society are collapsing, not only globally but also within the fabric of individual societies. Unfortunately, there is very little introspection on this because Khasi society is itself divided by faith, politics and class. The current reduction of values to personal likes and dislikes and personal rights have brought with them a certain unhelpful personal hedonism.

It is true that traditional value systems have been challenged because of their inability to adapt to the necessary changes. The youth regularly question accepted values and express frustration and distress at being imprisoned in a cultural trap. That's because there is none to engage with them and to honestly answer their questions in a language they understand. The youth are aware of their own influence in the life of society and they want to be a part of that but parents and educators are resistant to allowing them that space. The institutions, laws and modes of thinking and feeling as handed down from previous generations are not always well adapted to contemporary times hence the upheavals in society. The collapse of the moral fibre is evident everywhere but is more pronounced in politics. It is futile to expect other institutions of society to remain untouched by this ugliness.

Letters to the Editor

Are Christians missing something?

Editor,
Both the special articles, "On corruption, charity begins at home" by Albert Thyriang and "Ecclesiae et civitatis" by Rev. Lyndan Syiem (ST June 2, 2022) were brilliant exposition of the Christian Church and corruption and its proximity with the politicians. Mr Thyriang and Mr Syiem have driven their points of view very well. Now that the election campaign for 2023 has started in Meghalaya, nasty "mudslinging" accusations are now the norm. If Jesus Christ were walking the earth today, would he vote for one candidate or another? There is a wide spread misconception that Jesus Christ's message was mainly about himself. Very few who profess to be Christians realize that Jesus' gospel had much to say about world government. A great many

people think of Jesus as just the 'baby in a manger' rather than the true biblical Jesus Christ who is now at the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 7:55-56). Few consider that Jesus Christ promised to return as the very real King of Kings over the whole earth, including Meghalaya. A foundational problem of the human race is that people, from the time of Adam and Eve, have desired and attempted to rule themselves apart from God's involvement and leadership. The Roman Governor Pontius Pilate challenged Jesus Christ about whether he considered himself a King. Christ's answer was: "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Jesus had no intention of being involved in this world's politics. He represented a different world and different government - Kingdom of God. There is no indication

In the last few weeks, this column has carried a few articles on the New National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020. Continuing the discourse on this topic, in this article we take a closer look at some of the issues and challenges in implementing key provisions of NEP 2020 for the Under Graduate (UG) courses in Meghalaya. There are close to 80 thousand UG students in the State enrolled in about 80 colleges and other higher educational institutions, and improving the quality of education of this segment of our education system is of utmost importance for progress of the State and the society.

The foundational pillars of the NEP 2020 are Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability with special emphasis on the socially and economically disadvantaged groups, and it is aligned to the goal of quality education for all as per the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The new education policy has set a goal of universal access to education by raising the target of gross enrollment ratio (GER) across all levels of education (100 percent GER target for school education by 2030). It aims to address the deficiencies in learning outcomes by overhauling the existing curriculum and pedagogy along with changes in the educational governance structure. It seeks to replace the present education system with one that is learner centric, a curriculum that is less in content and more devoted to critical thinking and inquiry-based learning that will produce empowered students with skills and values suitable for the 21st century.

A major change introduced in the NEP 2020 is the extension of the scope and flexibility of the present Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) by allowing students to pursue UG courses in more than one core discipline (such as option of two major or one major and one minor) with other elective papers comprising of ability enhancement and skill courses. Further, it allows students multiple entry and exits options at the completion of every year (with appropriate degree) of the proposed 4-year programme with credit earned at each stage accumulating in the Academic Bank of Credit. The CBCS for UG courses was introduced by the Union Grants Commission (UGC) in 2016 to make higher education in the country more learner centric allowing students freedom to choose a core discipline with electives from other disciplines.

In Meghalaya, CBCS has not yet been adopted in the UG courses offered by colleges affiliated to the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). Few years back colleges had shifted from the annual to semester (six month) session and ac-

ordingly the curriculum was revised. However, the whole exercise was undertaken in a perfunctory manner ignoring the UGC minimum course curriculum for CBCS. For example, the total number of core papers for UG (Honours) taught in our colleges is only eight along with six other elective papers as against 14 core papers and two discipline electives along with eight interdisciplinary electives as per UGC model curriculum. Further, currently the electives offered by colleges are restricted only to few combinations in the same stream of the core subject.

The adoption of CBCS for UG courses is therefore a first step that needs to be undertaken here in Meghalaya which is however not without its challenges. First is the issue of single stream colleges (there are quite a few even in Shillong) where subject combinations will be limited only to the same stream as offered by these colleges with no scope of making subject combination interdisciplinary.

"A major change introduced in the NEP 2020 is the extension of the scope and flexibility of the present Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) by allowing students to pursue UG courses in more than one core discipline (such as option of two major or one major and one minor) with other elective papers comprising of ability enhancement and skill courses."

ary. The increase in number of papers to be taught in each subject as per UGC guidelines (core and elective papers) will also be another challenge for colleges with limited number of teachers (many with only three full time teachers in a particular subject) and those running more than one session in a day (morning, day and evening in some cases).

Then there are colleges that have all the three streams of Arts, Commerce and Science but are not offering interdisciplinary electives to students. While it may not be possible to offer complete freedom for students to choose any combination of subject from all the three streams due to limitation of classrooms and other infrastructure, some relevant combinations across the three streams will have to be introduced to make the UG course in the state truly interdisciplinary.

An important feature of the NEP 2020 is the emphasis on skilling of young people by making vocation and skill courses as part of the curriculum starting at secondary schooling and continuing up to post graduation level. According to 'The Future of Jobs Report 2020' (World Economic Forum), by 2025 85 million of existing jobs may be lost and replaced by

97 million new jobs centered on wide range of skills from decision making and creativity, to social, emotional and technology skills. While skill courses are very much needed for our UG students, only few colleges (mostly in Shillong) are in a position to offer soft and technical skill courses. Skill courses will therefore have to be offered mainly through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platforms such as Swayam for which colleges will have to create the necessary ICT and related infrastructure.

Here the State government will have to step in and utilize the centrally funded Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) fund to support colleges in creating an enabling infrastructure for students to have access to the online courses. In the long run, planning and coordination will be needed for creation of skill courses relevant for students of the State such as those related to hospitality and tourism sector, financial literacy, waste management,

that provides regular feedback to teachers to improve teaching and learning achievement during the process of instruction on the basis of evidence of student understanding and performance. This calls for a multi dimensional approach to assessment with equal emphasis on both formative and summative assessments. Colleges will have to shift to 50: 50 internal and external evaluation patterns to allow ample scope to teachers to use a range of tools such as projects, works, paper/seminars/poster presentation, group tasks, field work, and case studies as part of comprehensive assessment, as has been proposed by UGC committee on Evaluation Reforms in Higher Educational Institutions (2019). Awareness and training will be needed to orient teachers to the new assessment approach.

Next, we examine the NEP target to increase the GER in higher education to 50 percent by 2035. For Meghalaya, this will be a tall order to achieve given that the present ratio is only at 26.1 percent with that of the ST population at much lower percentage (23.6 percent). This would entail substantial increase in the capacity of existing colleges and also establishing new institutions particularly in the five educationally backward districts of the state namely East Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills, RiBhoi, South Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills (as on 2021).

The changes proposed in NEP 2020 will require a concerted effort and full support of the State government and NEHU (affiliating university in the state) in mentoring and building the capacities of our colleges so that they eventually emerge as autonomous institutions offering high quality education and conducting meaningful research. A suitable time frame will be needed to prepare colleges to implement the changes with strong mentorship and adequate financial support. Unfortunately, UG programmes in the State are not getting the required attention due to them considering their important role in deciding the future prospects of young people of the State. This calls for much more involvement of the State government through a council for higher education that will be responsible for planning, co-ordination and monitoring the development and maintenance of academic standard of our colleges and other higher education institutions in the State.

(The writer teaches economics in NEHU)

Key UG Indicators for Meghalaya	
No. of Colleges (reporting)	67
Estimated student enrollment	73202
GER in higher education (all)	26.1 (27.1*)
GER in higher education (ST)	23.6 (17.7*)
College per lakh population	20 (30)
Gender Parity Index	1.16 (1.01*)

Source: AISHE 2019. * all India

Undergraduate Education Reforms for Meghalaya

By Sumarbin Umdor

BJP's Politics

End of social justice?

By Sagarneel Sinha

The Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party government has completed eight years in office and amidst this the country has seen changes in society and politics. Modi's supporters and his critics both agree on this, although their interpretations on the end result of these changes are poles apart.

Since coming to power after winning General Elections 2014 with a clear majority, the dispensation has faced allegations of favouring majoritarianism and weakening democracy. These charges have grown after Modi stormed back to power with a stronger mandate in 2019. Supporters of the dispensation, on the other hand, claim the BJP's electoral success since 2014, including the twice saffron victories in Assembly elections in the most politically significant Uttar Pradesh, are a clear indication that caste-oriented politics is no longer applicable to the country. Besides, Kamandal (the temple-oriented politics) has swallowed Mandal (caste-oriented politics), and many others view it as the end of social justice politics. Is it so?

There's no denying that in these past eight years, BJP has strengthened itself and deeply penetrated into rural areas of the Hindi-belt. It has resulted in weakening of caste-based parties, such as Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal-United (JDU), Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) etc have partially or largely lost their core bases to the BJP. These parties attribute their strength to the Mandal politics of the 1990s, pitted against BJP's Kamandal politics. Parties such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party in recent times are trying to look beyond their caste-arithmetic and focussing on economic issues. This is a clear confirmation that they too are accepting that their old caste formula isn't drawing the support of the masses.

Just because caste-based parties are struggling, it doesn't mean it's an end of social justice politics. In the name of social justice politics, these parties practice the bitter truth in that they have failed to benefit all sections of the society. Even those in the backward classes, who aren't powerful and are divided into small groups didn't get the benefit of social justice politics practised by these parties. Lalu Prasad Yadav's RJD claimed to represent the oppressed, but it represented the Yadavs in Bihar.

The same happened with SP of Mulayam Singh Yadav and later Akhilesh Yadav of Uttar Pradesh. The Dalit-centric BSP under Mayawati came to be actually representing the interests of the Jatav Dalits. Although during elections these parties try to attract other communities, the truth is that the power of these always remains in the hands of those coming from their core community. As a result, the other backward communities wanting a share in power were often left unhappy and angry.

The BJP and its ideological parent Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), understood this and took advantage of the weakness of the Mandal parties. The saffron party guided by the Sangh Parivar started engaging with these left-out backward sections. As a result, today in Uttar Pradesh, the non-Jatav Dalits are identified as vote banks of BJP — not Mayawati's BSP! Even a section of Jatav Dalits too have moved to the saffron camp in UP. The Dalits are accommodated in power centres both at State and Central level. In addition to this, the various welfare schemes of the Modi government are successful on the ground, and the beneficiaries also include the left-out sections of the society.

Importantly, one crucial aspect that often gets ignored is that the Sangh Parivar itself sees casteism as a barrier against its mission of Hindutva, which seeks to unite all Hindus under one umbrella. So, to assume that under the dominance of BJP, the politics of social justice has been weakening doesn't reflect ground realities. Basically, the politics of social justice has undergone a change in the present era. Now, the baton of the champion of social justice has passed from the earlier caste-based parties to the Hindutva-oriented BJP.

On the other hand, the arguments of caste-based politics almost coming to an end, as pointed out by leaders of BJP, including Modi, on the basis of the electoral outcomes during these eight years also don't seem to be reflecting the exact ground reality. Whether one likes or dislikes the bitter fact is that caste does matter. It is a ground reality. The arguments of Kamandal eclipsing Mandal, often heard, are overly exaggerated because it's a given that even BJP devises its election strategy keeping the various caste-equations in mind. Then how come the saffron party's victory represents the end of caste-oriented politics or more properly Mandal politics?

Obviously, there has been a change. The change is that BJP's style of doing politics of social justice is mixed with the Hindutva agenda. Its agenda is not to discard the Mandal politics but to align it with Kamandal. Earlier Mandal and Kamandal were poles apart and were two sworn enemies but now under BJP's rule, the party's main agenda is to make Kamandal the best friend forever of Mandal.

Coming to the issue of the rise of majoritarianism under these eight years, what the Left-leaning intellectuals ignore or may be simply not interested to know, is that Hindutva itself has many shades. It isn't a uniform idea. That's also the reason it is not rejecting Mandal politics, but carefully appropriating it only to align with Kamandal.

Interestingly, many of the Right-leaning activists or more properly those associated with Sangh Parivar too ignore the fact that Left itself has many shades, including extreme ones. It has been seen that most of the time these factions of the Left don't get along. Similarly, there are extreme factions along with the moderate ones within the Hindutva movement. These extreme factions try to unnecessarily vitiate the society through their vicious ideas. The extreme factions of the Left too do the same. Basically, both extreme sides complement each other.

Like minorities, majorities are also human beings having their own issues — religious, social or economic. The BJP as a ruling party has the responsibility to understand the concerns of the majority too. They also have their own legitimate concerns. Those worries can't be just brushed aside. It can seriously affect the health of our democracy. Understanding worries of the majority shouldn't be constructed as a stand against minorities and is not healthy to term this as "rise of majoritarianism". Importantly, in this country often the word minority is associated with the minority religious communities forgetting that there are other minorities too, ethnic and linguistic.

Obviously, there are some legitimate concerns from some sections of religious minorities too — and those need to be addressed. It is the responsibility of the saffron party, being the ruling party, and also the Sangh Parivar to keep their extreme factions under check. After all, such factions complemented by the extreme ones of the Left only ferment unrest in the society. The claims of rise of majoritarianism under BJP rule, however, are highly exaggerated. —/NEA

The mission of true Christians is to help prepare the way for the Kingdom of God, the literal government of Jesus Christ. It will replace the human governments of this earth. Revelation 11:15 foretells the announcement of that divine takeover: "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever'" (NASB). The political system we see now is going to change — ultimately for the better, and that's great news. Our focus needs to be vertical, keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ and not so much on the political systems of this world.

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

Justice for the kids!

Editor,
The merciless murder of

two young innocent souls must not just be condemned in the strongest terms but requires a societal reflection too. This must be the first instance when a father kills his two children. Its unfathomable what led to this horrific step. The two angels are now in a better place but that's how we humans console ourselves. This world is a brutal and cruel place and those two children became victims of this perversity. Meghalaya is in deep sorrow and we can only imagine the plight of the poor mother who has lost two of her kids at once. She has lost her support system.

No one deserves death this way, and definitely not innocent kids. We expect swift investigation and judgement in this case. At the same time we are left wondering how safe our children and women are? How much longer should we wait for the culprits to get capital punishment for their unforgiving crime? How long will it take for the families of the young

to get justice? Death can never be compensated, but justice is the only way. We appeal to our judiciary that murderers and rapists should never be spared, nor should conviction be prolonged. Poor Indians can only dream of justice, as it never prevails on time. As in the case of Nirbhaya, the four convicts were executed after nine years. This procedure should change and the judiciary should speed up justice delivery.

Only speedy justice will be a deterrent to such crimes in the future. We don't want another such story coming from within the state or country, and so the "law" has to prevail.

Rest in peace Felisha and Gerald!

Yours etc.,
Emidao Shylla,
Via email

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THE EXQUISITE COLLECTION OF HUBERT DE GIVENCHY



Christie's announced the full list of 1,229 lots in the much-anticipated Hubert de Givenchy Collectionneur, which will be auctioned live in Paris and online between June 8 and 23.

Hubert de Givenchy's life and work exemplified a constant and successful quest for an ideal, that of classical beauty, as a passionate aesthete deeply rooted in his country's culture. The extraordinary variety and richness of works in the Hubert de Givenchy Collectionneur perfectly represents the world-renowned couturier's deep passion for objects and impeccable taste, ensuring that these auctions will be a must-see event as well as a tribute to the great collector. The collection is expected to cost around 50 million euros in total.

Selected highlights from the auctions as follows:

PROVENANCE

For Hubert de Givenchy, each object had a life of its own, appreciating its seduction and the memory which originated from it. For him, appreciation and engagement came not only from the beauty of the object, but also from its provenance, and the auctions are filled with such pieces of prestigious provenance.

In the 1950s, the young couturier began his "second career" as an art collector. From the collection of Coco Chanel, who invited him regularly for dinner, comes a superb Regence console (estimate 60,000-100,000 euros), while from the collection of Jose-Maria and Misia Sert comes a rare Italian neoclassical console table, probably the work of Torinese craftsmen active at the

court of Savoy (estimate 12,000-18,000 euros).

From the "Palais Murat", the home of a very important collection visited by the royal families of the 19th century, comes a shaped porphyry potpourri vase, probably acquired by the King of Naples around 1780 (estimate 60,000-100,000 euros). Of Imperial provenance are a pair of monumental girandoles attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire for Tsar Paul I of Russia (estimate 700,000-1,000,000 euros). These sculptural pieces surrounded the access to the garden at his Paris home, the Hotel d'Orrouer. In the same salon, any visitors' eye was drawn to a set of Regency ormolu-mounted vases attributed to Vulliamy & Son delivered around 1807 to the 1st Earl of Harewood (estimate 100,000-150,000 euros). Today, the name of Hubert de Givenchy is synonymous with a prestigious provenance, sought-after by the most discerning collectors.

ARCHITECTURE

From fashion to decoration, Hubert de Givenchy approached his projects as an architect, as did his mentor Cristobal Balenciaga. Architecture embodies Givenchy's ideal of balance, harmony and majesty, and is therefore omnipresent in many of the pieces included in the Collection, as it is the case with a superb baroque bronze censer from Augsburg (estimate 30,000-50,000 euros), and a pair of late Louis XV candlesticks attributed to Pierre Gouthiere (estimate 60,000-100,000 euros).

Architecture is also present in paintings, such as Hubert Robert's The Pool in the Terms (estimate 12,000-15,000 euros) and the Landscape with Obelisk and Colonnade (estimate 250,000-350,000 euros). In Givenchy's bedroom at Hotel d'Orrouer the neoclassical lines of the monumental desk by Roentgen are perfectly matched by those of a mechanical box by the same artist (estimate 8,000 - 12,000 euros), and a Louis XVI commode by Pierre Garnier (estimate 200 000-400 000 euros).

SEAT FURNITURE

For Hubert de Givenchy, "every object is the result of an encounter, of love at first sight". Chairs - which are represented by more than 400



examples -, occupy a very special place in this Collection. Not hesitating to declare himself "madly in love" with a Louis XVI fauteuil, de Givenchy was also seduced by a pair of bergeres stamped by Georges Jacob from the same period (estimate 15,000 - 25,000 euros). Equally, he appreciated the lines of a pair of Regence armchairs, formerly from the collection of Lady Baillie at Leeds Castle (estimate 100,000 - 200,000 euros). Often Hubert de Givenchy reupholstered furniture with modern textiles such as a Louis XVI bergere by Nicolas-Quinibert Foliot with a designed textile by Georges Braque (estimate 6,000-10,000 euros), transcending periods and styles. The sale also includes a number of more modern seat models from the 20th century, including Decour bergeres from the grand salon of the Manoir du Jonchet (estimate 800-1,200 euros).

WILD LIFE

Hubert de Givenchy also liked to be surrounded by representations of animals. They were omnipresent and gave life and majesty to the interiors he designed. For example, the Gazelle by Jean-Marc Winckler watched over the guests in the dining room of Hotel d'Orrouer (estimate 1,000-1,500 euros). Hubert de Givenchy had three



deer heads added to the facade of the Jonchet in honour of his patron saint, and in 2011 he generously donated the casts that allowed the restoration of the Cour des Cerfs to the Chateau de Versailles. Posthumously, the large stag by Francois Pompon, was donated to the Chateau de Chambord, having originally decorated the grand salon at Manoir Jonchet. In the park of the Manoir du Jonchet, lived a splendid pair of bronze deer, executed in 1964 by Janine Janet, gifted as a present by Cristobal Balenciaga (estimate 80,000-120,000 euros each).

And approaching the house, visitors were greeted by Francois-Xavier Lalanne's Oiseaux de jardin (estimate 400,000-600,000 euros each), while a 1973 turtle by the same artist slumbered in Hubert de Givenchy's bedroom (estimate 20,000-30,000 euros). Furthermore, the park held five sculptures by Diego Giacometti (estimate 20,000-30,000 euros each) immortalising Bucky, Lippo, Sandy and Assouan, Hubert de Givenchy's canine companions. Animals were also to be found at the Hotel d'Orrouer, where a pair of 19th century gilded copper Tibetan deers were placed on the mantel piece of the main salon (estimate 20,000-30,000 euros).

FINE ARTS

Hubert de Givenchy's eye was

equally drawn to Domenico Piola's monumental 1695 painting Alexander and the Family of Darius (estimate 80,000-120,000 euros), Max Ernst's luminous, tiny 1961 Untitled (Soleil) (estimate 50,000-70,000 euros), and the elegant minimalism in Robert Courtright's 1972 painting Untitled (estimate 10,000- 15,000 euros).

In the Collection, representations of the human figure abound, whether a pair of busts of emperors in the Antique style (estimate 250,000-350,000 euros) or the portrait Grande tete de Katia by Henri Matisse (estimate 7,000-10,000 euros). Keeping with the collector's concept of architecture and fashion, fabric and clothing were important, as in the portrait of an Indian dignitary, luxuriously dressed in 17th century Persian fashion (estimate 60,000-80,000 euros).

DECORATIVE ARTS

Hubert de Givenchy had always loved imposing furniture and especially large armoires and bookcases. The auction offers two superb armoires, the first dating from the Louis XIV period, made in the Boule technique, with ebony marquetry, and the second a replica made by Michel Jamet at de Givenchy's request to form a pair (estimate 50,000-100,000 euros, the pair).

Furthermore, the Collection includes a splendid commode, attributed to Joseph Poitou (estimate 250,000-400,000 euros) as well as an important selection of pieces by Diego Giacometti, a close friend, including a Console oiseau et coupelle from 1976 (estimate 400,000-600,000 euros). Collectors will also be able to acquire an imposing contemporary travertine and granite dining table (estimate 8,000-12,000 euros) which comes from the Manoir du Jonchet.

GIVENCHY AND THE COLOUR GREEN

A true leitmotif of the interiors created by Hubert de Givenchy, the colour green is undoubtedly not foreign to the feeling of serenity and calm evoked by all visitors entering Hotel d'Orrouer or the Manoir du Jonchet. Green is omnipresent in the Collection, and the salon on the second floor of the Hotel d'Orrouer is named in its honour.

A natural sponge, painted in green by Charles Seigny (estimate 2,000-3,000 euros) is a nod to another great master of the art mixing modern and classical works, Charles Seigny. He decorated Hubert de Givenchy's first apartment, in addition to those of the Empress of Iran and Bunny Mellon. (LANSlife)

Cleaning India's coastlines



A vegan beauty and personal care brand, Plum Goodness, joins hands with WWF India to work on the issue of marine debris across the coastlines of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Maharashtra. As a long-time member of the global movement of '1% For The Planet', the brand gives away 1% of every sale to support environmental causes.

It has been estimated that between 4.8 to 12.7 million metric tons of plastic enter our oceans annually globally. Due to harsh sun rays and weather conditions, the discarded plastic breaks into minute fragments and gives birth to micro-plastics.

This poses a considerable threat to our seas and the lives dependent on them. The 'Cleaning our Coastlines' is a project under which Plum is supporting WWF India in their work on marine plastic debris and abandoned/discarded/lost fishing gear (ADLFG). Another aspect of the project will cover the upcycling and management of such debris and ADLFG in the states mentioned above.

Additionally, efforts will be directed towards raising awareness on the issue by engaging fishing communities and citizens.

Shankar Prasad, Founder and CEO of Plum Goodness, said, "Being good has always been at the core of whatever we do. Since our inception, we have been a proud member of the global movement of '1% For The Planet'. With the help of WWF India, we made a modest attempt to protect the snow leopard over the past couple

of years. This year, we are working with WWF India for a cause closer home - that of cleaning our coastlines and protecting the ocean from harmful marine plastic debris. We aim to take a small step towards a plastic-free, litter-free, and pollution-free marine environment through this initiative."

Vinod Malayilethu, Associate Director, Marine Conservation Programme, WWF India said, "Plastic waste pollutes our oceans and seas, threatens marine life and even ends up in the seafood we eat. One of the most threatening forms of marine plastic pollution is abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear commonly referred to as Ghost Gear. We want to thank Plum for joining the effort to address the problem of marine plastic pollution."

To kickstart the citizen awareness under the partnership, Plum and WWF India conducted a community-driven beach clean-up drive at Dadar Chowpatty, Mumbai. Supported by Beach Warriors India, a Mumbai-based NGO known for its clean-up initiatives at various beaches in the city, the clean-up drive saw 85+ participants assembling to collect garbage strewn on the beach.

Most of the trash collected was single-use plastic, a significant cause of pollution and environmental deterioration. All the waste material collected was put together to form a thought-provoking art installation - that of marine life being threatened by man-made waste. (LANSlife)

Ride across Umling La, world's highest motorable pass

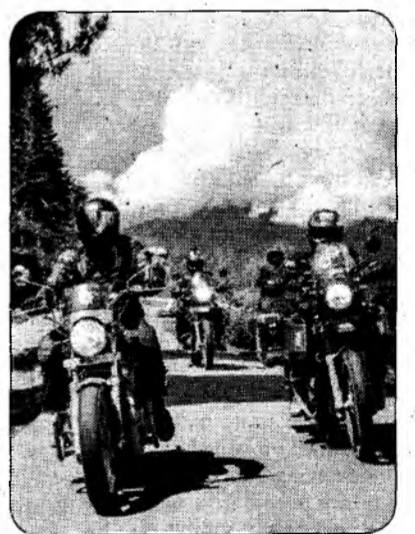
The dates for the much-anticipated Himalayan Odyssey 2022 were announced recently by Royal Enfield. Himalayan Odyssey, which returns after three years, is one of the world's largest motorcycle rides of its kind, with over 70 participants traversing the mighty Himalayan terrain on their Royal Enfield motorcycles over a distance of nearly 2,700 km in 18 days.

It will be held from July 2-18, and will bring riders from all over India together while providing them with an endless supply of breathtaking views and intimidating terrain along the way.

This edition of the Himalayan Odyssey will continue to raise awareness about the Royal Enfield journey of sustainability in order to reduce impact on the Himalayas' fragile ecosystem. While travers-

ing some of the world's roughest terrains, highest mountain passes, and empty stretches of pristine landscape and rock-strewn pathways, the Himalayan Odyssey contingent will also be strongly propagating the concept of a sustainable motorcycle journey this year.

The 18th edition of the Himalayan Odyssey will begin in Delhi and travel to Umling La, the world's highest motorable road at 19,024 feet above sea level. The expedition will take two routes, and while both groups will leave from Delhi together, they will take separate routes before meeting in Leh. The participants will travel through the picturesque Himalayan regions of Ladakh and Spiti during the ride. While both regions will present riders with hostile challenges in terms of weather and terrain, the riders will also get to experience an



adventure unlike any other.

The registration is open on the Royal Enfield website, www.royalenfield.com, from today onwards. (LANSlife)



FICTIONALISING TRAUMA

Ratan Bhattacharjee waxes eloquent on International Booker Prize 2022 winner Geetanjali Shree's book

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

Memory dilutes, but the object remains unaltered, wrote Aanchal Malhotra in her book *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory*. This year, Geetanjali Shree became the first Indian winner of the International Booker Prize for her riveting book that fictionalises the trauma of material memory.

Tomb of Sand, Shree's Booker-winning novel, opens thus: "Once you've got women and a border, a story can write itself. Even women on their own are enough. Women are stories in themselves, full of stirrings and whisperings that float in the wind, that bend with each blade of grass."

The International Booker Prize, formerly known as the Man Booker International Prize, was introduced in the United Kingdom in June 2004. The prize was then given

every two years to a living author of any nationality for a body of work published in English or generally available in English translation. It rewarded one author's continued creativity.

Since 2016, the award has been given annually to a single book translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland with a £50,000 prize for the winning title shared equally between the author and translator.

The Man Booker Prize was open only to writers from the Commonwealth, Ireland and Zimbabwe while the present Booker was open to all nationalities who had work available in English including translations similar to the Nobel Prize for Literature.

For the 2022 prize, the judges were Frank Wynne (chair), Merve Emre, Petina Gappah, Viv Groskop and Jerem Tiang. The long list was announced on March 10 and the shortlist on April 7. Finally, on



May 26, the winner's name was announced.

Shree, who got the prize for her only book available in English translation, wrote it in Hindi as *Ret Samadhi* in 2018. US translator Daisy Rockwell translated it into English as *Tomb of Sand*. It is broadly categorised as Partition literature. Shree was born in Mainpuri town of Uttar Pradesh. As the daughter of a civil servant, she lived in various towns but mostly in a Hindi ambience. It was her upbringing in such a background that she felt inclined toward Hindi writing.

During her PhD on Premchand from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, she had her fictional debut and there was no looking back since the publication of this short story. She felt privileged to be a writer in Hindi as she proudly said: "Behind me and this book lies a rich and flourishing literary tradition in Hindi, and in other South Asian languages. World literature will be the richer for knowing some of the finest writers in these languages."

Frank Wynne, the chair of judges, said the panel members were "captivated by the power, the poignancy and the playfulness" of her novel. In his opinion, "This is a luminous novel of India and Partition, but one whose spellbinding brio and fierce compassion weave youth and age, male and female, family and nation into a kaleidoscopic whole."

Shree is the author of several short stories and five novels. Her 2000 novel *Mai* was shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award in 2001 and its English translation by Nita Kumar was published by Niyogi Books in 2017. *Tomb of Sand* inspires one to approach reality anew. It gives a jerk to make people look inwards, to re-examine this 'age of excess'. The contours of consciousness are hazy and miracles are allowed to happen. Tolerance is taught and the message is clear about being respectful of one's choices.

This book will instill faith in literature. It traces the transformative journey of 80-year-old Ma who becomes depressed after the death

of her husband. She then decides to travel to Pakistan confronting the trauma that had remained unresolved since she was a teenager who survived the Partition riots - all, however, imagined by the author.

Shree wrote: "Anything worth doing transcends borders." The Booker Prize authority hailed the novel as an "urgent and timely protest against the destructive impact of borders and boundaries - whether between religious, countries or genders".

There are many stories that came together in the book but the most motivational aspect is that the old woman gradually rose up from her deathbed to reinvent her life. All of human history, literature, art, thought, and politics have been at the service of this story of the book in the autonomous narration.

The relief came from the writer's playing with words for the sake of wordplay, and her digressions, all come to make a full circle in the end. Rockwell found the translation difficult because of its 'experimental nature' and 'unique

use of language'.

"I never dreamt of the Booker, I never thought I could," Shree, the writer of the 725-page novel said after bagging the International Booker Prize as the first Indian on May 26, leaving behind five other shortlisted titles by Mieko Kawakami, Bora Chung, Jon Fosse, Claudia Pineiro and former winner Olga Tokarczuk. This is different from the Man Booker Prize which is for English novels and has been won by Indians in the past, including Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga.

It is a matter of pride for all, that she is the first among the Asian, Indian and also among the Hindi writers to get this prestigious award. Her work has been translated into English, French, German, Serbian and Korean and the award is likely to acquaint the rest of the world with her body of work as well as Indian literature.

As she rightly said in an interview on the Booker Prize website: "There is a vast world of literature with rich lineages which still needs to be discovered."



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambli

Sunday, JUNE 5, 2022

Moon sextile Sun on your solar return chart and will give amazing results. It will prove to be best year for you. You will like to take a short break from your work and go to a travel destination with your family for fun and relaxation. You will be in a positive frame of mind. You will also look for new avenues for growth. The time will be of new opportunities, adventure and new hopes. You will be active socially and interact with large numbers of people. It will be a success granting year. You will have profits in business and job. You will have clarity about your goals. Students will prepare for some exams. You will also come out of a confusing situation. Income will keep rising. Property matters will get resolved. New projects will get started. Those who are single will get suitable marriage offers. You will activate new plans. You will also increase your luxuries.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

An important event will take place in your work and it will completely change things for you. But you may be denied of the honor you are entitled to receive. Your bosses will be having high expectations from you and you will disappoint none. Your suggestions will get implemented. There are full chances of being successful in competition/interview. Your income will be good. But before money comes in, there will be a way out for it. You will also be concerned about the future of your children. You will invest in your children, and will get the love of your parents. You will listen to people's problems and also try to find a solution. Lovers can be united. There will be an improvement in your health. You will complete your pending projects. You will get the blessings of some elderly person. You will also receive a pleasant news.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your work will get done easily and you will also complete it in time. You will be ahead of your deadline. You will also get the support of your bosses. You will be very ambitious and will have a positive outlook towards life. You will be highly extolled and will have an interest in spiritual matters. You will also get busy in preparations of a family function. You will spend quality time with your friends and family members. You will take out time for romance, hobbies and entertainment. Plans for something special will be made. There are chances of obtaining money from somewhere. Your hopes and expectations will soar and your attitude towards life will be positive. You will receive a good news about a relative of yours. The atmosphere in the family will be cheerful. Your efforts will be fruitful.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It will turn out to be a great week. But you will have to do every work very carefully. You will also get credit for work done. You will come out of difficult situations most unexpectedly. Your efforts will be praised worthy. You will also be the focus of attention. Needless to say, your name and fame will also rise. You will also spend your time in amusement and entertainment. You will also connect with your inner self and offer prayers to God. Love between wife and husband will enhance. You will have mental peace. You will also try to deal with many problems that you are facing. You will also plan for outing or picnic with your family. You might be a victim of a conspiracy. Your reputation could also get a beating. Hence you need to remain alert. Otherwise, your motive may be mistaken by others. You will also have gains in business.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The objectives that you have set in your mind will be achieved. You will be much ahead of others. You will also be in a strong and secure financial condition. There will also be an inclination to do something new at every moment. There will be an inflow of money. The graph of your respect and prestige will go up and you will be successful in competitions and exams. You will also get the support of your bosses. You will have monetary gains. You will also be energetic at work. Some urgent matter will demand your attention. Despite your busy schedule, your family will be your top priority. The time is favorable. A worry that was nagging you since a long time, will come to an end. You will not compromise with your self respect at any cost. People will value your suggestions.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will make spiritual progress. You will have monetary gains. There will be an increase in your working capacity, and great satisfaction in your mind. You need to be alert in financial dealings. Do not sign any legal document without reading it. You will also do such work that will bring criticism for you. Situations will improve because of change in planetary positions. The time is right for starting new projects. Your dominance at your place of work will continue if you decide to start anything new you will do it at any cost. There will be an increase in everyone's heart. The blessings, advice and inspirations of elders will help you to make progress in your career, and financially also you will be strong. You will complete all work on time to the grace of God. Your own people will help you a lot in times of need.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will enjoy a wonderful time period. Your seniors will praise your work. Your meeting with an influential person will bring fortune for you. You will have monetary gains. You will not take any decision in haste. You will also plan to buy a house or vehicle. The misunderstandings between husband and wife or with other members of the family will come to an end. You will

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

There will be increase in your income. You will get opportunities to rise in your job/profession. There will be quality in your work. You will pay more attention to quality rather than quantity. The time is auspicious. You will also plan to get married. You will work hard to bring yourself and your family back on track. You will establish a dialogue with everyone. You will attain your objective at any cost. You will return to your work with full radiance and shine. You will get a good news. You will make preparations for festivals etc. You will progress more and the time will reap rewards. You will be mentally relaxed. Your image will improve. At the office or at work you will work with team spirit.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will earn lot of money through your efforts. It will increase your wealth and your social status will also go up. Your importance in your family will be more. You will be happy. Someone might have an eye on your earnings. You yourself might become a victim of this. So you need to be careful. You will give time to your family and deal with your complaints and listen to others' woes. Your love request will be accepted and those unmarried will receive proposals. There will be gains in business. You will do what your heart tells you, if you listen to others just think about what is best for you. Marriage of your child could get fixed and all credit will go to your efforts. You will find yourself enjoying your studies. You will become very busy with your profession.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

There are strong chances of getting money in your business. You will have expectations from some particular person but your hopes may not materialize immediately. Your detractors will try to target you without much success. There will be a chance meeting with a friend of good old days. Your influence and dominance at workplace will increase. You will work hard to get success in your work. You will also establish relationship with influential person. Travelling will help you in obtaining money. You will be busy with family and home, helping in domestic chores. You will bring in a novelty to your way of thinking. A cause of worry for long time will come to an end. The financial condition will be in your favor. Money will keep coming. Financially you will be in a very stable condition.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There are chances of money gains. There will be serious deliberation on increasing your salary. This is a good opportunity for monetary gains. Your boss and superiors will be happy with your work. You can participate in recreational activities. There are chances of some matter being revealed that you wanted to keep a secret. You can also get delayed a bit. Misunderstanding among your family member will decrease. With your good behavior and family attitude you will also be able to win over your enemies. Happiness may get disturbed in the family. You need to resolve disputes at the earliest. Your juniors and helpers will obey you at this time. You will commit a mistake for which you will have to make up. It will open the doors of progress for you. You will buy something new for the house.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will be able to complete your work with sincerity. You will also achieve fame and have direct conversation with the people who matter. You will have much more authority than before. Financially you shall be much strong. You will get new opportunities to make big time investments at home. The auspicious functions may continue. You will have a great time. Your relations with spouse will be sweet. You will also spare some time to sit with your parents/elders. You will also be known for your noble deeds. Your disputes with brothers is quite likely to come to an end. Your terms with the relatives will remain perfect. You will enter a very progressive phase. Your family will be your top priority. You may also start a partnership business to enhance your business field which will be fruitful in every way.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It is time for introspection and thinking. You will perform a great deal of skill and understanding and you will get the results that gives pleasure to you. Your children, family and relatives will be closer to you. Money inflow will be very fast. You will be so strong and confident that every possible task will be done with ease. You will get the benefit in your business. You will also go for renovation of your house. The new task will be planned. There will be some problems in marital life but which will get over soon. You will not allow your ego to be interrupted in the midst of domestic affairs. The ambition of the business will be fulfilled. You are likely to get a new order or contract. Money matters will be settled. The sources of income will also increase. You may attend a wedding ceremony or a party and its time to enjoy the fullest.

Bringing the fun back to chemistry

What students are taught in the name of chemistry -- like many other science subjects -- is just to memorise a lot of names of elements and compounds, their properties, vital statistics, and uses, a host of equations of reactions, strange concepts such as the Periodic Table of Elements, abstruse calculations, and a few controlled experiments in labs.

What this goes on to do is to rob chemistry of any interest and its real world aspect and applications -- say, to understand why cutting onions makes us cry, why chillies can leave us gasping, or even, why did the Japanese use missiles made of cadmium against Godzilla? And where can we find these since the existing textbooks are too technical even for students?

But, for this, we must first understand what chemistry is, or rather, what it entails -- in our lives.

Stripped of its scientific connotations, chemistry for lay people means an abiding mutual attraction, or attachment, as we say so and so enjoys a "special chemistry", or interaction as in "they lack chemistry". Thus, in a way, the subject can be seen as a microcosm of our personal, social, and professional lives.

In its academic manifestation, it is the study of properties and behaviour of matter, but then so is physics.

The study of chemistry enables us to understand a bit about how everyday things work, say why gold gleams and can stay untarnished, or why laundry detergent works better in hot water, or why sending an electric spark through a gas can create magic, or why not all pain relievers work equally well on a headache, and so on.

Like for many other varied subjects, there are a number of books that can reveal the deep mysteries of the chemical world, spanning organic, inorganic, and physical, to give the most basic classification.

Of them, it is the middle one, dealing with the 118 elements -- at the most basic form as part of compounds -- that make us and our universe that receive the most emphasis -- due to the exotic substances that populate it.

We are all familiar with carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, sodium, iron, silicon, gold, and silver, and so on, but what about bismuth, cobalt, krypton, yttrium, thorium, astatine, and many others.

For a most elementary (pun intended) look at the elements, there is Paul Parsons and Gail Dixon's *The Periodic Table: A Visual Guide to the Elements* (2013), which combines a terse, yet insightful explanation, with some stunning photos of the elements in their primordial state.

Basically, it tells us how to interpret Dmitri Mendeleev's Periodic Table, which groups the elements

into an arrangement that showcases their behaviour, as we gain insights into their activities, ranging from the little-known uses of gold in mainstream medicine to the development of the hydrogen bomb.

On the same, but a more limited pattern is Norwegian scientist Anja Roynne's *The Elements We Live By: And Other Surprising Superpowers of the Periodic Table: How Iron Helps Us Breathe, Potassium Lets Us See, and Other Surprising Superpowers of the Periodic Table* (2020), whose title is self-explanatory but has some riveting insights into the few elements it deals with.

For a more detailed look, there is the indefatigable Sam Kean's *The Disappearing Spoon... and Other True Tales from the Periodic Table* (2011), which shows how the elements inspired passion, adventure, betrayal, and obsession as it follows

every single element's role in human history, finance, mythology, battles, the arts, medicine and the lives of the (mostly) mad scientists who discovered them.

It is here you will find answers to Godzilla's fate, as well as other many unrealised historical conundrums such as Mahatma Gandhi's relationship to iodine.

And then in *Caesar's Last Breath: The Epic Story of The Air Around Us* (2018), he takes us on a different journey on the same route as

he shows some of us that may still be inhaling the same molecules as that "most noble Roman" did, or for that matter, some bearing the "traces of Cleopatra's perfumes, German mustard gas, particles exhaled by dinosaurs or emitted by atomic bombs, even remnants of stardust from the universe's creation".

Italian chemist and Nazi concentration camp survivor Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* (1975), which is a collection of 21 autobiographical short stories connected to various elements, in some way or the other, is an acknowledged classic, but an equally and engaging personal look is afforded by British neurologist, science historian, and writer Oliver Sacks' *Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood* (2001), in which he combines autobiographical elements with the history and science of chemistry.

As a review said: "If you did not think that gallium and iridium could move you, this superb book will change your mind", and reading it will lead you to the same conclusion. Carbon, which we see and use in the forms of coal, graphite, and diamond, but is also an essential ingredient of the human body, in association with some more fellow elements such as oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen, as well as most articles we need to survive and thrive on, from sugar to plastic, also gets its due. (IANS)



"Nothing can have value without being an object of utility."

—Karl Marx

The Shillong Times

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Communal amity first

POLITICAL parties are protective of their folks and spread a ring of security around the errant among them even when grave acts of crime are committed. Scruples are thrown to the winds. Parties take the people for granted, project a larger than life picture of their 'good deeds' and win votes and elections. As public memory is short, people forget the past and pay attention to only what is trumpeted before them. It might come as a whiff of fresh air, however, that the BJP has expelled two of its prominent faces on TV and social media, Nupur Sharma and Naveen Kumar, from the primary membership of the party over the way they "vitiated communal harmony" and acted against the BJP's "core beliefs."

At the same time, scores of Muslims have been arrested over the violence in Kanpur in protest against the anti-Muslim comments by Sharma and others. An expulsion of the two will, by itself, not do. They must be brought before law. That can send out the right lessons to the wider society. Having won the opportunity to hold power, the BJP would earn more support if it acts more responsibly. The party, with its present eminence, should show the way to others. Though the communal scenario had worsened after the arrival of the BJP as a strong force, its rule at the Centre and in the states are generally on secular lines with exceptions like the way the CAA-NPR provisions were conceived. The nation paid a price for that too as this caused fresh ulcers on the body politic. The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh run by a hawk in the form of Yogi Adityanath too charted a safe course free from any aggressive pursuits.

Notable, in this context, is also the recent statement by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in relation to a tendency among some Sangh Parivar outfits to "go and search for an idol under every mosque and create a new communal problem." This, he ruled, was unacceptable. The RSS showed the maturity to cry a halt to this obsession. In fact, the pro-Hindu outfit is evolving into a more socially responsible entity and has stated it treats all Indians in the wider framework of Hindus. The right for all communities to co-exist in this country is a fundamental right guaranteed under the Constitution. The Indian psyche is dominantly tuned to such a social and political ethos. It will be in the fitness of things that the RSS and its feeder organisations keep this in mind, enabling the nation to rise as one and march forward.

British Government's Military Operation against Jaintia Rebels

By H H Mohrmen

This is another write-up about the famous Jaintia rebellion in a run-up to the 160 death Anniversary of U Kiang Nangbah.

When the efforts to get the Jaintia rebels to surrender failed, the only option remaining for the British was to prepare for a battle. Captain F.K Gilbert, Assistant Adjutant-General of the Army Presidency Division, in his letter to Colonel Dunsford CB Commanding Jaintia District letter No. 452 dated, dated December 1, 1862 forwarded notes on the operation plan to be pursued by the officer and the troops on the ground in the fight against the Rebels.

The first and the most important point emphasized was to secure the base of operation. The suggestion was that two companies of Kamroop Regiment were to be posted at Sylhet and another under a European officer and the same strength at Cachar also under European officer. Notes were also sent to all the Deputy Commissioner requesting them to keep a sharp eye on the movement of the rebels who may come to the village or the markets in the plains for supply or to plunder. They are requested to provide immediate information to officers in the military command whose duty is to proceed immediately with a force to surprise and arrest the rebels.

It was also instructed that the remainder of the Kamroop Regiment was to be detached to the hills and employed as the commanding officer directed. It was also instructed that the head quarters of the Kamroop Regiment should be at Sylhet.

The order was that a Regiment of not less than 180 Rank and file were to be presented at the Headquarters in Cherrapunjee with a captain and two Subalterns available to take command of patrols in force and moveable column. The remainder of the Regiment should be stationed at Nongkhlaw, Mawphlang, Iewduh, Shillong, Puriang, Nongkrem and Sohmynting. The strength of each company should be determined by the Officer in Command. At Iewduh and Sohmynting detachments of thirty rank and files were felt necessary. It would be of advantage to relieve them on a weekly basis. The relieving party will have to travel along the routes that are reported and suspected to be haunted by the rebels.

The party at Sohmynting should keep up communication with the headquarters of the detachment in the direction of Nongtalang. Whenever parties of rebels

are heard of in this quarter, every detachment should be put in motion and every exertion made to intercept and seize them.

The base was thus being defended so that there will remain only the Jaintia hills free for rebels to move in, and the force to be used against them are the 28th Native Infantry, the 21st Native Infantry and the 44th Native Infantry. Two companies Kamrup regiment and 1st Police Battalion would also be employed in the battle.

It also stated that it is impossible for an officer who is located at a distance and without reliable intelligence to direct with advantage the details of movements of the parties. The Brigadier-General therefore suggested that whatever measures needed to be done with regards to the operations, are to be consid-

The Left Wing is to have its headquarters at Nongtalang with detachment at Amkoi, Padu, and other places where circumstances at the moment may render necessary. The two remaining companies of Kamroop Regiment may be posted wherever the Officer Commanding may think desirable.

ered as general suggestions for consideration of the officer in immediate command of the troops.

The letter also sought to know the correct information about the location of the place where the families of the rebels and their stores were concealed. It said that the lack of detailed information about the area made it impossible for the Brigadier to propose a proper plan of attack against the rebels.

The Brigadier recommended Jowai to be the ordinary headquarter of the troops while they were engaged in an active operation against the rebels. This would enable the force to make a periodical relieve of the outpost and will also enable the commanding officers in the District to move out any moment with sufficient force any part of the district.

It was also necessary to send escorts to the different outpost in charge of supplies and rations which could not be done without a large force being assembled at Jowai. 250 men a coolie corps should be located at Jowai and placed entirely at the disposal of the officer commanding.

Detachments were to be sent from these Regiments

to Amwai, Nongbah, Mynso, Ialong, Laduber, Shangphung, Nartiang and Jaintiapur. The second locality that would benefit from the posting of a regiment would be to the East and South of the District, the Headquarter to be at Kya Khullah (British spelling)/khatkasla, with detachment at Raliang and Khonchnong, parties in force to weekly patrol to Nongkhlieh. The headquarters of the Left Wing should be at Rngad, with detachment at Bataw, Die-fshalalu and other places which the commanding officer considered necessary.

The Third Regiment should be divided into Wings: The Headquarter and Right Wing to be at Shilliang Myn-tang and to send detachments to Nonggingi, Takhniang, Barato, Lapangap and Hurwan/ Kyrgan.

The Left Wing is to have

the Khasi, who wish to assist in the suppression of the rebellion, should be employed. They are to be enlisted in the police and the Brigadier-General recommends that parties of police be sent with all the military detachment for the purpose of obtaining intelligence regarding the haunts and strength of the rebels.

If after the capture of the stockade, the rebels run and conceal themselves there would be a general simultaneous movement of all corps and detachment throughout the district. The Brigadier General would not allow any terms to be offered to them, and all who were caught with arms and in opposition should be at once executed. If men come in, and surrender unconditionally, they will be pardoned, unless the crime of murder in cold blood is proved against them, and except for such acts or marked instances of recusancy, men should be executed for political crimes by sentence of a judicial enquiry.

It also emphasized that every endeavour should be made to seize the stores and cattle of the rebels and to capture women and children. Later they decided that it would be advisable to remove them to Cherrapunjee. They should be well treated but kept under restraint until the rebellion ends.

It was left to the local officer to decide with regards to the disposal of the stores and cattle confiscated. The Brigadier General (BG) also said that he did not consider it advisable except in cases of necessity to destroy the grain or appropriate the cattle. The loss of both in the country may lead to famine and distress. The BG was of the opinion that the discomfort and distress caused by constant movements of the troops through the country and the capture of their families would induce the rebels to come in and offer their submission.

A. Eden officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to BG Sergeant G.D. Showers, C.B. commanding Presidency Division (No. 5159, dated the 9th December 1862) informed that Lt G approved all the instructions to BG St G.D Showers C.B. except with regard to the item related to the execution of the captured rebels. The LG requested Shower to instruct the officer commanding that no one though caught with arms and in opposition to the government can be executed until he has been brought before a commissioner appointed under Act XI. Of 1857, tried, and found guilty of capital offence.

God Save the Queen: Continuity amidst change

By Dr. Nsungbemo Ezung

On June 2, 2022, the Kingdom of Great Britain marked the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne of the Kingdom, as their Queen has become the longest-reigning monarch in the history of more than 1000 years old the United Kingdom. The longevity of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II is no doubt a triumph of the right side of history as the Queen and her reign epitomized the great traditional western values which represent the best of humanity – not just the British culture but the timeless values that define humanity. While the political power and influence of the British monarch in the politics of the British nation and the nations of the world diminish to a considerable extent in modern times, what makes Queen Elizabeth II an inspiring and adorable monarch/personality is that amidst moral bankruptcy and decline that becomes an order of the day all over the world, she continues to exhibit high moral character in public life and represent the moral standard which was the foundation of the great western civilization.

For seventy years, Queen Elizabeth II has been on the right side of history. She has been left as the few remaining western leaders as the defenders and promoters of western traditional values including democracy as the best form of government, right to life, freedom of religion and traditional definition of marriage and family value; all these values which makes the western civilization as the greatest civilization ever known to humankind. Nevertheless, the defence of this great western value comes at the time when powerful liberal forces had already emerged, from within and outside the west, to challenge and redefine those values, an attempt that amounts to undoing the very essence of humanity.

During her last seventy years of reign, Queen Elizabeth II rarely voices her opinions on different social and political issues that confront her Kingdom and the world. The world may not know her views and opinions on different issues, but the world knows her personality. The world knows her as a monarch who is a woman of faith deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition that believes and promotes honesty, integrity and decency in public life. Her 2000 Christmas Message was an affirmation of her commitment to the Christian faith, and its role and influence on her life as a British monarch: "To many of us, our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life". At a time when many leaders and people in the world choose to follow their own feelings and opinions which only leads to chaos and conflicts among humanity, the Queen's 2000 Christmas Message reminds us of the need for faith in a Power that is above our feelings and opinions, and the need to be accountable to that Power (God).

2022 should not only be a year for celebrating the 70 years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II as a British monarch. The world should also not forget the 74 years of her wonderful marriage life with her spouse, Prince Philip, until his sad demise in 2021. The Queen had led by example in promoting the traditional institution of marriage and family value with 74 years of faithful marriage with one man – meaning a lifetime commitment to one man, keeping her marriage vows that she took, not just seriously but obediently, at

the age of 21 in 1947 in front of God, the Church and the world which is a rare of its kind in present-day's world standard. By keeping her marriage vows along with her spouse – till death do us apart, the Queen had fulfilled the most important obligation as the Supreme Head of the Church of England.

In fact, it was the question of marriage/divorce, that had brought the then Princess Elizabeth to the throne in 1952 who was otherwise nowhere near to the line of succession prior to her accession. It was in 1936 that the proposal of the then reigning monarch King Edward VIII to marry an American woman who was then twice divorced became unacceptable to the Church of England and the Church refused to give sanction to their marriage. The then King had decided to abdicate the throne in favour of his younger brother, George VI, to pursue his marriage plan. And upon the accession of George VI to the throne in December 1936, the then new King's daughter Princess Elizabeth became the next in line for the throne, and the rest is history.

When this crazy world began to challenge and defy the traditional institution of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, the Queen, by remaining faithful to her spouse for 74 years, only to let death separate them, had conveyed a powerful message to the world that other than a union between one man and one woman no other form of unions can be termed as marriage; and that the so-called demands of progressive world/society cannot alter this great institution of marriage as ordained by God. She defended marriage not through speaking or by lecturing but by demonstrating in her own life.

The sad side of the story though is that the next monarch, going by the present succession plan, will be someone who had broken his marriage vows. In the post-Queen Elizabeth II world, the Supreme Head of the Church of England will be someone who had failed in his marriage which will be a nightmarish scenario; meaning the beginning of the dilution of the great values of faith and humanity that the Queen had defended and promoted during her reign. It is inspiring to note here that as the next monarch-to-be had broken his marriage vows and choose to get married for the second time through civil ceremony in 2005, the Queen choose not to attend the marriage programme and never pressured the clergies belonging to the Church of England, using her power, to perform the second marriage of her son from the Church. In other words, even when the prestige and reputation of her children were at stake, she chose principles over compromise.

One can only hope and pray that the British royal house will produce many monarchs like Queen Elizabeth II even in the future who will take the lead in promoting those timeless values of humanity and inspire the world to embrace those values toward making the world a better place to live in. Considering the inspiring life that the Queen lived, and the values and traditions that she has been defending, upholding and promoting not only in her Kingdom but the world around, it is right and proper for the United Kingdom, British Commonwealth, conservatives and well-wishers from around the world to sing for her – God Save the Queen!

Letters to the Editor

Priest Vs Priest

Editor,
At the outset let me thank The Shillong Times for carrying out three articles in recent days on a very sensitive subject which many in Meghalaya feel strongly about. It is about the stand of the Church in Meghalaya in relation to corruption that is endorsed by the political establishment. Three prominent members of society wrote on the subject because of the spate of cases involving corruption and misuse of authority by political leaders of this MDA Government. The first article "Church finally steps out of the purdah" was by Toki Blah (ST May 31, 22), was by Toki Blah, President of ICARE, a civil society organization. The writer had come down heavily on the established church for its silence on state-sponsored corruption and deterioration of morality and ethics within the political establishment in Meghalaya. The second and third articles, "On Corruption: Charity Begins at Home and Ecclesis et civitatis (ST June 2, 2022) both by two priests, Albert Thyriang of the Catholic Church and the other by Rev Lyndan Syiem of the Presbyterian Church came out on the same day

and on the same subject and are interesting for throwing light on the contrasting and divergent stands taken up by ordained Christian priests on the issue of corruption in Government.

Fr Albert Thyriang had taken the bull by the horns and strongly condemned the silence and apathy of the Church on corruption. He made a pertinent point by questioning, "What is the point in installing a clean government if priests can't speak on corruption?" What is the point, indeed? It just shows the dismay and disappointment certain faith leaders have reached because of Church tolerance on corruption in political circles. Such faith leaders are willing to take a stand on the issue because of its detrimental impact on the overall well-being of society. On the other hand is the article by Rev Lyndan Syiem of the Presbyterian Church had come out with a lengthy, highly theological argument as to why priests of the Presbyterian Church cannot interfere in matters of the State. This priest had neatly and conveniently avoided and side stepped the critical social need for his church to speak out against corruption in politics and in high places of administration. The article is a non-starter, akin to

sophistry. It's neither here nor there. It's the church playing Pontius Pilate!

In the 16th Century, Martin Luther, a German Catholic priest revolted against the Catholic Church and started the Protestant Reformation. He challenged the papacy which is the apex body of the Catholic Church, at that time and even today, for trying to generate money through the sale of Indulgences. He basically saw this as a form of a corrupt practice imposed by a powerful church clergy on an ignorant and poverty ridden laity. The Presbyterian Church is a by-product of this challenge that led to the Reformation.

Today in 2022 in Meghalaya we find a Protestant Priest defending the indefensible; supporting the head in the sand attitude of his Church against corruption. On the other, we find a priest of the conservative Catholic Church, voicing his indignant protest at the indifference and apathy of his Church against corruption. Two diametrically opposed stands by ordained priests on an issue that caused a division in Christianity 500 years ago. Church Reformation has now come a full circle. A very interesting historical and social development in a state where the majority are

Christians.

Last word of advice for mule-headed Religious leaders, "The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men." I didn't say this. Plato, the Greek philosopher did more than 2500 years ago. It still holds true today!

Yours etc.,
Ambrose Reggie Lyndgoh,
Via email

Snoring during exams

Editor,
When the captain sleeps, defeat wanders not far! This proverb holds so much truth for all involved in the current Even Semester End Semester Examination conducted by the Examination Department of the North – Eastern Hill University (NEHU). The information I am divulging, through your esteemed daily, can be easily verified by willing and dignified individuals currently employed as professors in any of the seventy four colleges affiliated to NEHU, and much could also be learned from retired professors who had seen better days.

I recollect how one senior professor recounted to me his discussion with (L) Prof. B.

Pakem concerning the system of examination and evaluation carried out by NEHU in the yesteryears, and what was most impressive about the narration was that Prof. Pakem refused to compromise with procedures, tough and stringent though they were, so as to ensure that the degrees conferred by NEHU would be of the highest possible standard. Sadly, this is no longer the case today!

With NEHU conducting the aforementioned examinations in the offline mode, just as was the case in the previous years, I was shocked and dismayed to learn that the evaluation of scripts would be done externally, but that in the most remote sense of the term; in fact in a manner most opposite to the term. This would surely give room to the baser elements of human nature to creep in and get the best out of otherwise honourable professors who would have to take up the task of evaluators and scrutinisers, while being given a free hand to determine the marks of their own students, which most likely will be INFLATED. The wild inflation of marks is not a new thing; it has already been evident from the initial years of the Semester System in the case of Internal Assessment; and

now this discrepancy will spill over to the External Assessment, and if we consider the External Assessment carried out in the online mode, it probably already has.

Gone are the days of the coding system; gone are the days of confidentiality; gone are the days of academic rigour and just rewards; gone are the days of weighty mark sheets and certificates; gone are the days of merit lists and medals of gold. The University has become a sleeping giant, ever shedding its responsibilities to the colleges under its charge, even to the point of compromising intellectual and academic integrity and student well-being. Therefore, all involved, students and teachers alike, should try to wake up their captain before time runs out and the North – Eastern Hill University never realises its potential for excellence!

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

"Sustainable development requires human ingenuity. People are the most important resource."

— Dan Shechtman

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.295 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 2022

Of puerile political barbs

EACH time the State President of the National Peoples' Party opens his mouth it is only to rebuke political opponents. He has hardly ever engaged on policy issues or taken part in discussions related to governance where he would rise to a higher plane as the leader of a national political party. There are certain expectations from people who assume leadership positions. They abstain from personal remarks and adopt decency as a mark of respect to political colleagues. There is no reason to get personal, for, politics makes strange bedfellows. But there appears to be in Meghalaya a certain tendency among the political class to flex muscles perhaps to impress the voters who have a fetish for the strongman image.

People with a fetish for the strongman image are demagogues born of a churn in societies scarred by political establishments built on inherited title deeds. A Rajya Sabha MP representing the entire State of Meghalaya and an academic at that ought to be spending time studying the deplorable statistics in the state's human development. It should have been the endeavour of the MP to travel the length and breadth of the State to see for himself what hinders positive development and advise the Government and his Party accordingly. Did the MP travel to Garo Hills in recent times and witness the plight of the banana farmers who have been brought to their knees by Assam merchants who demand the product at throwaway prices? The frustrated farmers preferred to throw away mountains of bananas than be subjected to the tantrums of the buyers from Assam. Is the Rajya Sabha MP even remotely affected by the plight of farmers? Does he have a plan of action on how to reduce their plight as one who represents Meghalaya's interests in Delhi? And is his party the NPP which leads the Government in the State not responsible for the farmer's distress?

Political one upmanship beyond a point is jarring. The elections are seven months away and anything can happen between then and now. In Meghalaya political fortunes hang by a thread. It is infantile to predict the results at this stage especially after the series of scams attributed to the MDA Government. Those in the Opposition have the legitimate right to critique the Government for its lapses. That cannot be taken amiss. It is an imperative of democracy. Such criticism of the government of the day should not be reduced to a trading of charges. Whether or not politician A becomes the next chief minister is for the electorate to decide. Where are the statesmen in Meghalaya?

Why undermine the importance of Public Health?

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

'Health is wealth' is a phrase that is not strange to any person in any society. What is technically confusing is how to practically assimilate the living lifestyle for good health. For instance, if a person is sick and indisposed, the entire scope of acquiring good education is meaningless unless one first takes care of the health condition.

Individual health is good for an individual but that should also translate into the healthiness of the community or society. Thus, here lies the importance of medical science which helps to differentiate between micro and macro health and how to accord equal priority to both. Covid-19 has taught us many lessons and we have seen the kind of mentality and behaviour in the community when it comes to the pandemic and the contagion therein. Lest we forget, during the peak of the pandemic, the most estranged sections in the society that people were reluctant to come in contact with were medical professionals and front-line health workers. It is a sorry state of affairs that should not have happened but it is also a fact that medical science cannot address this problem. Therefore, there should be a third party that can bring convergence between individual health and community health and the acceptance thereof. I sincerely hope that more and more students would choose Public Health as a career because our state needs such professionals to address the complicated health issues especially in rural areas and among the lowest stratum of the society who are victim of all kinds of ailments and cannot afford the sophisticated treatment.

In a developing country such as ours where the concentration of population and lifestyle of the public in general is highly vulnerable to contagious diseases, we cannot rule out the need to promote advanced public health mechanisms. To achieve that, thorough knowledge through research and analysis should be carried out to understand the lifestyles and behaviour of common people in the region or locality. In my opinion a Public Health Policy should have been the core agenda of the Government and Public Health Institutions should have been established long time back. But to the dismay of the public at large, such a premier institution set up in collaboration with

the Government, namely the Indian Institute for Public Health (IIPH) Shillong for the benefit of the state and the society is being impeded and why it is so or is it because of the conflict of interest and egotism. Finally who suffers if not the future generation whose aspirations to have a role in the development of the society is being shattered.

If we look at history we read of how the founders of medical science who were merely traditional physicians struggled immensely on how to treat infections that affected people and society.

here in our own state what happened 30 or 40 years ago or even before, were there any such restrictions and high cut-off percentages to obtain a medical or engineering seat through government quota? None and thank God for that! Because if such restrictions were in place in those days, I am sure that most of the professionals from the fraternity would not be in their jobs and perhaps there will be a huge shortage of medical practitioners today.

Even in the case of nursing which is a highly demanding profession today the required

by 50 percent per lakh live births by 2035 (sources WHO 2016). Taking into consideration the above requirement of health professionals here in the state of Meghalaya with a population of 3.28 million as per 2021 statistics available from aadhar UIDAI, the number of health professionals would roughly be around 3 to 4 lakhs. The question is, from where can we bridge this huge gap unless more and more students venture into medical studies and allied courses.

We should be grateful to then State Government for bringing institutes like IIPH Shillong to the State where the long cherished hopes of a medical college is still a distant dream. But on the contrary, that young Institute too seems to have encountered the tip of an iceberg instead of garnering support and encouragement from every quarters of the society. The kind of humiliation and degradation perpetrated on the IIPH students and faculty should not have happened. Or has there been any administrative failure from the part of the present Government to handle such conflicts. Or should we say a 'conflict of interest'?

Our memories are not yet blurred that there are a handful of medical professionals in the State who also became successful politicians and we know who they are. How could they achieve such support and trust if not because of their generous and friendly behaviour during their period of service and their interaction with the patients. But such familiarity and decency are absent today. Oh what a situation we are in! I think it's high time that people at large should learn how to prevent and treat their own petty ailments as many citizens do in developed countries rather than depending on chemical laden allopathic medicines that will ultimately entail government expenditure amounting to crores of rupees in purchasing those drugs from the market. Of course, that reality is still a far away dream in a third world country like ours.

The mission of the central government to bring health services to the doorstep of the family will not materialise if there is a huge shortage of health workers and professionals which includes all category of health workers and social workers but more particularly public health workers.



Their trial and error methods perhaps have given birth to the growth of medical science. Sometimes I wonder who were the faculty of the first medical graduates and what qualifications did they possess? Anyway, we are thankful and indebted to them for the growth that has taken place till date. The growth of medical sciences from a

qualification today is Class 12th passed or graduate level. Whereas, in those days it was only a training course provided by the premier Welsh Mission Hospital or the Robert's Hospital Jaiauw with minimum qualification of 10th standard for trainees both from rural and urban areas. The goal in those days was driven by the mission

"In a developing country such as ours where the concentration of population and lifestyle of the public in general is highly vulnerable to contagious diseases, we cannot rule out the need to promote advanced public health mechanisms."

voluntary health service in the 18th century to a commercially organized institution of the later centuries is phenomenal. So much so that today only excellent students and toppers of various entrance tests can get admission into such medical institutes besides spending huge amount of money. But how pathetic we are to have easily forgotten our recent past and history. Considering the fact that

to cater to public health in general and to assist medical practitioners whose mission was to heal patients at any cost.

As per the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimation, there is a requirement of health workforce in the ratio 5.9 skilled health professionals per 1000 population for Ending Preventable Maternal Deaths initiative, thus reducing global maternal deaths

Tourism Infrastructure in shambles

By Barnes Mawrie, SDB

We speak of Meghalaya as being rich in tourism prospects, which is indeed very true knowing the exquisite natural beauty that our State possesses. Our leaders as well as many people continue to repeat ad nauseam that tourism can be the primary source of the state's GDP. However, the reality is that we are far from achieving that desired goal. There is an attractive and meaningful vision statement which says "building dreams and shaping lives." Looking at our state, we can boldly affirm that we are only building dreams upon dreams which never come to a realization. Even the dream of having a state-of-the-art Assembly House, has literally collapsed in recent days. It is sad to say that this negative soul searching of the state of our State, should happen in this Golden Jubilee

One particular tourist from South India said these words to me, "You are blessed by God with exquisite natural beauty, but you are cursed with poor accessibility." How true this statement is when we really know the condition of our road connectivity. In the words of the Gospel, it is, "throwing pearls to the swines." It is sad to say that we are squandering away the riches we are given by God.

The village NGOs who look after these tourist spots are doing their best to improve the places. Kudos to all of them! What is lacking however is the government's political will to prove their worth. These approach roads to such world renowned tourist destinations should be of excellent quality. This is the case when we go to similar locations either in other states of India or



year of our statehood. But we have to call a spade a spade and face the reality as it is, rather than beat about the bush and find comfort in a make-believe idea of success. Our governments, past and present, have failed the people of the state in many ways. Not only are we tormented with frequent unstable governments, but we are also being let down in areas of development. In these fifty years, we have experienced only regress and not progress.

Yesterday, I had accompanied a group of participants of the national conference held in Mawlai, for a trip to Sohra and Mawplang. They are all persons coming from different states of India. I was literally ashamed to witness the condition of the roads to different tourist locations. On the way to the world famous Mawplang Sacred Grove, we had a rough journey right from Mawngap. The

abroad. What the public has realized is that giving the work to the PWD is not going to improve the situation. We all know that PWD roads are haphazardly done and are of poor quality and often the work done is not proportionate to the money invested due to corrupt practices. PWD roads are made only for one season and thus the government squanders a lot of public money in repairing them year after year. We begin to wonder, is the government trying to create employment by making miserable roads that need constant repairs? If so then that is not a good idea for it implies duping the public and wasting the tax payers' money.

The approach roads to these iconic tourist locations should be given to companies who could provide us with quality roads which would last at least a decade without the need for repairs in between. Simple logic

The approach roads to these iconic tourist locations should be given to companies who could provide us with quality roads which would last at least a decade without the need for repairs in between. Simple logic tells us that it is more economic to make good roads once and for all than to spend on repairs year after year. So far our government has been penny wise and pound foolish.

stretch of road is already in a half dilapidated condition. There is no sign of repair work at all. While passing through Dairhithlen to reach the main road to Sohra, we had a back-breaking journey. That stretch of road which is hardly 3 or 4 kilometers took us more than 30 minutes. There is neither a black-topped road nor any semblance of it anymore. It is a road full of ditches and stones. I asked myself, is this the approach road to this popular tourist spot?

Again on our way to Nohkalikai Falls, we were encountered a horrible road condition. The road is both narrow and poorly constructed. There are so many potholes that make the journey so uncomfortable. The narrow road makes driving of buses extremely difficult and dangerous. I again asked myself, is this the road to the world famous Nohkalikai Falls? How hypocritical the government is when it shamelessly speaks of boosting tourism enterprise.

tells us that it is more economic to make good roads once and for all than to spend on repairs year after year. So far our government has been penny wise and pound foolish.

Perhaps to mark the golden jubilee of our statehood, the government could undertake a massive quality-road project in areas where important tourist destinations are located. Let us not forget that good public infrastructure like good roads, is the secret to any economic development. Good road systems are an incentive to tourists from near and far. As of today, no tourist would venture a second time to many of our tourist spots on account of bumpy roads. I for myself would not encourage tourists from outside to go to these places because it would only project a poor image of our State. I hope that the Government would take a positive step along this line in order to leave a memorable monument of this golden jubilee.

Letters to the Editor

Collective Responsibility

Editor,
On May 30, 2022, the most heinous of crimes occurred when two innocent young children followed their father whom they trusted, to their death. The man turned monster, in a most horrific way, took their lives. We strongly condemn this unspeakable and horrifying act and we must seek speedy delivery of justice with the maximum punishment this man deserves.

This incident is a chilling reminder of how vulnerable our children are, from predators who abuse, violate and threaten them. Often the children are just an act away from being silenced for good.

Let us be alert and vigilant. Let us act and intervene. Let us report and seek help. Let us listen and encourage our children to speak up without fear. Let us not negotiate and compromise with wrongdoing and wrongdoers. Let us protect and provide the children a safe and happy childhood as much as we can. Let us nurture and encourage them to dream to be creative, to express themselves freely. As responsible citizens and caretakers of the young, we are the fences who can keep them protected.

"A Society is judged by the way it treats its Chil-

dren"
Yours etc.,
Iamon M Syiem,
Chairperson, Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Rejoinder to Facebook Post

Editor,
The R & R Colony Welfare Society and residents of R & R Colony take strong exception to the Facebook post of Patricia Mukhim on Jun 3, 2022 regarding wrong parking of vehicles as no clarification or information was sought from the R & R Colony Welfare Society before publishing such defamatory message on social media platform defaming the locality as a whole. The Welfare Society would like to clarify following points

Regarding the traffic mismanagement in R & R Colony, Patricia Mukhim has defamed the locality by using highly objectionable words like "notorious locality" and "where the rule of law does not prevail" without verifying facts. Regarding the traffic scenario at R & R Colony, mostly the vehicles which are parked at the Main Road 1 and Main Road 2 belong to residents of other localities who come for shopping at Rynjah Bazar which has been made into a "No Parking Zone" and hence finding no other alternative people park their

vehicles on the Main Road 1 and 2.

The menace of parking on both sides of the road has been brought to the notice of Rynjah Traffic Branch and Shillong Traffic Police on a number of occasions by R & R Colony Welfare Society. The R & R colony locality has been used as a Local Taxi Parking area for neighbouring localities which causes inconvenience to the residents of the Colony and reduces the parking space for other vehicles. This also has been to the notice of Rynjah Traffic Branch and Shillong Traffic Police on a number of occasions by R & R Colony Welfare Society.

Yours etc.,
A B Sen
President
R & R Colony Welfare Society, Shillong-6

Cherry Blossom planting

Editor,
My attention is drawn to the event of mass planting of Cherry Blossom trees in Shillong on Environment Week celebrations. In the first place I wonder who was the initiator of the idea of associating Cherry Blossoms with Meghalaya. It is an alien species of Prunus family with many cultivars. It is usually associated with Japan and Japanese culture

where it flowers at the onset of spring. Some European countries have their own varieties of Cherry Blossom plants. Some plants were gifted to USA by Japan long back. Cultivars have been specially developed to yield large flowers. In Meghalaya I have seen sporadic trees have been planted in the past just as other garden trees. However large-scale planting of this tree is fraught with inherent risks of introducing alien species. This tree flowers only for a week or so in a year. It sheds all its leaves once a year, spreading leaf litter all around. For the rest of the year it is less than a good looking tree. I haven't seen it bearing fruits attracting birds. It harbours insects of Lepidoptera species the larvae of which hang from the branches in multitude on gossamer like threads making it extremely difficult to go near the tree or even pass by it.

In addition, any alien species is a potential threat to local plant species. Planting of Cherry Blossoms is exactly what should not have been done in the name of Environment Week. I had spoken to my ex-colleagues about the rationale of promoting such a species. The impression I got was that it was done at the behest of some non-government agency by some higher ups and they were not even consulted. It would be more prudent for the Meghalaya Government

to rely on their forest officers than external agencies who do not have any accountability. As for the Japanese way of life it would be better to emulate their work culture and ethics than try to mimic their lifestyle.

Yours etc.,
V K Nautiyal
Ex PCCF & Hoff
Via email

MATI civil services coaching

Editor,
Since the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute is again accepting applications for free Civil Services coaching, I would like to highlight the fact that MATI Training for Civil Services exam needs reformation. Through personal experience I would like to give some advice:

First, please admit serious aspirants (those who have at least cleared their Prelims before) to teach. We need MENTORS not COLLEGE TEACHERS; the aim is to clear the exams not to become a PhD in any subject. In other words, make it more "Civil Service Exam" centric, not another redundant college session. This is not to undermine the teacher's capability, but let's be honest, they don't have an iota of knowledge about the demands of the Civil

Services Exam especially with the latest trend.

Second, make the admission process more systematic with prudent screening (e.g. Residential Coaching of Jamia Millia Islamia) to ward off the non-serious aspirants.

Third, the Civil Services exam is more about how the individual approaches the exams and not the number of hours in a coaching class. Hence, the maximum duration of classes should not exceed 3 hours/day or maximum 4 hours, making the learning process fun, viable and lucrative rather than making the aspirants lethargic.

Again, I would like to stress that these are my PERSONAL views, advice, opinions, criticisms, whatever you may call it, speaking from experience. However, if there have been changes in MATI Coaching after 2018 then these points are invalid. If not then please take this matter seriously and do not make MATI Civil Services Coaching Programme another leeway of siphoning public money.

Yours etc.,
Kevin M Shangpiang,
Via email

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

"Think twice before you speak, because your words and influence will plant the seed of either success or failure in the mind of another."

— Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Threats from the Gulf

ADMITTEDLY, the communally sensitive remarks made in reference to Prophet Muhammad – in relation to the Gyanvapi Masjid issue – by BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma as also some others were objectionable and unwarranted and these have provoked Muslims worldwide. Yet, the threats and protests that emanated from some Islamic countries, mainly from the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, were also unjustified and unacceptable. Kuwait, Qatar and Iran have summoned the Indian diplomats to put on record these nations' protests. There were those who called for a snapping of trade relations with India.

Unlike the Gulf or the other Islamic countries, India is a free society. Freedom of expression is one of the main guarantees that the Constitution has given to its citizens and its misuse is commonplace. Media discussions, especially TV debates, often go overboard as they did in the case of Nupur Sharma. The BJP took note of the embarrassment it caused to Muslims as also the Islamic countries and removed the errant member not only from the positions she held but also from the party. Nupur Sharma has openly apologised for what she did. The matter should have ended there. It didn't. Threats about 'action' against India are coming from responsible quarters in the Gulf, where millions of Indians have helped build the economies and infrastructures of a bunch of tiny nations the size of small Indian districts. The Gulf nations have very little military muscle and they depend on the US for their protection. Trade between India and the Gulf nations are mutually beneficial. It was often rumoured that worse and provocative statements against India or Hindu religion were being made by the mosque heads in their routine sermons there. These are not reported to the outside world because of the communication controls that these nations have.

On its part, the Modi government has stood its ground and made it clear that offensive tweets or comments do not reflect the views of the Indian government. The BJP itself issued a statement saying the party does not approve of any insult to any sect or religion. Yet, the comments from the spokespersons were in tune with the kind of communally loaded politics that the BJP has been practising. This kept vitiating the atmosphere. The CAA-NPR, not a bad idea, too got caught in the communal twists the government sought to give. The Islamic world is, put together, a strong force on earth now in terms of their population, economy and diplomatic credentials. India cannot afford to live in isolation.

The Meghalaya Literary Assembly

By Kyrsoibor Pyruh

This story is not about the literary association or a literary conference, rather it is about literary debates which occurred during the First Session of the Meghalaya Assembly after the first general elections in 1972. Fifty years ago, the Temple of Democracy in Meghalaya was occupied by men of high degree of intellect and caliber. Also, one should not forget to acknowledge the contributions of Percylyn Marak, the lone woman legislator then.

On the election of Prof R.S Lyngdoh to the Speakership, Paitem Jormanick (MLA), who presided the House as Acting Speaker noted in his speech, "we know him (Prof R.S Lyngdoh) for his profound knowledge of Constitutional History, an asset which will go well with him in the exercise of his duties as the Speaker..." Other members who spoke on the occasion minced no words to praise the caliber of the first Speaker. Mr Hoover Hynjiewta emphasized that they (MLAs) had collectively and jointly reposed the responsibility on the able shoulders of Prof R.S Lyngdoh. He further added, "Sir, you will be laying the foundation of a true parliamentary democracy in these Hills... and you will be the first Speaker of the Assembly of the full State of Meghalaya to keep and draw a firm dividing line between allegiance to a certain party and allegiance to your solemn office. Sir, I believe that you will be the epitome of decorum and decency on the floor of this House as well as outside." Haven't the past Legislators established the high principles when the State was formed? They have indeed remained committed to those high principles, until corruption and cronyism set in and de-stabilized not just politics and governance, but destroyed the ethos and ethics of society.

On both sides of the aisle the First Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was filled with knowledgeable, sharp-witted legislators and orators who represented the 60 Constituencies. From the Assembly Reports, it is evident that the debates were exemplary and should provoke academic enquiry. From day one, the first legislators not crossed swords, but spent hours to debate even on the connotations of words and sentences. The debating atmosphere was profound and vibrant as legislators threw their knowledge and wits at each other in the process of building the new found State.

No one has the right nor privilege to judge the capability and standard of debates inside the current State Assembly, but outside it the content of political discourse reeks of mediocrity. It lacks decency and civility, and is bereft of ideology and issues. The discourse is becoming inconsequential and politics is nothing more than a prattling exercise. However, there is a silver lining in the midst of a haze and soon will emerge fresh, committed and gifted personalities who will throw their hats in the electoral challenge in 2023 sans the backing of established political parties (both national and regional). Of course, many so called "educated faces" will be joining the fray and are crying for "change", and only God knows what change they are talking about under the patronage of political party/parties which have no ideology and principles and whose leaders have become redundant and obsolete. Therefore, let us commit and throw our weight on groups and personalities that have clarity of thought, ideas and issues and whose commitment to socio-economic justice is evident from their consistent struggle and engagement with myriad socio-political and rights-based movements. Be assured that such personalities will relive the prudent past and certainly enliven the debates inside the august House while ensuring that policy and law making precede personal interests.

Let us come now to the story which I want to narrate in this article and it pertains to the debates on the privilege motion against the vernacular daily, Ka Pyru U Riewlum. After the election of Speaker, the above name Khasi newspaper ran the besmirched report regarding the conduct of the few elected MLAs on the floor of the house during the election of the first Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly which was held on the March 29, 1972. When the House resumed its sessions in April, Prof Martin Narayan Majaw moved a Privilege Motion on grounds that there was serious breach of privileges of the honorable members of the House. The portion of the news report which was believed to have violated the privileges of elected members of the Legislature is quoted here. "Ha ka por ba shim ia ka bynta ba nyingkong da u Acting Speaker, Bah Jor Manik Syiem ban jied ia u Speaker, la don ka jingkaw-kaw bad jingpywit da u Bah D.D Lapang, Bah

H.Hynniewta bad Bah M.N Majaw kiba long ki opposition" (At the time when the Acting Speaker, Jor Manik Syiem, initiated the business of the House for selecting the Speaker, there was undignified, unjustified and useless chatter, and obstruction of the proceedings from Mr.D.D Lapang, Mr H.Hynniewta and Mr. M.N Majaw, of the Opposition)

What ensued afterwards were the finest literary debates on the connotations of the words and sentences of the news report vis a vis the English translations. One can only imagine how sophisticated the debates were, when the Speaker who was the authority on Khasi language and a renowned historian would listen attentively to the submissions of members who were also no less intelligent, articulate and authoritative in their own right. Intermittently, like the headmaster, the Speaker poked the members with questions and made the debates more interesting and expansive in literary terms. The debates centered around the interpretation and translations of the specific Khasi words and sentences, like the meaning of "Jingkaw-kaw and Jingpywit" and also the translated words "selecting" and "electing" the Speaker.

To give the readers a sense and liberty to deduce the manner of such significant literary debates which had happened in the first sitting of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly let me quote the proceedings in the abridged form, however citizens can also avail the Assembly Reports, in the following:

The Speaker- "Now Prof Majaw to raise the privilege issue against the local Khasi paper, "Ka Pyru Riewlum" under the relevant rules and procedures of conduct. Instantly the Speaker poked the mover with the question, "Did not the honourable Member give an English translation?" To which the member replied that the translation was prepared by the staff of the Assembly Secretariat and that he accepted the translation as it was. Again, the Speaker interjected and asked "Who did the translation work because the word "selecting" and "electing" have different meanings. Thence, the debates picked up and Prof Martin Majaw confidently submitted that the words selecting and electing mean the same in Khasi. The Speaker poked further, "From what authority did you translate "Jingkaw-kaw and Jingpywit" as undignified,

unjustified and useless chatter? And Prof Martin replied, "Sir, translation is a matter of opinion because there are two types of translation; one gives the exact sense of the word and the other is the literal meaning. Even in the English language there are synonyms which do not have the identical translation...Mr Speaker Sir, being a Khasi...I do not think it necessary to establish the meaning of a single word "Jingkaw-kaw". The Speaker retorted, "Even an Englishman has to consult the Chambers Dictionary".

Mr BB Lyngdoh who participated in the debates had brought along with him two Dictionaries written by A.S Shylla and Nissor Singh respectively. For him the Khasi words stated in the news report are simple ones and submitted, "Mr Speaker Sir... The simple word "Jingpywit" means obstruction and the simple word "Jingkaw-kaw" means noisy." There was no need for interpolations and that the mover of the motion had misguided the House, he argued.

In fact, other members, like P Ripple Kyndiah and Maham Singh also participated and added color to the debates. However, Mr Hoover Hynniewta made impressive submissions and elicited peals of laughter with his witty comments. He strongly argued, "Mr Speaker Sir... There is no "Jingkaw-kaw" on that day... And if nature has equipped Mr Majaw and myself with loud voices and you have allowed us to speak, Mr Speaker Sir, that cannot be construed to be noisy. If it is otherwise...people with loud voices should not be allowed to contest the elections... There was no "kaw kaw" to carry the connotations of useless and undignified voice".

The Speaker made his concluding remark that "this particular matter involves academic discussion" and referred it to the Privileges Committee. If ever the Khasi Language gets recognition under the 8th schedule, it is because of Legislators like these and the State and society will certainly grow and prosper if we elect people who understand the arts, poetry and have a strong sense of history of the place, not the greedy and corrupt.

(Note: Prof R.S Lyngdoh was a profound Khasi writer and the pioneer of Khasi Department, NEHU. Whereas, Prof Martin Majaw taught English in St Anthony's College and Mr Hoover Hynniewta was an astute orator).

Gulf nations outbursts causes panic in BJP leadership & Modi govt

Suspension of spokespersons not enough to ensure normalcy

By Sushil Kutty

Finally, much to the delight of millions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not the Invincible! Little Qatar in the Gulf brought the Modi Government to its knees even as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Iran weighed in. Modi's 'Arabian Nights' stands curtailed because Modi is no Xi Jinping.

Also, the BJP's 'Naya India' is not a patch on the CPC's old style People's Republic of China. Fact is, Qatar would never do to Xi and China what it did to Modi and to India. The tiny country poised to host the big World Cup Soccer cut India to size. The insult cut deep because the Modi Government was compelled to give it in writing that India had wronged the 2 billion Muslims "east and west".

In the process, Modi and Modi's India also embraced the secular hijab! Expect the "Hijab Girls" to take up hijab all over again. The long and short of it was, at the end of the day, Modi's elegant bandhgalas was in tatters, and the BJP couldn't look the "sickular" and "pseudo-secular" in the eye. #Shame-onBJP trended, so did #Cowards, with #Prophet and #Nupur lending support.

And in its new role, the Modi Government told Qatar and the rest that it were the "fringe" elements which "insulted" and that amends had been made "pending investigation". Modi could have avoided the humilia-

People will remember only that Modi buckled. The first "apology" set the stage. Modi will carry this "defeat" to the end of his tenure. That tenure may not last beyond 2024. Seriously speaking, Sunday has lost Modi at least half his hardcore Hindutva vote-bank. If Modi matches himself against Nupur Sharma, chances are Modi will bite the dust.

However, the impact will be felt in the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh assembly elections. AAP with its "soft Hindutva" will benefit at the cost of the BJP, as the Himachali JP Nadda will come to realize. For reasons not far to seek, the BJP can't wait to occupy the Congress-mukt space at any cost.

There is a latent Muslim appeasement. Apparently, Modi cannot bear losing his emerging "Vishwaguru" image. Acutely aware that the Gulf nations embraced him with their highest state awards, he is also addicted to the "Dubai adulation" that he gets in all countries.

In 2017, still in his first term, Modi was lauded for strengthening India's standing in Arab countries. Then, wrote a journalist, "Engagement with West Asia received momentum after Modi's visit to the UAE in August 2015 proved a game changer." India and the UAE expanded a counter-terror pact to defence manufacturing, and \$75 billion for India's infrastructure sector.

Modi's ties with the Arab



tion. He could have handled the rising tide of resentment in a manner befitting India's stature. Instead, India stands not only smeared, but also shown its place.

Can Modi with any sense of authority claim again that India is on its way to achieving economic superpowerdom? The long and short of it is, the Modi government panicked. And the orders

countries, and with Iran was based on safety of expatriates, securing energy resources, attracting investments, expanding counter-terror partnership, and connectivity corridors. The Arabs chose to ditch Pakistan. Modi's visits were toasted in every Arab capital. Modi had got used to the adulation; he wouldn't want to lose it at any cost.

"As was bound to happen, Modi is now bigger than his party. It has got entrenched in him that the BJP, the BJP's vote-banks, why even India and every bit of goodwill for India, is solely to build his stature in the eyes of the world."

came from the very top, the PMO, to suspend Nupur Sharma, and expel Navin Jindal. With that Modi has been reduced to a caricature, which Charlie Hebdo would gladly publish.

As of June 5, India's ties with the GCC and Iran stand changed. India's foreign policy goals took a massive hit. Worse, it will take a long time for India to regain its stature. Modi will have to just grin and bear it. Modi has lost face among the leaders of the world. French President Emmanuel Macron handled a similar crisis with a firm hand, not bowing down to threats.

Macron did not ditch his "people", despite the Islamist threats, including from Mumbai and Delhi. The French President refused to succumb. Modi, on the other hand, gave in without even a whimper. The boycott of Indian products was a threat, but double-edged. Both sides would have suffered.

Not even at the cost of losing his Hindutva support base. As was bound to happen, Modi is now bigger than his party. It has got entrenched in him that the BJP, the BJP's vote-banks, why even India and every bit of goodwill for India, is solely to build his stature in the eyes of the world.

The fact is, Modi will not lose much if he did some fact-checking to rid himself of the feeling that he's irreplaceable, and invincible. Nupur Sharma's suspension and Navin Jindal's expulsion from the party has several implications. One, TV debates on Hindu-Muslim will stop entirely or will lose its leading edge. Sambit Patra and Gaurav Bhatia would scale down the rhetoric. Two, unlike Islam, Hinduism will be debated and ridiculed. Three, blasphemy is now written into the Hindu psyche, just like undeclared emergency in the Muslim's. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Garro Hills needs rapid development

Editor,
Meghalaya can be broadly divided into two distinct regions – the higher altitude Shillong plateau consisting of the Khasi and Jaintia hills and the lower altitude region consisting of the Garo Hills. Shillong being the erstwhile British capital along with pleasant weather had seen lots of development. With huge tourism potential, the whole of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills has got more than adequate attention. Whereas the tourist foothill in Garo Hills is almost zero.

Garro Hills with a different topography and people's mindset, requires different development planning parameters which should be different from the rest of the state. The development model followed in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTR) in Assam, which saw massive development in the last two decades, can best be followed in Garo Hills. All official works up to the Secretariat level should be made available in Tura and the people of Garo Hills should not be burdened with frequent visits to Shillong for petty official works.

Tourism development needs a booster, which can be based around the two National Parks – The Balpakram and the Nokrek,

which require rejuvenation by breeding of more wildlife. Local Self-Help Groups should be assisted by the Government to take up eco-tourism and for setting-up traditional village resorts, which are in big demand among those coming from the metros. The Government should encourage and invite tourists to Garo Hills when they visit Shillong. This requires a well-planned tourism circuit.

Agricultural practices should be changed from shifting cultivation to more value added horticultural produce and plantation crops. Local Garo youths should be encouraged to start businesses and food processing industries based on local produce, which can easily be exported to Bangladesh. Shifting cultivation should be banned as the practice is rapidly causing desertification and water crises alongside.

We need to rejuvenate the rivers and streams, particularly in Tura town, where almost all the rivers and streams are encroached upon converting these into filthy drains.

Merely providing good connectivity through good roads, people will develop at their own pace due to massive increase in economic activities provided by these roads. Almost all the roads are in very bad shape and the Agia-Medhipara-Phulbari-Tura (AMPT)road is the

worst, where the maximum economic activities are based and which is connected to Bangladesh.

People should stop relying too much of Government and the Government too should stop thinking about how to get more money from the Centre. Government should encourage economic activities thereby generating more revenue resources.

Yours etc.
Dr. T. K. Barman
Via email

Plight of banana farmers in North Garo Hills

Editor,
Apropos the news item appearing in The Shillong Times dated 6th June 2022 highlighting the plight of banana farmers in Adokgre in North Garo Hills District, it is really very sad to see huge stalks of bananas abandoned by farmers because they would rather not take back the unsold bananas. While we are encouraging the farmers to go in for more plantation and horticulture crops but at the same time, we fail to create marketing linkages for their produce's. This perhaps, is the major problem and a recurring one. Every year, due to failure of the main buyers from Bihar and West Bengal to turn up for whatever reasons, the farmers had to resort to distress sale. The need of the hour is

not to blame anyone but to come together and find out ways and means to lessen the burden of the farmers. Adokgre and its surrounding areas are known for producing huge quantities of bananas and oranges. I would appeal to the Agri/Horti Deptts; the Farmers' Commission, Banks and development agencies working in the State to come together in one platform and try to address the problems of the farmers in that area. Similar interventions may be required for the farmers in different areas of the State.

Yours etc.
Fergertson R Marak
Burny Hills,
Tura

FlyBig should be banned from flying Delhi - Shillong - Delhi sector

Editor,
On Monday, May 23, 2022, I was excited to take the FlyBig flight from Delhi to Shillong. My family and I reached the Indira Gandhi International Airport around 10:00 a.m. We waited to board the flight at 12 which was the scheduled time and the flight was to take off at 12:55 pm. Alas! There was a 2-hour delay but the airlines didn't even bother to announce the delay. Anyway the passengers, mostly

for me and thereafter she picked her items. Being from a middle class family, FlyBig has delivered a huge blow to me. I will never take a direct flight ever from Delhi to Umroi airport.

Interestingly even the authorities at the airport told me that if I had taken any other flight from Delhi to Guwahati then such an episode wouldn't have occurred. I feel that FlyBig which just started their flight on May 2, 2022 should stop operating their shoddy flights. I also feel that a small plane cannot handle heavy turbulence while flying such a long distance and keeping the lives of the passengers at stake. I request the Government to stop the Shillong - Delhi-Shillong flight. FlyBig airlines have cheated passengers like us as I lost a huge chunk of money unnecessarily. If the airlines does not allow hand baggage then it should say so upfront. At least this way the passengers are warned not to carry cabin baggage and they will not lose money the way I did before boarding the flight.

Yours etc.,
Amit King
Shillong-4

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"Being entirely honest with oneself is a good exercise."

—Sigmund Freud

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NEP: Challenges to implementation

THE National Education Policy 2020 has come 38 years after the last Education Policy. It is an ambitious project aimed at making India the Vishwa Guru of the world. The philosophy behind the NEP 2020 is to reclaim India's past glory as a repository of ancient wisdom which has the first universities Takshashila and Nalanda. All these were destroyed first by Mughal invaders and later by the British rulers whose design it was to produce clerks and servants of the Empire. All these novel ideas underlying the architecture of the NEP 2020 are admirable and the intent too is noble. At the end however what matters is implementation. There are so many ideas embedded in the Policy which will require a thorough overhaul of the present education system which has created batches and batches of unemployable graduates. There is a dire need to reverse the present system but time is of the essence.

The teaching community under the present system must have the passion and the flexibility to adapt to multi-disciplinary learning techniques and the new hybrid model of teaching. This would require a human resource that is committed to the cause of education. Is it possible to harness such a band of dedicated educators that have come from a system that was highly unimaginative and relied on stereotyped learning outcomes? The NEP's hallmark is quality with equity. This means quality education that is also affordable. Emphasis is laid on skills training but using local resources and adaptive to local needs. The NEP proposes smart classrooms that would be linked to a Digital University. For connectivity the Union Government had sanctioned 889 mobile towers in Meghalaya alone but for some reason not even 25% of the target has been achieved due to logistical challenges. Again in a State like Meghalaya where the Lower Primary school infrastructure are in shambles implementing the NEP is a tall order. The infrastructure needs a robust overhaul and revamp.

In the area of skilling, the NEP needs to be more flexible and more nuanced towards the needs of the markets in the region for that would assure employability. For this the states have to continue to feed their inputs to the Union Education Ministry. Moreover, the NEP at this point appears to stress more on higher education than on primary and high school education, when it would have been more prudent to strengthen the foundational pillars of education. At the university level students have already found their feet. It is at the high school and undergraduate level that they really need to find their feet. Clearly there is a huge chasm between embracing the NEP 2020 and putting it to work on the ground, especially for a state like Meghalaya.

India lectured to by theocrats & other issues

By Albert Thyraing

After the backlash from Muslim countries the BJP suspended its national spokesperson Nupur Sharma and removed her from the primary membership of the party. Sharma, who had been associated with the BJP for over 15 years, allegedly insulted Prophet Muhammad during a television debate. The saffron party also expelled the Delhi media in-charge Naveen Kumar Jindal over his media posts calling the 'Prophet' a rapist.

Reports have also appeared that following the controversy the ruling party has introspected and has identified 38 leaders as offenders and warned 27 leaders. The strong actions were taken due to the outrage in the Islamic world including the super oil rich Middle Eastern countries like Kuwait, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Indian ambassadors were summoned; strong statements were issued and calling of boycott of Indian products was spread on social media. Forced to act the BJP stated that it was "against any ideology which insults or demeans any sect or religion," adding it did not "promote such people or philosophy". Diplomats explained to the incensed countries terming the offensive comments "views of fringe elements".

We ought to know by now that Sharma and Jindal are not the fringe. They are very much mainstream. The former firebrand spokesperson has Prime Minister, Narendra Modi among her more than half a million followers on Twitter. Following her TV outburst she tagged PM Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda in her tweets. Her supporters praised her and raised her to the status of "a lioness, a fierce and fearless warrior". The Nupurs and the Naveens are among thousands of hardliners in the BJP and they are not to be dismissed as 'fringe' constituents.

Vitiation of the religious atmosphere; the creation of communal disharmony and the spread of hatred for the minorities are synonymous with the present nationalist and Hindutva regime since the last eight years. Voices of concern within the country and churning from democratic countries across the globe have been constantly directed at the current dispensation but to no avail. It is shameful that theocratic nations of Kuwait, Iran and Saudi Arabia had to compel the secular coun-

try of India to respect all religions.

Though the constitution of Kuwait provides for freedom of belief and religious practice, Islam is the state religion and the feared Sharia is a source of legislation. In Iran though Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism are officially recognized religions religious intolerance is very high. In Qatar the Constitution provides freedom but worship is restricted and proselytizing by non-Muslims is prohibited as the state religion is Islam. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic fascist absolute monarchy and Sunni Islamic country firmly ruled by Sharia law. Non-Muslims can't practice their religion in public lest they face prosecution, discrimination and deportation. In the Saudi and much of the Muslim world blasphemy and apostasy are punishable crimes.

So, it is sheer hypocrisy for these countries to lecture India on religious freedom. Painter MF Hussain who painted Hindu goddesses in the nude was honoured and given citizenship by Qatar. But that is precisely the point. The situation in India, the birthplace and the habitat of many religions, has reached to such a low that practitioners of double-standards had to preach us. We, whose Constitution is firmly founded on inclusion, have to bow to the Arab nations where religious freedom is virtually non-existent. This is because the present leadership ridiculed the cries of citizens who have been ringing the alarm bells for a long time. The 'fringe elements' were never reined in. The BJP had to learn it the hard way. It has been practicing the policy of majoritarianism at home but it has to realise that its actions have repercussions far beyond the boundaries of the Indian sub-continent.

With the Arab world up in arms the Indian ruling hardliners had to be termed the 'fringe elements' overnight to protect the image of the Prime Minister, Modi. Economic reasons too play a part. The call for boycott of Indian goods left the government with no choice. Grocery shops were already boycotting Indian goods in the 'aggrieved' countries. India's trade with the Gulf countries was worth \$7 billion dollars in 2020-21. The region has millions of Indians who live and work in these countries.

The consequences are too grave to be ignored. The insult took place on May 27 but till June 4, no action was taken in spite of the protests and violence in Kanpur. It was only the outcry by the Islamic world that ensured the branding of the former proud party spokespersons as 'fringe'.

Recently International Environment day was celebrated. Trees were planted to emit more oxygen and cool the ever-increasing heat due to climate change. Cleanliness drives were organised to prevent public places from being eyesores. The environment is not limited to the physical surrounding. It includes the human surroundings as well. In fact, humans are the most crucial elements of the environment. It is humans that are responsible for the alarming degradation of the environment. Planting respect, tolerance, inclusiveness and the like should be undertaken to emit better air in the country. The garbage of hatred, disrespect, intolerance should be cleaned up in our minds so that the beautiful values of India can come alive again.

In Meghalaya too Environment day was celebrated enthusiastically. The Chief Minister, other ministers, officers, the deputy commissioners, government departments, schools, colleges and organisations posted images of tree plantation on social media. But no one asks, "What has happened to the trees planted last year and the previous years?" I posed this question to someone. With proof and example he replied, "95 per cent have died or were eaten by cows. We plant but we don't care whether they survive or not". Regarding cleaning up he said, "We may make children clean but the government has not come up with a sustainable waste management solution. Neither Shillong nor Tura nor Jowai has healthy dumping grounds. They are hazards."

Anyway, let us go beyond the physical environment. What is the social environment in the state today? Corruption is the talking point right now. Corruption in the illegal mining and transportation, in the construction of the Shillong ISBT, in the erection of the dome of the Legislative Assembly building, in the state electricity board, in the coke factories, in the

operation of illegal gates, in the district councils and the like. The latest allegation is from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) which has trained its guns on the three ADCs. According to the CAG these institutions don't prepare accounts and maintain records of expenditure thus engaging in mismanagement, misappropriation, wasteful expenditure for years. Earlier when the government's attention was drawn to all the above misdemeanours the reaction was stout denial. When the coalition partners threatened to pull out, the warning is linked to elections. But what is not associated with election? The solution of border disputes is aimed at elections. The present government is in a hurry to come up with the MOU with an eye on elections. The date line of the completion of the new legislative assembly building is connected to 2023. The Harijan colony is an election issue. It is another matter that these matters can go haywire because of the ambition of leaders in the present government. When the MP of the Congress alleges corruption, the ministers remind him of the time his party ruled the state. Under what circumstances will this government be forced to accept the reality? Perhaps under humiliating and embarrassing settings!

The gruesome murder of the two children in Nongrah points to an underlying problematic environment. This shows how things can happen when families fall apart. The other day in a YouTube video, a person revealed that 40 per cent of the female hawkers have illegitimate children (without husband). This is an undesirable environment that needs to be addressed urgently. Connected with this is the issue of gender equality. Niti Aayog's North Eastern Region District Sustainable Development Goal Index in 2021 places Meghalaya at the bottom of the gender equality table. The state's matrilineal doesn't seem to help gender equality. All districts in the state are right at the bottom of the ranking. This poor performance is an unkind message. We better pay attention to it. The Nongrah incident is a voice that needs to be heard. Unless the issue is attended to, more painful symptoms may appear. The father must be punished as per law. But there is a serious underlying social issues and ignoring them could be disastrous.

Sorry seems to be the hardest word

By Ganesh N Devy

'Sorry'.. just a common word exchanged between people who feel related.

One hears it frequently in everyday life. It has been in use for the last thousand years. The Old German language inherited it as 'sore', meaning 'pain'. Later, in Old English, it became 'sarig', meaning 'pained or distressed'. It continued with a variant spelling 'sorry'. A word easy to say when it is necessary to say it. But even simple words prove difficult to say in some rare circumstances. Shakespeare's Macbeth, having just killed the king, confessed that, in response to the church bells ringing, he could not say 'amen'. The word that means "so be it", just stuck in his throat. That was in medieval times. More recently, in 2007, during a television interview with the Chief Minister of Gujarat, the CM had to rush for a glass of water and bring the interview to an abrupt end when it came to this simple word.

The interviewer recalls the scene at the point the CM was asked, "Why cannot you say that you regret the killings that happened? Why can't you say maybe the government should have done more to protect Muslims?" The answer was "what I have to say I have said at that time, and you can find my statements." However, the statement was "action creates reaction." Then the interview was brought to an abrupt end.

The word sorry has been a peculiar difficulty for this CM of Gujarat, who is now the PM of India. And the difficulty has increased with time. Recall the long lines of migrant workers walking home after the lock down was announced without sufficient preparation? Many died on the way. Surely, someone was responsible for the miscalculated decision? But saying sorry was scrupulously avoided. Recall also the year-long agitation against three farm laws introduced without discussion in September 2020? A large number of farmers died during the peaceful protest. The word sorry once again stuck in the throats of those who should have expressed regrets. Mob-lynching, allegedly, was by fringe elements. False encounters were, allegedly, by patriots fighting foreign infiltrators. Imprisoning intellectuals was, ostensibly, to crack alleged conspiracies of disruption of law and order. However, anti-conversion laws in many BJP ruled States were not passed by any fringe elements or non-State actors. Yet, for the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that was created no one wanted to say 'sorry'.

No one has said 'sorry' for messing up with the COVID death figures. No one at all has said sorry for the motivated use of CBI, NCB, ED and police. No one ever said that they did not intend to scare and intimidate, no one said 'sorry, that was not intended.' When trolls roam unchecked on the nation's digital highways, when vigilante mobs roam the physical highways and openly assault any difference of food or dress, they have never been told, sorry guys, "it's too late in the day to use coercion to sort out differences; we live in a civilised nation."

When a neta makes an open appeal to shoot protesters, when a dharm-sansad gives a call for communal purging, when a Lok Sabha member describes violence using the 'karma' theory, the word sorry is expunged from the public discourse.

Why is it then that the RSS and the BJP have all of a sudden found the word still exists in the dictionary?

Mark the chronology, to use an often-heard phrase. First, the RSS supremo explains to his organisation that India has a constitution, that it requires treatment of all citizens on an equal footing, and that all citizens have the right to practice religions of their choice. Following this explanation, the government of India assures many Asian countries that India will not tolerate hatred towards any religion. Then the Karnataka CM assures the people of Karnataka that the misrepresentation of Basava and Ambedkar will be rectified and the school textbooks will be modified.

Recall also the chronology of the foreign affairs minister retorting to his American counterpart when the latter mentioned the increasing communal divide in India. Media devoted to the current dispensation has spent many hours of TV time explaining how today's India is a more confident nation. Not more than a month ago, when Muslim vendors were being driven away from Hindu temple premises in Karnataka, the Chief Minister had justified the action by citing an obscure law. Just a couple of weeks ago, lists of mosques to be brought under the Hindutva scanner were in wide circulation in UP. The word sorry was in an acute short supply in those instances.

In ancient Roman myth and religion, Janus is the god of beginnings, transitions, and endings. He is depicted with two faces, one looking to the future and one to the past. Thus, the month of January, which looks at both the year gone by as well as the new year, is named after Janus. But why has the BJP decided to behave like Janus in the month of June? Is it the stern warning from the oil producing countries to the government to prevent BJP leaders and politicians from using the language of hate? Or is it the clear signs of fatigue that Hindu voters have developed towards constant minority-baiting? Or is it the government's assessment of the Chinese threat, making a QUAD alliance take precedence over the idea of Hindu-rashtra? Or, is it the fear that anarchic mobs let loose may bring India closer to a Sri Lanka-like situation? Or all of these together?

The punishment dealt to two of the BJP's leaders in Delhi, Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal, is a big surprise. It is confusing to the RSS and BJP's ranks. Yet, recall how Narendra Modi had done a 'pranam' to the Parliament House, and in the years of his tenure brought down the centrality of the parliament as a house for dialogue.

Many decades ago, I was watching a folk performance of the epic Ramayana. The actor who played Ravana had been done up with ten heads. The performance went on late into the night. There were many recesses. In one of the recesses, the actor playing Ravana took a break to eat. And as he did so, amused children discovered his real head! Ravana has ten faces the Roman god Janus has two. Like Janus, the RSS and the BJP have two faces, one face has marks of the actions of the past on it. Some of these marks are too clear and deeply etched to allow a makeover.

(Dr. Ganesh N Devy is a literary critic and a cultural activist. He is Chairman of the People's Linguistic Survey and leads the Dakshinayan movement of writers) (Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@the-billionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Clarification on AISPETC

Editor,
Apropos of the letter to the editor captioned, "MATI Civil Services Coaching" (ST June 7, 2022), the Office of the All India Services Pre-Examination Training Centre would like to make necessary clarifications to this. Since the inception of the Centre, 66 trainees were qualified for appointment to various All India Services. Many of the trainees have also been able to obtain good appointments in State, Central Govts, Banks and other institutions. They have given their full credit to the system of coaching, dedicated and able faculty members and good library facilities for such big achievements.

After a thorough assessment of the coaching program as a whole, the Government in the year 2021, took up a new initiative, with the whole coaching curriculum modified and upgraded. The Coaching Classes were then held at the Auditorium Hall of MATI at its permanent Campus at Mawdiangdiang with a capacity of 100 seats. Free hostel facilities were introduced for the first time with a capacity of 50 seats initially. Capable and dedicated faculty members were drawn from reputed IAS Academies on a weekly

basis. Around 1500 applications were received for the year 2021. The current session for 2021-22 started on November 22, 2021. Online classes have also started simultaneously so as to provide accessibility to eligible students who could not be accommodated for the offline classes. There is also a free lodging and food facility with a capacity of 75 seats now. Students from all the districts of the state have been accommodated.

There is a positive and good response towards the expanded initiative. The next batch is set to start from July 4 this year.

As such the office of the AISPETC would like to request any interested candidates to kindly update from the Centre itself for any further information regarding the functioning of the Centre through the office email petcmeghalaya@gmail.com. They can also visit www.matigov.in

Yours etc.,
Director,
All India Services
Pre-Examination Training
Centre,
Add. Secretariat Building,
(Old MATI Premises)

Environment is a daily affair!

Editor,
While congratulating in-

stitutions, individuals, groups that have taken active part during the "World Environment Week" there is also a concern that these events are becoming mere symbolic gestures. Pictures and stories are splashed across newspapers and on social media depicting many engaged in cleaning drives, creating awareness and planting trees. This is all very satisfying to watch, however there is a catch here. When we talk about the "Environment," it cannot be reduced to a one-day affair, especially going by the status that we post and the commitments we make on World Environment Day.

It is high time that educational institutions and forums take initiatives to undertake regular and year-long cleaning drives, tree-planting drives, soil conservation activities and other environment friendly activities. This will encourage the younger students to engage in constructive activities, which by and large ignites their inner passion and love for the environment (mother nature). Students of higher classes can also be given tasks and responsibilities to generate more environmental awareness on garbage management etc.

Multiple projects and initiatives have been taken to stop the use of plastic bottles and for banning the "single

use plastics" which any day are a threat to the environment. However none of these projects were sustainable and things quickly went back to square one with no one voicing out their concerns and no action taken from the government. This is a very worrying sign.

As self-proclaimed "environmentalists," our responsibilities and duties are vast and do not end with that "one good picture" with that plant in hand. The question that should follow every planting drive is "Who's going to own responsibility and care for that plant until it becomes robust and reaches maturity. That should be the day that calls for a real celebration. Only then can the person who planted the tree say, "Yes, this was planted 5 years ago and we cared for it to our level best to have it grow and provide shade and oxygen to humans."

As of now on a rough calculation only 2-3 out of 10 people are involved in any environmental activities, consistently. The question then is whether we are committed to reducing the burden on this earth. Only then do we have a reason to celebrate Environment Day, in its true spirit.

Yours etc.,
Priyankur Nandy,
Shillong

Disgusting mobile service

Editor,
I believe that most mobile phone users in this city have never been able to use the "mobile data" of Jio. Though the fixed 1.5 GB data is allotted per day, people cannot use even 10 kb against the payment of full amount Rs 666. It is because the Company has taken too many customers while it does not have the required infrastructure to stream the data seamlessly. When the Company is not capable of offering services, why does it charge "money for data" from the users? It is totally outrageous. It seems that we are just allowing the company to rip us off mercilessly. One gentleman remarks: "Initially JIO enticed us into switching to its incredibly fast service by offering free calls and free data. In fact, its prime motive was to eat up the major share of the business by kicking out other small players. This rapacity itself is very disgusting. And now its service is getting worse with each passing day. We cannot even make phone calls."

On the other hand, how do we react to a poor green vendor on the street in case he gives us 800 gms of vegetables and charges us for one kg? We will definitely lose our cool and scold him. If the

vendor shouts back and puts his foot down then we might even call the police and get him arrested.

In contrast, why do people and even the authorities in the Government, become silent when big companies like Jio, Vodafone, Airtel have been continuously robbing us of crores rupees every day without ever providing service as promised initially. Money charged without proving service is a "criminal" act.

Incidentally, have we forgotten the Reliance Communication (Mobile) of Anil Ambani, which had suddenly stopped its services in 2017? The company has not yet "returned" the collected "security money" from the millions of customers. Is it not a serious crime? Has the owner at all been arrested? We scream against cab drivers, street hawkers, petty retail traders or daily wagers but remain silent against the day-light robbery of the big companies. Raise your voice before the Forbes magazine again shouts out their names as one of the richest men in the country. Men without integrity cannot be rich!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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

"Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us."

— Samuel Smiles

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 10, 2022

After Kovind, who

INDIA is set on a new season of presidential polls—a voting exercise involving elected representatives from Parliament and state/UT legislative bodies. While the Election Commission has issued the schedule for the polls leading up to the installation of a new President on July 25, there is no scope for a serious contest this time, or a nail-biting finish or a spirited pre-poll build-up. The ruling NDA is in a comfortable position to win the race in case there is a contest—which is likely for the sake of a contest—and the mood in the Opposition camp is progressively downbeat after the recent electoral win of the BJP in four states including UP. This has cleared all uncertainties in the air about the Presidential polls.

The suspense, however, is on the selection of the NDA candidate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi does have the last word but he's sure to consult the RSS leadership and his own cabinet colleagues on a final name. The President's signature is the most prized requirement to run the government at every step it takes forward; and yet, this is seen as an ornamental post for the reason that the decisions of the executive—cabinet—prevail as long as no harm to national security is involved. By convention, Indian presidents are not on a confrontation course with the elected government. Yet, in crucial situations like a government losing its majority, the President holds the trump card as to how to handle the extra-ordinary situation. India is passing through a phase of political stability and this warranted no President's Rule even in states in recent years.

As no President other than the first occupant of Rashtrapati Bhavan Dr Rajendra Prasad got a second term, chances for Kovind for a repeat term are less. Several interest groups vie for recognition and the PM may have to reconcile with these. The BJP had made Space scientist Dr Abdul Kalam the President when Atal Behari Vajpayee was prime minister. Someone from a minority segment could be among the list of probables for President and Vice President this time around too. Kalam was a combination of eminence and minority representation. He lent added weight to the institution of Presidency by his conduct, words and deeds. Such are the ideal situations. Fact of the matter is there's a deficit of eminence when it comes to India's governance systems. Even the upper house of elders, the Rajya Sabha, is now filled with run-of-the-mill politicians who do not inspire the nation.

Civic Engagement of the Universities

By H. Srikanth

The news of NEHU slipping to 59th position in NIRF ranking, 2021 disheartened not only the teachers and students in the university but also the members of the civil society in Meghalaya. The continuous fall in the University's ranking became a subject of everyday discussion in the academic and social circles in the state. Although NEHU's performance was not that discouraging in matters relating to faculty publications and infrastructure, the NIRF report showed that NEHU lagged behind other universities in some fields. The university did not fare well in the case of extension activities and people's perceptions. There has been considerable discussion in the university on how to increase faculty publications and expand infrastructure, but the university community has hardly discussed what more the university could do to the society apart from carrying teaching and research. It is a fact that, barring a few departments, the faculty and students in the university hardly engage in any extension activities outside the campus. Most academic departments do not even have any idea how they could become relevant to the communities and people outside the campus. This lacuna deserves a serious attention.

Teaching, research and awarding degrees are the primary responsibilities of the universities. In the universities, there should be vibrant academic activities such as seminars, workshops and conferences, wherein the peers meet, discuss and contribute to dissemination and further advancement of knowledge. The governments, industries and business enterprises may use subsequently the knowledge disseminated, or generated by the universities. But are they enough to justify the existence of the universities? Some activities and achievements of the students and faculty are often reported in the newspapers and the educated people in the society come to know about them. But the masses who are not so educated hardly have an idea what the universities have been doing and how they are useful to the society. Very often, there is a disconnect between the university community and the communities living outside the campus. Living in self-contained ivory towers, the students

and teachers believe they are contributing a lot to the nation. Most don't have any idea how they are connected with and dependent on the communities outside the four walls of the campus.

Not many students and teachers know that their universities came into existence because of the people's aspirations and movements. It is through people's money that the governments fund the universities, and enable them to build infrastructure and employ teachers and supporting staff. We often forget that universities are built on the land that the communities have voluntarily donated, or forcibly taken away from them by the government. Different services are provided by the communities living around the campus to students, teachers and officers living on the campus. The students secure degrees,

extension activities. But in reality, it is possible for every department or centre to take up one or the other extension activities. All need not engage in similar kinds of activities. Each department or centre can think in ways they could be of use to the communities. Depending on one's area of interest and expertise, one may decide whether to run adult education centre, offer free tuitions for the young, educate the communities about health care or environment, take up voters' awareness campaign or human rights education, conduct socio-economic surveys, impart life-skills or organize sports and cultural activities for the local communities. Even at the individual level, the faculty members and scholars can contribute to the local communities by writing articles for local newspapers and by

universities plan their extension activities after discussing with the civil society activists and organizations. It is heartening to see that NEHU, while celebrating the NEHU Day, honoured Smt. Patricia Mukhim. But that is not enough. There should be continuous interaction with social activists. Involving them in workshops and brainstorming sessions help in coming out with creative ideas on how the educational institutions could contribute to the community welfare. Mukhim inspired and mobilized students from different schools and colleges in cleaning of the rivers. It is unfortunate that we in NEHU remained passive bystanders. Talking or writing big things about climate change make little sense when we do not come forward to keep our environment clean. Organizing workshops with civil society activists will help the university get new ideas how we could engage with the communities.

Exploring the potentiality of the alumni is another method by which we can improve the civic engagement. Earlier Vice-chancellors also have spoken about the Alumni Association. But no one made any sincere attempt to identify and organize them. The NEHU Alumni is spread in all states of the northeast. Most of them have emotional attachment to the University. They will be more than happy to associate in some form or the other with NEHU programs and activities. All Alumni students may not contribute finances, but they can offer a helping hand by providing free services required for the university sponsored programs. They can also offer innovative ideas for strengthening the bond between the University and the civil society. It is for the University to take the initiative and create a forum for them to play a supportive role.

It is heartening to see that the new Vice-Chancellor of NEHU has expressed the desire to revive the rapport with the civil society and use the services of the alumni. We can fill the gap between intention and actual realization only through effective planning and execution. Creating a separate unit for coordinating the extension activities of the university would be a step in the right direction. The civic engagement of the university will help in creating a considerable goodwill and will go a long way in building healthy relations between the university and the civil society.

(H. Srikanth teaches Political Science in NEHU. Email: hskant@gmail.com)



the scholars get jobs; the teachers get promotions and awards, but how does all that benefit the civil society? This is not a matter that concerns only NEHU. The universities across the globe have debated on this issue and advocated for civic engagement of the universities. They have emphasized on the need for the academic departments and the university community to build rapport with the civil society and engage in extension activities. The educationists have advocated extension activities not just to benefit the communities. Community engagement helps the students, research scholars and teachers become aware of the problems and perspectives of the masses, and develops their communicative and leadership skills.

Some universities mechanically create some departments to take up the

associating themselves with different local community organizations. If the faculty and students brainstorm, they can come out with creative ideas and plans for civic engagement. The universities may come forward to adopt one or two villages / localities and earmark fixed budget for undertaking these activities. The NSS units undertake cleaning drive programs on the campuses. But the same can be extended to the localities outside the campus as well. The civil society will be more than happy to collaborate and support such initiatives. Local churches, school buildings, community halls can be used for undertaking the activities. Even if each department / centre focuses on one activity and executes them effectively, the universities can make a big difference to the society.

It makes sense if the uni-

Women: Still many mountains to scale

By Patricia Mukhim

A Conference that brings together women from a cross section of Meghalaya's population has to be celebrated. Above all a conclave that gives agency to women to articulate their angst and get their questions answered and their grievances addressed is something to be cherished. This is perhaps the first time that women entrepreneurs, members of different self-help groups, weavers and farmer producers have converged under the aegis of the State Health Department, Community & Rural Development, Social Welfare Department and the State Commission for Women. In a society where women are pushed to the shadows and their voices relegated to illogical prattle not worth paying heed to, on June 8, following the inauguration of the State Women's Conference 2022 and post a panel discussion moderated by the State Chief Secretary, RV Suchiang, several women spoke up. In fact, the post panel deliberation could have carried on if not for paucity of time.

As someone who has had to literally clamber up from the dark hole of single parenthood and be where I am today, I can very well understand how difficult it is for Khasi women who are not 'to the manor born,' to find their space in this society. Our lives are a daily struggle. My only good fortune is to have an education, courtesy a single mother who struggled equally hard and begged and borrowed to keep me afloat through high school and then college. It was tough to make ends meet and often my mother was amiss in paying school fees so I was sent home amidst great humiliation. But I guess that is what toughens every woman. There are millions of women who have been through what I did and perhaps worse but they have not given up and have fought the good fight.

When officials use the word "women's empowerment" they cannot fathom the deeper ramifications of those words; the processes involved and the giant leap that a woman must take before she can speak up for herself and own that power and voice. Meghalaya has a total fertility ratio (TFR) of 2.9 which is just above Bihar which is at 3. Total Fertility Ratio is the number of children a woman gives birth to during her child-bearing years. The TFR betrays the reality because the respondents probably combine people from urban and rural Meghalaya. Just 32 Kms from Shillong is Kharang village. On my visit there as in other villages too, one sees cowherds that are barely 12-14 years all out of school because their parents can't afford to pay for their education. On speaking to them one learns that the mother has seven children while the father is a labourer. This is a common plight in Meghalaya's rural outback. For those whose reference point for Meghalaya is Shillong, such realities may seem absurd.

A couple of years ago I was part of a University study group that sought to bring family planning awareness programme in a village in East Khasi Hills. We had taken a dildo to demonstrate how a condom is to be safely worn. The women who attended that meeting were shocked and covered their faces. They asked us how we could even bring such a thing. And that precisely is the problem with Meghalaya. Men and women will have sex but discussing sex is a taboo. It's an activity reserved for under the bed-sheets in the dark of night. If this is going to be the attitude of women and men towards sex; if sex cannot be openly discussed; if the husband and wife cannot jointly decide how many children they can afford to bring up, then it will take a revolution to bring behavioral change in Meghalaya.

When we asked women why they were giving birth to so many kids when they can

hardly look after them, the standard response is, "God gives, so we must accept." Not too sure that the blame should go to God for human indiscretions. Only after a conversation do women tend to open up. So, their story is that the man does not want to use condoms, while women are wary about intra-uterine device (IUD) for spacing and nor do they want to take pills. As far as sexual abstinence is concerned, women fear that if a man is denied sex on any grounds he may walk out of the marriage/relationship and leave them high and dry. That's how brittle co-habitation is and yet it's a tradition and no one seems to have any control over how to regulate the relationship between a couple. The Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act is not stringent enough but come to think of it, if even married couples can break up then what's a registration? And the idea of maintenance is fraught when the man is working in the informal sector or is a labourer. No one can make him pay maintenance even for the children.

The bottom-line here therefore is that a Khasi woman does not enjoy sexual and reproductive rights. She does not own her body. It all depends on the whims of the male. Without that primary right over her body and sexuality what other rights can a woman hope to enjoy? All the feminist slogans about "My Body, My Right," are good for educated, liberated women, not the rural woman in Meghalaya or anywhere in this country.

It's important that women in rural Meghalaya are given intensive awareness and counselling about the need for spacing childbirth so that both the mother and child have better health statuses. Currently the indicators have shown that 54% of Meghalaya's women in the age group of 19-45 are anaemic. The reason is because the gap between one pregnancy and another is less than 32 months as a rule. An unhealthy mother gives birth to underweight, unhealthy babies. Hence malnutrition and under-nutrition continue to remain high among children. According to the NFHS-5, the percentage of stunted children has marginally increased by 3% from 44 per cent to 47 per cent in the four years between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. The report found out that 47 per cent of children, under five years of age, are stunted, or too short for their age, which indicates that they have been undernourished for some time.

The percentage of children who are underweight (27 per cent) or wasted (12 per cent) has marginally declined since NFHS-4. Among the 27 per cent underweight which takes into account both chronic and acute undernutrition, even during the first six months of life, when almost all babies are breastfed, 23 per cent of children are stunted, 15 per cent are wasted, and 18 per cent are underweight.

Twelve per cent are wasted, or too thin for their height, which may result from inadequate recent food intake or a recent illness causing weight loss, and five per cent are severely wasted.

However, one indicator that should worry the Government is the very high number of single-woman headed households which according to NFHS-5 is 41%. We may protest that the numbers capture a small sample size but unless we have alternative figures we will have to work around this figure.

The answer to the above maladies is to get more public health care professionals penetrating the rural areas of Meghalaya. Government cannot rely only on its healthcare system. They need to combine forces and use the self-help groups in creating awareness on family planning among their cohorts.

Letters to the Editor

What a sad plight!

Editor,
With sincere support to the letter, 'Collective Responsibility' by Iamon. M. Syiem (ST June 7, 2022), I would like to add that prompt legal action and exemplary punishment of the child-killer may temporarily appease our anguish, but the irreparable loss of the unfortunate mother will never be filled. The moral degradation of such cruel and heartless revengeful fathers will not be met by severe punishment but only by true repentance and realisation coming from the depth of their hearts. The domestic life of parents and their innocent children cannot be regulated by any government or administration. It is a relationship of love, faith, tolerance and adjustment with each other. In too many cases the maladjustment between husband and wife victimises the innocent children, where humanity fails! The recent incident is the worst example of such inhuman and brutal act of immorality! When the father himself is the killer of his own child, where is the solace? The remedy for this social malaise is counselling for behavioral change which may bring domestic peace

and safety for the children.
Yours etc
Uma Purkayastha
Shillong - 4

Why the negativity

Editor,
For the first time a conference of women was livestreamed and one watched the women who participated in the first ever State Women's Conference held on June 8, 2022 at the State Convention Centre. This Conference reveals an evolution in the empowerment of women in Meghalaya. As per statistics released by the CM, the Chief Guest of the event, there are more than 40,000 women SHGs now in Meghalaya. If this is true we are seeing a counter revolution for empowerment, of women, by women in Meghalaya. It is a move that should be encouraged. Empowering our women, especially in decision-making should be a natural outflow of State Policy in a State that loves to showcase its Matrilineal system. If one is not mistaken this was the focus point of the presentation made in the Conference by Ms Pithalia Toi, Chairperson of the Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW). Em-

powering women through Women SHGs; encouraging entrepreneurship, empowering them to participate in governance, business and profit-making activities, should and must be a thrust area of development by the Government. The CM spoke of Rs 210 Crores earmarked for the above. This is great but Government must also make sure to empower these women's groups on concepts of book-keeping, accountability and transparency. They must develop the trust and confidence among themselves as this is the basic foundation and motivation for their growth.

In all this euphoria, hope and exultation towards a better future for our women, especially the rural women of Meghalaya, someone had to stand up and pour cold water on all the expectations of the day. We are told that a woman activist was invited to speak and she literally damned the whole proceedings by her unparadigmatic and unfounded bitter criticism of the initiatives of the Government, the Department concerned and the MSCW. While there is a time and place to censure the system when it fails the people but there are occasions when one has to rise above cynicism and negativity to give inspiration and optimism and

this conference was an ideal moment to encourage the women of the State as they struggle to find their own space in a world dominated by indifferent and at times hostile men. I know that Marx and Mao were great champions of the proletariat but the need for our women today is not that they be brainwashed by disciples and devotees of Maoism but to give women space for women themselves to find their own feet, stand on those two feet and start changing the world. Forward Women of Meghalaya. God go with you.

Yours etc.,
Phillis Nongbet,
Via email

NEIGRIHMS and CTVS Ward

Editor,
As one of the patients who has been suffering for many years, I take this opportunity to set aside the doubts of most people about the carelessness of doctors and nurses of NEIGRIHMS hospital. Many people have unnecessarily instilled fear in those wanting to be treated at NEIGRIHMS that if they are treated there and especially if they undergo heart

surgery the probability of dying is very high. I also heard a lot about the carelessness of the NEIGRIHMS nurses from too many people. But as one of the patients who has just completed 100 per cent successful Aortic Valve Replacement (AVR) surgery, I take this opportunity to clarify about these general misconceptions.

Most people will tell you not to get treatment here (NEIGRIHMS) because of the fears that have been lingering amongst us. This is completely untrue. Some patients are taken to NEIGRIHMS as the last resort which is likely to be difficult for the doctors and nurses. As a patient who is healthy now and who just received successful heart valve replacement surgery, I would like to clarify that the allegations against NEIGRIHMS are untrue. During my 41 days of treatments in the ICU and CTVS ward I found that the doctors, nurses and even the ward boys and girls and the staff were very kind and helpful in immeasurable ways.

On behalf of all the patients who had received successful surgeries especially in the CTVS ICU, I take this privilege to thank Dr. Reuben Lamiaki M. Ch, Dr. Sanjib Rawat M. Ch, perfusionist (Mr. Mrinal Mandal

and Mr. Ioosar Dkhar), all the sisters in ICU as well as in the CTVS wards and all the ward boys and girls and the staff of NEIGRIHMS for their treatment, words of encouragement, support and their kind gesture towards us patients. I hope this letter will encourage those in need of treatment to remove the fears and misconceptions that are spread by prejudiced minds. Go get your treatment in NEIGRIHMS and you won't regret it. But please don't go there as a last resort because that makes it difficult for any doctor anywhere to treat. Last but not least, "Time is the very essence of life itself."

I express my deepest gratitude to NEIGRIHMS for giving me a second lease of life and lifting me out of depression. I have written this from personal experience and from what I had witnessed during those days of my treatment. One person's experience may vary from another's but this is my testimony.

Yours etc.,
T. Khongphai,
Upper Shillong

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"Only those who have patience to do simple things perfectly ever acquire the skill to do difficult things easily."

— James J. Corbett

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXIV No. 299 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2022

Environment demands long term commitment

THIS month is dedicated to the environment. When the world designates a particular day towards a cause whether it's women's empowerment, the environment or human rights, HIV-AIDS, child labour etc., it means those subjects need special attention because they are either posing a serious threat to society or that society is posing a threat to them. HIV-AIDS is a threat to the well-being of society. With the environment it is humans that are posing a threat to its bio-diversity and sustainability. Hence June 6, is designated as World Environment Day. This year Meghalaya observed Environment Week which saw planting of hundreds of trees during the first week of June. The tree-plantation drives continue because this is the rainy season and trees have a higher survival rate during the monsoons.

Indeed, school and college children and individuals with a heart for the environment have planted trees this week and will be doing so through the month of June. The challenge is to revisit the plant that was put into the ground on a particular date to see if it is surviving. The environment requires a long term love affair with humans. A one off tree-plantation drive for photo-ops alone is a bad example. Each person who planted a tree must revisit the plant regularly to ensure its survival, to protect it from grazing animals and from enemies of the environment who delight in lighting up forests. School kids should be brain-washed with certain key information. An important one is that half of our oxygen needs comes from trees and the other half from oceans, seas, and rivers. Ocean and riverine plants produce oxygen through photosynthesis similar to trees. Forests contain 80 percent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity which is basically everything that is alive on land. This includes plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria.

Research shows that approximately 50 square miles of forests are lost each year due to human activities. This requires intensive re-afforestation and reducing the amount of resources used. One out of four medicines are sourced from rain forests. The North Eastern region is rich in medicinal herbs but at the rate at which forests are being cut, medicinal herbs are likely to disappear. Children should know that one tree removes 48 pounds of carbon every year. Trees recycle carbon dioxide into oxygen. But the carbon dioxide does not disappear. It continues to remain in the tree so when trees are cut down the carbon stored in them is released into the atmosphere. Hence as carbon levels continue to rise, the importance of planting trees cannot be over-emphasized. Trees are integral to life! Planting a tree is good but ensuring its survival is more crucial.

Tragedy or triumph of the commons?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A few weeks ago this author visited the Directorate of Agriculture with a colleague from NESFAS (North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society). During a discussion, a senior staff of the Department remarked that the lack of proper registration of land holdings is responsible for the farmers in the State missing out on financial benefits which would amount to a loss of thousands of crores. There is some truth in his assertion.

The much-touted PM-KISAN scheme is meant to provide an income support of Rs. 6000 per year. But in 2021 the number of farmers who benefitted from the Scheme was only 9000 (1% or less of the State's farming population) which was down from the 70,236 (1% or less of the State's farming population) that got the benefit the year before. Both numbers are very depressing. The reason for this is not the official reply about the beneficiaries' inability to provide 'correct and verified data'. It has to do with the 70% landless households in Meghalaya and the land tenure system which consist of community land/ Commons (Ri Raid) alongside private land (Ri Kynti). While in the former the cultivator does not own any land, in the latter no papers can be produced because only usufructuary (use) rights are available not of ownership. Viewed in this manner, the Commons are a part of the problem why farmers in the State miss out on such benefits. It follows therefore that the solution should lie in secure tenure rights under a private property regime.

The idea of the benefits of a private property regime is in fact very much deeply held in the mainstream policy circles. Whenever one talks of reforms in any sector of the economy, it is about reducing communal ownership (state/public property) and introducing private ownership (privatization/disinvestment). A case in point is the ill-fated 2020 Farm Laws. The narrative of the inefficiency of the communal ownership model has become highly intensified in the post liberalization period, i.e., after 1991. This was done on the pretext of bringing efficiency and ensuring profitability, touted as the main weakness of the system. All this is consistent with the argument made by Garrett Hardin in his 1968 seminal work 'Tragedy of the Commons'.

In the paper, Hardin gave the example of a pasture which is open to all herders, i.e., Commons. According to him, the arrangement initially works because of warfare, poaching and preva-

lence of diseases which limits the number of animals in the pasture. However, when social stability is achieved this arrangement fails and leads to an over-exploitation of resources. It happens because as a rational person, every herder tries to maximize his own benefit by adding more animals under the assumption that the benefit of increasing the herd will accrue entirely to him but the negative effects will be lesser since it will be shared by all. Since every herder follows the logic of a rational man, the entire pasture becomes degraded, hence, the tragedy of the commons. On surface the argument appears logical but does it stand up to empirical scrutiny? What happens to those groups whose land tenure system is based on the Commons, such as the indigenous communities of which the Khasis are an example. Did the Commons lead to a degradation of the environment and loss of resources? In 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of

All the four biodiversity hotspots found in the Indian sub-continent, viz., Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, Indo-Burma, Himalayas and the Sundaland (which includes Andaman and Nicobar Islands) are home to many tribal groups. But according to the logic of the tragedy of commons, indigenous territories should instead be characterized by scarred and degraded landscapes, the result of centuries of exploitation due to the land tenure system based on community land ownership or com Commons mons. How did the reverse happen? The answer might actually be found in the way cultivation practices of broom grass (Thysanolaena maxima) in Meghalaya differs in community land as against that in private land.

Broom grass is a very important cash crop for the farmers in Meghalaya. Its importance is highlighted by the fact that it is one of the crops whose price is being regulated by the State Government. It was remarked by



the UN (FAO) brought out the report "The White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems". This document was the result of collective work by Indigenous Peoples' representatives and experts, scientists, researchers, and UN staff with this author being one of the contributors. The initiative was coordinated by the Global Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and edited by a Technical Editorial Committee. A very important finding from the paper is that while indigenous peoples occupy over a quarter of the world's land, their territories hold 80 percent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. This is true of India as well. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs in its 2006 report 'National Tribal Policy' has also stated that while the tribal (i.e., indigenous) population makes up less than 9% of the country's population, they are found to be living in areas which are very rich in natural resources.

a senior scientist, with whom the author was working many years ago, that cultivation of broom grass is one of the most important factors in thatch houses transforming into pucca houses in rural areas of the State. But at the same time, the crop is blamed for causing severe land degradation. Anecdotal evidence abounds on how villages growing broom grass eventually had to be abandoned because of the drying up of water sources. Absent in all these discussions is whether such villages were growing broom grass in community land or private land.

Just like many in the State, farmers in Nongtraw, a village in the Khatarshong Laitkroh C&RD Block, also grow broom grass, both in community land as well as private land. While in the private lands, broom grass is grown continuously for many years, in the community land it is grown only for three years. With shifting cultiva-

tion being the main farming system in the village, broom grass follows after the food plants have been harvested after a year of cultivation. Although broom grass remains even after three years, the community does not allow any more harvesting but mandates the land be left fallow. After a period of 12-15 years, natural vegetation returns overwhelming the broom grass. The land is cleared and the cycle begins again. Done in this way, livelihood is assured but environmental degradation is avoided. This is because the community makes decisions based on collective good and not individual needs.

Garrett Hardin's thesis of 'Tragedy of the commons' has been criticized for lacking historical and empirical grounding. But even the theoretical basis is also highly shaky. According to him, while the private property regime is one of the solutions to prevent the indiscriminate exploitation of resources, he does admit that it is an unjust system but disturbingly "injustice is preferable to total ruin" (p.1244). In another place, he questions whether the solution might even work through the example of an owner of the factory on the bank of a stream who under the private property regime has difficulty in seeing why it is not his natural right to muddy waters flowing past his door. The thesis lacks both theoretical and empirical basis. But it is what drives the narrative of property regime discussion in the mainstream, i.e., individual patta, privatization of all economic sectors which includes agriculture, etc. The outcomes of accepting the idea are the current ecological crises and growing inequality globally.

If Meghalaya wants to improve the lot of the citizens in the State (especially the farmers), it will have to confront the issue of landlessness which is growing like a cancer and realize that it is linked to the growth of erosion of the Commons. This is already having ecological (coal mining) and social (rising inequality) problems in the State. The solution cannot rest on expansion of the private property regime (something which caused the problem cannot be the solution). It instead lies in coming together, state and civil society, to strengthen the tradition of Commons (i.e., community lands) of the indigenous peoples of the State.

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Bridging inter-generational gaps through storytelling

By Chenmiki Laloo

Our mothers would apply lime to our stomach drawing a very visible plus sign if we are suspected to be suffering from stomach discomfort (sabuit sakai). She would apply a chewed beetle leaf to our wounds if we fell down or met with a minor accident. She even made us drink a mixture of water and salt as a replacement for ORS when we are down with loose motion. There are several examples of remedies that are highly effective and curative. Well, who invented all these remedies? I would ask my mother this question. She says she learnt it from her mother and likewise her mother got it from our ancestors. Oral communication passed down by our ancestors continues to sustain the traditional wisdom of our indigenous people.

The first modern medicine (morphine) was developed in 1804 by a German scientist Friedrich Serturner. Prior to that invention there were traditional medicine practitioners who were the caretakers and healers of the society; they were pioneers in treating, diagnosing, and preventing illnesses in order to maintain well-being. By definition, traditional medicine refers to health practices, approaches, indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral based medicines, spiritual healing and manual techniques of birth attending. The practice of traditional medicine and traditional healing still plays a pivotal role in our society, however they are more relevant in villages and inaccessible areas where development has bypassed them. A pregnant woman in labour has to climb 4000 steps to reach the main road and then catch a public transport to get to the hospital is an ideal example of how traditional medical practitioners are needed in these areas.

On March 2, 2011, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council passed an act for promotion and protection of the Khasi Traditional Medicine. The Act received the Governor's assent on September 22, 2011. The Act defines Khasi traditional medicine as the comprehensive wisdom, knowledge, skills and practices in the broad context of holistic wisdom including philosophy, theology, social customs and traditions, diets and foods, folklore and legend, sacred sites and space, traditional social lifestyles and community relationships, home remedies, spiritual and psychological healing, chants, prayers and invocations; that are practiced, performed and used by Khasi traditional healers, priests, elders, housewives and other practitioners throughout Khasi society. Now who is a Khasi traditional medicine practitioner? The Act defines him/her as someone who is highly-learned in the knowledge, skill and practice of Khasi traditional medicine. After commencement of the Act, the KHADC constituted a Commission known as the Khasi Traditional Medicine Commission. The major functions of the Commission are to educate, train, promote, protect, formulate policies, encourage documentation and research, ensuring they have knowledge of their rights, coordination with various government and civil agencies and to manage finances for the protection and promotion of Khasi Traditional Medicine.

The United Nations General Assembly, which adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in September 2007. Article 24 of the resolution states that the 'Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals'.

On May 28, 2022, Grassroots - an indigenous rights-based organisation committed to working for community development from an indigenous and gender perspective organised a one-day session titled "Bridging intergenerational gaps and promotion of traditional wisdom through storytelling" at Khrang, Laitkroh block.

The program was conducted in collaboration with Nangkyrsoi secondary school and youths from the village. The session is also a component of the project 'Kyrswiew Ia La Ki Tynrai' supported by Pawanka Fund. We might wonder, why storytelling? In the past storytelling was used as a medium that shaped our moral and cultural values and customary laws. The famous Khasi anthology "Sawdong ka Lyngwiar Dpei" interprets that these stories were mostly told around the hearth. Another advantage of storytelling is that it draws family and friends closer. However, the art of storytelling is a forgotten art in this fast-moving world. Grassroots organized this programme to bridge the intergenerational gap between the traditional medicine practitioners and the younger generation through storytelling. It was aimed at disseminating information on the knowledge and wisdom of traditional medicinal practice. Students and teachers of Nangkyrsoi secondary school, youth groups from Khrang and Klongthong, village organisations and traditional medicine practitioners were participants amongst others. Four prominent traditional medicinal practitioners were invited to share stories about their journey, challenges and intergenerational traditional wisdom. Klannel Khongrymmmai - a Shaman narrated how he uses the power of spoken words to fight illnesses. He negotiates with the divine power to heal the person. He has the ability to feel the illness inside a person with his fingertips. He emphasized on healing through the power of faith. Another healer was Prisca Lynrah - a massage therapist who is visually impaired. Her recognition for traditional healing by the general masses began in 1995 when she healed her own husband. The mystery of healing was sensory - by feeling with the hands. She helped several women conceive through her massage. She is also assisted by her husband when she needs medicines to be extracted from plants, bees, etc. The third practitioner Darmasius Rani, a traditional herbal medicine practitioner emphasised that his expertise lies in helping accident victims with wounds and broken bones, etc. He vividly explained while displaying the plants he uses for blood clotting and other remedies. He is an orphan whose gifts were visible since he was young. His first clients were his own brothers and himself. He credited his knowledge to his elders. The last practitioner who shared his story was Andreas Sohkhlet - who is close to 90 years but still has lots of patients seeking his expertise. He started his journey of traditional healing in 1963 when he had enough of cremating dead bodies especially those of children every day. "Those days we cremated dead bodies and every week I cremated 5-6 children". With the help of his elders, he started experimenting on herbs and when people healed, he started gaining ideas on the mixture and components of the medicine. With his experiment, he would give these herbal mixtures to people and children and then noticed that the number of deaths decreased. He continues with this practice till date. Memorial Khongkai shared a meaningful story from the Lepcha community that was told to her by her friend Minket Lepcha through puppeteering exhibiting the story of a plant called 'Oroxylum indicum' locally known as 'Pagoreep' which has its significance in human rites and rituals and is used as a medicinal plant for healing. In this age of technological advancement, it is imperative to revisit our roots and bridge intergenerational gaps by tapping on traditional or non-traditional media so that stories such as these carrying meaningful insights about our society are not lost. A famous American author Ursula K. Le Guin once said, "There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories"

Letters to the Editor

Women deserve centre page priority

Editor,
The State Women's Conference 2022 was a profound moment for our state. For decades many have held the fond but false notion that women have equality in our society. In fact, some misinformed outsiders gushingly claim Meghalaya as the place where women rule. It is only in the lived daily experiences of the harsh life of a Khasi or Garo woman, that grim reality reigns. If the editor of the Shillong Times says that she "had to literally clamber up the dark hole of single parenthood", how difficult must it be for other women in even more straits. Little has changed for these women, they remain below the social, political and economic radar.

In sociology we teach the teach the different types of families: nuclear, joint, extended etc. But the typical family in Meghalaya today is headed by a lonely, deserted, poverty-stricken single mother who battles

her own stress while having to care for malnourished, dropout children. Given that more than one-third of women head such families, why are there no specific schemes for single mothers or for their children? Men in desperate circumstances turn to drugs, militancy, alcohol or even suicide, but the single mother steels herself to stay alive for her children's sake. Recent research studies provide the evidence for the contents of this paragraph.

The unequal plight of women is hardly different anywhere. The corporate world was recently startled by the sudden resignation of Sheryl Sandberg, the billionaire CEO of Facebook, now Meta. Ms Sandberg, only 52 years old, is the author of "Lean In", the best seller that urged women to take charge of their lives and succeed in a male-dominated workplace. It is presumed that being a single mother, she left to take care of her teenage children.

A poll by Sandberg's own "Lean In" Foundation found 71% of women expected being older to count against them at work, and half had experienced sexism and

ageism around menopause. Women in the workplace are disadvantaged at every stage in their career: getting married means giving up career or following the husband as he pursues his career, taking maternity leave, child care and then the stress of menopause. Along with these additional burdens, they still are held to a different standard than that applied to men, Sandberg declares.

Our Chief Minister placed his finger on teenage pregnancy as an urgent social problem. He is absolutely right, because the pregnancy of a teenage girl begins the bleak downward spiral of that woman, blighting the lives of her children and herself for decades to come. We know what is needed to prevent that pregnancy is sexuality education and contraception, but we need a dependable system to carry it out.

It was disheartening to see that yesterday's editorial on women was pushed to the side of the page, when it should have been in the centre.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Where are the indigenous trees?

Editor,
I was so relieved to read V K Nautiyal's letter 'Cherry Blossom Planting' (ST June 7 2022) for, like him, I too have long felt that 'any alien species is a potential threat to local plant species'. I have always been deeply concerned that we do not take pride in learning about our local plants which are part of the eco-system that has long sustained the state and is now increasingly threatened. In more ways than one, this fascination with the 'foreign' at the expense of our own, is unfortunately an affliction that is becoming nigh incurable in our State. How many local species of plants, birds and animals will become extinct without anyone knowing their names or their role in maintaining a delicate ecological balance? Eulogies to sacred groves ring hollow if their purpose is merely employed in the service of tourism. It is about time that the expertise of the Forest Department is

consulted and the tireless work of naturalists like Bah So Khongsit is recognised and documented before our heritage is lost to us for the sake of a short-lived show.

Yours etc.,
Janet Hujon,
Via email

NEHU employees strike

Editor,
We are all aware of the massive anomalies at the behest of NEHU's administration regarding hostel and student affairs. The VC somehow has given a 15-day time frame to rectify the issues and come up with a brand new set of facilities as per students' demands. That being said, what makes us sad and annoyed at the same time is the plight of the casual workers who are braving rough weather to push for their demands to be heard during these testing times. A meagre salary of Rs 20,000 cannot go too far when one has a large family to feed. And that amount when a person has been serving

the institution for over two decades is gross injustice! Irrespective of their resolute efforts, what is disheartening is that the VC has till now not met them. If the head of the Institution does not meet them then how shall their demands and grievances be heard? It's really painful to pass by the NEHU administrative section every day to see these hapless workers, solemnly waiting for their voices to be heard. Through this daily, I urge the officials and the VC in particular (who is usually out of station), to at least listen to what the employees have to say and what it is that they want to convey rather than comfortably sitting in the chambers and leaving these poor souls to drench in the torrential rains. Alas, education doesn't make anyone a bigger person but a kind heart does!

Yours etc.,
A.Lyngdoh
Shillong-6

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

A gamut of genres for the avid but unaware reader

For devoted readers, or those who pick up books for the sake of reading and not just to while away time, there can never be too many books. Yet, even the most devoted adherent can overlook works that are of special interest to them, given the vast amount of material available in every conceivable genre.

The reason for this is not too difficult to fathom - books are written by people for the enjoyment and edification of other people, and given the inter-connection of the human experience, something or the other is going to strike a chord with someone somewhere.

Be it, say a cross-generational, cross-cultural romance set in pre-WWII Singapore, a 'ripped from the headlines' thriller reprising a Daniel Pearl-like situation in Karachi, a tale of political or criminal chicanery set in some forgotten corner of Europe, or sub-Saharan Africa, or a darkly comic look at a big or small historic episode, through the eyes of an anti-hero, or more.

Let us look at a handful of books that may defy slotting into particular genres, may have gone unnoticed, but are compelling and delightful reads. Of course, there is a caveat that reading choices can be very subjective, but then, some of them may click too.

The Mafia has inspired a number of books and movies, the most famous of them being Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969). A contemporary, and less sombre, even rollicking, look is Pulitzer-winning American journalist and author James Earle 'Jimmy' Breslin's *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight* (1969; filmed in 1971 with Robert DeNiro).

Based superficially on the life of New York mobster Joey Gallo aka "Crazy Joe", it is the story of Kid Sally Palumbo, a long-loyal operative of the Brooklyn Mafia and skilled in murder, which brings him to the attention of the local top Mafia boss, Baccala, but his vocation doesn't get him the money and respect he craves. Also because, his mental skills are negligible -- "Baccala was of the opinion that Kid Sally Palumbo couldn't run a gas station at a profit even if he stole the customers' cars."

To keep Sally from stirring up trouble, the boss offers him an easy assignment -- organise a bicycle race through Brooklyn, and keep the profits. The result: A messy

turf war that quickly engulfs the borough and which the usually complaisant police cannot ignore. And yes, there is a lion there somewhere too.

The quips are hard to stop evoking laughter - say, "Raymond the Wolf passed away in his sleep one night from natural causes; his heart stopped beating when the three men who slipped into his bedroom stuck knives in it." There are plenty more like that. And the caricatures and unsuccessful love story round it off.

More serious, but no less compelling is French-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf's historical fiction *Samarkand* (1988 French, 1994 English).

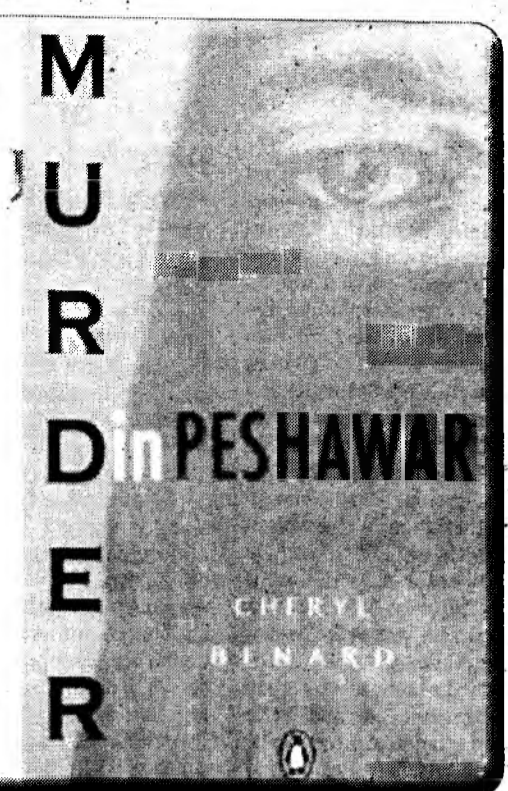
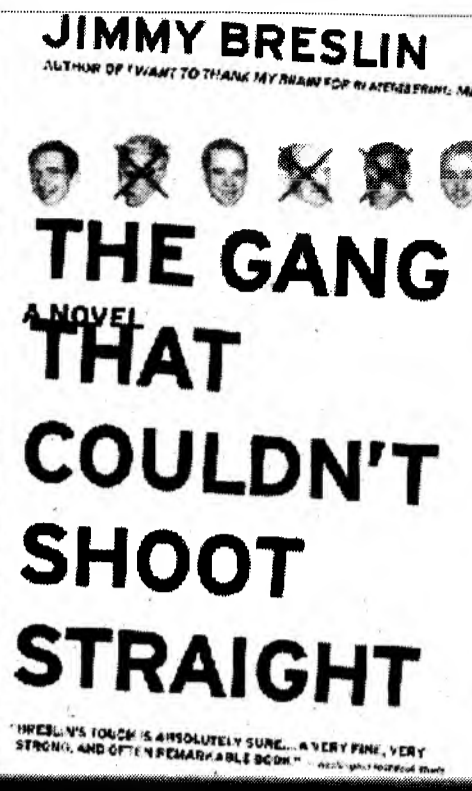
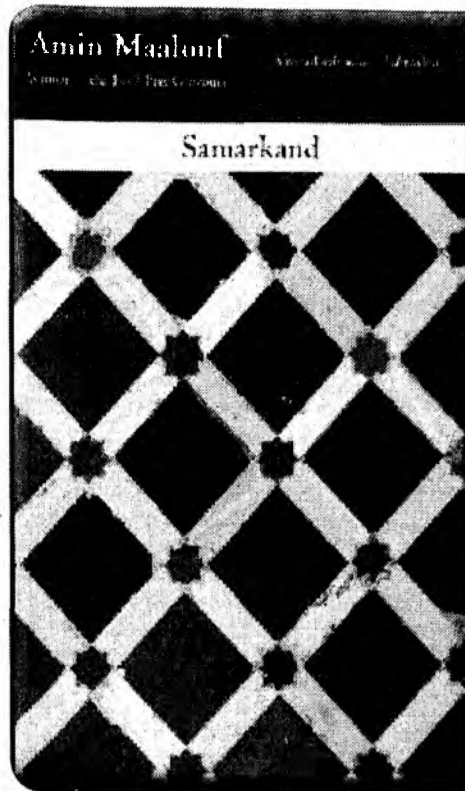
This combines a depiction of 11th-century Persia and Central Asia, where poet-astronomer Omar Khayyam is trying to compile his celebrated "Rubaiyat" and early 20th-century Iran, where a young and a bit impetuous American named Benjamin Omar Lesage is trying to get his hands on the work's original manuscript and gets involved in the 1905 Revolution.

Adding flavour to the work are Khayyam's interactions with historical personages like the Seljuk Vizier, Nizam al-Mulk, and Hassan al-Sabbah, founder of the feared Order of the Assassins, and his love affair with a female poet of the titular city. The modern part deals with the American's own view of Persian culture and history and his bittersweet romance.

Lesage ultimately achieves his aim and sends his valuable package home -- only he picks the Titanic.

Espionage, with all its twists and turns and layers and layers of deceptions, is a difficult genre to pull off -- even for those who have had first-hand experience of it. There is no shortage of books, however - Dan Fesperman's *The Double Game* (2012) gives an extensive list, or old and new authors who are not that well known -- Geoffrey Davison, Desmond Cory, Adam Diment, Kenneth Benton, Alan Williams, and more.

British novelist Gavin Scott is also a filmmaker and writer of the Emmy-winning mini-series *Mists of Avalon*, *Dreamworks' Small Soldiers*, and after moving to the US, he tied up with George Lucas to develop and script *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. We are however concerned with his Duncan Forrester series.



The Age of Treachery (2016), set in Oxford a year after the end of WWII, has former Special Operations Executive Agent Duncan Forrester seeking to resume his academic career, but the atmosphere at his college becomes tense when a much-disliked don is found murdered in the quadrangle and his colleague and friend is the prime accused.

Our hero, whose PTSD is still to be quelled, jumps in to save him and must navigate lost Viking sagas, Satanic rituals and wartime espionage in his quest.

What elevates this is some cameos by academic colleague J R R Tolkien, concerned over his first *Lord of the Rings* manuscript, a helpful ex-colleague-turned-journalist (and budding author) Ian Fleming, and the toxic atmosphere of ambition and extremism as the Cold War dawns even as Nazism remains to be extirpated.

If you happen to like this, Forrester returns in *The Age of Olympus* (2017), set in Greece heading towards civil war, and *The Age of Exodus* (2018), set in 1947, where Britain comes to terms with the loss of its empire, a grisly murder in the British Museum, and terrorists targeting a senior minister make for a compelling read.

Mogul Buffet/Murder in Peshawar (2003) by researcher and analyst Cheryl Barnard, who also happens to be wife of top US diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad, is another book that is difficult to categorise.

At face value, it tells of an American businessman going missing from a Peshawar hotel, leaving just a cryptic blood-smeared message and believed murdered. As his sister comes there from the US to uncover his fate, there is a string of other murders, including those of a prominent local businessman and fundamentalist cleric.

An upright police officer is despatched from Islamabad to get to the bottom of what is going on, and his demure wife, and her hotwire woman journalist friend accompany him, while in Peshawar, an enigmatic high-society woman, a lovelorn student, an abused woman, and so on, round up the scene.

Technically a mystery, it is also a black comic look at modern Pakistani society, including its complicated gender roles and relations, the way it interacts with the West, and of course, the birth of the Taliban.

On a different genre and continent is British-born, Australia-settled jour-

nalist-turned-writer Nicholas Drayson's ingenious but endearing love story-cum-zoological caper *A Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (2008), featuring a Nairobi businessman, Mr Malik, and his family and friends.

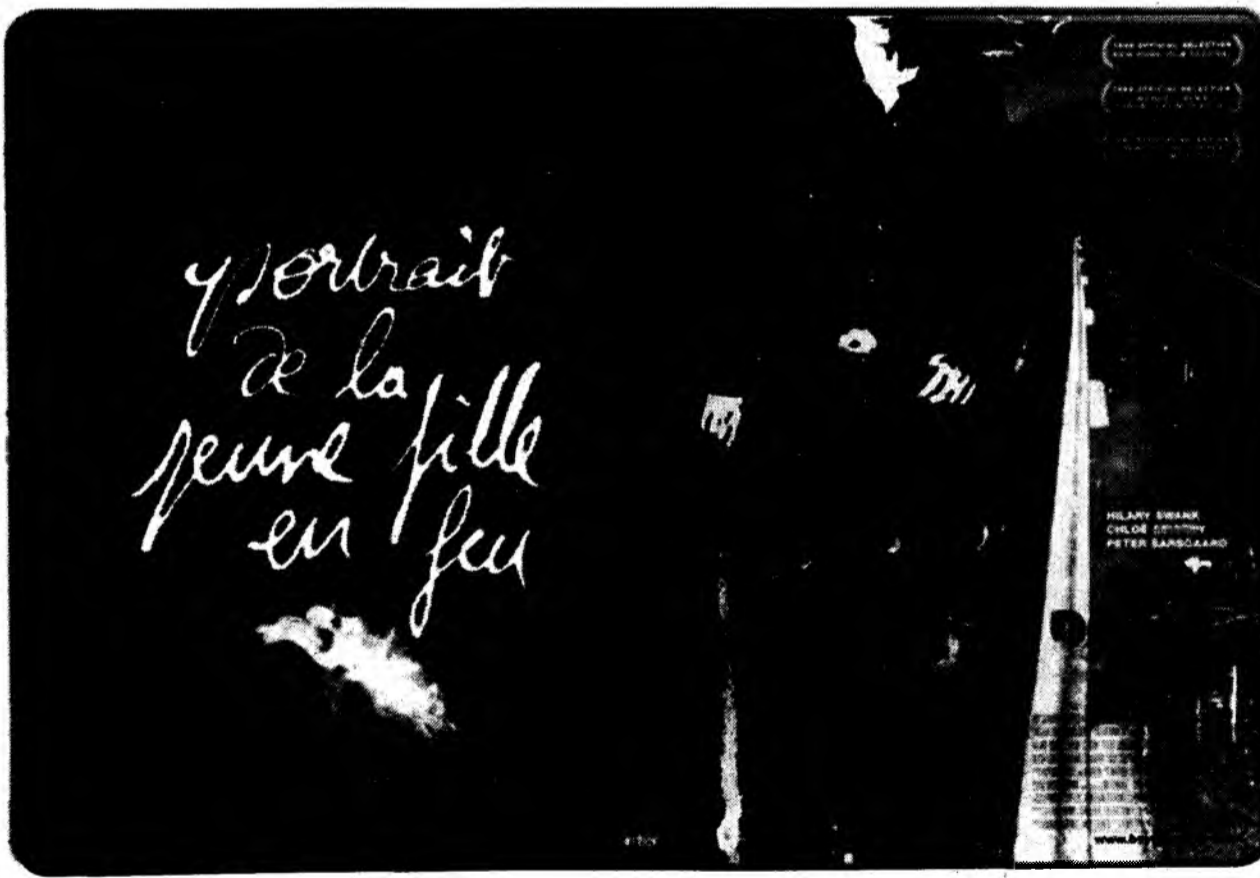
The short, slightly overweight, balding middle-aged widower develops a crush on the leader of his Tuesday morning bird-walk and intends to invite her to his club's annual ball, but a rival - a former schoolmate - unexpectedly surfaces and has the same aim.

To resolve the issue, members of their club devise a unique wager -- and ensure plenty of misadventures for both in the scenic Kenyan countryside, with not-so-pleasant political intrigues to keep the reader engrossed.

You can see what Malik and his family and friends get up to next in *A Guide To Beasts of East Africa* (2012), where his planning of his club's annual safari is hit by a series of strange crimes, which puts its very existence at risk.

It is up to him and his friends to unravel this tangle, as well as an age-old murder, recover the club mascot and identify, finally, the most dangerous beast in Africa.

Ten feature films to watch this Pride Month



Cinema becomes an important reflection of what life is, often a celebration. It sometimes also mirrors the nuances of the struggles people go through, struggles which are incomprehensible in real life.

"In order to be an ally, you need to acknowledge the struggles, celebrations, and lives of queer individuals. Queer movies become a source of understanding the queer experience which in return gives you an insight into how similar yet different our lives are. It not only expand your understanding of queer lives but also sensitise you to the struggle and oppression that the community went through at the hands of patriarchy and heteronormativity", says Yashwant Panwar, Communications lead Imbue Natural.

This Pride Month, here's a look at the movies that have helped us understand and witness what it means to be queer in different parts of the world.

Fire

Loosely based on Ismat Chughtai's sensational short story *Lihaf*,

Fire is one of the first Indian movies that explicitly depicted the struggle of queer women in an overtly homophobic and patriarchal society.

Memories in March

This masterpiece by Rituparano Ghosh not only gives us a perspective on coming to terms with queerness, but also teaches how grief brings people together.

Aligarh

A movie that strips itself off of all the subtle metaphors and gives us a raw depiction of what it means to be queer in a religion-driven homophobic Indian society. This is not just the story of professor Siras but everyone who had to face discrimination because of their identity.

Blue is the Warmest Colour

A coming-of-age story about love, acceptance, betrayal and accepting your identity.

Carol

An adaptation of the romantic novel *The Price of Salt* by Patri-

cia Highsmith, the story revolves around the relationship between Carol, a recently divorced mother and Therese, an aspiring photographer.

Boys Don't Cry

Based on the murder of Nebras-

kan Trans-man Brendon Teena, this is one of the first movies that initiated the conversation around gender and transphobia in mainstream cinema.

Moonlight

This critically acclaimed coming-of-age drama revolves around coming to terms with queerness in African-American cultures.

The movie won three Oscars including Best Picture in the year 2017.

Margarita with A Straw

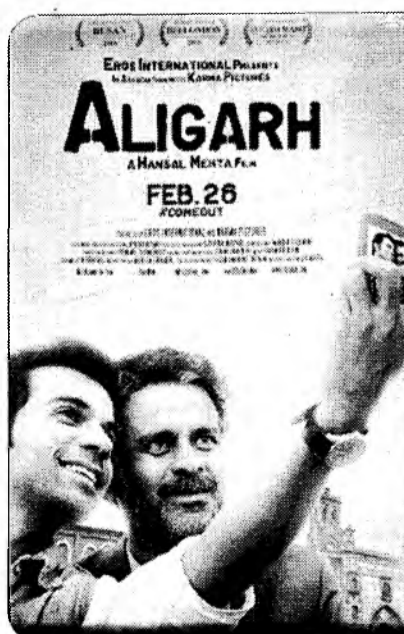
One of the first Indian movies to depict queerness and disability explicitly. The story revolves around Leila Kapoor, a teenage girl with cerebral palsy and her encounter with bisexuality, New York, family and life.

Kapoor and Sons

A Bollywood anomaly that depicts a queer experience as a practical reality, instead of sensationalising or de-sensitising sexual identities.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire

This French masterpiece gives us the beauty of the female gaze. Set in the 1770s the story moves beyond the love of an artist and her muse by portraying love as an art. (*IANSLife*)



Alienation of Punjab's youth

Book Excerpt

The average man, particularly the average young man, or woman, may have trouble articulating their situation, but they know what they are experiencing: stagnant economy, deep trouble in agriculture, symptomised by an appalling number of rural suicides every year, collapse of industry, no jobs and no hope of jobs, a state government that in fact has no money and falls deeper into debt with every passing year.

A report by *Common Cause* points towards an ingrained distrust of the police and by extension, the government. Some people may be able to identify a year or a period when this distrust took root; for others, it is just a 'given' that they grew up with.

Militancy itself was a symptom of a long-standing sense of alienation. The state's response drove that alienation deeper. Ruthless measures employed to crush it perverted the administrative culture, particularly police culture. The courts were paralysed for 20 years.

Industry was always denied to Punjab on the pretext that the state was vulnerable to attack, and, in recent years, tax-holiday packages granted to neighbouring states have drained away industry and jobs. Traditionally, Punjab has been an agricultural state; but, if any hope remained in agriculture, then farmers and farm labourers would not be committing suicide.

Successive state governments have come in on big talk but, either because of indifference or inability, all the indicators show the state on a downward path. Parties woo the voters with solemn oaths to provide corruption-free and efficient governance; they promise to rescue agriculture and revive the villages; they commit to attracting industry and creating jobs.

If the claims are to be believed, would lakhs of young people and their parents make such a heroic effort to get out of Punjab, get out of India? It must also be pointed out that the politicians of Punjab send their own children abroad, which

THE LEGACY OF MILITANCY IN PUNJAB

Long Road to 'Normalcy'

INDERJIT SINGH JAJEE
DONA SURI

strongly suggests that they do not believe what they say either.

"It Can't be worse there" The motivations of those desperate to leave Punjab are largely economic, but not only economic. Another thing that drives them to risk everything to get out of Punjab is the belief that there is absolutely nothing that they can do to change a corrupt administration, a rapacious police force, and a selfish, static, unresponsive political culture.

A story in *The Indian Express* of March 3, 2018, quotes a youngster from a village in Gurdaspur district:

He has studied up to Class 10 and wants to "get out of here". He says, "I don't believe Greece can be worse than Punjab. The agent has told me that there is always work for those who are willing to work hard. I am. At least I can go out and see the world."

Within a decade or two, most of the generation that witnessed events of the 1980s and 1990s will be gone.

Some of that generation were sufficiently alienated from the government to get into a war with it. They were not alienated from home and faith, so fighting still seemed worthwhile. Very few of their children and grandchildren have much awareness of, or interest in, the traumas suffered by the preceding generation. They see so little hope in their homeland that fighting does not seem worthwhile; they simply leave. (*IANS*)

Visit to Nairobi National Park

By CK Nayak

The Nairobi National Park in Kenya is a short drive away from its central business district. Wide-open grass plains and a backdrop of the city scrapers, scattered acacia bush play host to a wide variety of wildlife.

Established in 1946, the park is fenced on three sides, and the open southern boundary allows migrating wildlife to move around the park and the adjacent Kitengela plains. Despite its proximity to the city and its relatively small size, it boasts a large and varied wildlife population and is one of Kenya's most successful rhinoceros sanctuaries.

Visitors can enjoy the park's picnic sites, three campsites, and the walking trails for hikers all within just half an hour's journey from the centre of the capital.

The park has a large and diverse wildlife population and animals

found in the park include lions, leopards, African buffaloes, black rhinoceroses, giraffes, hippopotamuses, spotted hyenas, blue wildebeests, zebras, cheetahs, gazelles, common elands, impalas, hartebeest, waterbucks, common warthogs, olive baboons, black-backed jackals, common ostriches, and Nile crocodiles.

It is the main tourist attraction for visitors to Nairobi. Visitor attractions include the park's diverse bird species, cheetahs, hyenas, leopards, and lions.

Other attractions include wildebeests and zebra migrations, the Ivory Burning Site Monument, the Nairobi Safari Walk, and the animal orphanage. Inhabitants of Nairobi and thousands of Kenyan children on school field trips visit the park every week.

Our tour guide, Kennedy says the park has five big (baring elephants), small fives, ugly fives, and many more fives including the shy five.

The sight of animals in their natural surroundings and close to our armoured vehicles was like the films on the popular National Geographic Channel. But the best sight was that of a hungry lioness waiting for its kill - she was unmoved with our presence. The clicking of our cameras and whispering voices hardly had any impact on her.

After a breathtaking 15 minutes, she just walked away like a queen along the sides of our vehicle while other enthusiastic visitors peered out the window to catch a last glimpse of her.

According to Kennedy, the term "Big Five" originally referred to the difficulty in hunting lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants, and African buffaloes. These five large African mammal species were known to be dangerous and it was considered a feat by trophy hunters to bring them home. Today, however, the expression takes on a gentler form, referring to 'seeing' the Big Five—not



shooting them. Kennedy also told us about many other fives the park has. The "Little Five" - ant lions, rhinoceros beetles, buffalo weavers, and leopard tortoises. There is even the Ugly Five - a whimsical listing of animals that includes hyenas, marabou storks, vultures, warthogs and wildebeests. The 'Shy Five' are hard to spot due to their introverted nature. These animals are porcupines, bat-eared foxes, aardvarks, meerkats, and aardwolves.

Like all other parks, Nairobi National Park is being affected by the ever increasing human, and livestock population including poaching of wildlife. The park's creator Mervyn Cowie designed several of Kenya's national parks with human visitors in mind. This emphasis helped in making tourism Kenya's primary industry.

Initially, it exacerbated problems between the human population and wildlife. The park is under pressure from the city's growing population and needs for farmland. People live right next to the park's boundaries, which creates human-animal conflicts.

To solve the problems, the government signed treaties with the local Maasai community who gave up their grazing lands on the Laikipia escarpment near Mount Kenya.

Some of the park's revenues have been used for community projects for the people in Kitengela. Maasai landowners have also formed the Kitengela Landowners Association, which works with the Kenyan Wildlife Service to protect the wildlife and find benefits for the locals. The farmers are compensated with cash if their livestock are killed by lions outside the park.

The park's Wildlife Conservation

Education Centre has lectures and guided tours of the park and animal orphanage. The Kenya Wildlife Service has also created a Safari Walk that highlights the variety of plants and animals that are in Kenya.

Above all, the entrance of the park is lined up with original Maasai people of all ages in their traditional attire, welcoming the visitors with their dance.



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JUNE 12, 2022

Moon is opposite Venus on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. There will be new aspects of progress. Your financial position will be stable and strong. You will be satisfied with your performance in your job. You will be planning to achieving your targets. Time will be suitable. You will have auspicious news from your relatives. Those who are eligible for marriage will get good proposals. You will give importance to your love and relationships. You will also plan to take a short break from job and you may face problems. You will also fulfill wishes of your spouse/mate. You will be able to outline the framework of some significant work. Your respect and prestige will grow. You will have full faith in your own abilities.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Time period is to your liking. You will be full of fun and excitement. Your zest and zeal to do things will be unmatched. You will have monetary gains. You will also plan an outing with your loved ones. Your desires will get fulfilled. You will also plan to take a short break from job and you will plan to visit a picnic spot or retreat near to you. You will also get a thing you have desired for long. There are going to be extremely favorable days. Destiny will favor you and stars are on your side. You will work hard and race ahead of others in terms of skill, achievements and knowledge. You will get good business/job offers. Your relations with your life partner will be cordial. Your elders will bless you. You will have stability in your job.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It will be a perfect time to lay out your plans for the future. You will carry out your duties nicely. You will not be afraid to accept challenges. Your enemies and opponents will get defeated. You will be busy in your work and business. You will also get rewarded financially for your efforts. You will also pay attention to your personality. You will get positive feedback from your well wishers. Your life will run smoothly on its tracks. You will also start interacting a lot and meeting lot of people. Those who are in media, dance, entertainment, writing, fashion and in creative field of work will make good progress in life. Your mind will also be filled with positive thoughts. You will give advices and suggestions to the people close to you. You may also take part in some wedding or event.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It is going to be a wonderful week in terms of money gains and achievements. You will make good progress in your job/business/profession. You will take work as a worship and will perform all your tasks in a methodical manner. You will inspire your subordinates and colleagues. Your bosses will have words of praise for you. Money and wealth will keep coming. New business plans will also come in your mind. New contacts in business/profession are also possible. You will not bother about any criticism in your work. Even your relatives will criticize you, but you will not pay any heed to them. These are enlightening days. Students will be excited about their careers. All the doubts in your mind will also get cleared. All the people around you will try to come closer to you. You will disappoint none.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your efforts will bring lot of money and wealth. Money that had been struck somewhere will come to you. It is time to kick start new projects. New business plans for expansion will be laid on the table. New job offers too will come. A promotion you have been waiting for so long will come all of a sudden. Your income will be good. It is time to realize your dreams. You will think about something big in your life. You will take part in entertaining and creative activities. You will also do some important deals related to land, property etc. There will be an increase in your income. There will be various ways to earn money. You will also give lot of importance to your personal relations. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. Love affairs can end in marriage. You will be full of joy and cheer.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will be in a relax mood this week. You will plan to spend a lot of time with your family. You will also make up for neglecting your family life earlier. You will try to strengthen your relationship with your dear ones and elders. Husband and wife will also share wonderful bonding. You will also like to do a lot for people who matter to you the most. You will have gains and profits in business. Those applying for government jobs will also get success. Your pending tasks will get completed. Works related to pension, taxation, insurance, legal papers, passport, etc. will be completed. You will be praised for your work. In the office work will gather speed. There will be an increase in your income. You will pay attention to your health. You will obtain your objectives at any cost. You will return to your work with full confidence and enthusiasm.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There will be flurry of activities this week. You will plan to start a new job or business. You will also be busy in family weddings and parties. The marriage of a family member will also get fixed. You will also plan expansion in your business. You will get loan for it. There will be an increase in your income. You will also do some overtime work to meet your rising expenses. You will also bring about an improvement in your

working style. Your neighbors will be jealous of your success but it will not matter to you much. You will also keep a watch on your health and will go for regular checkups. You will also get some auspicious or good news from somewhere. You will also get help in family dispute but it is better to move ahead with mutual understanding and compromise.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It will turn out to be a wonderful week. You will be busy in your work, your noble and worthy deeds will bring lot of name and fame for you. Your self confidence will be high. Your bosses will remain satisfied with your performance. You will inspire many a people. You will also purchase new items for your household needs. You will also plan for expanding your business/work. You will be never short of money. Availability of things will bring happiness in your life and help to make you feel secure. You will spend most of your time on entertainment and fun activities. There will be situations of changes and transfers. The atmosphere at your workplace will be favorable for you. Success will be yours in some exams/interviews.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Time is on your side this week. You will feel more energetic than usual. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also explore additional sources of income. You will also follow a routine time table. You will complete your work in time. You will feel mentally peaceful. You will enjoy your domestic life. Love birds will understand feelings of each other well. Marriage is on the cards. Troubles that have been worrying you for some time will vanish all of a sudden. Your enemies and opponents will have to out a sorry face. They will not get success in their endeavour. The time will be fruitful for you. Your financial position will be much better than before. Property related disputes will get resolved. You will be interested in business related activities. You will develop interest in spiritual matters too.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 22)

It is a favorable time period. You will get the full support of your better half. Those who are unmarried will get favorable response. You will be busy in preparation of a family function. Peace and harmony will prevail at your home. You will get lot of happiness and bliss from your relatives and friends. Your married life will be peaceful. You can also fall in new love relations with persons known to you. You will also have a hold at your place of work. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will also share good relations with your in-laws. A person may try to harm your interests but will not be successful. How you present yourself will be an important factor. The differences with your siblings will come to an end. Your creative side will be on display. There will be no dearth of your supporters.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The first few days of the week will be full of action. Your brighter side of the personality will be on display. A problem at workplace will get resolved timely. Do not compel your partner with your opinion and view point. He/she is ready to listen to you. Talk to him/her with an open mind, with love and understanding. Your cool nature will help you in all situations. You will once again focus on money making activities. Income will be good. You will feel yourself financially secure. You might get something as ancestral property in legacy. Ties between parents and children will become stronger. Your and their siblings will also become stronger and there will be wonderful bonding on display. People will give you respect and importance. There will be gain in business and those in jobs will also be beneficial.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It will turn out to be a wonderful week for you. Things will happen as per your plans. Your self respect and dignity will increase. Your colleagues will listen to your views. You will be heard with interest. Your valuable suggestions will be implemented too. You will also make good progress in your business. There will be stability in your career. Your efforts to earn money will be successful. Your government related matters will gain momentum. You will also get facilitated in a function. You will be victorious in legal battles. Your self confidence will be high. You will also have a happy and secure future ahead of you. Love affairs will be successful.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A chance meeting with an unknown person will lead to blissful period of love and romance. You will be serious about this person. You will also get a chance to connect with people from different walks of life. Your popularity will also rise. A person may try to drag your name in a official matter but will not get success. You need to be careful while dealing with strangers and unknown persons. Guests will come to your house and will bring in happiness. You will feel tenderness for the weak and feeble. You will get lot of name and fame for your noble deeds. There will be better co-ordination between husband and wife. Your in-laws can also visit your house. You will also pay attention to your business and job. You will get benefits from your siblings. You will be satisfied with your life.

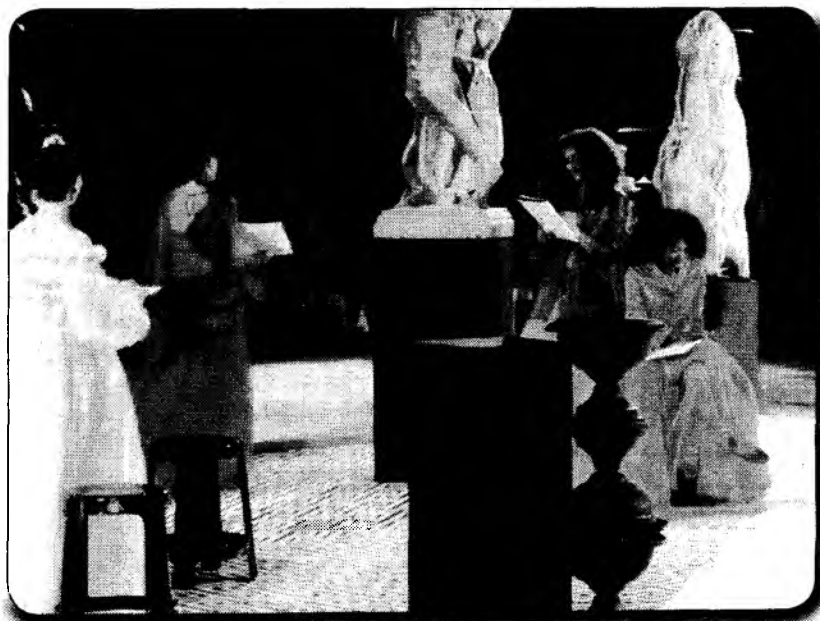
Molly Goddard's 'The Art of Literature' exhibition

Molly Goddard has been a fixture on the British runway since 2014, with the designer known internationally for her ethereal tulle dresses, which have been worn on the red carpet and on screen by actresses Sonam Kapoor, Rosamund Pike, and Jodie Comer, among others.

Molly found inspiration in the English countryside as well as classic narratives of English literature, particularly Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Molly

2019 Ready-to-Wear Collection, which was inspired by Tess of the d'Urbervilles. On display at Christie's King Street in St James's from June 6 to 15.

Goddard comments, "Hardy paints an incredible picture of the English landscape and seasons in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. The collection was definitely about being wrapped up against the weather physically and metaphorically. The pieces included in the exhibition are a very good representation of what



explained that these looks were about being frivolous and fabulous while also being strong, tough, and resilient -- about thriving rather than just surviving. Tulle in all weathers was paired with utilitarian accessories inspired by Thomas Hardy's ill-fated 19th-century British heroine, Tess Durbeyfield.

Christie's announcement that 'The Art of Literature Exhibition' will include fashion by Molly Goddard, a designer whose creative inspiration comes from a variety of sources, including author Thomas Hardy's work. 'The Auction Highlights' will feature a selection of artistic masterpieces inspired by literature throughout the ages, alongside looks from Goddard's Autumn/Winter

we do best, by which I mean taking simple designs and turning them into something totally different, using techniques like shirring and hand-smocking, or by scaling them up and using unexpected fabrics."

Annabelle Scholar, co-curator comments, "We are thrilled to include these wondrous creations by Molly in 'The Art of Literature Exhibition', pieces which were inspired by a work of literature and ushered in a new era of British fashion. In this cross category exhibition spanning three millennia we're looking at how the written word has inspired artists and creatives to make works of art, or bring new meaning to existing works of art." (LANSLife)

Indian television welcomes Billy Elliot: The Musical

For the first time on Indian television, Zee Theatre presents Billy Elliot: The Musical, a critically acclaimed coming-of-age story set to Sir Elton John's music. The musical, based on the 2000 smash hit film, is set in a desolate English mining town during the 1984 miner's strike. The story then follows the inspirational journey of a young boy who chooses ballet shoes over boxing gloves and defies gender stereotypes to follow his heart.

Even in the face of his father's disapproval, he refuses to give up and begins to secretly prepare for an audition at the Royal Ballet School. Along the way, his love of dance not only transforms his life but also inspires others in his community to dream bigger.

Shailja Kejriwal, Chief Creative Officer - Special Projects, ZEEL, says, "Billy Elliot is emblematic of young people all over the world who dream of rising above their circumstances. This aspirational theme is just one of its many strengths and this musical has both an emotional core and spectacular showmanship. It offers a sensational theatrical experience that will stay with Indian audiences for a long time."

"In fact, every single musical that we are bringing to India, be it this one or The Sound of Music Live, or Hairspray Live! or Peter Pan Live!, offers transportive entertainment and transformative hope. These stories also make for perfect family viewing because they stir our deep love for celebratory songs and dances as well as for powerful stories."

Billy Elliot on Broadway received 15 Tony Award nominations in 2009, has been seen by over 10 million people, and has won over 80 theatre awards worldwide. It has millions of fans and was named the "Best Musical of the Decade!" by TIME Magazine in 2010.

Stephen Daldry and Brett Sullivan direct Billy Elliot: The Musical, which stars Elliot Hanna, Ruthie Henshall, and Deka Walmsley. It will be shown at Tata Play Theatre on June 12th at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. (LANSLife)

"The only time people dislike gossip is when you gossip about them."

—Will Rogers

The Shillong Times

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Women at work

WOMEN labour participation in India is lower than in Saudi Arabia, as was stated by noted economist and former central bank governor Raghuram Rajan. Rajan should know, considering his understanding and involvement with global economic matters and his association with entities like the IMF. For the plain eye too, this looks so. Large sections of Indian women laze away their time at home or keep giving birth and rearing children and are at peace with themselves. The society imposes its diktat on them – that their place is in the confines of their homes. Over generations, that became the norm. There are the exceptions – as in the urban areas where some 35 per cent of the population is entrenched now. There too, women in the lower strata of the society with no proper education or learning of skills remain confined to their homes. With the rest of India, or rural India, social norms take control over the lives of women – many choosing to or being forced to remain tied to their domestic duties.

In some states of South India and in the North Eastern states women enjoy more social and economic mobility and are engaged in the world of work more often out of sheer necessity since women have to run their households as single parents. Admittedly, in cities, larger numbers of Hindu women go out to work while fewer numbers from among Muslims. Christianity encourages education among children, which is helping them stir out of homes and eventually fetch jobs. Education is the key. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly focuses attention on states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and Uttarakhand. The rest of the Hindi states including Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh might have a similar situation requiring special attention.

Introduction of government schemes or earmarking huge funds for their implementation in themselves serve only half the purpose. What is essential is also a change of mindsets. Large segments of the Indian society are caught in the grip of age-old traditions. Winds of change do not blow across their hamlets. There are also the vested interests that discourage the poor from educating their children. The political leaderships have a single-point agenda of winning elections; and efforts at social change, they feel, can wait. To say that participation of women in productive sectors of the economy here is less than that of tradition-bound Saudi Arabia is also a commentary on India's slow economic growth. Saudi Arabia is oil-rich; meaning it has resources that keep its economy up. India is not as lucky. Our productive forces must be fully utilized.

Memories that remain alive

Editor,
As an ardent admirer of the legendary orator, Bah Hoover Hynniewta, I read the special article, "The Meghalaya Literary Assembly" (June 8, 2022) by Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh with keen interest. The article transported my memory back to one afternoon in the summer of 1972. The location: the chamber of the Speaker of Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. While Bah Radhon Singh Lyngdoh (Bah Duh to my father), Bah Hoover and my father were deeply engrossed in their conversation on various topics, I sat on a chair in a corner of that big chamber observing these three friends conversing with each other and exchanging views laden with wit & humour. A small boy then, their conversation did not interest me much and it was natural for me to get fidgety as I was itching to go out of the room to enjoy watching the blue-yellow city buses and the black-yellow ambassador taxis plying on the road (now called Soso Tham Road). Despite being in the midst of my

restlessness, I still clearly remember that one of the topics they delved upon was so interesting that it was a big takeaway for me from their conversation.

Selection : u paidbah u jied ia me da kawei ka sur
Election : u paidbah u jied ia me da bun ki dur.
(Selection: when the people vote unanimously... Election: when people vote through multiple choice)

Yours etc.,
Allan Lyndem,
South 24 Parganas,
West Bengal

BNSL: Poor service delivery

Editor,
With much fanfare and publicity, BSNL introduced its Broadband Fiber internet service in Williamnagar town on November 20, 2020. However, after getting a BSNL broadband connection the customers feel cheated as the service provider could not live up to their expectations. The broadband service is always not functioning; sometimes it remains without service for over 10 days in a month and with no guarantee from the service provider as

Meghalaya election 2023: Trends, Opposition and Alternatives

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

There are three important components of democracy. A government 'of the people' followed by 'by the people' and ending on 'for the people'. The three components shape an ideal democracy which would be an outcome entail features of a 'sovereign socialist secular democratic republic'. In Meghalaya, this inherent understanding of democracy is largely absent primarily on account of an unaware or indifferent electorate. For example, 'of the people' has no meaning when the government of the day does not fulfil its promises, election manifesto and is detached from the woes of the common man. 'By the people' is a misnomer as the electorate is mostly engaged only during elections and is uninterested or has no say in government formation, governance and opposition. 'For the people' is nothing but a scam as the legislators in power are unaccountable and only interested in their own and cronies well-being.

who are looking to join them. This merger has already happened and by all means is going to become more frequent in the days to come. It is a situation where the others do not see the possibility of beating them; hence, the best strategy is to join them. This is an unhealthy trend and basically it tells us two things. First, the only factor that decides the merger of others with NPP and UDP is 'win-ability'. The more important parameters like political narrative, ideology, election manifesto, etc all goes out the window. Is this the sort of political amalgamation that we seek? Can we not see that they are just looking to form a government by any and all means possible? Second, the trend is taking us towards a totalitarian government. A situation where the government of the day will have total freedom to do as it pleases. The electorate will

to it. This can be one of the reasons as to why so many individuals and parties jump ship while not doing justice to their roles as an opposition. The Congress is a good example. Now they are in the ruling dispensation. The AITC (Meghalaya) has come into the picture as its members led by Mukul Sangma do not want to be in the opposition next term. The small regional parties like PDF, HSPDP, KHNAM, etc are never really interested to be in the Opposition. They are always on the look-out for their pound of flesh. Well, what to say about BJP (Meghalaya)? They are like a soda bottle full of air. 'Threaten, take in humiliation and stay in' is their mode of operation and all with the objective of enhancing their image and voter base. By and large, it seems like the political parties are purposefully creating a picture that there is no such thing as a strong

cause many have opinions and viewpoints on political matters. An outcome of this is the birth of alternatives for the electorate. If a political system fails in giving birth to alternatives then the condition of the people would never improve. In addition, the old and grand political parties would never seek to correct and better itself. It is in this context that an alternative becomes a critical element in electoral politics. Here, VPP and KAM Meghalaya (which translates to 'work' in both Khasi and Hindi) have been formed so as to offer an alternative. They claim an alternative from corruption, dynastic politics, distance from the people, etc. VPP has already started its awareness campaigns with regards to its principles and political narrative. KAM is basically an 'association of persons' projecting themselves as an alternative to the current dispensation. How will the electorate take such an association remains to be seen in



But still, the power to bring change rests with the people. Democracy and people are synonymous. They hold the keys to their own well-being, progress and development. However, are we able to see through the recent developments and the choices that may be worth assessing or are our minds and thoughts so clouded that nothing seems to make sense. This is an evolving picture and as of today is summed up as follows.

Trend: If you can't beat them, join them

It is a must for the electorate to assess what has been happening over the last two months. It is important to read between the lines and think outside the box. The NPP and UDP are positioning themselves as the only feasible option. The result is a beeline of leaders and their followers from other parties

turn into subjects and they would behave like Kings. In such a case, it can be taken as a certainty that they will win election, 2023. Why would they not? After all, the other leaders and parties are joining them. If this trend continues unabated then we are going to see the same governance as we have experienced over the last four years. The sad reality is that in 2018 they were voted to power on the hopes for a better Meghalaya, that which did not come true. Now, the danger is that they will be voted to power again because of a lack of choice(s).

Opposition: The hallmark of a healthy democracy

One of the problems is the tendency to focus too much and only on government. No one really likes to talk about the Opposition. We do not give any importance

opposition and that it has no role in a democracy. We must note that they are winning on this front. It is time to realize that if it is important to have a government; then, it is also important to have a strong Opposition. The need of the hour is an Opposition that questions, debates and takes the voices of the people into the assembly and act as checks and balances. For example, illegal coal mining would not have been so rampant if there was a strong Opposition in the assembly. If the Opposition is non-existent, the people are to be blamed for not forcing their party/legislators to stay true to their roles.

Alternative: A critical element in electoral politics

Everything evolves. It can be said that in electoral politics evolution is at its most dynamic. This is be-

the coming months. Be that as it may, the point is that there is an alternative in the election, 2023. Importantly, it is a message that this alternative is going to do things differently and most critically is 'willing to be in opposition' in case of lesser seats won. But, the real question is this. Are the electorate ready to give them a chance particularly when they would be having far less money-power in fighting elections?

In the end, we will get what we deserve. Many will say we deserve better. But, better means making a conscious decision come voting day. Are we willing to vote for change and good governance as against the enticements and temptations of money and short-term benefits? Are we up for it?

(The writer teaches at NEHU. Email benjamin21-in@yahoo.co.in)

Ri Bhoi District: Striving Towards Excellence

By Maitphang Syiem

"Chem kynphaw nga Ri Bhoi Thymmai Ba da i Hun ba i hai hai" Chem Kynphaw nga Ri Bhoi Thymmai Zin sargu ka la eh ba Chem," an excerpt from the legendary poet of Ri Bhoi, R. Shadap in Ri Bhoi dialect which translates to how the Transformed Ri Bhoi has overshadowed the old charm of Ri Bhoi. It's indeed something which the people of Ri Bhoi need to introspect on about the existing transformation and the rapidly changing cultural landscape. It is 30 years now since Ri Bhoi was upgraded from a Civil sub-division to one of the Districts of Meghalaya on June 4, 1992, and ever since there has been no looking back for the District. Indeed, those men and women who had burned the midnight oil to make the creation of the District a reality and built it brick by brick, deserve credit and applause from all of us.

As a District, Ri Bhoi has gone through many monumental changes in the context of education, sports and health infrastructure, utilities, agriculture, farming, commercial activities etc. We cannot deny that the peoples' representatives have played an important role in shaping the District back then, therefore credit goes to them as well and to those in the civil services back then who

the birth of a District and the changes that have been effected and also the contributions of the people who have laid the foundation for taking things forward. But what lies ahead for the people are still huge challenges. The question to ask is whether people are content with the current scenario of development. This is where the people need to introspect. As it is, many key areas of development have been established which undeniably have been a blessing to the people and many are in the process, so here the general question is to rate how far the District has progressed and whether people are really satisfied?

Let us find the answers through self-introspection. Let us also be reminded that we need to come out of our complacent nature (chalta hain attitude) as we need to strive for good and quality development. Hence the educational infrastructures and other utility services etc., that we are entitled to should carry values and quality. In this aspect, since we are in a democratic setup we need to understand that we are not alone but are a force if we act unitedly. It is important to educate ourselves and our future generation that it is imperative to elect public representatives who are competent, educated,

The District based on 49 indicators and 5 thematic domains had witnessed accreditation in the recent years, particularly in the aspirational district baseline ranking report as published by NITI Aayog in 2018.

helped shape the idea of Ri Bhoi District. They cannot go unmentioned as they were the driving force of the entire process of development. If we look at the current scenario the kind of changes that Ri Bhoi has undergone is quite commendable.

The District based on 49 indicators and 5 thematic domains had witnessed accreditation in the recent years, particularly in the aspirational district baseline ranking report as published by NITI Aayog in 2018. It was ranked 51st position from 101 aspirational districts and in 2022 the ranking leap-frogged to 5th position from among the 112 districts in the country, therefore this justifies the claims that The District has gone through monumental transformation. However this signifies one aspect of the changes; there are more that the people should introspect and should strive for.

With no intent to offend anyone, legends in the past suggest that Ri Bhoi was a place nestled in the jungles, so was kind of forbidden to visit. Such narratives would be carried forward at times to suggest that Ri Bhoi is still in the woods. But look at the situation today! Who would not like to come down to the plains of Ri Bhoi? In fact many people have ventured to acquire vast acreage of agricultural land and are engaged in farming. Resorts have come up and tourism is flourishing. However, there is something that the people of Ri Bhoi are really blessed with and that is the gift of soil fertility. Hence agricultural farming is an activity that is very closely associated with the people of Ri Bhoi, and the gift of fertility is a compliment to that legend that says, "Just close your eyes and throw a seed anywhere it will surely sprout up and grow." So the focus here is whether we are really using that gift which can be a blessing for many. Ri Bhoi District may have earned the sobriquet Food Basket (Shang Ja) of Meghalaya and this point may be well justified because Ri Bhoi is indeed the rice bowl of Meghalaya. It is said, "As you sow, so will you reap." This should be an inspiration for the people of Ri Bhoi.

That was one part of the story, where we have seen

understands the virtues of democracy, has a rapport with the downtrodden, the young and the elderly and also one who exhibits transparency and accountability and understands the concept of more governance and less government in letter and spirit.

With time we are also faced with many more challenges in the social, environmental, economic and spiritual spheres but these challenges can always be overcome if we start educating ourselves and our generation about the challenges we are facing to be prepared for the ones to come, but let us have clear aims and objectives that come what may we need to strive for excellence. In particular, the younger generation would have forgotten about many of Ri Bhoi's legends. They have left behind a rich legacy which could inspire us. Its time to find who these legends were and their contributions to the growth and development of this area.

With time everything has changed. Gone are those days when people hardly knew about the professions of medicine, engineering, administration, scientific knowledge, business management et al. Today we have professionals from every field. However, the people of Ri Bhoi must strive to produce more professionals who can add value to the District.

To conclude, let the people of Ri Bhoi be reminded of the words of the legendary poet R. Shadap and the lines which speak about the anticipation for men and women who will be leading Ri Bhoi to a brighter and more prosperous future.

"Khlur Rupa jan e hiba tbeh ba iah luti/ Soh Chibet ha ka Ri zong i/ mynta la shai bnei ha pyrdi Ri Bhoi/ Jingshai kala poi ka ri nang roi/ Neng zi mui ki sngi jingkyrkhu, longbru manbru nangu/ chaduh ki kyndong kynshrot karlein ki bastad sepmi chaduh ka ri zo i ba khei kani longbru manbru nangu nangmuit ki jingkyrkhu. Wishing good luck and prosperity to the people of Ri Bhoi District on the 30th Anniversary of Ri Bhoi Foundation Day.

(The writer is a native of Ri Bhoi and a Geospatial Technology Expert)

to when it will be restored.

The customers would like to remind the BSNL authorities that with the entry of Jio Fiber providing broadband service in parts of Garo Hills, a time will come when there will be no takers of their service. Hence, requesting the BSNL authorities to sit up and take notice of these complaints and provide better service to their customers.

Yours etc.,
Ivan N Arengh
Williamnagar

Stark reality of SSLC topper's success.

Editor,
Congratulations once again Amebaaihun Kharbih of St Paul's Marbisu. It is a matter of great achievement and it is heartening to listen to her reasons of a great feat of this sort. First is her complete trust in the Almighty, second, her resolute mind and will power to aim for the top slot, blessed with the family's inspiration and thirdly the Mathematics and Physics teacher who has put in whole-hearted effort not only to help her alone

but the students in general. And this is what all teachers should try their best to do. And last but not least is the Principal of the school who when one listens to his interview has gone the extra mile in acknowledging, "Theory without practice is lame and practice without theory is blind." Science teaching is supported by textbooks and much more with experiments and practicals that are easily affordable. How happy was one child of Class 7, ICSE school when she told her parents "I saw a rainbow in the school laboratory and the prism costs only Rs 20. Such experiments will imbibe in the child a love for Physics.

Amebaaihun has also suggested to all SSLC friends to make use of YouTube. There are good Samaritans in Science who love to give their best to the users without counting the cost. During the Covid lockdown computers had substituted real life experiments. This has helped tremendously in making practical lessons close to real life experiences. And these YouTubeers are people from our own country and from outside as well. To me, success of this sort must be attributed to these computer-

aided graphics. The only sad reality is the rich-poor divide but if laptops were given to all who passed SSLC a few years ago, we see no reason why this should not happen today.

To conclude, I have a humble request to MBOSE as far as text books of Physics by Sally and Agarwal are concerned. From July, courtesy an English daily, letters upon letters were written on this issue and one letter was shot off to the Chairman, MBOSE Tura. The letter sent by Speed Post was devoid of delivery status and so I apologize if the letter was not delivered. But far from doing anything to correct the anomalies of the Classes 9 and 10 Physics, CBSE was introduced in 2019-20 session, displacing the Physics book by Mehta & Brothers. In the 2020-21 2021-22 session this same Sally and Agarwal Physics was introduced but with 2 erroneous topics (Supersonic Boom of Sound and 'Fuse' of electricity) removed. And surprisingly, the cost shot up from Rs 250 per copy to Rs 285. The DERT should have intervened on the issue of price. More devastating was to find upon proper analysis that 3 practical lesson very

also removed. They included Bell Jar (sound), Archimedes Principle (Why ship floats on water) and Faraday's law of electromagnetic induction that resulted in man's ability to build dams to move the magnet to and fro, the copper coil etc).

When asked as to who approved such a book, the MBOSE failed to give any response. The 2019-2020 MBOSE debacle with South Garo Hills being the worst hit was due to this. And if the CBSE which is nationally recognized includes text of Classes 11 and 12 which are linked to topics in Class 8 with this Sally and Agarwal text book which is full of errors, our children studying under MBOSE would never get the justice they deserve.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
(Member of the 2005 workshop on curriculum and textbooks evaluation committee arranged by DERT (GOM) in collaboration with National curriculum framework New Delhi.

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"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

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Child labour rampant in Meghalaya
MEGHALAYA came into the limelight in 2010 when Impulse NGO claimed to have detected 70,000 children working in the mines of East Jaintia Hills. The Government then had come under a lot of flak and the National Human Rights Commission took suo moto notice of this claim. While the numbers were contested as being over the top and based on extrapolation after multiplying the number of mines by the number of child labourers found in a few mines, the fact remains that children were rampantly used to dig coal inside the shafts that had very little space for mobility and was profitable to the mine owners.

In 2019, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong while addressing a gathering admitted the prevalence of child labour in the state but said a mechanism is in place to ensure that the state is completely free of the social malaise. Tynsong said then that district task forces headed by deputy commissioners were constituted and there is enough manpower to ensure that child labour is not allowed to happen. He also said that Labour inspectors are posted in each of the 46 blocks to make Meghalaya free of child labour. The problem with making tall declarations about entrenched social issues is that ministers get caught in a web of lies fed by respective departments. Meghalaya is not free from child labour. Rather, child labour has spiralled during and after the pandemic. The reason for the rise in child labour is stark poverty of families that compels them to make the older children seek employment to keep the home fires burning.

The present Labour Minister, Sanbor Shullai should visit villages beyond his urban constituency to see how many children aged 14 years and below are employed as cowherds and are shepherding sheep and paid Rs 2500 for looking after one cow per annum. Girls aged 12 and below are forced to care for their younger siblings at home instead of being in school. The real problem with Meghalaya is that the Government is too Shillong-centric. Their vision does not include rural Meghalaya which is left to the elements. The plight of thousands of families need to be captured by statistical data which is non-existent when it comes to child labour. A Government is as strong as its ability to address acute human problems. For that to happen it needs a solid database. The Department of Economics and Statistics seems to have lost its moorings in the last two decades. A Government that fears to critically look at statistics is in a self-deception mode. Statistics is a good guide to how well or how poorly the Government is performing and provides the opportunity to improve things. The reality is - child labour is rampant in Meghalaya!

Please God, don't let me win 2023 Polls

The Dome episode from a different perspective

By Toki Blah

The other day a dear family friend dropped by. He had brought his SUV for servicing at a nearby workshop and while waiting decided to visit us. He is an aspiring candidate for the 2023 Assembly elections and quite upbeat about his chances of winning. As usual while chit chatting, the topic of conversation veered to corruption and then of course, with natural flow, to the infamous case of the collapsed Dome of the new Legislative Assembly building. We were having tea and he was in the act of popping a biscuit into his mouth, when suddenly his hand froze in mid-air, his eyes started to bulge and a sort of strangled, choked cry came from his lips. I became alarmed. "What's the matter, What's the matter?" I asked in concern as no host would ever want a guest to choke while under his roof. (Elsewhere OK, but not while having tea in my sitting room.) I vigorously patted his back as he turned to me with a puzzled look on his face and whispered "What if I win? As an MLA I would have that wretched restored dome over me all the time. What if it falls again? Oh my God." He left a pale, distraught man with the far reaching aftermath of a possible victory at the polls hanging heavy on his mind. And poor man I don't blame him.

Yes, approaching the forthcoming 2023 Assembly Elections from a purely humanistic angle, it is quite justified for any contesting candidate to ask "What happens to me if I do win?" In the good old days, which incidentally will remain just memories, family members, concerned friends and the candidate himself would pose the question "What happens to me if I lose?". People investing their life savings and at times ill gotten wealth, squandered away for years, for contesting elections were therefore quite entitled to wonder about bad investments if they should happen to lose. Understandable. But things have taken a U turn since morning of May 22nd 2022 and the exact opposite question is probably troubling the minds of all potential contesting candidates with a winning chance. Some people are ready to invest crores in the polls. They will invest with an aim to win but now people are having second thoughts on the prudence of such suicidal ventures. Winning

an election does mean two three notches up the socio-political ladder, but is it worth entering and working under a proven unstable structure with every likelihood of it collapsing again round your ears? The wretched dome might be reinstalled but who will guarantee it will not come crashing down again one fine day. Yes one is quite justified in having second thoughts on investing in elections and winning against the distinct life benefits that can accrue from losing! Let me tell you it's a difficult, really dicey choice to make and the remarks made in this writeup are the genuine outcome of the love, respect and concern of a citizen over the welfare and well-being of his honorable elected representatives.

Yes what are successful elected MLAs supposed to do post 2023? That grand majestic edifice of a Legislative Assembly building that was to have inspired awe, admiration and deference from lay citizens would have been repaired and waiting for its title holders to enter and take possession of it. That's what any self respecting building is supposed to expect once it is completed. But doubts are being entertained about this miserable eloquent structure under discussion. How can any happy, carefree, innocent MLA not entertain misgivings about winning for he will then be compelled to enter a proven unstable work space? The thought "Is this building structurally safe to work in?" is bound to seriously occupy his mind 24x7.

So let's imagine the manner in which our MLAs will enter their new Assembly Building. Forget about that pompous strut of a garlanded conquering hero so lovingly associated with newly elected MLAs. I expect that this time they will be seen creeping into the Assembly, on tip toe, cautious as mice of any noise their entry might make and thereby lead to consequences that no one wants. One is accustomed to read the "Silence Please" notices associated within the ceremonial splendor of Parliament walls. This time round don't be surprised to also read "Coughing is strictly prohibited. Violators may have to pay with their lives" signboards pasted on the walls. Noise can be dangerous to structures. If you don't believe me read in the Bible what happened to the walls of Jericho.

Also don't be surprised to come across suited booted, neck-tied personalities reeking with sprayed perfume, slinking about wearing sneakers instead of shoes. Leather shoes have a tendency to squeak loudly, which under the circumstances is hazardous to health but sneakers can also give one a head start if there is a sudden necessity to sprint for the exit doors. A scene playing out on the floor of the House would also be quite educative. Gone, Yes gone and out of Parliamentary vogue would be the usual thumping of desks and shouting, "I also want to be heard" scenarios of the past. All communication henceforth would be in whispers, in dead silence. A, "Mister Speaker Sir, I hereby strongly and most vehemently oppose" shout of protest from the opposition benches, will now be a gentle and decorous whisper into the mouth piece. Health is precious so let's have political unanimity of silence on this score, shall we! In this newly built, 127 crore Hall of the People, loud noise is taboo. Oh yes, fear and a clear and present lurking danger can really improve human behavior. Ego, pride, arrogance, sense of self importance can all vanish in the blink of an eye, if the threat of being squashed to death seems possible any given moment. Not that there is any intention of attaching such vulgar characteristics with our MLAs but don't be surprised if the sudden unexpected clatter of a falling chair, causes an unbecoming Legislative stampede in a mad "The devil take the hindmost" rush for the doors. Its abhorrent of course to parliamentary decorum which calls for dignity and poise within the hallowed chambers, but

life is precious and to run from danger, is instinctive. Apportioning blame in such cases will only add injury to racing pulses and thumping hearts!

We can also turn our attention to other connected matters. Now the visitors' gallery would simply turn into a vacant redundant chamber of no practical purpose. Seriously doubt if any sane and reasonable person would risk life and limb, listening to legislative astuteness and wisdom, while expecting the roof to fall on his head at any given moment. Don't be surprised if the press and the media were to ask for reportage by CCTV to a screen some distance away from the dome. I also have this distinct image, I just can't help it, of legislators listening in rapt silent attention to proceedings, while their craning necks and anxious eyes are fixed at the ceiling above on which a 50 ton concrete dome sits precariously. The usual degrading pictures of napping, snoring MLAs, minds absently wandering God knows where, will of course, thanks to slipshod construction, be a shame of the past. Everyone now will be alert and on their toes. Attention paid perhaps not on the matter under discussion but certainly on the ceiling and to any unexplained creaking sound.

Laws perhaps might not be the end product of such behavior but stiff necks are a certainty. Khasis are good in massaging and so perhaps massage kiosks outside the Assembly building would not be a bad idea. It could result in employment generation but its just a passing thought in trying to see positivity in a grim stressful scenario! Stress, tension and anxiety will also definitely be lifestyle ailments of Assembly sittings. For the palpating hearts, NEIGRIHMS is just next door so no worry. The Assembly Secretariat may also have to think of a "work from home" paradigm for the staff. I have a sneaky feeling that that might be in popular demand from 2023 onwards but as this is a proven workable model of Covid days, I see no problems on the horizon in its implementation.

In the end, what mental picture does the saga of the Fallen Dome bring to mind? It's a picture of Kalidas merrily chopping away at the branch on which he was sitting instantly comes to mind! That's what the saga of corruption has wrought in fertile minds!

Who's responsible for the scams in Meghalaya?

By Philip Marwein

A barrage of bashing and stinging reports and articles have flooded the pages of newspapers on the mal-governance, scams, corruption, omissions and commissions perpetrated by the NPP-led MDA government which have serious ramifications in the state and outside and have also reached the ears of the Union Government. Realising the adverse impact and disastrous effects of the matter, the MDA partners namely the UDP, the BJP, the HSPDP, the PDF and others have distanced themselves and tried to put the blame squarely on the NPP for all the mess (including protests on the signing of the MoU on border settlement with Assam). All these are weak attempts at deflecting blame and disown responsibility when in fact they are part and parcel; abettors and collaborators of the acts already perpetrated. If the collusion partners are blameless why have they not withdrawn support to the NPP led coalition government? But no, they are unabashedly sticking to the MDA through thick and thin because there's still time between now and the polls and the spoils are plentiful to be shared and enjoyed.

Dear NPP, UDP, BJP, HSPDP, PDF etc whom are you trying to fool and hoodwink? Is it the voters during elections in 2023? Remember, elections are just six months away! The voters are not so forgetful or foolish as you believe them to be. They can very well read between the lines what you have done and what was promised before and during elections. Among the coalition partners only the BJP openly criticized and condemned the NPP government for various scams. BJP President, Ernest Mawrie and its vice-President, Bernard Marak, the MDC of Tura have been very vocal. The UDP too was not very happy with the messy affairs within the government but it is helpless on the excuse that it wants to thwart President's Rule. But the reasons are different and we are not fooled.

The MDA government will not collapse if the 9 UDP MLAs and 2 BJP MLAs withdraw support from it for the effective strength of the government then will be 37 MLAs (48 - 11 = 37). The BJP here is not unanimous because the two MLAs in the government are determined to support the MDA but the non-MLAs are at odds with it. The central BJP bosses stand firm by Conrad Sangma's led NPP government because from day one it was supported by the central BJP to ensure the pan-India agenda of Congress Mukht Bharat. Even today the MDA government is cajoled and soft-peddled by the Central BJP bosses. Many here call the NPP the team B of BJP in Meghalaya in spite of the BJP's existence here. But the top bosses in Delhi care about Conrad Sangma's NPP more than the present BJP leaders here.

Now, let us turn to the Christian Churches here in Meghalaya. The mandated role of the Church is to serve and work for the welfare and salvation of the whole man comprising body and soul. The mandated role of the state (government) is to serve man and work for his overall welfare and ensure better quality of human life. Hence the roles of the church and of the state are similar in many ways - that is to promote human welfare. The state on the contrary is not concerned with the task of saving the human soul. In Meghalaya we have several denominational Christian Churches and nearly 70 per cent of the population are Christians. However, the Christian churches are aloof and indifferent to the iniquities, wickedness and rampant corruption, scams and injustices perpetrated by the state (government agencies). In the wake of all these ills happening in the state and society it is expected that the church should play its pro-active role (not to remain in hibernation; stay only in comfort zones) but

to take issues head-on and come out openly and fiercely against corruption, scams, injustices and other evils perpetrated by anti-social groups, the Government and its establishments.

Alas! The Church has failed to speak up against corrupt practices indulged in by political parties, politicians and their cronies during elections. In fact, the church as a mighty and powerful social organisation through its leaders should spare no efforts to fight tooth and nail against these evils prevalent in society for these are the satanic works on earth. The primary duty of church leaders like the Bishops, Priests, Pastors and church elders is to empower their congregation to call out the modus operandi employed by politicians and political parties during elections like various inducements by candidates, granting favours, cash for votes, proxy voting and other unfair means to win elections.

But the Church today is scared and hesitant to speak on politics for it is made to believe by former church leaders that politics is dirty and religion and politics don't mix. This is completely wrong. I am not sure which Christian leaders or churches advocated this line of thinking. In fact, it is Christians who should enter politics and bring Christ-like qualities into politics and cleaning it from inside; ridding it of infortinities, iniquities and wickedness. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Anyone who says that religion has nothing to do with politics does not understand what religion is." Bishop Desmond Tutu of the Republic of South Africa speaking on this issue said, "I am puzzled about what kind of Bible people are reading when they suggest that Religion and Politics do not mix". In fact, The Church must play its role in cleansing politics. It must combat injustices and oppression, arbitrary domination and intolerance by individuals and political parties. It must do so with integrity and wisdom as demanded by political principles. We must not forget that Christ was the greatest politician on earth and He dared to challenge the Jewish political rulers, leaders and teachers of His time namely - the Saducees, the Scribes, the Pharisees and even the Sanhedrin of the Jewish race of His time. Christ openly chastised and rebuked them and even scornfully called them, "brood of vipers." He introduced a new brand of politics of openness, transparency, accountability, justice, peace, brotherhood, love, charity, service, forgiveness, reconciliation and promised the people of his time a new Jerusalem.

The Church in Meghalaya has an onerous task to call out corruption in all its forms and guide its adherents to do the same. However, the Church must itself be responsible, blameless and transparent in its financial transactions and other dealings in order to have the moral authority as a powerful socio-religious institution. It is the bounden duty of the Church to wage war against the deep rooted evils of corruption in the political system and Government by clear-sighted strategies. It can partly achieve this goal by reaching out to the masses through its ubiquitous units spread out in the villages where sustained and repeated exhortations, awareness campaigns, teachings and trainings are conducted for church members on how to fight and root out corruption. Special awareness programmes on the subject can also be conducted by selected persons for the whole village in collaboration with the village authorities.

The church authorities should exercise their social and religious authority to repeatedly appeal and warn politicians and government and its agencies to desist from corruption and corrupt practices here in Meghalaya in order to be an example to the rest of India.

Letters to the Editor

Education above religion

Editor,

The last few days have seen tragic violence in India in the aftermath of the faux pas of Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal -- from riots and stone pelting, to hanging an execution-style effigy of Nupur Sharma from an overhead wire, to a YouTube video threatening to behead her, to the destruction of "illegal establishments and homes" of Muslims in UP accused of involvement in riots (ordered by UP CM, Yogi Adityanath). Nupur Sharma has received rape and beheading threats, plus death threats against her and her family. Naveen Jindal and his family too have received death threats! This kind of violence is unacceptable in the twenty-first century -- at that, in a democracy, although at least some of the violence, I imagine, is a culmination of long simmering tensions between Hindus and Muslims.

The only long-term solution, it seems to me, is education -- either in the sciences, which should make students more objective -- or better yet, in interfaith wisdom and theologies. High time Indian youth were exposed to the best aspects of each others' religions. Indian youth

should also be taught the Constitution and laws of India -- especially the fact that there can never be a blasphemy law in a secular state like India!

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Divide And Misrule

Editor,

What is history? It is perhaps a definable set of events which made an impact on the present for the future to remember and even study. But what happened in the past must have shaped events charting out a territory noteworthy for its happenings. So the Indus Valley Civilisation flourished but it also came to an end. How and why it came to an end researchers are not sure. There have been speculations but the question mark still remains.

Today there is a frenetic desire to unearth the past dating to ten to twelve centuries back. Unfortunately, this has been distorted beyond proportions to change the past. We cannot change it and redeem it to a new found present. But this is exactly what is being done. History is being rewritten to serve political ends and to create a cleavage and divide between

religious communities. Yet we say that we are a secular and tolerant nation. We are trying to rectify the past by discovering images of Hindu gods and goddesses in mosques. The result is a disastrous attempt at reviling the past, tear the present and point accusing fingers at people who lived ten to eleven centuries back. This also tantamount to holding the present Indian Muslim guilty of the past.

Now let us look at facts. Religion has been brought into politics, and this has been happening again and again. The argument is: Hindus have been dishonoured in the past. This must be corrected. How? by excavating mosques and discovering statues of Hindu gods and goddesses. The latest being the Shiva Lingam. This has been built up stage by stage. Erecting statues, uttering provocative words in processions, in other words as someone said in a tv news channel: "provoke, provoke and provoke". It is an insidious ploy of isolating and ghettoising the minority community. Every discourse of the government rivets around temples and statues. What about main issues of education and illiteracy? What about the poor, Hindu, Muslim or Christian?

Again, history texts are rewritten. Portions of the

Mughal rule are being deleted. This attempt at obfuscating and distorting history is a devious ploy to deny students their right to inexorable knowledge.

This is the new nationalism, founded on specious thinking. This is the new nationalism of driving wedges between the majority and the minority. Suddenly as it were the majority rediscovered a new founded nationalism, the basis of which is a sudden religious propensity. But at what expense? Holding the minorities for what is considered the ills of the past! Whipping up such sentiments and building them up is what construes a devil's dichotomy of divide and misrule. This has led to vitiation of atmosphere and sowing hatred, culminating in those abominable remarks against the Prophet Mohammed. Abominable is perhaps too mild a word. What those persons did was to hurt and anger a worldwide community. What could be more despicable and irreverent than this?

In the process we are a badly divided and wounded nation. The wounds are cut deep and the abrasions can be felt palpably. Rioting is the new order, so are threats of terrorist groups. We are playing with fire, circumventing history in the most despicable ways and disre-

specting religions.

Even the RSS chief has said that it is wrong to hold the present Indian Muslim responsible for the past. Is anyone listening? The Indian nation is marked for its heterogeneity, it is history which has shaped its destiny. We must uphold such historicity, not denigrate it.

My point is that phase by phase the false narrative has been built up in driving wedges between the majority and the minority communities climaxing in such blasphemous remarks. Once again the edifice of the country appears to be crumbling and ruinous.

Yours etc.,
Ananya S Guha,
Via email

Law and order imperilled

Editor,

The recent incidents of stone-pelting and violence in several parts of the country continues a disturbing trend of unrest that has emerged in India over the past three years. Since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections which saw the NDA return to power with a strong majority at the Centre, there has been a marked escalation of violence in response to even minor political or social de-

velopments, and indeed even in the absence of any trigger. This is unnatural and seems to hint that certain sections of people are encouraging such happenings as an attempt to oust the present government by destabilising the country and compromising internal security. Perhaps the groups concerned have come to believe that they cannot rely on electoral politics and democracy to achieve their desired political change in the immediate future, and have thus been forced to resort to such courses of action.

Of course, such designs are always possible in an open democracy, and one relies on the administration in these situations to quell all nefarious actions. However, the Narendra Modi Government has so far miserably failed to deal with such incidents, including months-long blockades and riots in Delhi itself. It is to be hoped that the government remembers to uphold one of its most sacred duties, preserving law and order, and that we are freed from this grim situation at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar
Shillong -3

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"All you need is the plan, the road map, and the courage to press on to your destination."

— Earl Nightingale

The Shillong Times

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Mission mode jobs

GOVERNANCE in India is increasingly becoming election-oriented; and winning elections the one-point agenda of parties. Selfishness of politicians wins over concerns of national well-being. The directive from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, out of the blue, to recruit 10 lakh persons to fill vacancies in central government departments in the next 18 months has more to it than meets the eye. He's aiming to make this his campaign plank for the 2024 polls, the precise time the recruitment drive in "mission mode" would be completed. The good thing is, some 10 lakh families — meaning 40 lakh people — would benefit from this government step.

The point to stress is, if the government aims to fill a huge number of posts in one go, the other side of the story is that as many vacancies have remained unfilled in the central government establishments for a very long time. The load got built up over time. The central government had a staff strength of 3.32 million in 2013, before Modi took charge as PM. It was reduced to 3.18 million by 2020. This was as per data in the 2022-23 Union Budget. The budget document for 2021-22 showed one-fifth of central government posts remained vacant. It meant the government dragged its feet on recruitment. In the normal course, a functional government or a private sector enterprise will keep recruiting to match with its steadily increasing requirements. That is one hint of good governance and good leadership. The reverse has happened in the past eight years. A similar scenario might persist with several state governments too. This situation emerged because of scarcity of funds caused by two factors; one, the over-spend on the welfare front including the subsidized rice scheme that reaches up to even the well-to-do today. Add to this the kits-raj of governments like UP before the assembly polls. In the process, a lazy new generation is being created. The second reason is the hesitation to raise direct taxes and the keeping of low charges for government services, as in ordinary rail travel.

A functional government will do its job; which on the one hand will mobilize resources and on the other roll out these funds for development and defence. When it comes to the Modi terms so far, there is a deficit in both these respects. The railway sector is hugely ailing. India needed to grow much faster by virtue of its huge human resources potential of 1.35 billion. If Modi functioned with a deficit of 10 lakh staff, there is little wonder the governance sector was ailing. Better late than never.

From The National Sports Club of Assam (NSCA) to U Tirot Sing Bhavan

An open call to save sports and sports facilities in Meghalaya

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Dear fellow Citizens,

This is an earnest appeal to all for the sake of the youths and future of sports in the State. We need to come together, break our heads and chart out a concrete plan to redevelop sports and sports facilities in the State.

Local sports events are forgotten by the masses. Even MLAs hardly debate on the subject of sports and youth affairs in the House. In fact, sports and leisure are an integral part of human society and Prof Radhon S Lyngdoh well expounded the Khasi concept of "rongbiria" which encapsulates, arts, music, sports and leisure. In his words, "u khasi/briew um lah ban im khlem ka rongbiria bad ka rongbiria ka long kaba kongsan ban pyntngen ia ka jingim ba thait bad ba lywait" (a Khasi/human will not survive without arts, sports, music and leisure. They are vital as they soothe all the pains, stresses and discomforts of life).

It was in 1985 that the Sports Cell within the Directorate of Public Instruction was upgraded into a full-fledged Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs, with the clear-cut plan to facilitate the development of sports, games and youth activities. The State has no dearth of talents, but is extremely lacking in support systems. This has adversely hampered the growth of sports, games and arts. Nonetheless, individual citizens of the State had been exhibiting their sheer grit and talents and excelled despite many shortfalls. And it is their love for sports that Meghalaya still remains a good place to live in.

In Meghalaya, sports is totally orphaned by the lack of proper sports facilities and even those that are still standing and providing a space for sports persons to sweat out, are on the verge of being taken down and converted into a Bhavan or an Administrative Complex. To give the readers a concrete idea on the deterioration of sports in the State let us look at how the only stadium where the game of Badminton is played — the U Tirot Singh Indoor Stadium — at Lachumiere is sought to be converted into an "Administrative Bhavan."

On December 21, 2021, the Notice Inviting Tender was published for the Construction of "U Tirot Sing Bhavan" on the location where the historic U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium stands. This decision came as a great surprise to sports persons and

especially the Badminton and Table Tennis players. It is also learnt that the Government had unilaterally taken the decision without any consultation with either the State Sports Associations or sports persons who are major stakeholders. That aside, the apathy and arrogance of those at the helm was such that did not even bother to respond to the repeated pleas and submissions on the matter. The sports persons and members of U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium along with other Sports Associations have made numerous attempts to draw the attention of the Government to reconsider the decision to convert the said Indoor Sports facility, at Lachumiere into an Administrative Bhavan, but all went in vain.

On February 24, 2022 the Badminton and Table Tennis players met in the premises and publicly expressed their resentment and protest against the move of the Government. Following this meet the Meghalaya State Badminton Association (MSBA) submitted the letter expressing disappointment (Letter NO. MSBA/2021-22/27 dated 5.4.2022) and on June 2, 2022 regular members and badminton players submitted in writing and pleaded with the Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Meghalaya to recall the decision. Till date the State Government has not responded to the appeals. On the contrary the State Sports Association, like the MSBA were served with a notice to vacate the premises vide letter NO. SSCM/CE/83/2013-2014/104 Dated Shillong March 28, 2022.

It is noteworthy to study the history and context of the location as it will guide us to get a better understanding on the matter. The U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium at Lower Lachumiere, was formerly known as the NSCA Stadium. Many of us were baffled by the abbreviation NSCA and what it stands for. Some senior members opined that NSCA stands for the "National Sports Council of Assam."

However, the official portal of the Sports and Youth Affairs Department, Government of Assam, shows no such Council existed. In fact, there is the Board of Sports of Assam in the hierarchy of Sports governance which is duly constituted as per the National Sports Club of Assam (Taking Over of

Management and Control) Act 1977.

After in-depth research on the historicity of NSCA it is found that there was the National Sports Club of Assam with its Regional wing at Shillong and its Constitution was approved in 1951. Subsequently, the National Sports Club of Assam within the composite State of Assam was registered on March 11, 1954 under the Registration of Societies Act 1860, with the clear objectives, "to provide means for improving the health and physique of the youth of Assam through the medium of Sports and games... and to promote, encourage and improve all outdoor and indoor games, sports..." etc.

According to R.B Das, one amongst the oldest living professional badminton players in the State, the land at Lachumiere was gifted by the P&T Department and the outdoor badminton court was drawn for shuttlers to play. Moreover, in 1959, senior government officers and prominent personalities, like Mr Dharmananda Das, who later became the Chief Secretary of Assam in 1971, and Mr Naresh Chandra Rajkhowa, a journalist of The Assam Tribune among others came together and mobilized funds for the construction of the Indoor Badminton Court in the said location. An old Assamese resident of Shillong said that besides Badminton, the National Sports Club of Assam also managed the games of Squash, Tennis, Billiards etc in the same location. The Squash court exists even today. There is no doubt that the NSCA was the National Sports Club of Assam in which both the Assam and Meghalaya Governments had taken over the management and control via separate legislations in 1977 and 1978 respectively.

On February 24, 2022, the General Secretary of the Meghalaya State Badminton Association (MSBA) clearly stated that the erstwhile NSCA Stadium at Lower Lachumiere, was inaugurated by Dr Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, former President of India in 1964 on the gifted land. It was the first Indoor Stadium in the entire Khasi-Jaintia Hills and was dedicated for development of the game of Badminton in the region. In 1992, it was reconstructed and improvised so as to meet

the basic facilities required for Badminton. Further, in honour of U Syiem Tirot Sing, the Syiem of Hima Nongkhlaw, it was renamed as U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium and the bust was erected inside. The citizens, especially students would visit and pay homage to the freedom fighter on July 17, every year.

Since the inauguration, a plethora of championships and tournaments were conducted in the U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium, viz, State Championship from the year 1982 onwards, the North East Zone Inter State Badminton Championships in 1996, 1992, 2000 and 2008 and Junior National Badminton Championship in 1996. More importantly, the MSBA in collaboration with Shillong Badminton Coaching Centre has been running the Coaching Centre since 2012, to train young shuttlers for the future.

The Government's decision to convert the sports facility into an Administrative Complex will have ramifications in the field of sports. It is very unfortunate that at a time when the shuttlers in the country are rejuvenated after India lifted the Thomas Cup 2022 and every shuttler is inspired by the achievement of Lakshya Sen, in Meghalaya the fate of budding shuttlers is in limbo. They are uncertain about their future. Where will they play and train themselves now? Or can they still pursue their interests and career in sports? Will there be any place left for them to compete in the sport? These and many questions are bothering us.

U Tirot Sing Indoor Stadium at Lachumiere is historically significant as far as the game of Badminton is concerned and its history must be respected and preserved. This utter disregard of history and the significance of sports activities is deplorable. The construction of a Bhavan reeks to us of the very thing which will ruin sports in the State. Talents are wasted for want of facilities and support. The problem is aggravated as the Indoor Sports facility at J.N Sports Complex in Polo, is out of bounds for sports persons even while this facility is also being used for non-sporting activities.

Sports and youth affairs are expansive and technical matters. They require an in-depth understanding and thorough planning with total commitment; not just distributing jerseys, laptops or musical instruments!

Significance of India's relations with the Gulf countries

By Ajit Ranade

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Secretariat, "condemned and denounced" statements made by two spokespersons of India's ruling party, the Bhartiya Janata Party for their comments on Prophet Muhammad. The statement of the OIC also referred to the spate of hatred and defamation of Islam in India. The OIC, founded in 1969, has 57 member countries, all of whom have Muslim majority populations. India with more than 200 million Muslims, is not a member, and does not even have an observer status. India has the second largest Muslim population of any country, only next to Indonesia. In response to the OIC statement, the Indian government has rejected it, and said that views of two individuals do not reflect the views of the government or indeed the people of India. Along with the joint statement of OIC, many members of OIC, summoned the Indian ambassadors in their respective countries and expressed disappointment and their condemnation of statements on the Prophet. The embassies replied and defended the stance of the government.

Two countries that summoned Indian envoys are Qatar and Kuwait. Both of these are also a part of the six-member Gulf Coordination Council (GCC). It is to be noted that two other members of the GCC, Bahrain and Oman, publicly appreciated the move.

en by the government and BJP against the two spokespersons. Their actions at least show that not all members of the GCC or indeed of the OIC are equally vehement or determined to corner India diplomatically. It is without doubt that this incident has been an embarrassment to the government, and that is why strict action was taken against the two spokespersons. It was not only the OIC statement, but even the observations and comments of other countries including America, that put India on the backfoot.

In the wake of the international furor are the wave of protests, violence and police action, at times quite brutal within the country, which are a source of major headaches and embarrassment. The two (or maybe three) camps are getting firmly dug in and entrenched, on the issues of freedom of speech, selective outrage, blasphemy and majoritarian politics. Space for dialogue and nuance is shrinking fast. This does not bode well for social unity, harmony and cohesion, even if these words sound hopelessly utopian now. Democracy is nothing but a continuous conversation and negotiation of power and its sharing. But that conversation must respect certain norms, written and unwritten, and the negotiation must always remain civilised, non-violent, respecting constitutionalism. One or the other warring party can blame the other for lowering the level of the discourse and making the "negotiating space" uglier. Whoever group is to be blamed for "you did it first", the outcome for society is that it makes everyone worse off.

The OIC and GCC diplomatic outcry has another implication which India must evaluate. The issue of morality in geopolitics is problematic and cannot be resolved. But the issue of India's self-interest is very relevant. This is an instrumental view of observing diplomatic niceties. India cannot afford to get isolated diplomatically since that will have real economic implications. At a time when India

has to meet the China challenge and reduce its import dependency on China, it is imperative for India to keep its coalition options open. This is for both geo-economic and geo-political reasons. Additionally, the linkage with the countries of GCC has multiple dimensions. The first is that of trade dependence. India's trade with the GCC countries nearly doubled in just one year since 2020-21, and is at 155 billion dollars presently. The share of India's exports that go to GCC is now above 10 percent and needs to rise. India's growth requires access to global export markets, and GCC is an important destination, for all sectors, ranging from food, agro-processed products, labour intensive products like textile and leather, engineering goods, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. India's imports from GCC are also crucial and went up by 86 percent in one year. Imports include the critical energy component. Oil imports from West Asia are needed not only to meet India's own consumption requirements, but also as feedstock for India's huge export of diesel and petrol, done by private sector companies like Reliance and Essar. Petro product exports of India constitute nearly one-fifth of all manufacturing exports in dollar terms.

The GCC countries also constitute an important destination for software and other services exports.



In May this year India signed a free trade agreement with UAE, a member of GCC, and the ambition is to take the trade with UAE alone to 100 billion dollars in the next few years. So, a strong trade and commerce linkage calls for removal of any diplomatic awkwardness. The second dimension as far as GCC is concerned, is the presence of India's diaspora. In UAE alone the population of people of Indian origin is nearly 40 percent, and a substantial proportion of these are Indian Muslims. The ratio of Indians in other GCC countries is also quite high. They are a big source of remittance income for the Indian economy. India is the world's number one receiver of inward remittances, at nearly 90 billion dollars. This income can easily reach 200 billion dollars, if the diaspora linkage is nurtured and enhanced.

In some ways the inbound remittance represents India's labour "exports", of its most abundant resource. This export is not of software "brains", but also of blue-collar workers. Indeed, remittance economy can easily match the earnings from software exports. The GCC countries are host to a large proportion of blue-collar work, which goes to people of Indian origin. Beyond these two dimensions of trade and a diaspora linkage, a third factor could be a civilisational tie. Countries like UAE and Oman can be natural allies to India due to a much older linkage between our peoples. This linkage and alliance have geo-strategic advantages for India too, as we explore land links to Central Asia, and possibilities of energy pipelines. Hence for these instrumental reasons alone, if not more fundamental reasons, India needs strong and friendly relations, be they diplomatic, economic, social or cultural with the countries of GCC. And some of these arguments carry over for relations with members of the OIC too.

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

Letters to the Editor

Price rise and our generosity

Editor, Covid-19 dealt a heavy blow to every one of us and affected us in various ways. Besides other sectors, the pandemic has hit the poor the hardest. Some unfortunate souls have lost their jobs and only source of income. They are struggling to eke out a living but it's not easy to find a job. While the rising prices of essential commodities at this juncture is a worrisome factor for every person, it is the poor that are hit the hardest. Besides the green vegetables, people have been complaining of the rapid escalation in the prices of essential food grains and other basic food items. Here the district administration needs to remain "extra vigilant". They need to ensure that no unscrupulous traders/retailers take undue advantage on the pretext of the rise in fuel prices. For that, each district commissioner should constitute a committee that will monitor the markets and help control price rise. This step by the authorities is a must. This is also the most "appropriate" time for the affluent to be more benevolent and express their compassion towards their poverty-stricken fellow-humans.

Incidentally, the prices of vegetables indicated in The Shillong Times "Prices of essential items skyrocketing in city" (ST, June 13, 2022) is also a serious concern. But here my question is whether the quoted prices will go directly into the pockets of the vegetable growers or into the bank accounts of the middle-men/women. Even if 50% of the mentioned prices go to the poor farmers then we should feel gratified. But that is not the case. At different points in time, I have witnessed how our farmers make their living and how much they toil to grow and bring a few sacks of vegetables to the market for sale. At every step, they are exploited. They are also at the mercy of "uncertainties" and their future is always unpredictable. Now go and visit Garo Hills and Assam to feel the real pang and anguish of the farming community. The floods have not just washed away their crops but also their dwelling houses and animals. Their condition is beyond imagination. Just a few months back the hurricane almost completely devastated the crops in Ri Bhoi in a span of a few minutes. Who will ever think of the tragedy experienced by those aggrieved farmers? Please note that if our farmers do not pick up "hoes and

ploughs," we will surely die of hunger, regardless of our fat bank balances and fleet of cars. Have we ever thought along those lines? Therefore, we should not regret paying some extra rupees to our poor farming community. Generosity towards the poor never goes to waste. But how do we ensure that the money goes to the farmers and not to the traders? This is where the Government should come in with a seamless system of procurement from the farm gate at prices that are worth the farmer's sweat and tears!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

A teacher's exhortation

Editor, With the declaration of results, colleges are flooded with students and parents anxious to get admission in the college they wish to spend the next three years of their lives in. This year too, it is no different. While there are happy faces that managed to come out with flying colours and have got into the college of their choice their parents too are jubilant about the achievement of their children. Why

not? After all, hard work always pays. I firmly believe this. However, among those seeking admissions are also a set of students who could not secure high marks and are therefore left anxious and worried as to which college will admit them.

As an onlooker, one can see the anxious and worried faces of the students but more so of the parents and guardians. They share the same fears that their children go through right from the time their children write their exams up until the announcement of the results and the time for admissions. While conversing with some parents, one could sense their anxiety. It's almost as if they are themselves sitting for the examinations and waiting for the results. Some parents say their children have worked very hard and prepared well while others felt their children did not give their best. Deep inside every parent wants their child to work hard and get good marks so that it's easier to get admission into a good college so that the student will do well in the undergraduate level.

The point one wishes to make here is that students need to take their studies seriously because parents spend many anxious years to pay for their children's education at great cost to themselves.

Having selected a course of their choice, students ought to work diligently and put in their best effort. Parents after all derive satisfaction and joy from seeing their child progress in life. Students are the pillars of society and state and need to understand their worth and what they mean to their family and society. As a college teacher, I would urge the students to make the best use of their opportunity to be in college. There are many out there whose parents cannot afford to send to college. Sure there is time for fun too but not at the cost of studies.

Yours etc.,
Jenieffer Dkhar,
Via email

Irresponsible NEHU

Editor, There have been numerous media reports, articles and even letters to the editor regarding the ongoing issues in NEHU but it seems everything has fallen on deaf ears of the NEHU administration. There are instances of lactating mothers, fragile employees and single bread winners braving the inclement weather to raise their voices to be heard, but the NEHU authorities have failed to respond to their

pleas. The shocking part is that there is a similarity on the grounds in which NEHU is operating of late by curbing dissent and threatening to cut off the wages of the dissenting workers if they do not go back to work. In which democracy do we see threats, summons and warnings without asking the other party to represent their views and hear them out? Is the seat of power so anarchistic to ignore the sentiments and emotions of employees, who earn minuscule wages and are visiting diplomats and envoys and the signing of MOU's more relevant?

There appears to be a major disconnect between the administration and the employees. The welfare of employees and students is given short shrift. With this I urge the Vice-Chancellor to look into this matter with utmost priority and resolve the issue at the earliest. At the end of the day NEHU is a university of higher learning and not a bureaucratic institution.

Yours etc,
Gerry Nongbri,
Shillong-3

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"A revolution is a struggle to the death
between the future and the past."
— Fidel Castro

The Shillong Times

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Living on the edge

THESE days it has become commonplace to take offence at any critique of religion. The question then is whether religion is beyond the realm of criticism. While faith is a spiritual phenomenon, religion is a human portent that should evolve with time and not be a prisoner of obscurantism. Civilisation demands that humans develop and respect reason and debate with dignity on issues that have the potential to inflame passions. It is interesting to note that the founders of all faiths were themselves more liberal than their followers. Indeed, it is the followers who have turned religion into a rigid framework of do's and don'ts and make claims that theirs is the only true faith and that those outside that fold are infidels or unbelievers. History is witness to the religious wars that were fought on account of claims over what is the true faith (religion).

All religions are founded on the principle of love and fellowship; of hating none and embracing all. Why then are people of different faiths in India quarrelling over symbols and are hell-bent on righting historical wrongs. How far back can a country travel in this endeavour and will this not be another misadventure when the demand of the present is to harness the progressive spirit and promote scientific enquiry. If the present generation are to be told to go back to the past rather than forging ahead and questioning every authority, every sacred doctrine and not take them as infallible, they will tend towards schizophrenia. The age of enlightenment also means keeping religion as a personal faith and not turning it into a public spectacle and a noisy affair. If one person practices his/her faith it should not be by inconveniencing another. This mutual respect is integral to the spirit of enlightenment.

Unfortunately, humans created the idea of religion and also the rituals that are embedded with each religion. Later they turned it into a sacrosanct idea that is beyond criticism on the plea that their respective gods/deities would be displeased. And their anointed prophets of yore who are as human as anyone else and are afflicted by the same human failings and predilections are suddenly turned into infallible humans. Is that even possible? Humans by nature are frail and subject to errors. But when what some humans say becomes absolutism and dogmatic, violence is the end result. It is this lack of critical thinking that leads to religious extremism. In this day and age to quarrel on prime time TV about whose god or prophet is being insulted is bizarre. This at a point in history when India is laying claim to being a superpower. This dichotomy must end.

Corruption is a Crime, for Crying Out Loud!

By Boxter Kharbteng

If we take the title for what it says, it means that each time you take somebody's money (including state's or public money) without permission and without the right to do so — no matter how (smartly, not-so-smartly, but all the same: *shamelessly*) and how much (one rupee or lakhs of it) — you are committing a crime. Simply put, you are a criminal. Accordingly, you should be punished. Thus says the law of the state and country!

Why is there so much corruption? It's all due to selfishness. It's about greed. But greed is just another form of selfishness that's become uglier. Corruption is selfishness that expresses itself at the expense of another person, including the government or any other entity.

Corruption is a multi-headed dragon — meaning: it appears in different forms. Bribery is one of those; manipulation of financial figures (cooking the books), submission of false expense reports, or any other crafty, deceitful means of making dirty money for the benefit of the self.

The recent reports about the collapse of the dome of the new-but-yet-to-be-completed Rs177.7 crore Meghalaya state legislative assembly, the leakages of the ISBT building, the allegations of corruption that have been doing the rounds in MeECL, the illegal but still-operating toll gates, the structurally compromised bridge on the Shillong bypass "due to the overloaded trucks ferrying illegitimate coal"; the illegal mining and transportation of coal enabled by those who have the official and legal power to stop such an operation, and so on are troubling. These cases are just the tip of the iceberg, but the exposure is large enough to show how deeply-rooted and widespread is the culture of corruption in our beloved state of Meghalaya.

The timing of the collapse of the dome in question is just as significant. Were this collapse — God forbid — to take place at the time when the assembly was in session, when lawmakers along with their assistants were milling about under the dome, imagine the horrific tragedy! NEIGRIHMS would be overwhelmed for days. Just the thought itself sends chills down my spine and gives me goosebumps. The implications and fallout are frightening! The eyes and ears and thoughts of the

rest of India would be trained towards Meghalaya's legislative assembly building at Mawdiangdiang — certainly not for the display of the good and the beautiful but for the exposure of the frightening beast called corruption.

Where does corruption begin? If it takes place at the bottom, the one at the top can effectively do something about it; but if it takes place at the top, then we're dealing with some kind of a malignant "cancer"! What can the head say if he himself is corrupt? He has lost his moral voice because his own morality has crumbled. How can he pull up on someone for corruption

And politicians are more than happy to contribute — even to those churches they least like — because they treat it as an investment that will translate into votes in the coming elections.

Unfortunately, our church leaders' vision seems to be no longer than their noses because they regard what they get from politicians on behalf of their church as part of the politician's duty and responsibility. When you get a politician to donate money to your church, you are likely to shy away from criticizing him (or her) when there is a need to do so. Your vote for him in the next elections

their initiative. They have fired their opening salvo and more is expected of them. Let's prayerfully hope that they are also watchful of *fatigue* because it will do what it always does: stop, give in and give up. From time to time, we need to be reminded of these words of Jesus: "You are the light of the world." If 75% of Meghalayans belong either to this or that church, if every one of them were to become a light bulb, imagine the amount of light Christians can shed over the landscape of Meghalaya that is covered with a thick fog of corruption! The critical question is whether or not the church will harness and translate its electoral power into moral power and influence? This is where the rubber meets the road! And this is the need of the hour. Respected church leaders, bless your heart for taking up the challenge to bring this transformation!

Corruption is a degrader and a drag. It generates disillusionment and hopelessness in the lives of our young people — who are the future of our society and state. They should have heroes to be inspired by rather than villains to contend with. Corruption is a race to the bottom. No wonder why Meghalaya's national ranking in every sphere of development continues to hug the bottom. Oh, I wish that our state were at least "the cleanest dirty shirt"! One authority listed eight reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire (27 BC-AD 476). Reason number seven says: "government corruption and political instability."

Material things are meant to meet our needs, but a corrupt person turns them into the goddess of materialism and zealously worships at its shrine. Needs have their modesty and limitations, but 'wants' don't. Like the arms of an octopus, they keep spreading and grabbing.

I conclude this article by pointing to theologian Carl F. H. Henry's analysis of the essence of sin. He observed that it is comprised of pride and selfishness. This is to state that for Christians, corruption is a double-edged sword: it is a crime as well as a sin. In the case of the latter, it is the breaking of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal."

(The author of this article is a retired professor of theology, ethics, and philosophy. He can be reached via email: bxb.kharbteng@gmail.com or by phone: 9436560077)



when he himself is involved in the same act? That would be like letting the fox guard the hen house. The deeds of a corrupt official are telling the rest under his charge and influence that corruption is all right — provided you are not caught, and especially if you are not punished. So, make him while the sun shines.

The Church's Role in the Kingdom of Corruption

In their recent articles on corruption in the government of Meghalaya, published in *The Shillong Times*, both Bah Albert Thyrmiang and Bah Toki Blah pointed to the civic responsibility of the churches and Christian denominations. Both are convinced that the churches must be proactive to ensure that we have a clean government. They reproached their respective denominations for their aloofness and indifference to corruption in public life. And may I add one more voice (mine) from the side of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If their churches have been guilty of being silent and indifferent to government-related corruption, so is my church. Perhaps we could say the same thing of other churches and denominations — big and small. Many churches solicit from their politicians material and financial help for church events and needs.

might simply be based on the fact that he contributed something to your church and not because you think he will make the most significant contribution to your area or village or town. Then there is also the question of legitimacy and legality in soliciting public money for religious purposes. Should we? Does the law allow us to do that?

I wholly agree with the mentioned writers' observation that the church's vision in this instance is myopic and self-centered; that it needs to look beyond itself, beyond its denominational boundary and identity. It needs to be more inclusive in its role. Every church and denomination needs to work for the common good without caring who gets the credit. So the clarion call to the churches of Meghalaya is clear: help retool our politicians to make them better and more effective in their service for the common good. If we fail to do that, we allow politics to degenerate into another form of a highly profitable business which, all the more, encourages corruption.

The work of the Khasi-Jaintia Church Leaders Forum (KJCLF) on this matter has just begun. At least that's how I would like to frame

Agnipath is PM Modi's seminal contribution to defence programme

The big rush of young unemployed will culminate in 2024 Lok Sabha polls

By Sushil Kutty

Agnipath and Madhusala! Two poems of Harivansh Rai Bachchan, actor Amitabh Bachchan's father. Agnipath is about 'hope', while Madhusala spells 'drunken despair'. But, with "Tu na thakega kabhi / Tu na rukega kabhi / Tu na mudega kabhi / Kar shapath, Kar shapath, Kar shapath / Agnipath agnipath agnipath", is the Modi Government fiddling dangerously with the

meets the eye? The Modi government has borrowed from "poetry and picture", and then glossed over the rest. 'Agnipath' and 'Agniveer' will go hand in hand with the mission to create 10 million jobs in one-and-a-half-years!

One-and-a-half years will take us straight to the 2024 general elections, and the BJP and Narendra Modi will be canvassing for a third

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, from the time he announced himself Prime Minister of India, gone on a disengagement from the time before May 26, 2014. To that extent, Modi rule is not about post-2014, but about ante-2014.

Narendra Modi has been systematically disrobing India, and changing the character of India's institutions from what they were like before 2014. What's disquieting is that it's still a work in progress. To get into Modi's head will be a discovery of a shocking India, one that will hark back and forth, leaving in its wake a hotch-potch India hard to recognize.

fighting spirit of the Indian Armed Forces?

Again, what's already being hailed as Modi's seminal contribution to the Indian Army, Indian Navy, and the Indian Air Force, 'Agnipath' and 'Agniveer', must have sprung from Modi's fertile imagination, nurtured since his movie-going days. The Amitabh Bachchan starrer, 'Agnipath', must have been a favourite, with 'Agniveer' a start-up he introduced.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, from the time he announced himself Prime Minister of India, gone on a disengagement from the time before May 26, 2014. To that extent, Modi rule is not about post-2014, but about ante-2014. Narendra Modi has been systemati-

straight term, and third consecutive victory! And there is enough unemployment in the country to put the army recruitment plan into action straightaway!

The plan is along the lines of Yogi Adityanath's free ration scheme. The economically weaker sections got their 35 kilos of paddy and grain and gladly voted BJP in the UP assembly elections. 'Agnipath' turns thousands of unemployed into soldiers and mid-2024, tens of thousands of 'Agniveers' in Delhi and elsewhere will vote Modi and BJP!

Dig deep, think hard and Agnipath is knee jerk. If 6-months can create an 'Agniveer', think of what a waste it will be to throw those "Universal Soldiers"



cally disrobing India, and changing the character of India's institutions from what they were like before 2014.

What's disquieting is that it's still a work in progress. To get into Modi's head will be a discovery of a shocking India, one that will hark back and forth, leaving in its wake a hotch-potch India hard to recognize. Whether it will be an idea of India the people would want to uphold would be hard to tell, suffice to say that the primary purpose of the discoveries would be to startle.

The Indian Army's history is of valour and victory. Post-Independence, it didn't need 'Agnipath', and 'Agniveer' to beat our enemies back. Right from the word go, India's fighting soldiers gladly embraced martyrdom. The Sikh Regiment, the Punjab Regiment, the Rajput regiment, to name just three, made bravery their motto.

And now there's news that the Indian army will lose its competitive edge that it gets from regimental pride! The one overriding characteristic of living under a dictatorship is that everybody of consequence is afraid to stand up to the authoritarian's hare-brained schemes. The Tughlaks always get their way.

To reiterate, doesn't it seem like there is more to the Modi government's armed forces recruitment plan than

back into the maelstrom, where they started from — unemployed again, with no pension to look forward to. The one-time cache of Rs 11 lakh will be gone before the ejected 'Agniveer' is inside the door of his mother's home.

Also, what's the guarantee the cast-aside Agniveer will land a civilian job? Study the Modi Government's employment policy, and what we have are hundreds of thousands of unambitious youth dragging handbags, selling pakoras and samosas.

A variant of 'Agnipath' and 'Agniveer' cannot be imposed on the Indian Railways. But disciplined soldiers will not raise a hue and cry when cast out every four years. The point is, what sort of jobs await them? Apart from crawling through undergrowth and thrusting a bayonet, what other things will an 'Agniveer' of 4-years' training know? The government will save on pension, but every four years there will be a stark stock number of youth joining the ranks of the burgeoning unemployed, youth trained to use the firearm. A steady stream of army-trained unemployed is a different kind of the unemployed let loose on the roads. From Agnipath to Madhusala, from hope to drunken despair, is but a short four years. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Who will regulate the taxi fares?

Editor,
Quoting from the report from *The Shillong Times* dated 22/05/2022 "Centre's move to slash excise duty on fuel to offer the public respite from inflation, the price of the petrol in the city has gone down to Rs 95.14/litre while diesel now costs Rs 83.13/litre" Since 2021 the taxi fares have doubled up on the plea that they were following Covid protocols. Later the protocol was relaxed by the Government while the fares remained the same. The public has to suffer no matter how much they are being charged. It may be a small issue for our Government but it does cause a lot of problems for the general public. The taxi fare from Garikhana to Police Bazar was raised from Rs. 10 to Rs 30. The fare from Garikhana to Umiam was raised from Rs 30 to Rs 50. Some drivers even charge Rs 60 per person with full capacity. Why does the Transport Department neglect these problems faced by the public? Kindly look into the matter and solve the problem immediately so that the general public will escape from this plight.

Yours etc.,
R Sarki
Shillong-2

Lack of accountability of ADCs

Editor,
The news item which appeared prominently in *The Shillong Times* of June 13, 2022 under the caption, "Opposition plea for tightening belt after CAG misdeed" and subsequent reports connected with the subject in question where it was reported that the Governor has sought the intervention of the Chief Minister on the non-maintenance of accounts by the three District Councils of Jaintia Hills, Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills is indicative of the lack of accountability of the ADCs. This has led to the habitual undeterred, rampant embezzlement of public funds by these constitutional bodies. In this connection I am tempted to openly ask this question from the public of Meghalaya as to who is responsible for electing the MDCs and why the CAG of Meghalaya which is constitutionally mandated to keep a tab of the incomes and expenditures of these bodies by auditing their accounts from time to time is not taking penal action on the "embezzlement of public funds for so long? Why are they not made accountable to anyone for the huge amounts they collect by way of taxes, shares of taxes

from State government, royalties, tolls, fees etc., and huge grants under article 275 and special grant assistance from Finance Commission? All these yearly revenues amount to several crores of rupees. It is a fact that not only do the ADCs not maintain their accounts timely but they also do it irregularly and haphazardly because there are no proper systems of accounting.

What is urgently required is to overhaul the whole system of maintenance of accounts by inducting financial experts in accountancy so that everything is up to date. More importantly it is to ensure by bringing in place a complete system of financial responsibility, accountability and transparency in these bodies. What was going on all these years was that money could be drawn and utilised at will based on the whims and fancies of those in authority in the Executive Committees. It was really a great puzzle to witness that in the name of some schemes how the ADCs' funds were embezzled left and right without any qualms of conscience by those in authority and without in the least caring to think that the funds belong to the public and is not their fathers' hard-earned money.

It must also be admitted that the CAG has failed many times in the past to prepare timely Audit Reports because we came across that

the CAG issued audit reports pertaining to old financial years. It may not be out of place to suggest to the CAG that he may depute experts to impart intensive trainings to the ADC personnel who are dealing with the day to day accounts so that accounts keeping records are correct and in order in all respects keeping in view the CAG standards. This will also facilitate timely submission of accounts by the ADCs and make the job of the CAG easy.

Let us, from now on, hope that the ADCs here in our state will deliver good governance (which we doubt) and live up to the goals for which they are mandated by the Constitution and that the public funds entrusted to them are in safe hands. We are tired of the repeated bad news of defalcation and corruption by these constitutional bodies who are duty bound to safeguard, preserve and protect the land, identities, culture etc of the tribals here in Meghalaya.

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

CUET & its implications

Editor,
Recently, the only public university of Meghalaya-NEHU, has published that all

PG programs fall under the ambit of CUET on its website. With this, there should be a relook into why NEHU was established in the North East (NE). Bearing the tag of being neglected, NE, was way behind other states, when it came to education and health care facilities. The then government at the Centre thought it would be wise to set up a central university in a region where the tribal population was in the majority and the terrain limited movement. Hence, it was decided that a university should be established which would cater to the needs and aspirations of the young minds of this part of the country. Looking at it now, all the vision of the previous regime seems to have gone into dust. Meghalaya can never be in the same playing field as that of a UP or Delhi in terms of coaching and other facilities which facilitate the success of an arduous entrance examination. What the Vice-Chancellor should be conveying to his seniors at the centre is more seats, reservation and priority to tribal candidates in the region and especially to those from Meghalaya. There are reservations for SC students as well, however, the state has a maximum ST population and ways and means should be devised so that the brightest and most deserving minds do not fall prey to the "experimentation" and whimsical trials and tribula-

tions of implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) at the cost of tribal students.

Many students even barely manage to pay their UG course fees, so one can imagine when people from other parts of the country come and flock to NEHU through CUET under the same 'ST' category, where shall our very own children go? Private colleges elsewhere that charge gargantuan fees? NEHU and its stakeholders should seriously sit down and deliberate if the 'dikats' are really meant to be implemented or be bold enough to be a policy maker of change in their own rights to preserve and maintain the tribal culture of our region which is diminishing day by day. Only God knows what would happen ten years down the line where one may witness zero students from Meghalaya studying in PG courses at NEHU and the entire vision of setting up a varsity falls into the doldrums. Hopefully the administrators, especially the Vice-Chancellor and student bodies can foresee the future which looks unfortunately pretty dark.

Yours etc.,
Pauline Wankhar
Shillong-17

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"Never cut corners, or accept anything that's second-rate."

— Bruce Oldfield

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 305 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 2022

Law and the Gandhis

LAW-violators must be ready to face punishment. But, they often get a long rope in the Indian justice-dispensation systems. While Parliament and state legislatures keep passing laws by the hour, like a production line, a stage has come when several laws are in conflict with each other. Add to this the piling up of crores of cases for unending years — a situation also compounded by the failure to fill the posts in the judiciary at regular intervals. Investigation agencies are generally on a merry-go-round. Influence matters. Under these circumstances, the National Herald Case, that was first filed 10 years ago by Subramanian Swamy targeting mainly the Nehru-Gandhi family, has not reached anywhere. It is unlikely that, despite the current activism by the Enforcement Directorate, it will reach a fair conclusion in the lifetime, at least, of Sonia Gandhi. If a Congress government returns to power, the whole case might be turned upside down.

National Herald was started by Jawaharlal Nehru with over 5,000 freedom fighters including him as the company's shareholders in 1938. What came to be known as the Associate Journals Ltd, with a string of other journals too, suspended publications in 2008 due to piling debts of nearly Rs 100 crore. Two years later, the entity went into the hands of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, who turned it into a family enterprise called Young India Pvt Ltd. While the AJL company reportedly had assets worth Rs 2,000 crore, the ownership got transferred for a song. In between, issues of money laundering related to the acquisition cropped up. This formed the basis for the ED questioning Rahul Gandhi, which will be followed by questioning of Sonia Gandhi.

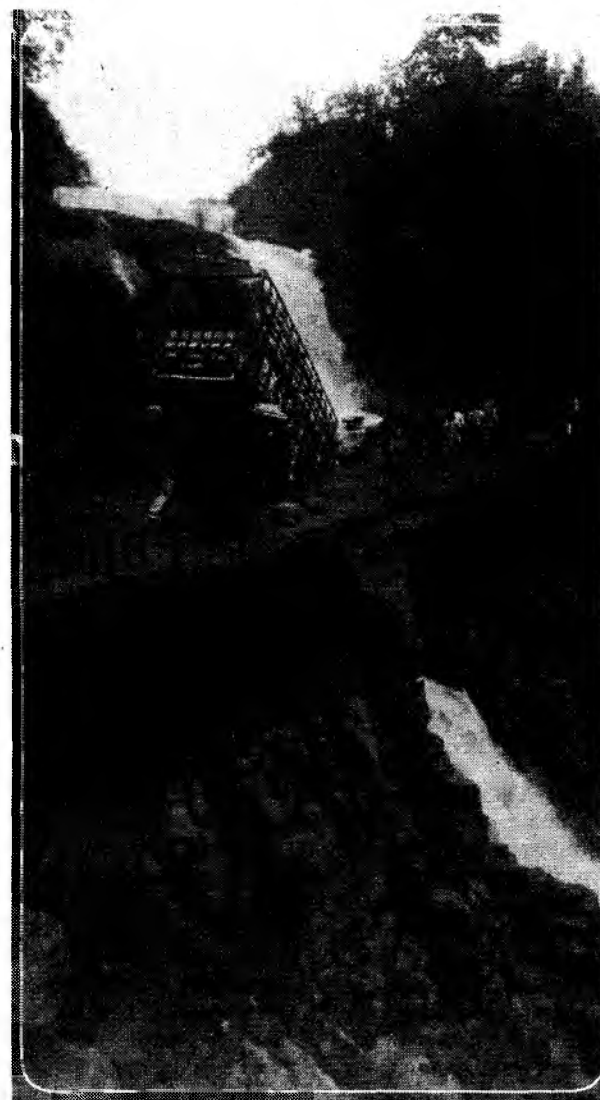
Before law, no one is a sacred cow. Law is equal for one and all, at least in concept. In practice, this is not so. The high and mighty or those close to the seat of power get away with their acts. Exceptions were a Bangaru Lakshman, a George Fernandes and a Lalu Prasad. They went to jail. They were found to be guilty also as they could not stall the course of justice. Several such cases are pending against top politicians who in general have a hand-in-the-honey-pot approach to public life. The age of ideology is over. It is the craze for money and wealth that guides many of them today. Law-violations by all and sundry is commonplace while the establishment is in a slumber. But this does not mean the Gandhis should not be questioned or their actions not be investigated.

The weather has been rather brusque with Meghalaya. True we have had heavy rains bearing down upon us in the past too but not as furious and unrelenting as it has been in the past few weeks and days. In West Khasi Hills the wild waters of a cloudburst carried a young mother and her kitchen away into the river leaving behind her two small kids in the bedroom. It's heart-breaking to even conjure these images. In East Jaintia Hills, on the national highway a road caved in due to a sudden gush of flood waters. The road now hangs by a thread. One cannot imagine how truckloads of cement negotiated these precariously hanging roads with deep gorges on one side. But this is also a natural audit process by no less than the Rain God. It has exposed our well-hidden engineering deficits which have been tolerated for decades. Corruption in the Public Works Department is an open secret with engineers and ministers and other clerks down the line, in the Department getting their regular share. The contractor is fleeced so badly that he has no alternative but to cut costs by building sub-standard roads, bridges and buildings. We are seeing all of these shoddy constructions before our eyes today. But if we think that even one engineer would be hauled up for this malfeasance we need to think again. Corruption is so normalised in Meghalaya that no eyebrows are raised, forget about raising voices.

The engineers are all part of polite society; all church-going members who contribute to the church's coffers; they are part of elite social groups that go for holidays to fantastic destinations together. These same people build roads that in the last few days have developed serious cracks and there are potholes galore around Shillong city while the rural areas are all cut off from civilisation because of heavy landslides.

The funny part is that both earthquakes and rainfall are part of the Meghalayan landscape. So either the engineering institutions never taught the engineers what bio-engineering techniques are and how they can be adapted to reduce landslides. Bioengineering techniques are useful approaches to prevent landslides as they improve slope stability and maintain ecological balance. They are mostly suitable to be deployed in developing countries because of their cost effectiveness and environmentally friendly nature. Practically speaking geologists have a major role to play in suggesting to

engineers what are the best ways to reduce landslides and what sort of plants are best to hold the soil together. Bio-engineering suggests that the plants should be deep-rooted and should be indigenous to the place. The reality is that there is hardly any conferencing between geologists and engineers to decide on how to minimise earth cutting and what plants/grass are best at holding the soil together. A recent article



by Dr Eladbor Laloo on the geological implications of building another bridge over the Umiam River was a very educative piece and those intending to undertake this complicated task had better consult the home-grown geologists who are otherwise never consulted. Or if consulted it is only to determine the quantum of extractable coal under the earth's surface in the coal-bearing areas of Meghalaya.

On a road trip from Kolkata to Jamshepur I witnessed the thickness of the asphalt on the National Highway. That road is set to last a long time. In comparison look at the thickness of the roads here in Meghalaya. They are barely two inches or even lesser in height. They are washed away in the first heavy showers on the monsoon. But what is even more intriguing is that

there are no drains on the side of the road for the water to drain into. Even on the Shillong Guwahati highway, we can see water flowing right across the middle of the road because there isn't a proper provision for drainage. Take a look at the roads around Shillong city and see how many roads have water flowing right through the middle because there are no provisions for drains by the side. Can I ask a question

we have seasonal waterfalls all along the sides. The waters come down like natural geysers. Without proper drainage at the side the water would erode the main road.

Nature can take only that much and no more. The same nature must be burdened by the level of theft at all levels where engineers build mansions for themselves but don't have any commitment to quality when it comes to public roads and buildings. Engineers don't earn salaries that enable them to build those swanky buildings with modern amenities and the best of accoutrements and trimmings that suggest acquisitions from ill-gotten wealth. There is a limit to how much nature can take. Karma always but always catches up and it seems to have come full circle this season from the tumbling of the dome to the leaks and cracks in buildings and bridges to large scale landslides that will take time to restore — we have them all. The only sad thing is that in this country the corrupt get away and have the last laugh. Not a single engineer to date, not even Mr Ransom Sutnga who supervised the installation of the infamous dome at the now disreputable State Assembly building has been asked to explain their acts of omission and commission. Sutnga has in fact passed the buck to his seniors and other co-supervisors of the Assembly building. In fact after the elections 2023 he might himself become the Minister in charge PWD (Roads) or Buildings. We the people of Meghalaya are quite capable of rewarding corruption. We have done it in the past and will do it yet again.

Meanwhile the Government has just formed groups of officials in all districts to manage the disaster that seems to have engulfed the state from all quarters. Repairing the roads that have caved in will require substantial funds but how much of those funds will actually go into making better, more durable roads is the question. At one time Mr PA Sangma as CM had invited a road construction company to build roads that were durable and needed no repairs for close to five years. I sometimes wonder why contractors here are never black-listed for constructing sub-standard buildings and roads that need annual repairs.

It is high time that people approach the Lok Ayukta to bring some sanity to this state. We are so morally deficient as a people that we constantly need the judiciary to give a stern order even for day to day governance. The moral meltdown of this Christian state is near complete!

Both Congress & BJP following bankrupt policies in Kerala

LDF must organise massive mobilisation to meet the joint offensive

By Prakash Karat

Kerala is witnessing the dubious spectacle of Congress and BJP protesters out in the streets demanding the resignation of the chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan. In several places, the protesters have turned violent and clashed with the police.

The agitation has been motivated by the ludicrous allegations made by an accused, Swapna Suresh, who has been charge-sheeted in the gold smuggling case and is out on bail. Her newly concocted charges include a bag of foreign currency being taken out of the country through diplomatic channels at the behest of the chief minister and other absurd stories like gold being transported in biryani vessels to the chief minister's residence.

When the gold smuggling through diplomatic channels was first exposed in June 2020, the chief minister

chief minister's movements in the state and show black flags. The frenzy whipped up led to a planned effort to physically confront the chief minister. Two Youth Congress leaders from Kannur boarded a flight on which the chief minister was travelling to Trivandrum, and on the plane landing, advanced towards the chief minister shouting slogans. The Congress leader of the opposition, V D Satheesan, has defended this dangerous action on the aircraft as just shouting some slogans of protest and demanded instead that a case be filed against the LDF convenor, E P Jayarajan, who blocked the protesters from advancing towards the chief minister and pushed them back.

It is ironical that when the Congress in Kerala was conducting protests against Pinarayi Vijayan on the day,



had written to the central government for an enquiry by a central agency as it fell under the jurisdiction of the customs department. For two years, the NIA, CBI, ED and customs investigated every aspect and detail of the case and despite wild allegations by the opposition and media, could find nothing against the chief minister or any other minister in the government.

Swapna Suresh, herself, in her nine testimonies to the various agencies, did not mention the chief minister. In fact, from jail, she had sent a voice message that she was being pressurised to implicate the chief minister.

Now, what has changed? Swapna Suresh got bail from the high court in November 2021. Soon after, she took up a job as an executive in an RSS-affiliated NGO — Highrange Rural Development Society (HRDS) along

Rahul Gandhi appeared before the enforcement directorate in the National Herald case, the Congress leadership and workers were out in the streets of Delhi protesting this act of 'political vendetta'. But in Kerala, Congress is saying that the ED has not acted against Pinarayi Vijayan, because a deal was struck between Modi and Vijayan.

A year ago, the Congress and BJP had conducted more widespread protests against the chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan in the gold smuggling case. After the central agencies failed to find anything to link the chief minister to the case and the people rejected all these allegations in the May 2021 assembly polls, the UDF had become despondent. Now, they are desperately clutching on to the RSS-sponsored Swapna Suresh show hoping to revive their fortunes.

Letters to the Editor

Whither District Councils?

Editor,
I really enjoyed reading the article "The Dome episode..." (ST June 14, 22) by my good friend Bah Toki Blah. It's quite exhilarating and entertaining after being bombarded on a daily basis with mundane and unpleasant news. I was thinking under which category will this piece of literature be placed. Is it sarcasm, allegory, a parable or sardonic; nay, I think it's a satire. It's good as a society we take time to contemplate our own image in the mirror such as this satire. The

C&AG report on public domain that almost indicted the three District Councils of mishandling of public funds and finances should concern every citizen of the state. New Delhi must be watching. The debate on the necessity to have the Councils in a resource-scarce state like ours needs to be revisited. This was debated some years ago when the narratives were dominated by the political class who

justify without conviction since they take the Council as the goddess of employment and ill-gotten wealth. If Mizoram and Nagaland can do without the Councils, one would like to be enlightened how the Councils can protect us where the State cannot do it.

The protection of land is done by the State through the Land Transfer Act. I wish some intellectuals would present a true and unbiased cost-benefit analysis of the effectiveness and advantage of the Council. The Hill State Leaders could have done away with it but they thought it will be a useful forum to groom future legislators. They never in their wildest dream ever thought that the daughter would rebel and fight against it's own mother. The same people sitting in the Council Secretariat would move to drop section 12 (a) of the Sixth Schedule and the same people sitting at the State Secretariat would oppose it. How can we trust such double minded people without any principles? Frankly speaking the minorities in the state need protection. How can majority be protected within the majority. It's not only a

constitutional anomaly but a dichotomy. If the Govt. of India can do away with article 370 one would not be surprised when one fine morning we wake up finding that the Sixth Schedule had been recast on behalf of the minorities in a majority state of Meghalaya and through an act of Parliament the structure and infrastructure of the Councils are transferred or better metamorphosed to the minorities with direct funding and they are legally allowed to administer according to their wisdom and understanding. Period. Hope this becomes one of the issues in the 2023 elections.

Yours etc
Torist Mark,
Via email

Ideological violence and bigotry

Editor
In the realm of politics (as in other realms), expediency should always be subordinate to moral principles — never the other way around. But Mr. Modi's BJP government has often, for the sake of trade, forfeited ethics.

We should therefore not be surprised at India's sitting on the fence over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nor should we be surprised that BJP suspended its former spokeswoman, Nupur Sharma, and expelled Naveen Jindal — following expediency at the cost of ethics. The cause of their suspensions was foreign backlash. We should not be surprised that Mr. Modi's government meekly allowed India to be rebuked by autocratic Muslim nations that have never taken PRC to task for its abuse and torture of Uighur Muslims. Nor should we be surprised that Mr. Modi has wooed (even hugged) Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), despite MBS being accused of the brutal 2018 assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.

In this cynical approach to politics, often, the first casualty is women's rights. Thus, in 2018, Indian coast guard forces stormed the ship of UAE's Princess Latifa, while it was still in international waters, ignored her pleas, and handed her over to Emirati special forces.

The Nupur Sharma event should have led to serious conversations about inter-

faith education, women's marital rights, and ethically appropriate ways of dealing with religious bigotry. But it has not.

The problem here is not just that Mr. Modi's government mixes religion with politics (an explosive mix), but that it has removed religion from the tripod (ethics-wisdom-mysticism) whereupon it should always stand. When religion divorces itself from ethics, it degenerates to ideological violence and bigotry.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Cumbersome CUET!

Editor,
Apropos the letter to the editor dated entitled CUET & its implications (ST June 15, 2022) I totally endorse the views of the author. Being the only girl-child of my single parent, it becomes imperative for me to continue my education in the same State. With demands of a State University seeing no light of the day, our only dependence is on NEHU for quality and economical

education. And when we, the indigenous community are given second class treatment in our very own state with regards to admission, it is a pitiful state of affairs. The shocking part is neither the administration of NEHU nor the Vice Chancellor have given any statement with regards to any special provisions, if any, for the ST students of the State. How can we compete with people from Mumbai and Kolkata who are already gearing up for the entrance examinations through coaching centres and state affiliated measures? The Controller of Examinations and the VC should come out in public and discuss the issues at hand and educate us on what grounds NEHU aims to admit students, especially of our state, rather than just passing on the buck to CUET and the UGC.

Yours etc.,
Bianchi Sangma,
Tura-2

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"The drama that unfolded after these fabricated stories has been predictable. The Congress party took up these laughable charges as the gospel truth and launched a protest movement to demand that the chief minister resign."

with another co-accused P S Sarith. It is a few months after this that Swapna Suresh recorded a Section 164 statement before a magistrate and then proceeded to make its contents public, even though it is meant to be a confidential document.

The drama that unfolded after these fabricated stories has been predictable. The Congress party took up these laughable charges as the gospel truth and launched a protest movement to demand that the chief minister resign. The BJP-RSS, which had orchestrated the whole affair, followed suit by hitting the streets. Much of the mainstream media has joined the campaign against the chief minister and the LDF government by peddling the falsehoods put out by Swapna Suresh.

The Youth Congress has been trying to block the

The way Congress is behaving in Kerala, explains a lot about why they have reached the current state of bankruptcy at the national level. They have no compunctions in joining hands with the BJP to fight a Left-led government. They seek to smear Pinarayi Vijayan as a 'deal-maker' with Modi when it is their own leaders who are in droves leaving to join the BJP. The fact is, the Congress in Kerala has become the cats-paw for the RSS-BJP-inspired conspiracy against the LDF government.

The Congress-BJP joint offensive in Kerala needs to be met with a strong rebuff by a counter-campaign and mass mobilisation. The people of Kerala who have full confidence in the LDF government and its policies will give a fitting response. (IPA Service)

"From the deepest desires often come the deadliest hate."

— Socrates

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 306 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 2022

ADCs have outlived their utility
THE Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) created under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution after solid arguments by the late JIM Nichols Roy in the Constituent Assembly, had served its purpose at a time when the tribes of Assam which included the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people were all part of the composite State of Assam. They were created to ensure that the culture and traditions of the hill tribes are conserved and promoted and that they are able to administer their own institutions for that very purpose. After Meghalaya earned statehood, these ADCs no longer had any meaning. They existed as second tier legislative bodies because the so-called leaders of the Hill State Movement did not have the foresight to see that these institutions would wither away or serve a very limited purpose. And that is exactly what has happened. The three ADCs have become employment agencies where the politicians occupying the seats in the Executive Committee would employ their camp followers irrespective of whether there was enough work to do. As a result, the Garo Hills District Council has far more employees than it can pay. The same is the case with the other two ADCs. What is worse is the propensity of these Councils to carry on with a business-as-usual attitude without caring to account for the public money used. For years their accounts have not been audited and neither are the utilization certificate submitted. They have carried on with a nonchalance that is now being taken seriously by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG).

It has taken the Office of the Governor to write to the Chief Executive of the State to push the Councils to get real with the accounts. There must be a lot of wrongdoing in these Councils. Some Members have even said that the moment the Councils are allocated funds they go on a spending spree without any policy on how to spend the amounts on public utilities. Naturally the 'sarkari' money is not considered worth accounting for. It's taken as a freebie. But that's not how public money is to be expended. Every rupee is to be accounted for. If the Councils cannot even account for the money they receive from the State and Central Governments how can they be expected to be judicious and accountable in their other dealings. How are they spending the money from toll gates both legal and illegal and their sundry collection from markets and forests etc?

A time has come when drastic action is needed. There is too much molly-cuddling in the name of protecting tribal rights. The tribes will not lose their scheduled tribe status just because the ADCs are abolished and the State Government is adequately empowered to look after the welfare of its people.

Letters to the Editor

Plight of women continues

Editor,
I was very touched to read the article titled, 'Women: Still Many Mountains to Scale', by Patricia Mukhim (ST 10th June 2022). Her elaborate discussion on the subject regarding plight of women in the matrilineal society is very well researched and a recurring problem of the day. While sincerely appreciating the learned author, I would like to ventilate some observations of my own in this regard.
The problem of forced production upon the woman is not only confined to any particular community but it is a practice in general since time immemorial. It is observed that during the last decades of 20th century, maximum married women had premature deaths due to 'Aplastic anemia' (Bloodlessness) because of repeated child delivery, beyond their physical capacity. Many unhealthy deformed and rickety children were born, burdening the society. There are records of bearing 16-22 children even during the span of 30-35 years of conjugal life; and as a result the ailing mothers had to suffer critically and die prematurely. The women had no opinion of their own, to force upon their partners, and had

to suffer silently. If one wife died, second would be very easily available! That was our traditional society.
Nowadays education has to an extent helped to make women conscious of their own safety; but the percentage of educated women is still very low in this region especially. Moreover, being the weaker sex, women cannot compete with male power in physical strength and helplessly have to surrender against their will!
I can recollect an incident of 1998, in Shillong which hurts me till date. A very sober girl of hardly 19 years would serve tea in our school canteen, a very sweet face with innocent smile. I used to mark a baby with her, back-packer with a sling. One day being curious, I asked her to know how old was the baby she carried on her back. She replied in a very disheartening voice that it was 21/2 years old but could not stand or walk. She had to carry it all day long. I was shocked to see the very sickly and deformed baby with a big head and two exceptionally thin legs all skin and bones. With tears she told that she had two more children at home of 4 and 6 years. She had been bearing a child since she was 13 years old. All the children were malnourished! She cried! I asked about her husband but she kept mum, and controlling her emotion and said that he left her, married again and had been living with his new wife and chil-

Wake up Call for TV News: Don't Profit from Hate

By Rajdeep Sardesai

In the aftermath of the Nupur Sharma controversy, the Indian television news media is being targeted from left and right. The left-liberal voices argue that news television is culpable for giving a ready platform to hate-mongers. The right, especially the Hindutva right, insist that news tv is guilty of selective indignation by allowing Muslim sectarians to get away easily. So where does the truth lie?

Let's take the left-liberal argument first. Is news tv giving space to hate-mongering? The short answer is yes. There is little doubt that there is far greater indulgence of those who spew communal venom now than ever before. After being unshackled from the government-run Doordarshan monopoly in the 1990s, private news tv in its formative years was not trapped in the frenzied competition one witnesses today where the concept of 'breaking news' has virtually broken down. Being part of a relatively nascent tv-news industry, news editors and reporters were almost insulated from market pressures and thereby had greater freedom to put journalism first. But now, with almost four hundred 24 x 7 news channels in the country, there is a manic competitive race for eyeballs that places sensation above sense. This transformation is reflected in the contemporary format of news tv where sharply polarized debate is often seen as a more effective and cheaper way to design news operations. Where once field reportage was the basic diet of news tv, now the tv studio with larger than life anchors is the dominant arena for noise rather than news. Even the nature of what passes off now as 'debate' has changed dramatically. I recall inviting in the 1990s the cerebral Congress leader, the late VN Gadgil to discuss a perceptible essay he had just written on secularism. I had planned to get the equally formidable intellectual Arun Shourie to debate with him on the issue. Gadgil politely declined. "I don't want a complex issue to be reduced to 'tu tu main main' soundbites between the two of us," was his excuse. This was an age when we would get a maximum of two to three high profile guests to debate a subject at length. Now, channels often have ten heads popping out of a tv screen, screaming at each other. I wonder how

the soft-spoken Mr Gadgil would respond to what I call the multi-headed 'Ravana' school of talking heads journalism!
Talking heads tv isn't just an Indian phenomenon but globally investments in traditional news gathering have steadily declined. A flawed television rating point (TRP) centric model has meant that most news channels are convinced that cacophonous debate over divisive issues like religious identity will garner far more eyeballs than intelligent and meaningful discussions on 'serious' subjects like the state of the economy. That on the very

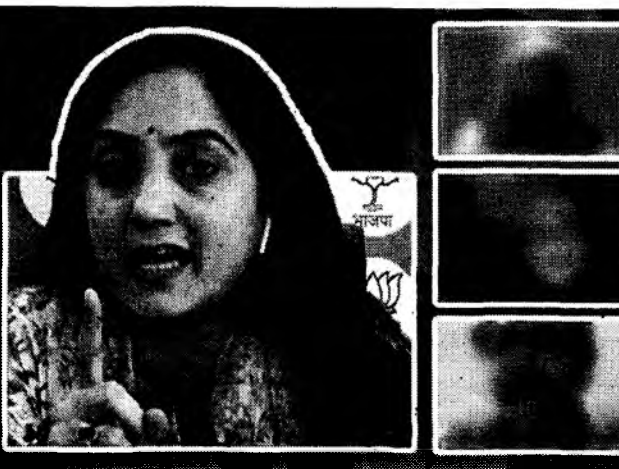
nels of 'manufacturing' hate forget that the likes of Nupur Sharma aren't 'fringe' elements as the government of India rather disingenuously describes them but represent the political mainstream of India's dominant ruling party. What Sharma blurted out about the Prophet may well have been expressed in the heat of another typically acrimonious tv debate but the fact is that her trenchant anti-Muslim views in general reflect the core beliefs of many within the saffron brotherhood for whom such language is now par for the course. A hate speech tracker earlier this year confirms a

of alternate views. The rise of the political right is seen to have ensured greater space in the media to opinions that are not tied into traditional political correctness.

This argument is valid but only upto a point. Yes, a large section of the Indian media was wary, even dismissive of the Hindutva right in particular but post 1992 as the BJP has become a principle pole of Indian politics, there has been a marked power shift. Where once the left-liberals directed the media narrative, now the right wing cheerleaders are firmly ensconced in leadership roles in most newsrooms. The alleged pandering of 'minority' communalists is more than myth than reality: in most instances, the topi-wearing 'television Muslim' is caricatured and made a figure of ridicule, often demeaned during pre-fixed slanging matches. In any case, the credentials of some of these self-styled 'tv maulanas' to speak for their community is highly dubious.

While the Nupur storm is a wake-up call for news tv, the elephant in the media jungle is the growing influence of social media in shaping the public discourse. While planning his controversial take-over of social media platform Twitter, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk had described Twitter as the 'digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are discussed.' Lofty words that bely the reality of a nightmarish space where hate speech often has a free run in the name of free speech. Many news channels today follow twitter trends, their prime time agenda almost dictated to by the clamorous noise in the virtual world. Sadly, in this public sphere where everyone - including highly organised political troll armies - seem to be outraging most of the time, farmer suicides don't gather traction but a raucous shivling versus a fountain debate almost certainly will!

Post-script: Leading business magnate, Harsh Goenka, who often creates a stir on twitter with his punchy tweets, recently warned that corporate advertisers were being driven away by those who feed off hate speech on tv. So will Mr Goenka walk the talk and call out the news anchors and programmes that routinely 'profit from hate'?
(The writer is senior journalist and author. Email: rajdeep@sardesai52@gmail.com)



day that consumer inflation peaked to an eight year high last month, the prime time menu of most news channels ignored this big headline but focused instead on yet another shrill debate on the Gyanvapi mosque reveals the skewed priorities of a morally compromised news ecosystem. A 'Fox news on steroids' news model - a reference to the pioneers of the 'profit from hate' tv network in the

near-pandemic in use of inflammatory language and an exponential rise since 2014, especially in remarks made by ruling BJP politicians.

Let's now reflect upon the right wing case of bias against their viewpoint. Recall that it was precisely this argument that saw the rise of Fox News in the United States more than a decade ago as a response to right wing politicians fulminat-

There is little doubt that there is far greater indulgence of those who spew communal venom now than ever before. After being unshackled from the government-run Doordarshan monopoly in the 1990s, private news tv in its formative years was not trapped in the frenzied competition one witnesses today where the concept of 'breaking news' has virtually broken down.

United States - has meant that credibility often loses out to chaos on the small screen and an advertiser-driven business bottom-line trumps journalistic ethics.

But why bash the frazzled newsroom editors alone? After all, a newsroom mirrors the grim reality of a conflict-ridden polity where hate speech is being 'normalised'. Those who accuse news chan-

ing against the so-called left-liberal domination of mainstream American news media. The initial Fox News motto was that it was 'fair' and 'balanced' because it was finally providing space on a news network to voices with pronounced right wing agendas. In India too, the legacy media was accused of being controlled by a left-liberal elite that was contemptuous

a far-flung area in North India seems to either pay no heed or does not want to understand the sentiments and culture of the tribal people here.
Take for example the implementation of CUET; when he was asked his opinion on the same, he quickly brushed it off his plate and passed the buck on to the State Education Minister. Is this the attitude of a leader who has been given the responsibility of steering an institution like NEHU which has been producing civil servants, renowned authors, politicians, etc., from time immemorial? My elder sister passed out from this Institution during the tenure of the only indigenous VC of this famed institution, Prof B Pakem. She regretfully claims that none of the VC's post Prof Pakem have paid much attention to the development and mobility of the tribal community. My sister is now well placed in America!

And why is any issue raised always linked to the fact that previous Vice-Chancellors since 1993 have not implemented certain welfare schemes hence they cannot be implemented now? Is shedding of responsibility the new ball game of the current man at helm? The protest of the students' body which is doing the rounds in social media also has the VC "smiling" while the agitating crowd places its demands before him. Is the

Parliament must plug loopholes in present Anti-Defection Law

Latest cross voting in Rajya Sabha polls underlines its urgency

By Kalyani Shankar

Elections and defections go together despite stringent anti-defection laws in the country. The law proves ineffective as the legislators are lured by money and position. The lawmakers skirt around the rules, find loopholes to their advantage, and defy them.

In last week's Rajya Sabha polls, Rajasthan's BJP legislator Shobharani Khushwaha, Congress's Haryana MLA Kuldeep Bishnoi, and JD(S) lawmaker from Karnataka Srinivas Gowda are classic examples.

Cross-voting occurs even in presidential and vice-presidential elections despite stringent anti-defection laws.

Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu recently commented that the anti-defection law must be amended to rectify the loopholes. Naidu, also the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, said there was no clarity about the time frame for the Speaker or Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to decide on anti-defection cases.

"There are certain loopholes in the anti-defection law. It allows wholesale defection. But retail defection is not allowed. Amendments are required to plug the loopholes," Mr. Naidu said.

(2019 and 2018), and Tamil Nadu (2017). In March 2020, Jyotiraditya Scindia and 22 Congress MLAs resigned, resulting in a government change in Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, six BSP MLAs merged their party with the Congress, and in Sikkim, 10 of the 15 MLAs of the Sikkim Democratic Front have joined the BJP in 2019. The list goes on.

Critics point out that the law's main issue has been the presiding officers' full authority to decide on the anti-defection petition. Initially, the decision of the Presiding Officer was not subject to judicial review. The Supreme Court struck down this condition in 1992.

The Apex court intervened again in July 2019 when ten Congress MLAs and two Maharashtra Gomantak Party MLAs defected to the BJP and were rewarded with ministries. The court prescribed a maximum of three months for deciding on anti-defection cases in 2020.

How could the loopholes be plugged in? In the past, expert committees have recommended that rather than the presiding officer, usually a ruling party member, the decision to disqualify a defector should be vested



The Vice President's comment is significant because elected representatives have been familiar with party-hopping tactics for decades. The defecting lawmakers have found a way to skirt the restrictions in the Tenth Schedule. Instead of formally "crossing the floor" or voting against their party in a confidence motion, they resign from the party. Some of them come back in the bye-elections.

In the past, there have been some bizarre cases. Gayalal, an independent MLA in Haryana, first joined the Congress Party in 1967; by evening, he shifted to the United Front, and within 9 hours, he re-joined the Congress party. What was more, he returned to the

in an independent agency. However, political parties oppose this change, mainly ruling parties at the centre and states.

Parliament needs to look at the law afresh because of the continuing trend of horse-trading. IN recent times the Supreme Court also observed, "It is time that Parliament has a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto. Parliament may consider amending the Constitution to substitute the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as an arbiter of disputes concerning dis-

"The Presidential polls were announced last week, and there are apprehensions about cross-voting. The best way is to tweak the law. Defectors should be barred from holding public office for a reasonable period, and the vote cast by a defector should be considered invalid."

United Front within a fortnight. This case is known as 'Ayaram, Gayaram' in political circles.

The 2003 amended law prescribed the penalty for shifting political loyalties: the loss of membership and a bar on becoming a minister. The law has been contested in courts multiple times.

Under the anti-defection law, unlimited powers are given to every political party to put down dissent or an alternative view. However, recent developments in many states show that it does not check defections.

To keep the flock together, parties often play resort politics by shepherding them to some resort, sometimes outside the state. Defectors have shown this trend many times-Rajasthan (2020), Maharashtra (2019), Karnataka

qualification under the Tenth Schedule."The Presidential polls were announced last week, and there are apprehensions about cross-voting. The best way is to tweak the law. Defectors should be barred from holding public office for a reasonable period, and the vote cast by a defector should be considered invalid. The electorate should also have a right to recall the representative. Resort politics should also be banned. The mass exodus of MLAs from the vanquished Congress to winning parties shows no respect for the anti-defection law. As long as givers and takers are there, the defection will not stop. What is needed is the political will, and all parties should come together and look at the law afresh. (IPA Service)

dren. He had been serving as a peon in a Government office.

Being deeply anguished, I immediately collected the address of his office and wrote a strong letter to the officer-in-charge of that office, relating the subject and requesting him to compel that employee to help his family financially. The officer informed me that he could not help in that regard because the man (Peon) totally denied the relation, and there was no record or witness or registered document in support of their marriage. He was helpless to help despite his sincerest sympathy.

I can never forget the pale face of that helpless young mother and today I could ventilate my suppressed pain after 24 long years. I fervently hope that large scale education of girls and the Women's Movements could stop the evil practice of forced motherhood upon the tender aged minor girls, and partially remove the plight of women as a whole.

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha,
Shillong - 4

NEHU needs a dynamic VC

Editor,
The entire student community wholeheartedly applauds the Hon'ble Speaker of the Meghalaya Assembly,

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

To Father, With Love

Take your dad on a trip in celebration of Father's Day

Skip the traditional Father's Day gift and treat your dad to an adventure based on his interests. A mini vacation can be kept simple or completely customised activities of his choice. Choose from these seven experiences that will allow you to spend quality time together, doing things you enjoy.

FOR THE HILLS

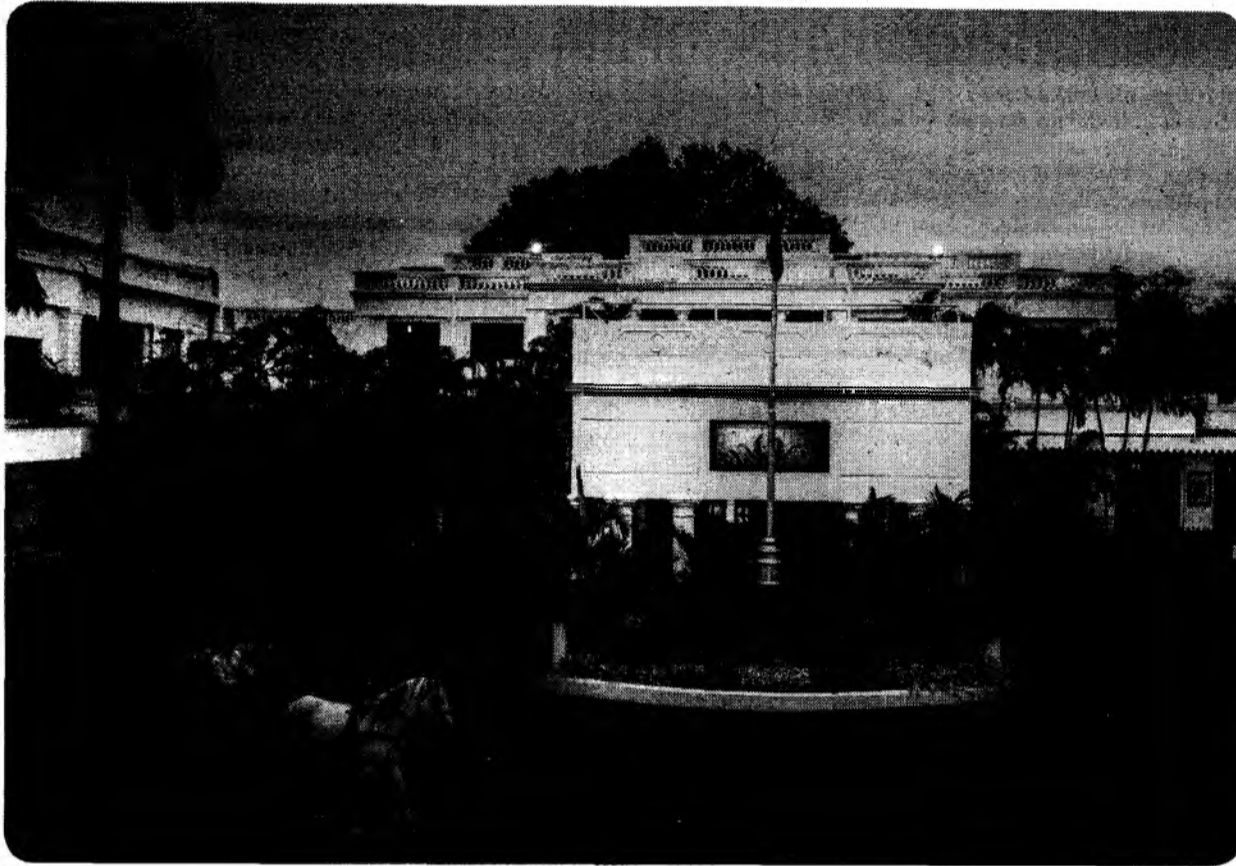
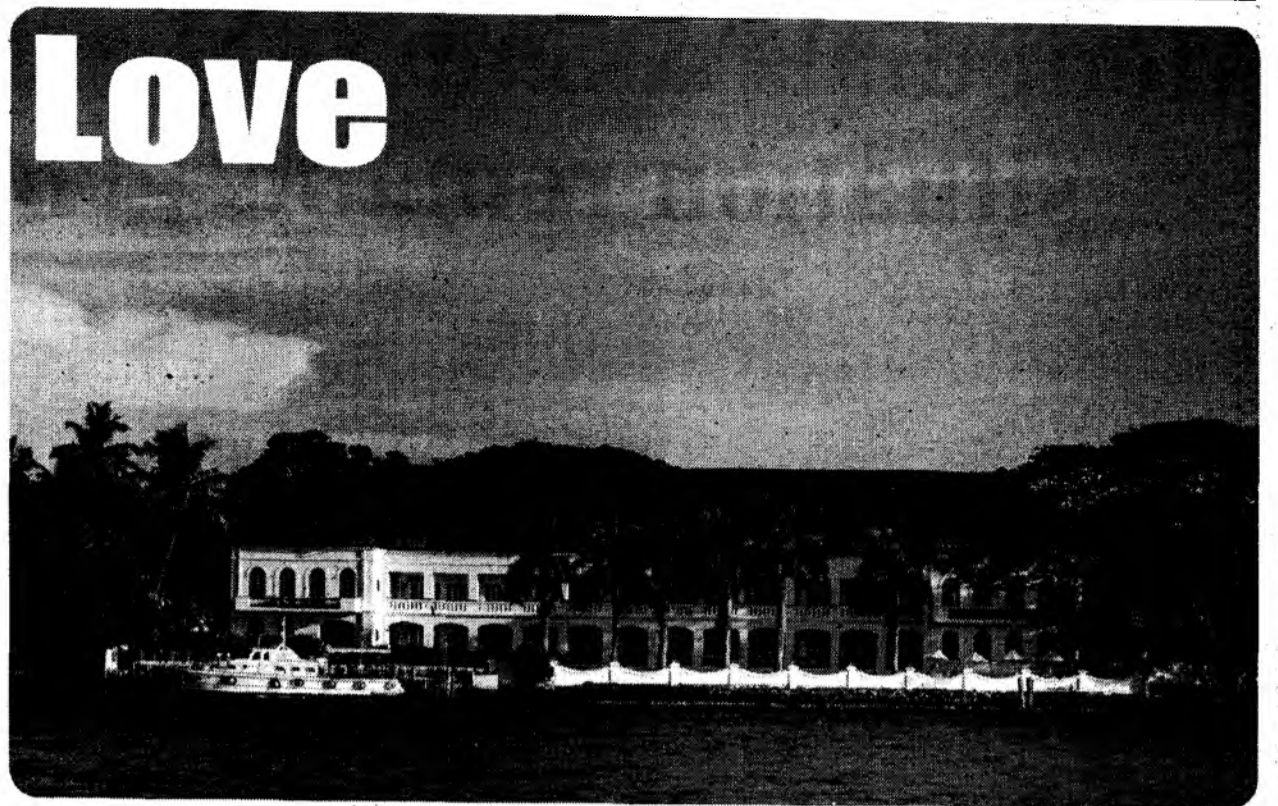
WelcomeHeritage Elysium provides an entirely new perspective on Shimla's legendary hill station. Whereas the hill station is known for its colonial architecture and influences, Elysium reimagines the Shimla experience through the lens of modern luxury and contemporary comforts. A stay at Elysium resort provides a 360-degree panoramic view of Shimla, the lush green valley, and the sublime temples, providing a whole new way to explore the area's beauty.

Recommended activities: Besides the regular visit to the mall road and bazaar, take a guided walk to discover some quaint temples and the British influences that continues to linger in this erstwhile summer capital.

FOR TROPICAL LOCALES

No place unravels the unique story of Fort Kochi better than Brunton Boatyard. Always coveted for trade, refuge, the local spices including the Black Gold, or simply chosen as 'home' by many travellers, Fort Kochi is an exotic amalgamation of influences - from the Arabs and east Asia to the Jews, Portuguese, Gujaratis, the Dutch, British Raj and many more. Conveniently located at the famed Fort Kochi harbour, the historic hotel is inspired by the harbour's story. Be it the colonial architecture and local aesthetics, or the heady blend of many cuisines that is a cultural narrative in itself.

Elegant and earthy sea-facing rooms and suites, even the windows next to the charming bathtubs facing the waters don't just reflect the city's strong local character but are also equipped with all modern luxuries. Watch-



ing ships and fishing boats go by, Chinese nets in action or gamboling dolphins waft over the waves from the leisure of your rooms and indulging in an adventurous time-travel Kochi episode, a Brunton Boatyard experience of all things Kochi is something few men would want to miss.

Recommended activities: Discover local flavours at the hotel's restaurants, History and Armoury, complementary guided walking tour, a visit to Mattanchery for the Palace & Synagogue and a stroll down Jew town (the hotel is happy to organise a tuktuk or a cab for you), Pandal cafe at David Hall Gallery for more delicacies and a glimpse into the thriving

local art culture.

FOR THE MULTI-GEN, SLOW & ECO-LIVING EXPERIENCE

Spice Village in Thekkady is an eco-living experience, a reimagined tribal village set up, just a stone's throw away from Periyar National Park. The retreat celebrates all things spice, including insights into hyperlocal experiences of the local community and the environment, exuding the raw spirit of unblemished nature. This property is ideal for multi-generational guests, including the elderly, because it has the feel of misty hills and forest, a moderate

temperature, and an easy-to-walk landscape. There are numerous experience options available for people of all ages, interests, and fitness levels. A fitting son-father-grandfather vacation.

Recommended activities: Introduction to spices with plantation visits, in-house interpretation centre, a nature walk within the forest, trek into the Periyar forest reserve, rafting and camping.

FOR WILDERNESS & ADVENTURES

Behind the curtain of clouds lies this magical land of plains, mountains, valleys and forest land that is waiting to be discovered.

Wayanad Wild is close to the edge of the forest reserve where countless shades of greens appear unbounded and is home to an ecosystem abundant with animals, birds, insects and reptilian life. Wayanad Wild has been designed to introduce you to a part of the Nilgiris Biosphere (one of the few 'Hot Spot' biospheres in the world) with David Raju, naturalist, author and General Manager of the lodge, an exploration that promises to leave you enchanted! Ideal for fathers & young kids who can bond over the discovery of the fascinating animal kingdom, birds, arthropods and amphibians that are indigenous to the region. Not to miss is the exciting night expedition to explore the nocturnal forest life.

Recommended activities: Nature defines the living experience here, bird hunt, an evening with the naturalist, night expeditions, walks, treks, wilderness lectures and interactions.

FOR UNBEATABLE WILDLIFE & SAFARIS

This one is for the dad who enjoys a full wildlife rejuvenation getaway with a touch of luxury. Samode Safari Lodge is a lavish wilderness and wildlife experience, cradled in luxury and a surprising level of sophistication for an Indian Safari Lodge. While the decor and architecture are inspired by the neighbouring village in order to blend seamlessly into the region's landscape, the atmosphere, vibe, and hospitality are unmistakably and uniquely Samode.

However, the wildlife experience is highly rated here! The lodge employs some of the most knowledgeable, passionate, and professional naturalists and trackers who will accompany you on your jeep safaris, walks, and

birding excursions and will regale you with conservation stories, folklore, and forest insights.

Recommended activities: Safari drives and chats with the naturalists for a dose of forest stories and adventures.

FOR THE FOODIE AND CULINARY EXPERIENCES

Nature and food have always been an essential driving force for the Jehan Numa group. A short flight into Bhopal, Jehan Numa Retreat offers a quick getaway to treat your dad to a two-day local Bhopali cuisine extravaganza! Located at the edge of the Van-Vihar Park, the 12.5 acre luxury retreat with its earthy cottage and lush foliage holds within its folds some celebrated culinary experience, 'Under the Jamun Tree' offers signature dishes that come from the kitchens of the Royal family of Bhopal. Inspired by the slow food movement, 'The Green House Bistro' is a farm to fork concept restaurant where one can pick your vegetables and ask the chef to cook it for you! The retreat can also give you access to 'The General's Table' a pre-reserved private dining experience at the Jehan Numa Palace that curates a 7 course meal from General Obaidullah's celebratory menu. And if all of this hasn't lured you yet, there is the lip-smacking Bhopali street food to experience!

Recommended activities: Gastronomical experiences of The General's Table & Bhopali cuisine at Under the Jamun Tree; a meal at the contemporary The GreenHouse Bistro, if time permits, a peek into Bhopal's history through Jehan Numa Museum at the Palace or a guided city walk that begins at the Palace Gates. (IANSLife)

Your June reading list

From much-awaited translations to new releases here's what you should stack up on for the coming week.

Nireeswaran (Vayalar and Kerala Sahitya Akademi winner)

From the author of Anticlock, Shortlisted for the JCB Award 2021 comes this "compelling narrative of shifting faiths and displaced gods. As realities and fantasies disentangle there appears in the nether regions an un-god, Nireeswaran, with no halo. A mind-boggling work from a master novelist" said M. Mukundan, recipient of JCB Prize 2021.

Is it possible for society to exist without religion? Nireeswaran, the most celebrated of Malayalam novelist VJ James' works, uses incisive humour and satire to question blind faith and give an insight into what true spirituality is.

Three atheists, Antony, Sahir, and Bhaskaran, embark on an elaborate prank to establish that God is nothing but a superstition. They instal a mutilated idol of Nireeswaran, literally anti-god, to show people how hollow their religion is. Their plan starts turning awry when miracles start being attributed to Nireeswaran-a man waking up from coma after twenty-four years, a jobless man ineligible for government employment getting a contract, a prostitute

turning into a saint-leading hordes to turn up to worship the fake deity.

The trio is put in a quandary. Will they fight their own creation? Is their intractable minds an indication that atheism is a religion in itself? Belief and disbelief, it is possible, are two sides of the same coin.

The Wait by Damodar Mauzo And Other Stories

"Damodar Mauzo's stories present us with vivid glimpses of the richly diverse, cosmopolitan reality of contemporary Goa. In these perceptive, keenly observed stories Hindus, Catholics and Muslims all find ways to co-exist, in defiance of bigotry," said Amitav Ghosh. From the 2022 Jnanpith Award winner, Konkani writer Damodar Mauzo's sometimes bizarre, sometimes tender stories, set largely in Goa, create a world far removed from the sun and sand and the holiday resorts. Here you find villagers facing moral choices, children waking up to the re-

alities of adult lives, men who dwell on remorse, women who live a life of regret and communities whose bonds are growing tenuous in an age of religious polarization.

with which they can be broken. Written in simple prose and yet layered in nuances, The Wait is a collection that brings to the anglophone world one of the doyens of Konkani literature.

Equal, yet different

A book by Anita Bhogle on how women want to be treated and need to be treated at home and in the workplace.

Equal, Yet Different is exactly how women want to be treated and need to be treated at home and in the workplace. This book talks about the catalysts that are required for women to reach peak potential-conditions, people, or even mindsets at home, at work, and in the ecosystem. Anita Bhogle draws from the professional experiences and wisdom of a large number of women leaders and experts.

Talking about the motivation behind this book, author, Anita Bhogle said, "I believe 'Equal, Yet Different' is how women would like to be and need to be treated at home and

in the workplace. They are equal to men in terms of ability and ambition but different because of how they are conditioned and given the challenges they face. The book draws on the wisdom and experience of several professionals and experts and attempts to identify conditions, people, and mindsets that can prove to be catalysts for women to achieve their full potential. The millennials are lucky to have access to the experience of a fairly large pool of career women today. As a society, it is time we realise that diversity and inclusion will only make the world a better place."

Beauty Unbottled

Can one make sunscreen from saffron? Can hemp oil help heal acne? How does madder root help cure hyperpigmentation? Beauty Unbottled is a unique DIY guide on how to use herbs and plants to turn your kitchen into a beauty lab. Learn how to treat hair loss, frizz, dandruff and premature greying with powerful Ayurvedic kitchen herbs. Create your own masks, moisturizers, serums and shampoos with superfoods like neem, tulsi, jasmine and sandalwood-herbs that are revered in Ayurveda. Explore the alchemy of Ayurveda and its long-lost, forgotten beauty secrets with simple step-by-step skin and hair recipes (with vegan options) in this definitive guide and self-help book. This book will also guide you to read and understand labels, have a balanced diet for a healthy body and choose ingredients that are super effective yet gentle on you and mother earth.

Banaras Talkies

Bhagwandas Hostel at Banaras Hindu University can be mis-

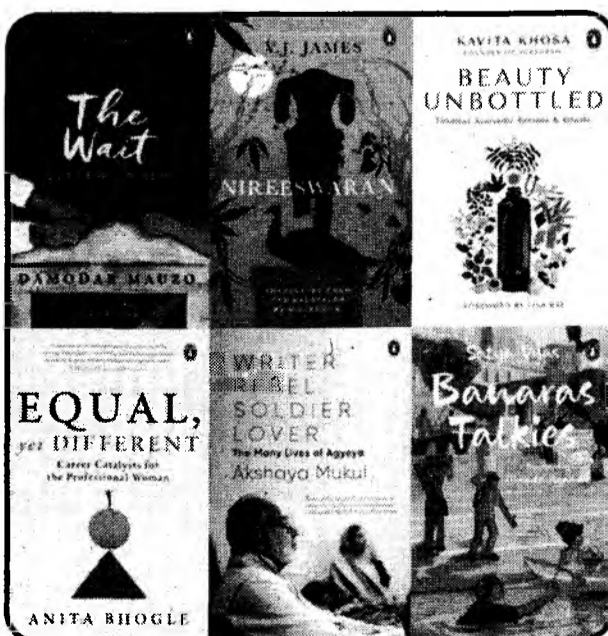
taken as being like any other college hostel, but that would be a gross error. For, among the corridors of BD Hostel roam never-before-seen characters: Suraj the narrator, whose goal is to woo a girl, any girl; Anurag De, for whom cricket is life, literally, and Jaivardhan, whose melancholia gets him to answer every query with *ghanta*.

Follow the adventures of the three friends and others as they navigate undergraduate life in one of India's most vibrant colleges, plan to steal exam papers, struggle to speak to women, find friends in corridors lined with dirty linen, and forge lifelong bonds amid bad mess food.

First published in Hindi in 2015, Banaras Talkies has remained on the bestseller list since then. A slice-of-life novel, it captures college life with all its twists and turns. Written with the idiomatic flourish that is the hallmark of Banarasi colloquialism by Satya Vyas, this comic novel is one of India's great coming-of-age novels.

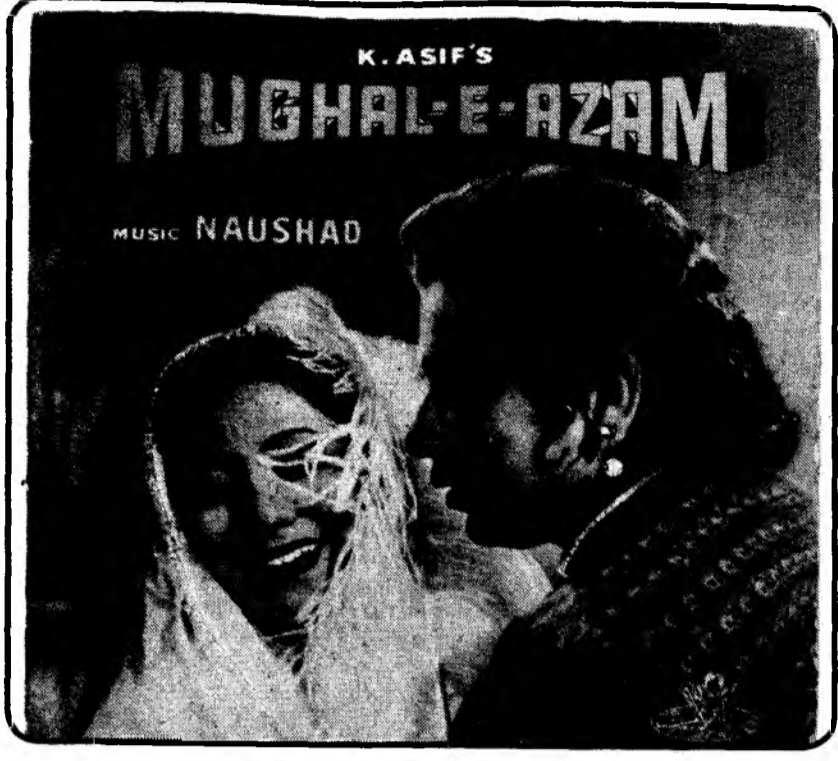
Writer Rebel Soldier Lover: The Many Lives of Agyeya

Writer, Rebel, Soldier, Lover features a formidable cast of characters: from writers like Premchand, Phanishwarnath Renu, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and Josephine Miles to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, revolutionary Chandra Shekhar Azad and actor Balraj Sahni. And its landscapes stretch from British jails, an intellectually robust Allahabad and modern-day Delhi to monasteries in Europe, the homes of Agyeya's friends in the Himalayas and universities in the US. The book is a magnificent examination of Agyeya's civilizational enterprise. Ambitious and scholarly, it is also an unputdownable, whirlwind of a read. (IANSLife)



Probing the deepest corners of the human psyche with tongue-in-cheek humour, Mauzo's stories reveal the many threads that connect us to others and the ease

How Bade Ghulam Ali Khan sang the tune of K Asif



By Vikas Datta

In his over three-decade-long career as a Bollywood director-producer, he had just half-a-dozen pictures to his credit, out of which two remained incomplete. Yet, *Mughal-e-Azam*, finally completed and released in 1960 after what seemed like an interminable gestation period, is enough to cement K. Asif's reputation.

Mughal-e-Azam had everything a successful film could need — a riveting story, crisp dialogues, lavish production values, two accomplished actors playing the principal protagonists with their usual bombast and restraint, respectively. Then, most importantly, a host of melodious songs, including one by a living legend of the Indian classical music world.

And the last one was a major coup by Asif, born Asif Kamal on this day in 1922, making it his 100th birth anniversary. We have music maestro Naushad to tell, in his inimitable way, how Asif convinced Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan to lend his voice for the film.

Classical singers such as Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Pandit DV Paluskar and Ustad Amir Khan had been roped into films, but Khansa-

hab had stayed away. As Naushad has recounted in several interviews, Asif asked him one day who should render the voice of Tansen, and he replied that it could be only the "Tansen of the time", Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Sahab, but added that he did not sing for films. Asif peremptorily brushed this aside, saying, "You arrange a meeting and I will do the rest."

Naushad compiled and they called on the Ustad the next day. After the usual pleasantries, Khansahab asked them how they had come and Naushad said that a landmark film, "that had never been made before or would be made again", was in the process and they would like him to sing in it.

Bade Ghulam Ali Khan was dismissive, saying if it was a concert or something like that, he would be glad to participate in it but films were something he was not keen on. This is where Asif interjected — Naushad noted in his rendition that he had a habit of smoking with the cigarette between the second and third fingers, not the first and second as common, and flicking off the ash with a snap of his fingers.

"Khansahab, you will sing for us," he said, taking a drag and snapping his fingers, leaving the Ustad taken aback with his brashness.

As Naushad relates, Khansahab reiterated politely that he was not keen on their offer. Still, retaining his courtly manners, he asked Naushad who this individual was and was not moved upon knowing he was a leading director and producer.

As Naushad went on to recount, Asif again dragged on his cigarette, snapped his fingers and repeated: "Khansahab, you will sing for us, name your price."

At this, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan drew

Naushad outside for a private conclave. He began: "Who is this man anyway? He keeps on insisting, despite my polite no. I will say something that will make him run away."

Naushad recalled that he remonstrated, saying it would be his own loss. When Khansahab asked how, Naushad said that he would lose the opportunity of working with such a Titanic personality. Then, Naushad asked what the Ustad would say, Khansahab replied that he would quote such a figure that Asif would not go ahead. Naushad told him that this was his prerogative.

They went back and Khansahab told Asif his terms — one song and he would take Rs 25,000. Naushad here notes that at that time, the top playback singers just took Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 a song.

Asif's response was masterly. "Only Rs 25,000 (drag on cigarette and snapping of fingers)? Ustad, you are priceless. Here is your Rs 10,000 advance."

The Ustad was taken aback at this ready acquiescence to his terms and told Naushad in an undertone, "He is a very considerate man."

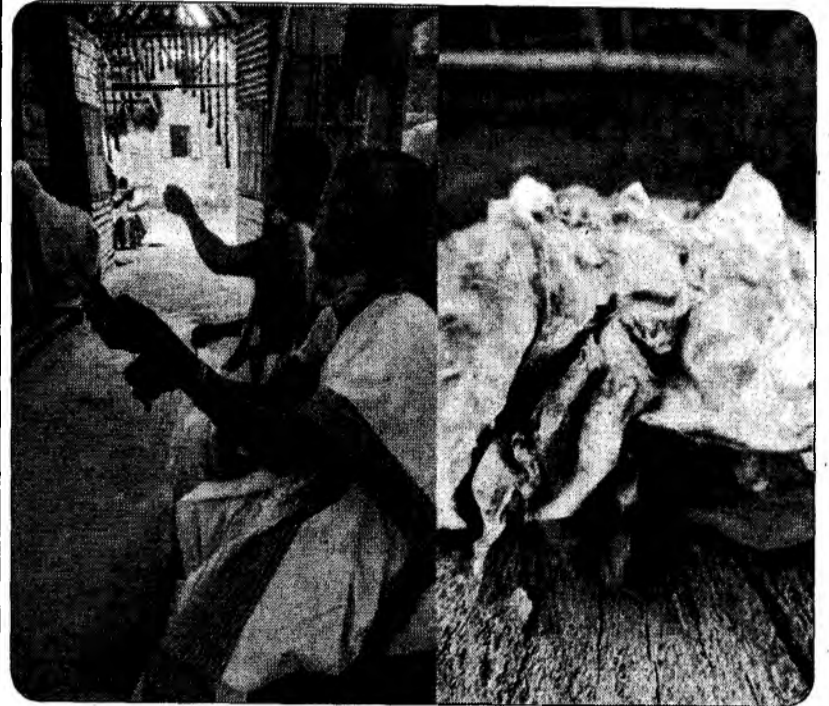
That was not the end of the story. On the recording day, Asif drew Naushad aside and told him to instruct the maestro to sing in a low and soft tone, given the scene was set late in the night. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan said he could sing only after he saw the scene. So, they cancelled the recording, edited the filmed scene that day, made a loop of it, and arranged a new session the next day.

Avidly watching the scene where Prince Salim (Dilip Kumar) caresses Anarkali's (Madhubala) cheek with a feather, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan sang along and the result — *Prem Jogan Banke* — is pure magic, in all senses of the word.

Tragically for Asif, nothing he did later could match the scope of his magnum opus. Having debuted with the box-office success, *Phool* (1945), he spent the rest of his life planning and shooting *Mughal-e-Azam*. After it, he planned a remake of the Laila-Majnu story in *Love and God*, but this seemed to be jinxed.

Shooting was put on hold when his choice for the male lead — Guru Dutt — died in 1964. He then recast Sanjeev Kumar as the lead, but Asif's own death in 1971 led again to the shelving of the project. It was finally released in an abbreviated, incomplete form in 1986 after Sanjeev Kumar's own death.

Ancient Assamese tradition gets a modern spin



By N Lothungbeni Humtsoc

The art of hand spinning yarn with a spindle, a straight stick about eight to twelve inches long on which the yarn is wound after twisting, is known as hand spun yarn. The ancient tradition Eri is not just an intrinsic part of Assam's tradition but also a critical part of the livelihood of many engaged in this art.

Hand spinning, however, is a vanishing tradition, a fading cultural practice, especially among the younger generation, as a result of the onslaught of modern textiles. It has now become a rare practice, affecting the price of Eri, which has been steadily rising.

To bring back a historic tradition to keep spinning alive the Indian Weavers Alliance launches Polash. A game-changing initiative for the Hand Spun Yarn segment, encompassing an end-to-end integrated approach to renew and reinforce the age-old tradition.

Polash's team has established a farmer producer firm called "IWA Silk Farmer Producer Company Limited," which has registered persons who spin by hand and produced a strategic road map for the sector's upliftment.

Saumar Sharma, Acting CEO, IWASFPCL, said, "IWA Silk Farmer Producer Company Limited — the farmer producer company has been privileged to have been able to start the process of creating a common facility centre at Borihat, Polashbari, Kamrup, Assam. The facility is about 8000 sqft which is planned to stock over 300 to 500 kgs. of grade one cocoons. The best part is that the myriad spinning artisans have been made dividend holders who are going to be directly connected to the profits." (IANSlife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 19, 2022

Moon semi square Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. Some domestic issues will rule. You can be involved in buying and selling and looking after the family. The coming time will be very busy. Official matters will dominate. You will remain devoted to your partner. You will look after your family well. Besides work, you might also take some interest in other things. The time will be spent in laughing and joking. You will be very enthusiastic. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. Students will get success in exams and interviews. You will work with full concentration and sincerity. You will win at whatever you do. You will be promoted in your job. Your prestige will increase. You will feel more satisfied and give yourself grand results. You will think of change in order to improve yourselves.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
The time is full of joy and cheer. You will be confident and full of energy. Some positive development will take place in your business/profession which will lift your spirits. You will have financial gains and profits which you had never imagined. You will get new tasks. Students will get their desired results. Your sources of income will increase. You will also have warmth and bonding in family ties. Your children will listen to you. Even your siblings will give you lot of respect. Your spouse will be affectionate towards you. These are important days. A new member may arrive in the family. New contacts will prove influential in uplifting your fate. You will have new friends. Health will be excellent. Your work will get done with ease.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
You will remain very happy. Situation will be in your favor in the family. Time is very good. Whatever matter is giving you tension at the workplace will come to an end. This is time to fulfill your dreams. You will make good progress in your business and job. Those who are planning to buy a new house or vehicle will get success. Favorable results are expected in competitive examinations. It would be easy to get work done from the officers. A family trip is on the cards. The people on the lookout for a new job will be rewarded. You will experience mental peace. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You will get success in your tasks. Designs for new tasks will be created. You will also meet some of your old friends. You will treat people with love and affection.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
It is a week indicating victory in official work and matters. You will feel a lot better and confident about your own abilities. Time will pass in fun, frolic and entertainment activities. You will have inclination towards work and will be able to finish all your important work with in the time frame. With passage of time your name and fame will also increase. This is the time for dialogue and mutual discussion. You may remain busy in preparing for a family function. Your image before others will be good. Love mates will understand the feelings of each other well. You will also get support of your spouse/partner. New opportunities to invest your money will come. Students will get success in exams/interview. You will eat healthy food. Your mind will be full of creative thoughts.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
It is going to be mixed week for you. Time will be just normal. A problem will crop up all of a sudden which you will be unable to avoid. You may be required to bring changes in your working style to keep everyone happy. There is no need to be apprehensive about it. You will also have to tackle secret enemies. You will be never short of money. Things will change for better. Lovebirds will understand feelings of each other well and will plan to get married. You will be filled with self confidence. You will have no health issues. Your superiority will be proved at your workplace. You will be bent on putting new projects into practice. You will touch new heights in your career. Acquisition of something new in the house is also possible.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
It is going to be a wonderful week. You will spend quality time with your family members. You will be on same wavelength with your spouse/partner. You will have the capability to lead. You will gain more authority than before. You will try to make your ideas a reality. Your bosses will support you fully. Even your colleagues will cooperate with you. Your financial position will strengthen. You will reach heights of success. Your pending work will get completed. During this time, charity work will attract you. You will be selfless in your action. Take some time out for your family members as they have lot of expectations from you. You will also acquire new knowledge and skills. You will get complete benefits for your work and efforts. You will try different measures to take time out for your work and thus your all works will be completed.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
Time will be on your favorable side. You will get complete benefits for your work and efforts. You will be having full time for good food, entertainment etc. Luck is on your side. You will be strong on the financial front. You will get multiple chances to prove your capabilities. You may be busy in shopping etc. You will also visit a religious place in search of some mental peace and calmness. You will also think about your future and observe carefully the things before you. You will spend

your money wisely. You will make a balanced budget for your household expenses. Friends and family members will give you happiness. You will develop your bonds with everyone. You may invent something big. You will get gifts from your relatives. Your personality will be more empathetic than before. Your long term plans will finally be fruitful.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)
It will turn out to be a perfect week for you. You will have monetary gains. There will be a rise in respect and honor. Whatever work you will do, will be totally fruitful and you will be filled with lot of positivity and hope. It is a time to look ahead in your life. You will also make plans to buy a new property. You will reap more profits. Your business will also grow and flourish. You will take such steps that will prove cent percent correct and people will appreciate your talent. This is best time for people associated with media, students, writers, professors and telecommunication. You will be able to maintain a balance between home and office. You will be very busy and hence feel exhausted and low on energy. There is possibility of getting involved in new romantic relationship leading to marriage. You will feel capable and independent.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
Things will be moving in the right direction this week. You will try your level best to complete the work within time. Your financial position will get strengthen. You will also feel stress free. There will be atmosphere of happiness, fun and frolic in your family. You will shoulder your responsibilities well. You will also have to bear with high cost of living. Expenses may be high. You will succeed in making others happy. You will have new ideas for extension of correct commercial activities. Your boss and superiors will be happy with you. You will prosper in your job. The jobless will get opportunities to find a job for themselves. You will complete all your tasks with your intelligence and reasoning. You will undertake new ventures to make money at this time. In these endeavors, Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
Your time is brilliant. You will make best use of modern means of technology. You will remain busy too. But your work will get easier. You will also showcase your intelligence at your work. You will move ahead bravely and without fear God's blessings will be with you. Your confidence too will grow. You will make new professional contacts. You will also receive support from your family members. Beginning of any work will be good and it is said that a good beginning is half winning. A fruitful journey is on the cards. You will return to work fully refreshed and rejuvenated. There will be transparency in your work. You may go to some party or marriage function too. You will support your siblings. You will also receive love and blessings of elders.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
There will be rise in your fortunes this week. Additional sources of income will be created. It will be a beneficial time period for you. You will not waste your time in futile works. You will remain focused and dedicated towards your work. You can also go on a business related trip. It will prove to be a good learning experience for you. Long distance travel will benefit you. You will be happy. You will also learn from your old mistakes. The atmosphere at home will be pleasant. You will find yourself in a better position. You will get new job/business offers. You will find true friends who will support you when you need it most. You will be engaged in activities like insurance, investment, tax and land property. You will be interested in every task and work according to your abilities. Your happiness resources will increase. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
It will prove to be a very good week for you. You will be exceedingly happy and delighted. You will also plan to go on a tourist place with your family. You will be never short of money. You will also plan to buy a new vehicle. You will feel great emotional attachment towards your family. You will also get full support of your spouse/partner. You will give a lot of importance to your work. You may receive a gift. You will also receive a bonus or increment in your job. You will give lot of importance to your work. Peace and harmony will prevail in family ties. You will get good name and fame. You will work on plans to carry the tasks further. You will demonstrate your work potential. You will remain social. You will experience bliss and happiness in marital life.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
It is a special time. You will move ahead with your business rivals. You will also get a good work order from abroad. Financial gains are indicated. Students will work hard and hence you will do well in competition or examinations. Some minor health issue may cause some discomfort. The pressure to complete targets in career or job will remain with you. Money inflow will be continuous. You will get opportunities to associate with new organization. You will meet interesting people. You will get time to fulfill your wishes and have fun with your family. You will be serious towards your work. You will have a feeling of happiness. You will attend marriage function. Rivals will be unable to harm you. Teachers will perform their duties with full zeal and honesty.

Monet's 'Nymphs, Temps Gris 1907' to go on auction

Claude Monet's *Nymphs, temps gris* (1907, estimate: USD 20-30 million) will be a highlight of Christie's 20/21 London to Paris sale series. It will be the artist's second major painting to be offered in London this season. Claude Monet's depictions of the horticultural paradise he designed and cultivated in Giverny are among his most famous works. *Nymphs, temps gris* is one of a small series of *Nymphs* painted by Monet during a period of intense creativity.

Monet used a vertical format to capture the spectacular effects of late afternoon light on his water lily pond in this painting. A long stream of light streaks across the canvas's height, overlaid in places by clusters of lily pads. Monet masterfully captured both the reflections of light on the pond's surface and the changing hues in its depths with this vertical format, using a variety of painterly techniques such as gestural brushstrokes, rich impasto for the flowers, and myriad layers of colour in the watery areas. As a result, this canvas is filled with a majestic visual drama that distinguishes this series from others of its ilk.

Max Carter, Head of Impressionist and Modern Art, Christie's New York: "Monet was the greatest Impressionist, the water lilies were his outstanding achievement and the 1909 exhibition of the best of the series at Durand-Ruel was arguably the most important show in his lifetime.

"One has never seen anything like it," said one critic, while another likened it to the Sistine Chapel. *Nymphs, temps gris* was included as one of the finest examples of the vertical format, more than half of which are in museums, and has over the years kept extraordinary company in the homes of Henri Canonne and the Onassis family. What an honour to offer this beautiful painting and to tell its story in London this June."

Keith Gill, Head of Impressionist and Modern Art, Chris-



tie's London: "To capture the fleeting moment was Monet's lifelong pursuit and the lily pond allowed him to experiment with the transitory effects of light on the surface of the water. By altering his viewpoint, and using the highly successful vertical format, he was not only able to portray the reflections but could also represent the changes taking place below the surface, resulting in powerfully abstract paintings that would go on to influence the generations of artists who followed. We are hugely honoured to present *Nymphs, temps gris*, an example of this exceptionally rare format that Monet only utilised on 14 other occasions in his oeuvre within his career-defining water lily series."

Eight of the 15 vertical *Nymphs* from 1907 are now in museum collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Artizon Museum, Tokyo. This work has a distinguished provenance, having been purchased by Henri Canonne, a Parisian pharmaceutical magnate and ardent Monet collector. Canonne amassed a notable collection of 15 *Nymphs*, in addition to other significant works by the artist.

Nymphs, temps gris will be on view in New York from 10 to 14 June before being exhibited in London from 22 to 28 June 2022. (IANSlife)

*"Dreams are today's answers
to tomorrow's questions."*

— Edgar Cayce

The Shillong Times

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Agnipath and youths

THE genie is let out of the bottle. The pent-up feelings of India's large army of youths facing serious problems of unemployment are pouring out into the streets while the Modi government is caught unawares. Joblessness is a serious problem that is worsening by the day. Prime Minister Modi's welfare raj stopped at providing doles to the poor, keeping their mouths shut and turning them into his vote banks. The government's decision to introduce a new system of temporary recruitments - Agnipath -- to the Indian Military came as the last straw on the ailing youths' back.

The Indian Military has a backlog of over four lakh vacancies remaining unfilled. Recruitments remain mostly stalled in recent years and interviews for induction of lakhs of youths who passed the physical and other tests have been postponed six or more times. Little wonder, then, that the youths who passed these tests formed the vanguard of the current protests. The new plan for recruitment of about 50,000 youths for a short term of four years followed by induction of as many in the second phase, with an age-limit of 21 (or 23) years, meant that most of the job aspirants in the military and those who passed the tests have been edged out. The short-term recruitments have no provision for pension, the main attraction for those who join the services. This was seen as an attempt to play mischief on the future of the youths who would dedicate themselves to the service of protecting the nation and its borders in harsh climatic conditions. Question also arose whether this was part of a larger RSS agenda.

There, however, are the larger issues. The role of the army is getting reduced in the modern styles of warfare, as was evident first in the US-Iraq war in 2003. Missiles fired from the US warships in the sea reached up to Saddam Hussein's fortress in Baghdad and demolished governmental edifices one after another. The war was won in less than a week, with very little of 'uniformed' manpower on the ground. A steady downsizing of military manpower is, thus, well-advised. But, the problem for India now is acute joblessness. The manufacturing sector is down in the dumps. Chinese goods have flooded the markets. Corruption in the bureaucracy and politics throttles the business sector. One has to pay through his nose to get clearances from governmental agencies to start a venture. Instead, those in businesses have made the 'loot of banks' their alternative enterprise. These are indisputable facts on the ground. The central government is simply blinking.

Two major attacks by Jañtia rebels on the British troops

By H H Mohrmen

(Series to mark the 160th Death Anniversary of u Kiang Nangbah)

In the entire Jañtia rebellion there were two major attacks made by the rebels which had a huge impact on the British troops. The attack was recorded by the respective commanding officers of the party that was assaulted by the rebels. The attack launched at two strategically important locations had a significant impact on the military operations of the British government in the region. The rebels made the first attack on November 30 in the Langkyrding area and the second attack was in what is now known as the War Jañtia area in between Amwai Poonjee/Thangbuli and Jaintiapur.

The rebels under the leadership of u Kiang Nangbah knew that the British troops were approaching the Jañtia hills from the plains at least from two directions and had prepared a plan to attack the soldiers. The first attack was not a common tale that people would narrate, but the attack in the War Jañtia area was a story that the people would share with pride that was visible in their demeanour.

The attack happened when Lieutenant F. Henderson who arrived at Teriaghat, located at the foothills of the region took charge of the post of commanding the detachment of Kamroop Regiment. Lieutenant F. Henderson, who commanded the detachment of Kamroop regiment, in his letter to Major J.C. Haughton, Commissioner Assam, Coosyah and Jynteah hills, Cheera Poonjee No. 5, dated Teriaghat the 1st of December 1862 reported of his arrival at his post on the evening of November 27 with fifty men under his command.

In the letter he also reported that on November 30, the Jamadar who was then commanding the detachment of Kamroop regiment in the area, moved with the party of thirty people to the direction of the stockade, located at Lenkadine/Langkyrding. On reaching the distance of five or six miles from the post, the troop was taken by surprise as they were attacked by the rebels. The rebels who had positioned themselves made a surprise attack on the British forces from different directions.

It was reported by the Jamadar that the rebels opened

fire on his party with arrows, stones, and with very few muskets. The British troops launched a counter-attack after which a large number of rebels immediately took flight in different directions but mainly in the direction of the stockade. While the majority of rebels fled to the stockade, a considerable number continued to harass the British party leaving three dead and about six members of their party wounded.

This incident occurred on a late winter evening when it turns dark very early so they did not consider it prudent to follow the rebels on their trail. The troops also abandoned the pursuit because of the comparatively small numbers of men they had with them. They returned to Teriaghat that same evening without anybody being wounded. The Jamadar estimated that the number of rebels who attacked them would not have been less than five hundred. This was further corroborated by his party and the villagers of Bor Poonjee who came to report the incident and seemed to be very well informed.

On December 28 morning Henderson dispatched a force to the outpost of Bor Poonjee and Lokhat/Lynkhat. It was a detachment of a good strength and this was in compliance with the instructions of Captain Morton, Deputy Commissioner Jynteah hills. Henderson had also received information of their safe arrival at the location. On November 29, Henderson proceeded along the hills with his party between Bor Poonjee and Lokhat/Lynkhat - a distance of about six miles. In the morning the lieutenant was with his party in Panduah/Pandua and the nearby areas but on no occasion did he have an encounter with the rebels. He was of the opinion that the rebels had temporarily left the area except for a good number of them who were still posted in the Langkyrding area where the stockade was located and the area was beyond Bor Poonjee.

There are two interesting points to note here. First the area where the stockade was located and the attack that happened was beyond what is now known as Jañtia hills. Did the Jañtia kingdom

then extend to this region? This question needs more inquiry. The second point to be noted is the British strategy to counter the rebellion. When the battle lines were drawn, the government had planned to move troops toward the hills from three different directions. One section of the force moved from Sylhet via Jaintiapur, another from Guwahati via Mairang and the third section of the force moved from Cachar towards the hills. The most effective trick employed by the British was to contain the rebels within the hills area of Jañtia by placing outposts at the foothills of the Khasi-Jañtia border - an area frequented by the people.

The second major attack made by the rebels on the body of a big British troop happened in the War Jañtia area in between Amwai Poonjee (most probably Thangbuli) and Jaintiapur. This incident was recorded in the letter from Col H.F. Dunsford Commanding Jañtia Field force to Capt E.K.O. Gilbert, Assistant Adjutant-General Presidency division - (No. 28, dated the 26 December 1862).

In the letter submitted to Brigadier General Showers commanding officer of the division, Dunsford informed that he was forwarding the letter in original No. 400 dated 24 December from Major Thelwal commanding Regiment of Punjab Native Infantry in which he reported the incident when the soldiers were attacked by the rebels. According to oral narratives the attack was said to occur in Syndai area in a location between Amwai Poonjee and Jaintiapur. The army convoy attacked by the rebels comprises 34 rank and file of the regiment and 350 coolies. The place where the attack happened was about eight miles below Amwai Poonjee and the commanding officer inferred that it appeared that the rebels were now concentrated in the south of the hills region. The reason is because most of the encounters that the British had with the rebels happened in the area.

Major W. Thelwal, commander 21st Regiment, Punjab Native Infantry in his report to Dunsford informed

that the strength of the army he commanded during the attack was 2 Havildars, 2 Naiks and 30 sepoys. The party also included 156 government coolies and it was also accompanied by a large number of villagers carrying provisions for the regiment. The total number in the convoy was 350. In the letter Thelwal also narrated the incident of how the convoy was attacked by the Jañtia rebels.

While they were climbing the steep hills and reached half way up the precipitous drop, the envoy was attacked by a body of Jañtia rebels on December 23. It was reported that the attack happened at the narrowest and the most difficult part in the climb which was also very steep. The precipitous path was also surrounded by thick forests on both sides. As the sepoys and the coolies entered the area, they were attacked by volleys of arrows, stones and even musket shots. The moment the sepoys were attacked they were in shock and fear the line was immediately halted until they gradually recoup and resisted the attack. The rebels could only put up some resistance but were driven off with a loss six or seven men and many wounded.

A sepoy was killed by one of the few muskets that were shot at them and two others were wounded by arrows. The sepoy who died was shot through the head and died on the spot. And before the party could come to his assistance the rebels who were hiding in the jungles very close to where the firing happened, took away his muskets and the ammunition in his possession. Several coolies were also wounded by arrows and stones were hurled at them in the attack and one who was shot through the lungs died the next morning. The troops estimated that more than six rebels were killed and they confiscated bows, arrows and swords which belonged to the deceased rebels.

The two incidents not only bear witness to the strength of the Jañtia rebels but more importantly it brought to light the tactics used by the rebels to fight the British force. The rebels were also able to gather strategically important information and tactically attacked the British force at very difficult stretches of their journey.

Education Vs Economic uplift of women: Need for balance

By Melari S Nongrum

During the recently held Women's Conference organized by the Meghalaya State Commission for Women and the Government of Meghalaya, we saw the government highlighting the economic investments it had made to create self-help groups (SHGs) across the state. Women testified as to how they had become empowered through their involvement in the SHGs. Over the years, there have been several studies that have shown the success of SHGs in poverty alleviation through incremental employment and incremental income growth.

I do agree that SHGs can be vehicles of change for the individual members as well as for the group as a whole. Yet, there is a gap that has been overlooked by policy makers in our state. We are eager to uplift women when they have come to adulthood but we ignore the same individual when she was a child. By this, I want to point out that the government has often neglected the basic right of the child i.e. education. We are all aware that the Right to Education is a fundamental right of all children. The question that arises is, whether our children are able to claim this right. While the Government has implemented the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) whose core objective is to attain the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) and to include universal access and retention by bridging gender and social gaps in education and enhancing levels of learning for children across the state, but the desired outcomes are far from being realised.

But claiming the Right to Education is not mere enrolment into a school. The Right to Education would mean that those children who have enrolled have access to quality education. The question that arises is whether our government schools are providing quality education in urban and rural areas? Traveling across the state for my field work, I often observe the conditions of our government primary and middle schools which are in a pathetic situation. More often than not, we see classrooms that are stained with dirt, windows broken; no electricity and the toilets are poorly maintained. How do students learn in such an environment? Apart from the poor infrastructure, we have teachers who have to go to the streets to beg for their salaries almost every alternate month. Who bears the brunt of all this apathy of the government? The children drop out of school. According to a SSA Report 2014-2015, the drop-out rate at the primary level is 10.34% and 6.82% at upper primary level. In 2017, it was reported that one lakh children dropped out in the last four preceding years. The Child Wellbeing Index Report 2021 ranked school education in Meghalaya at the bottom, in the 28th position. When children drop out of school, it results in these children becoming adults with only primary level education and not even the basic literacy skills. This was evident in two studies that were recently published by the Meghalaya State Commission for Women. The study report among single mothers showed poor educational attainment at 46.2% without formal school education and 28.4 with primary level education only. In the study report on social, economic, political and legal empowerment of women in North East India, that consultation before decision making increased with higher educational attainment of women.

The studies are evidence that education of girls and women would not only bring about economic benefits but will positively address many of the problems that have been plaguing the state such as teenage pregnancy, poor health outcomes of women and children, poverty, gender inequality in decision making and others.

Therefore, despite making all efforts to empower women through SHGs, let us first make all out efforts to put our children in school so that when these educated children become adults, they can make better use of resources through the SHGs to transform their lives, families and communities that they live in. Let this common phrase "Ngi ba bieb, bym nang bym stad" (We who are not educated) uttered by many women be a phrase that will be no longer heard as every child is on her way to becoming an educated woman. This needs an assertive action by the state, to invest in education and to reverse the numbers of children dropping out of school.

Turning our attention to the promotion of SHGs, it can be understood that by and large, the educational attainment of the SHG members is also low. Although the Meghalaya Rural Livelihoods Society (MRLS) is encouraging poor women to form Self Help Groups to unleash their innate capabilities to generate meaningful livelihoods which would enable them to come out of poverty, the outcomes are limited

because of their low educational qualifications. A study conducted by MRLS on the impact of SHGs showed that the outcomes were not very different between those women entrepreneurs engaged in SHGs and taking up different enterprises and the hired workers, domestic labourers etc. There could be a number of factors but to be an entrepreneur and start one's enterprise, one needs skills at various levels such as the technical know-how (production), access to finance, marketing, handling accounts, sustainability of the enterprise besides other factors. Without undermining the innate capacities of women, I believe that women who are not educated find it more difficult to absorb knowledge and training and to understand the larger ramifications of running a business. I am reminded of the famous words of Nelson Mandela who stated that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Though I believe that people can learn even without attending formal school programs and they may learn by observation and experience, yet attaining higher levels of education does have its benefits. Balasag in his paper on benefits of education on society and individuality states that education enhances self-awareness, develops awareness of the environment locally, nationally and globally, has greater propensity to vote right, to volunteer, trust and tolerate others; low propensity to commit (non-violent) crime, better educational parenting, high involvement in decision making and longer life expectancy due to the capacity to afford medical care and being more likely to engage on preventive care.

Further, studies published by the World Bank, state that the education of girls and women in particular promotes both individual and national well-being. There is a positive association between a woman's education and her employment and income. When women are deprived of an education, individuals, families, and children, as well as the societies in which they live, suffer. When women are adequately educated, everyone benefits. UNICEF also shows that investing in girls' education transforms communities, countries and the entire world. Girls who receive education are less likely to marry young and more likely to lead healthy, productive lives. They earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that most affect them, and build better futures for themselves and their families. Girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals, including boys and men, the opportunity to fulfil their potential. In Meghalaya too, it is observed from the study report on social, economic, political and legal empowerment of women in North East India, that consultation before decision making increased with higher educational attainment of women.

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Letters to the Editor

Umiam Bridge: A disaster in the making

Editor,
The news report on the dilapidated condition of the Umiam bridge, although reported years ago, has all of a sudden created a foreboding sense in the minds of the commuters who ply up and down this bridge on a daily basis. Knowing that the life span of the bridge has expired and witnessing the cracks developing on the stretch of road along the bridge and considering the increasing water pressure on the dam due to heavy precipitation these days, it is a matter of concern for every commuter not only in Shillong but in Northeast India as a whole. Tourists from across the Northeast and from other states of India travel to different tourist spots through this bridge daily. Is the Government not worried about the safety of people? An alternative bridge across the lake has been long overdue. What have successive governments done all these years? Are we waiting for the tragedy to happen and then think of remedying the situation? That would be too late and many lives would have been lost by then.

When we see so many alternative bridges being constructed over the Brahmaputra and then watch helplessly at the only connecting bridge that we have over the Umiam lake for the last 50 years of the state's existence, we cannot help but accuse the governments past and present of being callous and thoughtless. The Umiam bridge hangs like the Damocles sword and

we only pray to God that the tragedy may not happen too soon. The government should wake up to this existential threat to the lives of so many citizens. I can only imagine in horror the damage that would occur if the dam should give way. Hundreds of villages downstream would be washed away, thousands of lives lost, property damaged and then we would be cut off from any supply of essential commodities and our turbines would stop churning electricity. Literally, the State would plunge into darkness.

In my opinion it is the urgent duty of the government today to seek central funding from to construct an alternative connecting bridge over the lake. Perhaps a bridge like Bogibeel bridge in Upper Assam could be thought of. The old Shillong-Guwahati road could be used and in my layman's opinion it would not be difficult to put up pillars on the islands in the lake so as to connect the bridge up to Umsaw. The present Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways led by the dynamic Mr Nitin Gadkari, is very keen in expanding road infrastructure in the country. If the State Government puts up an urgent request for this project emphasizing its vital importance, I don't believe that the central government would be indifferent to the appeal. It is high time that the state government consider this as the primary agenda in their development plan. On behalf of all citizens of the state, I implore upon the leaders of our state government to wake up and do something immediately lest it becomes too late to do anything at all. Let us learn from the "dome

tragedy" and prevent another fatal mishap.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

This is DNA of majority of VCs

Editor,
While expressing my sincere thanks to The Assembly Speaker, Metbah Lyngdoh who had come forward to raise his concerns on the functioning of the NEHU administration, this time in particular, I wish to thank Adrian Kharkrang for his grave concern as expressed in the letter 'NEHU needs a dynamic VC' (ST June 18, 2022). Instead of tackling the urgent needs of our students of the Post Graduate sections as far as accommodation facilities are concerned the Under Graduate students who are grappling with CUET and also enabling the rank and file of NEHU to improve their standard of living, the present VC seems to be obsessed with Japanese language, despite knowing fully well that for academic excellence, all nations in the world cannot escape English. And for Meghalayans please accept that the Khasi vocabulary for Science, Geography and Economics is very limited. Hence we are handicapped. I consulted my Bengali colleagues whose state of West Bengal had produced two Nobel Laureates in Economics namely Amartya Sen and Abhijit Banerjee, and also Jagdish Bose and SN Bose the world's leading physicists about the richness of their

vocabulary and they humbly accepted that up to the degree level they could boast of having a rich enough vocabulary but not beyond that! Even the Japanese need English and there's no doubt about that. Perhaps on hindsight, this sudden love for Japanese language might be the outcome of our Prime Minister's visit to Japan for the QUAD meetings. I am also concerned about this recent push for making Hindi compulsory up to Class 10 - a brainchild of Amit Shah and endorsed as usual by none other than our CM Conrad Sangma whose children are studying in elite English schools outside the state.

For the NEHU, VC to advise our Education Minister L. Rymbui who shocked the academicians of Meghalaya the first time around d when he spoke against CUET but later did a 360 degrees turnaround seemingly because of the coercion of the VC. But the public should know that CUET was simply bulldozed by the UGC Chairman without heeding to the views of prominent professors of Delhi University and other scholars who are critical of these modern multiple choice question (MCQs) with no understanding for concepts and no creativity either. This is the main reason for the dismal performance of students in NEET and IITs (now). Two college principals of Synod and UCC had expressed concern for the rural poor students with bad internet connectivity and who are largely computer illiterate. Truly education will be facing major challenges with these impositions from Delhi where the states no longer have any

say in education despite it being on the concurrent list.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Ex HOD Electronics,
St Edmunds College.

Rongai irrigation project and floods

Editor,
I am glad that the Rongai Valley Medium Irrigation Project is back in the news at least in the print media of Shillong (I am not sure if it has appeared in the electronic media), after many years since 1992. This news item appeared a few days ago in the backdrop of the flood fury which inundated vast areas of Tikrikilla, Phulbari and few areas of Rajabala constituencies and which submerged vast tracks of fertile paddy fields of Rongai Valley which also destroyed the embankments built by the PWD during the early 1990s. The irrigation project benefited nearly 40 villages with approximately 8,500 households mainly under Tikrikilla, many from Phulbari and lesser from Rajabala constituencies. The embankments were built to protect the floods caused by the voluminous backwaters flowing from the mighty Brahmaputra river combined with flood waters from Jinjirang and Rongai rivers from massive erosion of the paddy fields and destroying the paddy crops grown in the fertile Rongai Valley. Almost every year, including this year, these floods have brought about untold misery to the people living in

that part of Garo Hills, including loss of cattle, human lives and standing crops.

What is needed is to solve this recurring problem once and for all, though solutions should have been found during last fifty years by earlier Meghalaya governments. This matter could have been handed over to expert agencies like the Brahmaputra Board or Central Water Commission who will go deep into the hydrology of these rivers and adopt appropriate plans, strategies and prepare DPRs etc. For necessary funding the government should move the Ministry of Water Resources because the project costs will be huge for construction of the required permanent embankment, which is very long, along with other items of works at the project site. If we expect the state government to fund the project it may not be possible to finance it for lack of funds. Piece-meal solutions for patch works will not work here because of many unpredictable factors and also the climate is unpredictable because Climate Change itself is unpredictable. However, it is good to learn from news reports that this MDA government has entrusted this matter to the Central Water Commission and something may come out of it. We only hope that the government will not forget this project because of the ensuing elections, otherwise the CWC will either sleep over it or not care a fig for the state government.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Senior Journalist,
Via email

"The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty; not knowing what comes next."

— Ursula K. Le Guin

The Shillong Times

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Agnipath: A trial by fire

JUDGING by the chaos across the country which is not ignited by any political party but which is fuelled by a hare-brained scheme called Agnipath, India is set to see a mental combat between those with a genuine desire to serve in the defence forces and those that will get into the services as an employment avenue. As per the scheme, Agnipath will induct 45,000-50,000 youth annually who have passed Class 12, into the three defence services but the rider is that they will only serve for four years after which only 25 % of those who are found to be fit for the services will be formally inducted to serve for 15 years. In terms of cost benefit analysis this does not add up. A lot will be spent by the Ministry of Defence in training these dream-eyed youth many of whom may ultimately be found unfit because they are not entering a service they would have chosen with their eyes open, but are enticed into an employment avenue that pay them salaries for four years. After that what? The Government has not promised to look after the welfare of those 75% youth that are found unfit for permanent commission into the defence services.

The Defence Services require a special mental and physical make-up and sometimes even with the right kind of aptitude and attitude there are many who cannot take the stress and strain of training in harsh conditions and drop out. The Defence Forces have always applied the most stringent recruitment rules especially at the officer's level. The National Defence Academy is a tough place to graduate from. Hence the bar as we all understand has been raised very high for anyone to enter one of the three services. But Agnipath will allow a youth who has passed Class 12 and is still unsure of his future and his aptitude to join a service that requires extreme dedication and commitment. But more than that is the question of the youth's future after he completes his four-year tenure and is not found fit for permanent commission. At 21 plus years with no degree or qualification how does the youth look for another job? As some blunderbuss has rightly remarked, those that are rejected after the four year tenure can find a job as a security personnel. This ingenuous and distasteful piece of advice shows just how insensitive some in the BJP can be. It is clear to everyone that Agnipath is an election gimmick and those that don't qualify to become Agniveers will be staring at a bleak future.

Civilized Leadership and Peaceful Coexistence

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Everyone today is harping on the policy and vision for the political leadership in Meghalaya. This article is one aspect of that cherished vision. Development and progress of the society and State depends to a large extent on the peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and mutual support it offers to, and receives from each of its neighbours around the borders and communities far beyond its borders. Such situations can happen only when competent, farsighted, and civilized leadership is in place. History shows that in the past, the Khasis had good relations with the neighbouring tribes surrounding them. As a tribe, the Khasis had never been in any violent conflict with any other tribe or kingdom, except ordinary skirmishes of individual Himas among themselves or with their neighbouring communities. Hence, even though surrounded on all sides by various tribes of the great Tibeto-Burman race, the Khasis survived peacefully as a tribe in their beautiful and resourceful realm till the advent of the British rule. The secret of all this is competent, farsighted, wise and accommodative leadership.

Long before the British rule, the Karbis, Lalung (Tiwa), Garos, Koch, Rabha, Biates and other tribes had been living together in various parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Karbis had been living in comparative peace in the territory of Hima Jaintia before they established their own kingdom in the Rongkhang plains. Some of the Karbis, Tiwas, Garos and Rabhas co-existed with the Khasis and intermarried among themselves in the northern part of the Khasi Hills, and many new Khasi clans emerged from such inter-marriages. The area they lived came to be known as Ri Bhoi (Bhoi country) today. Despite contrary narrative and denial, there is ample evidence that the Khasis in the western area of the Khasi Hills lived together in peace with the Garos and intermarried in the Lynggam area thereby producing a unique subculture which is a blend of both Khasi and Garo cultures. There are some political communities (Raids), established by the Karbis and the Rabhas in Ri Bhoi area long before the British rule. There are also four Raids established by the Lalung (Tiwa), called 'ki Raid Sarikrai'. Sarikrai in Khasi means "saw ksing-saw lama" in English it means 'four drums'. All these Raids formed by the non-Khasi tribes were recognized by the erstwhile Hima Shyllong before the coming of the British. They are also recognized today by Hima Myliem and Hima Khyrim.

We tend to speak reverentially of the British who

had once ruled the modern world. But who really are they? The islands of Britain and Ireland were first inhabited by few Old Stone Age people who lived in caves, and later disappeared. In their place entered the Iberians, the old inhabitants of Spain, then known as Iberia. It was these people who built the famous Stonehenge. The Iberians were overcome by the stronger Celts who also intermarried with them. The Celts who settled in the south were called Britons, and from them came the name Britain. Then for over three hundred years the land was under the rule of the powerful Roman Empire. When the Romans withdrew in 410 AD, a fresh wave of Teutonic tribes from Northern Germany, the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons entered into the land drove the existing inhabitants westward and called them Welsh, and the land they live in, Wales. The Angles took the leadership; hence the name 'England', and the language, 'English.' Then the Danes and Norsemen known as the Vikings from Scandinavia (modern Norway, Sweden and Denmark) invaded the country, and from around 860 AD they stayed, settled and prospered in Britain, becoming part of the mix of people who today make up the British nation. So, there is no pure race or tribe, anywhere in the world.

The State of Meghalaya, and the Khasi society in particular, is in dire need of competent, farsighted, committed, and civilized leadership. A wrong and myopic narrative of security and defence which had been sowed around the idea of a pure race and fear of the outsider, had overwhelmed the whole society. Leaders of the tribe should realize that the society cannot survive in isolation without good and supportive relationships with other surrounding communities. We cannot develop and progress, especially in this modern period, without inter-relations, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, mutual support, and mutual trust with the neighbours at the borders and beyond. We should also realize that many of our own tribes people had established settlements as Khasi communities in the territories of other communities close to the borders and beyond.

In Tamenglong District of Manipur, the Khasis had been residing since 1939-1940. Today, they live in three villages: Khedagar, Kamrangha Khasi and Abampunji Khasi. Majority of them make their living from agriculture, particularly betel leaf cultivation. Among the 19 different tribal communities recognized in Tripura, are the Khasis, known as Khashia. They migrated there since the beginning of the 18th century

for economic opportunities. They have their own gardens of betel leaves which is popularly known as 'Khasia paan.' This writer had visited the establishment of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTADC) in 2011 and was joyously surprised to find life-size statues of a Khasi couple displayed in the Autonomous Council's museum at Khumulwng together with some Khasi cultural artefacts. There are also Khasi communities in some parts of Mizoram.

The Khasis are also the first to introduce the unique way of betel leaf plantation in the Barak Valley of Cachar District. In 1870, the Khasi population in Barak Valley was 1000. Therefore, the Khasis must have been living there long before 1870. According to some recent independent survey there are 285 Khasi hamlets and villages, and the current population of the Khasi-Jaintia community in the Barak Valley is around 1.5 lakh. There are also Khasi communities in the border regions of present-day Bangladesh. They migrated there about five hundred years ago, and Bangladesh has been their home for hundreds of years within the cultural boundaries of their villages called punjis. According to some estimates there are altogether 73 Khasi punjis with a population of about 30,000 in Bangladesh today.

In Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills) District of Assam, there is a large village called 'Jatinga' which is well recognized as a Khasi (Pnar) village. The area was first inhabited by the Zeme Nagas, and the name 'Jatinga' comes from the Zeme word 'jatin' which means 'wind and rain', and the word 'ga' which means 'place'. So, Jatinga means the pathway of rain and wind. The place is famous worldwide for the mysterious visit and suicide of birds every year during the months of August to November. Jatinga as a permanent settlement of the Khasi-Pnars was founded by u Ma Lakhon Bang Suchiang along with his companions in 1905, primarily for betel leaf plantation and later orange plantation. Though all the inhabitants of Jatinga are Christians belonging to the Welsh Presbyterian Church, the people of Jatinga still follow the matrilineal system and all the Pnar cultural practices to this day. The Pnar dialect of Bataw is the common spoken language, and the Khasi written language (Sohra) is used in churches and schools. As of 2005 Jatinga had 350 Pnar households and few Dimas families. The population of the Pnars alone was 2500. From a humble beginning, Jatinga became the biggest village in North Cachar Hills District, and is the seen as the

Mother of all the Presbyterian Churches in the District. In 2010 this writer visited the Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council and learned that Jatinga is a second MDC constituency after Haflong, and the constituency is reserved for a representative of the Khasi-Pnar community only. There was also an MDC representing the Zeme Nagas.

The Khasis living amidst other tribal communities had been co-existing peacefully for decades and centuries. However, in recent times we have serious problems and conflicts arising in the State on account of contested borders. The life and property of our tribespeople living in Bangladesh and in the Meghalaya-Assam borders as well as in other states is fragile and insecure. The initiatives taken by the Khasi Students Union (KSU) to intervene in solving the problems of the Khasis living in Mizoram, in the Barak Valley, and in Tamenglong District of Manipur are highly commendable. There is hope that with the present leadership of this students' body, there may be brighter future awaiting the society and the state.

No society can prosper and exist in peace if its leadership is creating enemies within it and all around it, and for people to live in a climate of suspicion, hatred and fear. Protective and defensive attitudes alone would not serve as a policy for growth, development and progress. Mutual suspicion and hatred, reciprocal harassment and violence among various communities would only create more insecurity that would hinder development and growth in various aspects of life.

Universal justice is the foundation for a lasting solution to all inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-racial, and inter-state conflicts. We expect that our tribesmen living outside Meghalaya should enjoy all the rights as indigenous peoples there, with secured ancestral land ownership and land holding certificates, and be provided with constitutional protection to safeguard their cultural identity because they had been living there since the British era. But we also have a greater responsibility to do likewise to the people of other communities settled among us and who had obtained the approval of our ancestors much before the British era. It is wrong to expect people to concede to everything we want while we have no concern at all for what they want. For instance we need to show the same concern and kindness to the people of Manipur living permanently in Meghalaya just as the Chief Minister of Manipur has done to the Khasis living permanently in Manipur. That is competent, farsighted, and civilized political leadership.

Agnipath: Unleashing the path of fire

By Jagdish Rattanani

In the story of the blind men and the elephant, each touching a different part of the animal and quarrelling over what it is they have just "seen", the message is that partial knowledge is never good enough to describe the full picture. But Charles West Churchman (1913-2004), the American philosopher and academic who advanced the field of Systems Thinking, wrote once that the story was interesting for a different reason. This was so not as much because of the inaccuracies of the blind men but the role the storyteller gave himself—namely, the ability to see the full picture. "The story is in fact a piece of arrogance. It assumes that a very logically astute wise man can always get on top of a situation, so to speak, and look at the foolishness of people who are incapable of seeing the whole," Churchman wrote. This arrogance is at the heart of political decision making at the highest level in the India of today, one or more in a chosen set of "wise" men convinced that they see the full picture and are ready to drive monumental change sans any discussion or dialogue. In doing so, they have willfully dismissed the rest of India as blind, incapable or unworthy of consultation. Political parties get to be treated as irrelevant in the political sweepstakes and street battles show up as India burns again and again.

This is how and why India is on the boil, with Covid not yet gone and inflation raging, as protests spread across eight States, as trains and buses are burnt and the Indian State turns out in riot gear to stand against the youth of India. In this battle, the merits or otherwise of the scheme called 'Agnipath' are irrelevant in the present time. Even if the scheme was carefully crafted, well studied and meticulously planned, which is suspected if not known to be not the case, the government will now have to fork out concession after concession — which it has already begun doing so that the scheme keeps and does not meet the fate of the farm laws which had to be abrogated. Quelling the anger and protests now will take top priority. What is worse, and even outright dangerous, is that the defence services have been asked to promote and defend the scheme, and to ask the youth not to be among the protestors if they are to be considered for the short-term recruitment on offer. This has the colour of uniformed officers speaking on what essentially is a political problem caused by the political leg of the government. This is probably the first time then that there is a defence voice on political matters. It is true that the scheme is about recruitment in the forces, but its political burdens cannot be missed by anyone, given the violence that has gripped the nation, with the jobs crisis playing in the background.

The protests do not look good. Consider how much of the burning of India could be avoided if the scheme, dramatic as it is in its sweep, were discussed openly, over a period of time with a variety of stakeholders. That would give the government time to judge the mood, prepare the ground and tailor the scheme and then test implement before going the whole hog. In this exercise, many voices who are now against the government could have been speaking for it.

Needless to say, India can be run best only with consultative politics and some amount of give and take. A brute majority in Parliament may be good to have and can enable a government to push through a lot but it cannot be taken as a license to upturn laws, change systems and uproot traditions at whim and will. Moreover, a consultation is not a process of garnering favourable opinion but to build better and to

cover only as much ground as the nation is prepared to take. The government can nudge but it must equally be willing to be nudged if consensus is to be built and policy is to succeed. In many parts, India is still a hierarchically-driven nation. Hierarchy is even more prominent in the defence forces. Soldiers hired for the short term will not easily assimilate with the rest of the force, working in full knowledge of the system that they must leave soon. The reality is that the army remains a dream job for millions of Indians because of its image, its system of working, the pride its members take in their uniform and equally significantly, the cover it gives for life. It carries risks but remains a career unmatched by any other organisation. When that potential for a life-long relationship is reduced to a short-term appointment, unknown, unseen and understood consequences can follow.

None of this means we do not need reforms or that the pension bill and the average age of the defence forces must go on rising. But it does mean that changes cannot be forced, with motives that are politically suspect and a narrow shop-keeping agenda that thinks it can fight a potential war on the borders on the cheap. There are other unanswered questions on how six months of training as envisaged under the 'Agnipath' programme can prepare soldiers to operate sophisticated systems that the defence services operate, with sophistication only deemed to be growing over time. And how does the discipline, pride and honour sit once the soldier is discharged honourably and is forced to take up less than honourable jobs, like a security durwan for the BJP establishment, as a particularly idiotic and inadvertently frank-talking BJP functionary has offered.

At the heart of the problem is that our economy has been unable to create jobs. There is no real respect, it appears, or even demand across vast swathes of interior India, for private sector employment in the face of the promise of a government job. There are important issues to address on just how much jobs — with sustainable living wage and decent terms and benefits — the private sector has been able to generate. This raises questions on just how much of the private sector is professional in its operation and mature in its capability.

This columnist argued earlier that one important aspect of the farm protests was that the nation's farmers had no trust in the private sector that was being empowered to take over mandis and intervene in the agricultural system. The same can be said here. This remains one of the biggest failures of all governments. This failure is now sought to be covered with an offer of jobs that are less than jobs — so that youth will have jobs but not keep them. It has the effect of dreams being snatched away from our youth. The offer to absorb 25% of the short-term recruits may breed unhealthy competition. The rest need to look for jobs and will probably begin applying while they are in the short-term commission role, again hindering single-minded devotion to services in their limited time.

The government has said it will push ahead with the 'Agnipath' scheme. This means that tensions will continue to brew for some more time, and the one institution that was above it all will get entangled in a fractious debate and worse at exactly the wrong time.

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

Letters to the Editor

Baptism by Agnipath!

Editor,
The sudden notification on recruitment of youth between ages of 17 to 23 years through what we now know as the Agnipath scheme is creating chaos leading to law and order problems across the country. The concept of Tour of Duty has been ill-conceived by the powers in Delhi without understanding the psychological implications of young people who would find themselves in the lurch after 4 years of "glorious" service to the nation. With a package of about Rs 12 lakh in hand to seek for better pastures and out of which only 25 percent of Agniveers would be selected to join the mainstream armed forces there appears to be no logic in this scheme. Sadly the head of defence forces has absolutely no say in this except to concede that it's a good scheme. For example, how would an Agniveer who is inducted into the Air Force undertake technical training in aircraft maintenance when by the time he completes the entire training and internship program he would have very little time left to be inducted into a squadron? The same also goes for those vying

for the Navy which is all the more advanced with hi-tech machines and engineering. The summary is that the entire exercise is just another political gimmick to attract votes for the 2024 General Elections just as the PM promised fifteen lakh in every citizen's account in 2014 which none have received till date.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,
Via email

Religion for co-existence and peace

Editor,
Apropos of the insightful letter by a scholar — Dr Deepa Majumdar under the caption "Education above religion" (ST, June 14, 2022) I would also like to add a few words. Very importantly, each religion convincingly claims to teach good values and practices. So, none of them has the right to hurt the followers of other faiths. Of course, a religion should inspire its believers to appreciate God's limitless creation and sing His glory. Look at the flowers that bloom every morning, the trees that bring forth the fruits for every human being and all wonders

in the sky. Are they not the creation of one Almighty? When we sing hymns to the "same one" GOD there logically arises no scope for violence or hatred.

Yes, the knowledge of God is far above what we study in schools and colleges. Book knowledge may make us qualified for certain career-oriented posts or help us achieve certain positions and power but the knowledge of God should be capable of opening our inner eyes to see and feel His divine power that pervades every object, nay, every being and every phenomenon! The primary class of God's education starts with the practice of "detachment" from worldly objects and worldly affairs despite remaining amid them. Compassion, forgiveness, absence of anger and service to humanity without "expectation and discrimination" are four wheels of a religion. These few universal practices alone help us cleanse our minds and inner being.

However, if a religion encourages hatred for others — more precisely, towards the followers of other faiths, then it is totally disastrous. Then we must have "wrongly interpreted" or misunderstood the words of GOD. Does the intense surge of

hatred not lead to violence and violence finally lead to human degeneration? What do we see regularly now in the name of religion? God must be laughing at us! He must also be shedding tears to find us being dogmatically involved in the most self-destructive violence and hatred. Nothing is more self-defeating than to carry the notion that "my faith alone leads to God, and your faith leads to perdition!" This is perhaps the root cause of bad blood among existing faiths. How can we make peace with GOD when we fail to make peace with His created human beings and his incredible environmental ecology — which are all interconnected?

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

Tura gets most advanced auditorium in State

Editor,
The Shillong Times, as usual, prominently carried the news of the inauguration of the newly renovated and upgraded Tura Auditorium at Ringre, the centre point of Tura town of West Garo

Hills, by Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, on June 13, this month. I am very glad to know through this medium that this is the most advanced auditorium in Meghalaya with a beautiful gallery therein. According to officials sources this auditorium is self-contained having the most modern seats and seating arrangements, a huge modern stage fitted with advanced lighting systems, modern amphitheatre sound systems provided with control rooms separately and having dressing rooms for male and female performers. The auditorium is also provided with air condition systems, beautifully coloured entry and exit points and emergency exits besides, VIP wash rooms, modern toilets for men and women. The auditorium is also properly fenced, having strong and carefully fabricated gates and the entry approach paths are paved with specially made tiles. Besides there are other paraphernalia which go to qualify for a modern auditorium. The only sad part is that the District Library which is part of the premises is left orphaned, untouched, unrenovated and unrenovated. However, this auditorium is the proud possession of the Arts and Culture Department which will

be used for government and public functions, meetings, musical, drama and theatrical events etc., which require proper written applications to the appropriate authority in advance and written permissions should be obtained with strict rules and regulations to be observed by the users of the facility.

Serious problems to the owners of the auditorium may usually arise, when the users (especially the rowdy elements) leave the facility after defacing or destroying its costly utilities as has happened too many times to the "U Soso Tham Auditorium" at the State Central Library premises, Shillong. I sincerely hope that the future users of the priceless asset built there will understand the value and preserve the auditorium and keep it spick and span and ensure that whatever utilities are placed there remain in their original condition.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Senior journalist,
Via email

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

"Better to know the quick pain of truth than the ongoing pain of a long-held false hope."

— Trudi Canavan

The Shillong Times

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NDA picks tribal woman as Presidential candidate

THE NDA has announced its Presidential Candidate. Droupadi Murmu, a BJP member and former Governor of Jharkhand is set to be the next president of India considering that the NDA has the numbers. The Opposition has meanwhile named the 84 year old Yashwant Sinha as their candidate for the election scheduled for July 18. Earlier three of the Opposition backed nominees bowed out even before the nomination stage, which led the perceived weak "heavyweights" to go for Yashwant Sinha from Bihar, and announce him as the nominee of 18 political establishments including the Congress party. Predictably, there is neither surprise nor a murmur of acceptance nor any protest over Sinha's candidature.

Yashwant Sinha has his strong points. He started as a civil servant and quit it to join the Total Revolution of Jaiprakash Narayan in the 1970s, which was essentially an offensive against the Congress party and Indira Gandhi. He later entered politics through the Janata Party and held cabinet minister posts repeatedly, handling important portfolios like Finance and External Affairs. When Narendra Modi was voted to parliament in 2014 and took control of the nation and the BJP, Sinha was among the elders he sidelined and consigned into the Margdarshak Mandal, of "over-aged" advisers for the party. Sinha squirmed at this until Modi offered his son Jayant Sinha a ministerial post. A critical and dissatisfied Sinha later quit the BJP and joined the Trinamool Congress when chief minister Mamata Banerjee was attempting to give a national character to her TMC. The veteran politician however could not help the TMC make waves in his home-state of Bihar. His national appeal is limited because he had never attempted to build that aura around himself. Union ministers simply come and go.

While Sinha has the credentials to be a candidate for the presidential post, Droupadi Murmu being a tribal and a woman at that is symbolically what the BJP banks as its trump card. In fact, Murmu is the first Governor of Jharkhand to complete a five-year tenure. Yashwant Sinha's plus point is his clean image except for the UTI scam to which he was allegedly linked. But even as 18 parties are backing Yashwant Sinha, the NDA alliance has the numbers in the electoral college. There is little scope for any surprise as far as the outcome of this poll is concerned. This is probably why the likes of Sharad Pawar and Farooq Abdullah recused themselves from what is an uneven race. The Opposition could have done better by coming up with a surprise name. The NDA has beaten them to it yet again by springing a complete surprise in Murmu's nomination.

Thomas Jones Day: No Dichotomy in Thomas Jones' Mission

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

For the benefit of non-presbyterian readers and others, Thomas Jones Day is to commemorate the work and contributions of the first missionary of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Missions who arrived in Saitsohen, Sohra on June 22, 1841. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian Church is a strand of protestant Christianity deeply rooted in the Methodist movement in England and Wales in the early part of the 18th century. It all began in the year 1729 at the Oxford University when Morgan, John Wesley and others decided to meet every evening to read the New Testament and also to visit prisoners in jail every weekend. In the same spirit the gathering was held in Wales under the leadership of Howell Harris from 1735.

Among the stalwarts of the Methodist movement was John Wesley who was known as the great preacher of the Gospel in Great Britain. However, he was also the champion of Justice (socio and economic) and who firmly stood against all forms of exploitations and injustices. In the book *The Good News to the Poor*, Theodore W. Jennings, Jr had quoted several texts from teachings of John Wesley and it can be reproduced here; "...But how many are there in this Christian country, that toil and labour, and sweat and have it not at last, but struggle with weariness and hunger together? Is it not worse for one, after a hard day's labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength? You that live with ease in the earth, that want nothing but eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to understand how well God hath dealt with you is it not worse to see bread day by day and find none? Perhaps to find comfort also of five or six children crying for what he has not to give! ...O want of bread! O want of bread! Who can tell what this means, unless he hath felt it himself?"

In 1823 the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian Assembly adopted the confession of faith and basic tenets which were to become the guiding social and spiritual principles of the adherents of Presbyterianism. Apart from the spiritual or rather doctrinal principles, the Welsh Presbyterian Assembly had also explicated

socio-economic principles and incorporated them in its foundational document. To quote from paragraphs 14, 15, 17, 18 and 23 of the foundational text, members of the Church are taught "not to take advantage of the ignorance of the consumers and overburden them with exorbitant prices in trade and business dealings. Not to cheat or sell stolen products and not to evade taxes which are duly charged for their trade. Not to be selfish, greedy and exploitative... however to be kind, empathic and compassionate. Not to be dishonest in executing justice etc. Those who live by the sea ought to show compassion to travellers by sea. In case of any mishap at sea they ought to extend help to victims and ensure that any loss during the shipwreck is compensated justly and fairly..."

To better understand the life and works of Thomas Jones in the land of u Hyniewtrep, one has to grasp the historical context of England and Wales during the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. The interplay of socio-economic-political power and theology, ethics and spirituality have certainly shaped and informed his mission in these Hills. There were epoch changes in Great Britain during the 17th and 18th centuries. These changes came in two ways; viz, through Legislations in the form of Enclosures Act and the Industrial Revolution. These had adversely impacted the socio-economic lives of the people. The rich had become richer and the poor became poorer. During the Industrial Revolution there was enormous rural migration and this caused a change in the demography of urban and industrial centres. In towns and cities people lived in shanties and makeshift tents with no access to basic amenities like drinking water, food, housing, health and sanitation.

Before the Enclosures there were two types of land holdings in England which were termed as open fields or commons. There were commons whose ownership or land use were managed by commoners and the second type was managed by private individuals or families, called manorial system. Between 1760 and 1870, about 4000 Enclosures Acts were legislated through which 7 million acres of common lands were transferred to private

ownership. Those who no longer have access to these open fields became landless and impoverished farmers, peasants etc., who migrated to towns and cities in herds. Until the 1760, commoners in rural England had access to land in the form of collective management of commons for agricultural and livestock purposes and this gave them decent means to livelihood. But with the introduction of Enclosures their lives turned upside down and many hopes were destroyed completely.

Thomas Jones arrived in Sohra in the monsoon of 1841 and his first act was to reduce the local Sohra dialect to writing so that the natives could understand and read the Bible. According to Maurice G. Lyngdoh, "The first task that Rev Jones had in mind was to explore all avenues to reduce to writing the language of the Khasis and replace the Bengali scripts adopted by Rev William Carey." A year after his arrival he opened three lower primary schools, which in Khasi were popularly called as "Elpi skul", in Mawmluh, Mawmsai and Sohra in 1842. Eventually Rev Jones began the translation works and translated the *Rodham* or *Mother's Gift* and the *Gospel of Matthew* which were published in 1842 and 1846 respectively. Rev Jones also gave the Khasi community the first book to be read in school, the *First Khasi Reader* etc.

When Thomas Jones arrived, the officials, mostly Englishmen, of the British East India Company were found to be corrupt and utterly dishonest. The exploitation against the natives was rampant and poor tribals had no means to challenge and confront the powers that be, let alone the mighty British Empire. As quoted by Prof S.S Majaw in his book *U Thomas Jones bad Ka Pyrthei Saitsohen*, "To the Khasi and European traders alike... the regime in the Hills was rampantly corrupt and wildly out of control." Further it was reported, "Allegations of venality, oppression and corruption on the part of the officials at Cherra Court to which these hillmen had to resort... The people used to say, we can do nothing, every case is lost unless we give bribes."

The condition then was extremely pathetic and Thomas Jones found himself in the context which was similar to the country of his origin. Indeed, he was sent by his

sponsors to primarily preach the Gospel and proselytise the so-called "heathens and ungodly people". But to his astonishment he found that his own blood and people of his colour were exploitative and brutal in their dealings with the natives. Many orange orchards which belonged to the natives in Ri War or areas bordering Bangladesh were forcefully attached to the Inglis & Company at Chatak. Lieutenant Harry Inglis was known for his abuse of power and position, and during his tenure as Assistant Political Agent he allowed only oranges to be traded and thereby compelled the natives and orchard growers to sell their produce to his Company and obtained exclusive rights to trade and export oranges outside.

The fact is that Thomas Jones had a big fall-out with the Welsh Mission in Khasi Hills and the Mother Church in Wales and a long list of unfounded and baseless allegations were pressed against him. Perhaps, the Welsh Mission in the Khasi Hills or Mother Church in Wales was not happy with him because he spoke truth to power. He openly confronted and challenged the corrupt and the abuse of power by the officials of the British East India Company, especially Harry Inglis, who exploited the natives and common people. Without fear of reprisal, he wrote to the Board of Directors and stated that the Court at Cherra was dishonest and partial. Thomas Jones would never compromise with injustices and after witnessing the abuse of power and injustices committed by the British officials, who was of his own blood, he vowed to himself that he would never identify with them, rather stand up and call out the exploiters.

In the light of growing corruption and criminality in politics and governance in the State of Meghalaya, recently there was the debate and exchange of arguments as to the role of the Church in society. I can only say that there is no middle path and one cannot advocate with a dishonest and corrupt system. We need to confront corruption head on with clarity of thought and commitment. One hundred and eighty years ago the Reverend Thomas Jones had sowed the seeds of liberation and profoundly expounded the idea of Insaaf (Justice) in these Hills.

What are we doing today if not confronting the evils of corruption?

The Hospital Builder: Hugh Gordon Roberts

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

Rev. Thomas Jones Day is being observed in all the seven districts of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Government of Meghalaya had first notified this holiday in 2018, in honour of the first Welsh Calvinistic-Methodist missionary among the Khasis who arrived at Sohra on 22 June, 1841. There is a wealth of scholarly research, popular writings and documentaries on the man. The focus this year, 2022, will be on one of Thomas Jones' illustrious successors, the Rev. Dr. H.G. Roberts, who in 1922 established the hospital that today bears his name.

Hugh Gordon Roberts was born in Liverpool, centre of the large Welsh diaspora in England, on 16 July, 1885. His father was the eminent physician, Dr. David Roberts, who was also an elder of the famous Catherine Street Presbyterian Church at Liverpool. After his college education, Roberts apprenticed to become a chartered accountant. However, his quiet life of cashbooks, vouchers and registers was suddenly disrupted by the Great Revival of 1904-06, where he was profoundly touched by the preaching of the young revivalist, Evan Roberts. Much to everyone's surprise, the quiet, sober accountant suddenly expressed a desire for missionary service in foreign shores.

He joined medical school and qualified as a surgeon in 1912. He also received ordination, in keeping with the Welsh Mission's old policy of integrating church ministry with medical service. He married Katie Jones and the two sailed to India, arriving at Shillong in 1913. Adept with the latest medical treatment and modern surgical procedures, the young Dr. H.G. Roberts soon gained a reputation beyond missionary circles. When World War I broke out in 1914, he was appointed Civil Surgeon of the Civil Hospital (at present-day MUDA parking lot, Police Bazar), as the incumbent had been transferred to the war zone. So the Welsh Mission Hospital was not the first in Shillong but it followed the Civil Hospital.

Historically, the Welsh medical mission began with Dr. Owen Richards (1843-1844); his tenure had been too brief though to make any impact. The next medical missionary was Dr. Griffith Griffiths (1878-1904), who established a dispensary at Mawplang in 1883, which was shifted to Sohra in 1891, and thence to Laitlyngkot in 1897, which introduced the Khasis to Western medicine. There had also been Dr. Arthur Davies Hughes (1887-1891), who sadly had to return home after his wife suffered a major accident, and Rev. Dr. Edward Williams (1893-1925), who built a large dispensary at Jowai in 1914.

Recognizing that dispensaries were no longer adequate, Dr. H.G. Roberts coaxed the hesitant mission directors in Liverpool and the unwilling colonial British government to support his vision of a full-fledged hospital. With modest initial funding, construction began in 1917, in the midst of war, at the large mission property at Jaiaw. Dr. Roberts donated his entire earnings of 30,000 rupees, from three years as a Civil Surgeon, towards building the hospital. This was just the kind of exemplary leadership that inspired the Welsh to contribute generously. The Great War ended in 1918; the next year Dr. Roberts, Katie and the two children that had been born in Shillong went on furlough to Liverpool.

Dr. Roberts travelled across Wales and England to raise funds for the hospital building and for medical equipment. He featured in the 'Orient Missionary Ex-

hibition,' which enlightened Welsh Presbyterians about various needs in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Lushai Hills and the Sylhet plains; this exhibition raised 30,000 pounds for the Hospital. When Dr. Roberts and family returned to India in 1920, the government awarded him the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal in recognition of his wartime services, and appointed him as a member of the Assam Legislative Council. Construction hastened with fresh funds and the Welsh Mission Hospital was inaugurated on 25 March, 1922 by the Governor of Assam, Sir William Morris.

The hospital provided medical treatment, vaccination, rural outreach and training to compounders, who blended compounds into medicines. The nursing school, under Miss Margaret E. Buckley, produced annual batches of nurses. There were capable physicians like Dr. Drinsingh Hyniewta, Dr. Phin Sing and others after them. The hospital's reputation quickly spread throughout Assam (the entire North East India at that time) and beyond. Dr. Roberts was also an innovative engineer. He built the hospital's central heating system with old pipes and boilers from a decommissioned ship in Calcutta. He also installed a steam laundry and an X-ray machine, novelties for that age.

The arrival of another surgeon, Dr. Robert Arthur Hughes (1939-1969), eased the pressure on Dr. Roberts and settled the question of a successor. During World War II, the Hospital treated wounded British and American soldiers who had been fighting against Japanese soldiers. Dr. Roberts was appointed Consultant at the Military Hospital in Shillong. Despite such a heavy workload, he found time to minister as the Pastor of the Jaiaw Presbyterian Church; the church will celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2023. Dr. Roberts was well-known for his discipline and dedication to duty, qualities which he expected of his colleagues, qualities that defined the hospital during its glory days, qualities urgently needed today.

At the conclusion of World War II in 1945, Dr. Roberts and family returned to England. He immediately began fund-raising for constructing another hospital, at Jowai. Four years later, in 1949, Dr. Roberts and his wife arrived at Jowai, with 40,000 pounds for the new project. He personally supervised the construction and the hospital was inaugurated on 8 March 1953 by the Governor of Assam, Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram. Dr. Norman Tunnel (1953-1969) was appointed the senior medical officer, but the Hospital itself was a gift from the Presbyterian Church of Wales to the KJP Synod; it was formally handed over by Rev. Llewelyn Jones, General Secretary of the Mission Board.

In 1953, the 68 year old Dr. Roberts and Katie finally left the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. He became adviser of the Mission and mentor to aspiring missionary doctors. He passed away at Eastbourne, England, on 20 December, 1961. In honour of this great physician, the hospital was renamed in 2007 as the Rev. Dr. Hugh Gordon Roberts' Hospital; it is celebrating its Centenary this year. In its first fifty years, the hospital was the premier healthcare provider in undivided Assam. During the latter decades, it has faced many difficulties and challenges, yet by God's grace it has overcome these troubles. As in the times of Dr. Roberts, the hospital that he built still requires our support and prayers.

Letters to the Editor

Diagnosis partially right; wrong trouble shooting

Editor, Going through the article on Agnipath (ST June 20, 2020) one understands that it aims to achieve two things. First to solve as far as practicable the youth unemployment, though sadly in the process it ignored the youth that had already appeared for the stringent examination. Second, it is crystal clear that there's too much spending on pensions (the amount being equivalent for modernisation of the military) on soldiers who have served the country. So that formula of age of entry and 6 months of training with 3.5 years of service to finally return to villages, is to many a master stroke.

What is surprising is that corporates have pitched in to welcome the youth after four years of military service to serve the industries. It sounds like a shallow promise that cannot be taken seriously. Thanks to social media, our Meghalaya youth too joined the chorus of protestors in large numbers even while our elected representatives are in deep slumber after the dome collapse. Not a word was heard from them.

My appeal to the youth is to protest peacefully, with no burning of public properties. They should emulate the farmer of Punjab and Haryana who protested

peacefully for months. And let's remember that just as the hunger to win the Assembly elections in UP had led Prime Minister Modi to waive off the farm laws, in like manner his ambition to repeat the 2019 Lok Sabha in 2024, might force him to waive off Agnipath as well. The youth only have to be resolute and steadfast.

Yours etc., James Carey Wahlang, Shillong 14.

Citizens taken for a ride

Editor, The recent protests across the country against the controversial remarks of BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma against Prophet Mohammed, turned out to be undemocratic and uncivilised in some places. However, the resultant reaction of the UP Govt. of bulldozing houses of the accused protestors was equally barbaric and inhumane.

As enlightened citizens of a progressive nation we are failing to read the pulse of the current situation and the reasons behind such bizarre incidents. It is pertinent to mention here that such kind of controversies tend to emerge whenever simmering discontent among the masses are likely to emerge either due to price rise, failing rupee against the dollar, buoying rate of petrol, joblessness etc. As one remembers the adage, 'Religion is the last

resort of scoundrels' are we as common, peace loving, and tolerant citizens having centuries of shared history and respect for each other, being taken for a ride for the vested interest of our political bosses or the Leviathan to be more precise?

Yours etc., Sadiq H. Laskar, Guwahati

Umiam Dam hanging by a thread

Editor, While joining issues with Barnes Mawrie on his "Umiam Bridge: A disaster in the making" (ST June 20, 2022) some clarification is needed as to the life span of dams. The dam disaster of 1963 in Northern Italy, the Vajont dam was not due to its collapse but due to a huge landslide from mount Monte Toc despatching around 50 million cubic metres of water that claimed thousands of lives. Today it is discussed though not before the department in charge was taken to task later in the 70s for no proper study of seismological and geological parameters of the neighbouring region. The Hoover Dam in the USA is said to have a lifespan of 1000 years. The Bhakra Nangal dam at seismic zone 4, too faces no threat. Our hills and mountains are much older than the fragile Himalayas which in geological calendar are

mountains of yesterday so the Umiam dam may not be as vulnerable.

The Assam govt saw no harm to the dam completed in 1967 to be used as a bridge since at the time trucks rarely carried 20 tonnes of gross weight. But with East Jaintia Hills having struck coal at 2 feet below the earth and with plenty of cheap rat hole miners, the policy of paying for 15 tonnes and loading up to 45 tonnes has taken its toll. The Jingkieng Nongghymndai Bridge (the start of old NH 44) had snapped into two.

The Registration Certificate parameters have been gravely tampered with suspension multiplying three-fold and causing the driver to look exactly like a pilot on Boeing 47 with the bumper dangerously raised and with the centre of gravity lifted. The Lad Rymbai Bel-tola stretch has turned into a death stretch where trucks overturn on super elevation on bends. The frequent overturning of trucks at 3rd mile Upper Shillong till date is due to raised Centre of Gravity on sloping roads. In short the Motor Vehicle Act is completely murdered and there is no follow up on truck accidents that have claimed lives.

The bridge over Umiam Dam too is bearing the brunt now. Worse is the PWD planting speed breakers with the intention of slowing the trucks, little knowing that at dead of night truck drivers drive at breakneck speed causing more wear and tear

to the bridge over the dam. For sometime the Umiam Bridge got some respite as trucks were diverted through the Shillong bypass but the Dwar-U-Ksuid bridge gave way and later the Bailey Bridge too became unusable.

Recently the High Court stepped in to restrict trucks from carrying over 20 tonnes over the Umiam bridge. But the order lacked clarity as to whether it meant axle load or gross weight. Perhaps the High Court should rely on transport experts on such critical matters.

The plea to reroute trucks through the East-West corridor fell on deaf ears and understandably so, as majority of trucks are owned by ministers and influential people and coal is very important for the 2023 election. The High Court should also insist on reliable weigh-bridges which cannot be tampered with for the trucks.

With the rot that has set in amongst traffic police and enforcement agencies, we only need to focus on disaster management. A final question to the Disaster Management Force. How many fire brigade services are there in Shillong, with narrow bodies? How many water sources other than Ward's lake are available so that we do not have a repeat of what happened to the Qualapatty church where frantic phone calls were ignored and later the fire engines encountered traffic snarls.

I also take this opportu-

nity to condole the deaths of all who were devastated by the floods on June 16 and to the people of Garo Hills. For weeks the Meteorological Dept was alerting us Meghalayans but neither the Disaster Management Task Force nor the DIPR took the trouble to alert the people in the local languages. Had the BDOs been employed to send SOS messages to all villages by the public address system, the loss of lives could have been avoided.

Last year when cyclone Amphan struck West Bengal, the MET dept, aided with modern logistics and with spot accuracy, was able to save many lives. Let this be a lesson for us in future. About the snapping of NH 6, let us not blame the downpour. It is due to overloaded trucks having no respect for our notorious gradients. Those of us who drive behind these overloaded trucks (crawling at 3 Km per hour) face the danger of diesel mis-injection or faulty gear changing which could result in a roll back and crush the car behind.

And finally, in times of disaster let us not panic for panic only leads to greater disaster.

Yours etc., W. Passah, Via email

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

"There is no waste of time in life like that of making explanations."

—Benjamin Disraeli

The Shillong Times

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Maharashtra plunges into political crisis

WHAT Shiv Sena MLA, Eknath Shinde has done is unprecedented. Shinde who claims to have the support of 40 Shiv Sena MLAs and 4 Independents has stated that Uddhav Thackeray should abandon the Congress and NCP and form a government with the BJP. Shinde seems confident that he can beat the Anti-defection Act which requires that any group that breaks away from the main party should have at least two-thirds of the MLAs from that Party. The Shiv Sena has 55 MLAs in the present House. The MLAs who were holed up in a hotel in BJP ruled Gujarat until Tuesday and who were actually well guarded by the State Police there have now moved to Guwahati in Assam and are holed up at Hotel Radisson Blu. Such hotel politics where MLAs have been whisked away from the western part of the country to the North Eastern state of Assam has been happening quite frequently during the BJP rule in this country. The BJP claims that it is on a wait and watch policy but in Gujarat the BJP leaders have been in a pow-wow with the Sena MLAs. And there are senior BJP leaders, including the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma conferring with the Sena MLAs in Guwahati.

Meanwhile former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis made no bone about the BJP intent. He said the BJP strategy is to exploit the unrest within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance government and to provide the agitated MLAs from the Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena etc., to find a credible alternative. Meanwhile Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday called for the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray addressed the media on Wednesday and said he was ready to give up the CM's post if the Sena MLAs would return. He said he had never been ambitious but that the Chief Ministership was foisted on him. Thackeray seems to have realised that the Shiv Sena has reached a point of no return since Eknath Shinde claims he has 40 MLAs who have accompanied him to Guwahati.

The Shiv Sena legislators have rebelled against the party, plunging the three-party MVA government into a deep crisis. This crisis came after suspected cross-voting in the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC) elections in which the BJP bagged five seats thereby dealing a major blow to the NCP which won only 2 seats; Shiv Sena also won two seats while Congress was able to clinch one seat out of the total 10 seats in the Legislative Council that went to the polls on Monday.

Two questions on Meghalaya before 2023

By Toki Blah

Meghalaya has turned fifty this year and we are celebrating the state's Golden anniversary and a significant milestone. Meghalaya was first conceived as a protest against the imposition of Assamese on tribal minorities such as the Khasis, Jaintias and Garo people of the erstwhile districts of Assam namely Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District. The protest swelled to a demand for a state of our own; the, 'No Hill State, No Rest' slogan was coined. It united the three tribes mentioned above in their search for a political vehicle to convey them to the future. This agitation of the Hill people finally culminated in the birth of Meghalaya on 21 January 1972. Today 50 years since statehood, we the people of Meghalaya are supposed to celebrate the state's golden anniversary. Yet if one is to go by the daily news reports; if media coverage of events that have happened during the last 6 months is to be believed; if the rising crescendo of public dissatisfaction, anger and grievance is any indicator of our feelings, then one is forced to believe that there is very little to be cheerful or to celebrate about. All around us we see the failure and collapse of government; the increasing irrelevance of institutions that are supposed to govern us; the total disappearance of Rule of Law; the rapid rise and spread of poverty; the socio-economic difference between the Urban and the Rural sectors; unheard of inflation that has made our per capita meaningless and redundant; the disintegration of infrastructure be it our roads, bridges, urban waste management, education or public morale; the overwhelming grip of corruption and sleaze over those whom we elected to govern us. To top it all; to add salt to the injuries of the common man, we find a Political system, its Politicians and Political Parties absolutely blind; indifferent; uncaring and completely insensitive to the sufferings of the public.

In the midst of all this public anguish and misery our politicians can see no further than their win or loss in 2023! Politics has completely dissociated itself from the plight of the common man. So is this the profile of the Hill State we fought for 50 years ago? Corollary to this and the first question to be asked therefore is - 'Is statehood and the creation of Meghalaya a flawed concept? I intend no cynicism or sarcasm in the question

raised above. It is a question of a stake-holdership in the state of affairs relating to a concept, an idea, a passion that our ancestors invested in and for which we are supposed to reap the benefits. When this generation sees that passion and idea wither and go waste, it is compelled to ask what and where we went wrong. One expects answers to that question. So the first query naturally will be - who is supposed to uphold the concept of our own democratic, parliamentary, dependent Hill State? The answer is simple but tragic! It is me or should I say all of us individually; our families; our clans; our communities; the social and faith based institutions that we depend on and the education system and educational institutions we were weaned on. As stake-holders to this new political entity called a Hill State as a people we did nothing to understand its basic needs and requirements; we failed to nourish and strengthen it with the basic nutrients and vitamins so crucial for its administrative maturity. We all fell short of understanding the sustainability of statehood which called for universal appreciation of the tenets of parliamentary democracy; appreciation of the democratic principles of BY, FOR and OF the people; appreciation of the value of the Rule of Law. Again, all of us, failed to uphold the basic values that contribute to a democratic way of life. Fact is we failed Meghalaya.

In the last 50 years, the citizens of Meghalaya who are its prime stakeholders have slowly withdrawn their interests in the governance of the state. Slowly but surely we comforted ourselves by outsourcing every 5 years, Meghalaya's mandate as a state, to contractors who came in not to govern but to exploit. We never bothered to check whether these contractors delivered or not. Slowly the state has been leased to people, parties and individuals who were totally indifferent and worse, unprepared to promote its welfare; the wellbeing of its people; its development and growth. They were there and still are, for their own vested interests and profit. Sadly we the people have not realized this fact; not realized that Meghalaya belongs to us; that we ourselves need to manage it with love and understanding. We are still preparing to outsource the governance of Meghalaya in 2023 for another 5 year lease. It is not

that Meghalaya has failed us. Truth is we have failed to uphold and protect the idea of a Hill State; we have miserably failed in staking ownership over what is ours!

The second question crying for an answer is - taking into consideration all what has been pointed out above, does Meghalaya still have a future? Can we still detect some optimism in the concept of Meghalaya? Despite the obvious flaws of a failed state pointed out above I think that there is still hope in redeeming our Hill State. We accept Meghalaya as the vehicle to carry and drive our dreams and our future. There is nothing wrong with the chassis or body of the vehicle. It's as good or as bad as other vehicles elsewhere. Trouble lies with the nature, expertise, qualification, ability and most importantly the character, morals and ethics of the driver or drivers we elect to drive the vehicle. The problem is that we tend to choose individuals with no knowledge or skills of the task they are supposed to perform. Worse, they come without morals but with the mentality of a bania (trader).

Within the context of Meghalaya's governance we need to know where our politicians intend to take us; do they possess the vision and foresight for what is expected of them; do they share the same interests and outlook as the electorate that elects them; is the welfare of Meghalaya their priority or are they applying for a seat in the Assembly and the cabinet just to loot the state and further their own interests? We see it happening, especially in this MDA government and if we fail to realize the stakes involved, the signs of time point that the next Government in 2023 will be ten times worse than this one. Meghalaya and its people will be driven deeper into poverty; further into a dark bottomless abyss of hopelessness. Is that what we want? Definitely not! And if there are other stakeholders who are still in the dark, is it not the duty of others, the so called powerful Pressure groups (ki sengbhalang), the Dorbars, the Church, agitating teachers, the intelligentsia of the state, to take up the onus to enlighten our electorate of the dangers that arise from MLAs who seek to nullify the right to vote with money? It is a cancer that will spell doom for all of us. It needs to be nipped in the bud. The crucial question is how?

The most damaging aspect of Meghalaya is that it was created on the emotion of a Hill State of our own without ever thinking how to sustain and govern it. The sad fact is that 50 years down the line we are still on that emotional high without knowing where this Hill State is expected to take us. At this point what we really need is a vision for the state; a roadmap to take us down the future; a pre-meditated strategy on how to make such a vision work. In a parliamentary form of democracy where leaders seek election through the ballot box, parties can't come simply with the plea of "please help us win" but with a manifesto that outlines their policy for the development of the state and its people. The electorate on the other hand should be prepared with questions on how the candidate and his party propose to govern and administer the state for the next five years. This calls for parties and candidates that does their homework before they face the electorate. It is the only way to eliminate moneyed, arrogant but ignorant candidates who come with that sneering conviction that the rights of the common man can be bought with a bundle of notes. It's what has been happening to us. Time to stop this evil!

For this Meghalaya needs a vision statement from politicians as to where we see ourselves 10, 20, 40, 50 years down the line. Political parties and their candidates must necessarily come prepared with such a vision document on how they intend to govern the state and its people. The pertinent issues such a document must address are Education, Healthcare, Communication (to include road networks, bridges and transport systems), strategy on employment that includes viable options for investment, strategy on marketing the products of Meghalaya especially its farming and allied activities, poverty reduction strategies, plans to reduce landlessness, strategies on waste management, strategies on environmental issues and concepts on water management.

Politicians must have time frames and roadmaps for the future. Prepare your manifestos then face the public. We have had enough of demagoguery where politicians exploit us with meaningless talks on popular prejudices and make false claims and promises simply to gain power. Meghalaya needs solid concrete concepts on leadership and governance. Let's do away with hypocrites who approach us with money simply to murder our children and their future.

Alarming developments in Indian politics

By Barnes Mawrie

As Indians we are proud of being the largest democracy in the world. We take pride in the secular nature of our Constitution and the age-old values of tolerance, non-violence and love for peace and harmony. We refer to our country as one with "unity in diversity." When we witness our immediate neighbours like Pakistan being torn apart by elements of terrorism or China being in the grip of a communist regime where personal freedom as well as basic human rights are being trampled upon, we breathe an air of relief that our country is spared from such problems. However, the situation today is not as ideal as it used to be. India is gradually sliding towards a negative development. Our democracy is being threatened like never before. There are a few things that I would like to share with my countrymen which could help us realize where we are at present and perhaps awaken us to act collectively so as to protect our beloved nation.

First of all, our country as we witness today, is fast tending towards a sort of theocratic government. With the coming of the BJP-led government to power since 2014, we are witnessing the rise of Hindu religious fundamentalism all over the country, especially in BJP ruled states. When religion mixes with politics it forms a very lethal cocktail. History has a lot of lessons to teach us on this aspect. In Islamic countries like Iran where the Sharia Laws dominate, we see how fundamental rights of citizens are being violated. Take for example, the return of the Taliban regime to Afghanistan in recent years, is causing tremendous suffering to women in particular since religious norms are being strictly imposed on them. Girls are being prevented from going to school and colleges and women are barred from public life or even government offices.

With the intention of pursuing the Hindutva agenda today, our country too is coming to grips with the reality of religious fundamentalism. The implementation of Anti-conversion Laws in some states of India, the recent attacks on the Muslim communities, the harassment of Christian minorities, the process of saffronization even of the educational curricula are all signs of an attempt to convert India into a pure Hindu country. This is however absurd as it goes against the very nature of our country. We should not forget that the freedom of our country was won not only by freedom fighters of all faiths and beliefs. This is the reason why "secularism" is enshrined in our Constitution. Gandhiji the Father of our nation, believed in unity amidst religious diversity. With regard to Hindu-Muslim relationship he had this to say "I am striving to become the best cement between the two communities. My longing is to be able to cement the two with my blood, if necessary. There is nothing in either religion to keep the two communities apart. In nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity. Religions are no exception to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity. The need of the moment is not an establishment of a Universal religion but there is a greater need to develop mutual respect towards the different religions." I believe these words of Gandhiji are enough to convince us of the importance of religious tolerance. India in fact should not merely tolerate religious diversity, but it should celebrate such wonderful diversity. Is our country not the cradle of many world religions?

Secondly, what we witness as alarming in our country today, is the systematic demolition of the opposition parties by the ruling BJP government. The Congress which is the Grand Old Party is particularly targeted by the ruling party. The Nehru-Gandhi family is being harassed from time to time. These days, the news is on Rahul Gandhi being grilled by the ED and next it would be Sonia Gandhi and the list may go on. Targeting leaders of opposition parties has become the policy of the government. I shall not comment on the innocence or culpability of these individuals, but what I wish to emphasize is the growing trend towards demolition of any opposition to the government. It is clear that the BJP intends on clipping off the wings of the opposition or at most transforming it into a paper tiger. Such an attempt is definitely against democratic principles. This was what Adolf Hitler did when he became the chancellor of Germany in 1933. He systematically got rid of all oppositions and paved his way to dictatorship. We cannot imagine a thriving democracy without a strong opposition.

Some of the vital functions of the opposition in a democracy are: (1) To check the government from becoming authoritarian and to restrict its powers, the opposition parties keep a watch over them, (2) To criticize the policies of the government, (3) Outside the legislature the opposition parties attract the attention of the press and report their criticism of the government policy in the news papers, (4) To check the expenditure of the government, (5) During the question hour, the opposition parties generally criticize the government. The opposition therefore acts as an effective check and balance on the government and its policies.

Thirdly, the increasing number of hate speeches either in public gatherings or on social media are not healthy developments in our country. These things have attracted international condemnation. In fact, the UN Secretary General Guterres, has called upon the Indian government to put an end to religious intolerance. Hate speeches either by religious fundamentalists or even by members of the ruling party, have become too common and they threaten the internal security of our nation. The fact that many prominent BJP members or sympathizers who indulge in such hate speeches go scot free, is a matter of concern for the country. How can we allow such individuals or groups who sow the seed of division in the country escape the law?

India has always been an exemplary democracy in the past, looked up to by other nations in the world. Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a much respected leader in the world who is leading the country on the path of development and progress. However, the present internal situation in the country raises a lot of questions and doubts in the minds of well-meaning citizens. What will be the benefit of development when there is unrest in the country, when citizens cannot live with each other because they belong to different religions? How can we say our country is progressing when the freedom of citizens is gradually being curtailed?

Let us save our great Indian democracy and let us value our ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Let me conclude with the quotes of two great men, Gandhiji who said "our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization," and Martin Luther King Jr. who said "we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools." The choice is at the tip of our index finger, what do we choose?

Letters to the Editor

Calling all women's groups to take heed

Editor,
The letter by Uma Purkayastha (ST June 18, 2022) "Plight of women continues" is heart-wrenching to say the least and is one among several letters that have appeared in this column which expose the painful truth about how abandoned women with children especially those living below the poverty line, live their daily existence in our state today.

Writing about a young mother bearing a child at the age of 13 and carrying a third child, crippled by malnourishment, on her back all day long even when she's trying to earn some living is painful enough. But worse is that the father of her children is living with another woman and refuses to acknowledge her as his responsibility because she is unable to prove their relationship due to absence of a marriage certificate and therefore denied of child support, is a harsh reality for many abandoned women with children in our society today. And many of them live below the poverty line, if I must stress again.

Sadly this problem, it seems, is still not getting the right priority from most of

our religious bodies, women's group and individuals and we are not doing enough to find a solution. At the same time there are those who continue to live a comfortable life in denial of this fact that such a situation can exist, and some, living with the attitude that "...if it doesn't happen to my family it doesn't happen at all."

To such people I would say, "Come down from your high horses for a day, away from your pulpits, your raised platforms, your lunch and dinner seminars and conferences and take time to walk the narrow path of the poor, the abandoned and the exploited for your sermons and speeches to have any impact on the ground realities before this vicious cycle continues from mothers to daughters and to their granddaughters.

I appeal to the women's organisation of the state to organise, like Uma Purkayastha suggested a Women's Movement on behalf of your very own and make registration of all marriages mandatory, at least as one of the solutions, just to give the abandoned/divorced mother a fighting chance to fight for financial support for herself and for her children.

Yours etc.,
Michael N. Syiem
Via email

NEHU needs to revisit its curricula

Editor,
I am a student currently pursuing my Master's Degree. I graduated from St. Anthony's College in 2021 and obtained my Bachelor's in Economics. However, I am currently not pursuing my Master's degree in NEHU or under any NEHU affiliated institutions and which is the subject matter of this letter. I wish to share my own experiences and difficulties during my "gap year" which I faced academically while preparing for various Entrance Exams for Masters/PG Degree. I felt greatly suppressed under NEHU's academic regime. Please note, this is not to defame NEHU's prestige or its honour but my attempt to convey a message and speak out on why it is compulsory to start revising and adopting a new regime of learning in our syllabus for Under-Graduates under the NEHU Board. The syllabus needs to meet with the standards of various institutions outside of NEHU that are more progressive and doing better than most of the colleges affiliated to NEHU, specifically in areas of a broader and more complex syllabus, relative to what is being taught under

our current NEHU syllabus. As I was comparing notes with other prominent institutions such as St. Xavier's University, DSE and the like, I realised the negligence we faced insofar as the current NEHU syllabus is concerned. For example, Mathematics, being the backbone in economic theory was not given the importance it deserves and its usage was limited. This affected my comprehension in deriving economic theories whereas the above progressive colleges provided a great deal of mathematical insights relating to numbers and graphs to economic theories. Therefore, it is of strategic importance that we try and adapt to various other university curricula in order for us to meet with the growing academic demands arising from the rest of the nation.

With all these observations, I feel it is of great importance especially for every aspirant's interest, that NEHU does a brainstorm to keep up with the demands of the new environment and adopts new strategies to combat our academic backwardness when compared with other universities.

Yours etc.,
Meban Wantei Khyriemmuaj.
(Student, Master's in Economics)
Via email

Whither free and fair journalism

Editor,
The role of the media has changed in recent years. There is a severe lack of independent and impartial journalism. The rampant misuse of media to polarize society has made the situation worse. The role of media as a watchdog is important in a democracy to expose errors and wrongdoings. Media provides a platform for people to discuss and debate news on any topic. This interaction of people from different backgrounds strengthens civic engagement in society.

Fake news is not a new phenomenon and is associated with the rise of social media. The looming menace of fake news can have an unprecedented impact on the electoral cycle, raising serious questions about the integrity of democratic elections, policy-making, and our society at large. Computational propaganda is the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully distribute misleading information on social media networks.

Media companies unable to balance competing interests have been unable to balance national security concerns with capitalist mo-

tivations for profit. Media anchors can comment on matters of law and order and national security without any responsibility to increase viewership with half-baked opinions and intolerance for dissenting views. One of the most common criticisms of implicit journalism or media is that where people only see the points of view they agree with and isolates dissenters, resulting in to polarization.

With the advent of social media and technological changes, the reach of media has increased significantly. Its reach and role in influencing public opinion have made it all the more important.

Sensational reporting compromises the identity of rape victims and survivors despite Supreme Court guidelines. Fake news and yellow journalism are important concerns affecting the public and affecting national security. For example, spreading fear through the media has led to mob lynchings, and attacks on migrant populations.

In developing countries like India, the media has a great responsibility to fight backward ideas like casteism and communalism and to help people in the struggle against poverty and other social evils. Therefore, having journalistic ethics becomes very important.

Yours etc.,
Satyavan 'Saurabh',
Via email

"If you lose sight of the smaller accomplishments, you end up with an imbalance in your life."

— Alexander McCall Smith

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2022

Undoing of Uddhav

THOSE watching the present political crisis in Maharashtra unfolding were convinced from the very start that the exit of Uddhav Thackeray from the CM's post and a return of the BJP to power in the state were a fait accompli. A large number of Shiv Sena legislators having been taken away by rebel leader and urban development minister Eknath Shinde to far-away Assam. Even a master strategist like Sharad Pawar could only blink and scurry for cover.

That this was in the offing was clear as sunlight after the Shiv Sena ditched the BJP and did what came naturally to the Thackerays — do muscle-flexing, and break up the long-held alliance with it for the obvious purpose of grabbing the CM's post. This was when the BJP won double the number of seats compared to what the Sena could get in the 2019 polls. Such a questionable act was followed by the cobbling of a Sena-NCP-Congress alliance that was against the very spirit of the people's verdict. With all the power in its command at the Centre, the BJP could only sit back and bide its time. Eknath Shinde was next only to Uddhav Thackeray when it came to mass support in the Shiv Sena. That high aura also resulted in the CM and his minister-son Aditya suffocating him in the ministry. That the CM scooted from the scene in a huff on Wednesday evening by hurriedly exiting from official residence Varsha was proof he lost the game. Politics is a dirty game. With Pawar around, politics in Maharashtra was hugely vitiated and corruption was the byword for ministers in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Proof is also the jailing of two ministers in corruption cases and a third being framed by the ED.

The grim episodes like the bar bribe case, in which an NCP minister allegedly forced the Mumbai cops to collect a hundred crore for him or his party as bribe every month from the bars there, only showed how the system of democracy was being rubbished. As per the statement from a top cop, both the CM and Pawar simply dismissed such complaints. From the very start, the CM was proving his ineptness in running the government. The Covid crisis had battered Maharashtra — not just Mumbai — the worst under his direct watch. Notably, the Shiv Sena had split in the past too, but the central edifice remained intact. All eyes are now on the Thackerays as to how they would weather this storm.

The Maharashtra imbroglio: A reminder of Meghalaya's sordid political past

By Patricia Mukhim

In Meghalaya we have been used to musical chairs since the state was formed. We have had governments being formed by lucky dip and political chicanery of the highest order. Hence what is unfolding in Maharashtra and Guwahati are old hat for us. Stability came in for a short term during Salseng Marak's tenure but the game of musical chairs continued when (late) JD Rymbai was CM and later DD Lapang. Mukul Sangma brought in political stability since 2010. Today the MDA Government is on a steady keel and that is largely due to the fact that it is part of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) with Himanta Biswa Sarma keeping a close eye on the Meghalaya affairs. Otherwise, why would even some Congress bigwigs make a stop at Guwahati to meet HBS? So too other head honchos of the regional parties!

Let's not forget that HBS is nothing short of being Prime Minister of North East India. We may all think that different states are ruled by their respective Chief Ministers but other than the Manipur CM, all the others CMs are remote-controlled by HBS. Look at the manner in which the border pact was signed between Meghalaya and Assam. We have to grant it to HBS for managing statecraft in the way that Chanakya had outlined.

Chanakya or Kautilya as we all know was the Prime Minister of King Chandragupta Maurya. But he is better known for his statecraft and diplomacy. Chanakya said every single aspect of human life is subject to the jurisdiction of the state and he laid down an organisational set-up for that. Even at that time Chanakya made a clear-cut division of ethics and politics and opined that politics devoid of ethics is dangerous and could bring down the prosperity and security of the entire kingdom.

It is intuitive that even at that point in time Chanakya had stated that, "People In Power Must Be Accessible." We can see that Uddhav Thackeray failed to do this and granted more access to the allies than to his own Shiv Sainik MLAs. At least that is what Eknath Shinde and his group claim. Running a coalition government is fraught and Uddhav must have taken for granted that since he is the natural heir of Palasahab Thackeray, the Shiv Sainiks would never desert him come what may. He was so wrong.

Chanakya's exhortation, "When in the court, the king shall never cause his petitioners to wait at the door, for when a king makes himself inaccessible to his people and entrusts his work to his immediate officers, he may be sure to engender confusion in

business and to cause thereby public disaffection, and himself prey to his enemies." If only Uddhav Thackeray had read the Arthashastra and put those words of wisdom into practice he would not have had to eat humble pie today.

The Arthashastra outlines a system of civil, criminal, and mercantile law. Civil and criminal law were clearly codified such as a procedure for interrogation, torture, and trial, the rights of the accused, what constitutes permissible evidence, a procedure for autopsy in case of death in suspicious circumstances, what constitutes defamation and procedure for claiming damages, valid and invalid contracts (Kautilya, Book 4, Ch. 7 & 8). It's a differ-

exactly what has happened in Maharashtra.

Coming back to our own backyards, some people have already started scenario building for 2023 and thereby thrown cold water on the aspiration of those that want to bring change. These astute scenario-builders claim that Conrad Sangma's NPP will get 40 or more seats in 2023 and the person who will make that happen is Himanta Biswa Sarma (HBS) because he will never want to see Mukul Sangma his beta-noire anywhere near the CM's chair. They point to the basic behavioural trends that separate the Khasi-Jaintia from the Garos. Their contention is that Meghalaya has 12 ministers of whom only two (and

to questioning authority. For several decades we have outsourced the questioning part to key pressure groups (whose names I need not mention). These pressure groups seem to believe that other than the Inner Line Permit they don't need to harp on any other thing because ILP touches an emotional chord even as it sends this already insular society into another cocoon. In any case we have all been brought up to believe that we should not question our parents or any authority figure. So, we have imbibed this as part of our second nature.

Some of us believe there's nothing wrong if our own people become rich; its better than a "dkhar" (outsider) making away with our money. If a tribal makes money that will circulate within the state. There is nothing democratic about life in Meghalaya other than voting. We don't see public protests on any issue other than the usual suspects. We didn't even see public protests by political parties including the newly formed ones on the accused "Dome." They are quiet as mice; all waiting for 2023 to launch themselves as if they are sure to take the trophy home. Mamata Banerjee made a noise about the luxury flight that landed at Guwahati at a time when Assam is battling floods. The TMC in Meghalaya is uncharacteristically quiet other than giving a few bytes to the media on every issue and only when they are prodded. We have heard nothing from VoPP; their plea being that they are awaiting recognition from the Election Commission of India. Now a political party seeking recognition has to prove its strength by making a noise. There is no rule that debar a new political outfit awaiting recognition from airing their views and having public meetings on issues affecting the State and people.

Hence Conrad Sangma and his Deputy the spin-master with his not so funny one liners, are sailing on very calm seas. They see no threat at all. That's because "We the People of Meghalaya" don't want to create any turmoil on that sea.

Martin Luther King (Junior) writing from Birmingham jail said, "We will have to repent not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of bad people but for the appalling silence of good people." However, we can perhaps take courage from what King said at a later date, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." We hope and pray that the arc bends sooner than later. Otherwise, as Henrik Ibsen says, "Striving for democracy is bone wearying, agonizing, frustrating, cruel, bloody and often deadly work. You should never have your best trousers on when you go out to fight for freedom and truth."

"Chanakya or Kautilya as we all know was the Prime Minister of King Chandragupta Maurya. But he is better known for his statecraft and diplomacy. Chanakya said every single aspect of human life is subject to the jurisdiction of the state and he laid down an organisational set-up for that."

ent matter that the rulers of today, especially those that claim to be the avant-garde of Hindutva, only cherry-pick what they like and discard the rest of what the Arthashastra prescribes. If India's rulers had paid attention to Kautilya, we would not have witnessed corruption at the scale at which we have seen it happening in the past few decades in this country and in our own state today. Historians state that one reason why the Mughals could conquer Hindustan was because

siblings at that) are from Garo Hills. The rest 10 ministers are from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills but the Garo people have never made an issue of this under-representation. As a wit said earlier today, "The Garos prefer to have a King from among them than 10 generals. This is perhaps the basic difference between the Mon Khmer people and the Tibeto-Burmans. The latter are happy with quality; the former with quantity."

While one must encourage those who seek to bring

"While one must encourage those who seek to bring change in the electoral behaviour in 2023 sometimes realism has to kick in. Those of us sitting in Shillong think the electorate is aware of the sleaze besetting the MDA government but we are wrong because Meghalaya does not fit into the western concept of democracy where raising voices, asking questions and demanding transparency are part of the process."

the later Hindu rulers had abandoned the principles laid down by Chanakya, which is wont to happen. The system of division of labour (Varnas) degenerated into the caste system which relegated the Sudras to a sub-human rank and therefore antagonised them. Chanakya has warned that when there is internal strife a kingdom is in danger of being conquered by outsiders. Note that this is

change in the electoral behaviour in 2023 sometimes realism has to kick in. Those of us sitting in Shillong think the electorate is aware of the sleaze besetting the MDA government but we are wrong because Meghalaya does not fit into the western concept of democracy where raising voices, asking questions and demanding transparency are part of the process. We are a community that's not used

In Maharashtra, BJP's game for power at any cost

By Lekha Rattanani

Maharashtra has irked the BJP over the last few years and the Shiv Sena under Uddhav Thackeray as the Chief Minister has been a troublesome thorn in its side. Other States have provided sturdy opposition to the near-complete sweep and control of the BJP — West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are examples. But Maharashtra has been a particularly sore point for the BJP because it is here that friends have turned foes. At one point they were quite well-aligned and many viewed the BJP and the Shiv Sena almost like kin-quarrels, no matter how fractious, may happen but ultimately, they would come home to one family and settle the matter under one roof was the general view. Bicker, fight and rage at each other they did, but the partnership held. However, in 2019, all that changed. Uddhav Thackeray and the wider leadership of the Shiv Sena began to see the BJP as less of a partner and more as an enemy, daggers drawn, preparing, gearing, growing and waiting to gobble up all power for itself. This led to the split, with Thackeray claiming the position of Chief Minister by discarding the BJP and signing on the Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP as partners.

This didn't come easy. The BJP attempted to split

appears to have caught the Sena in a pincer. The block of Shiv Sena MLAs (at first 26 Shiv Sena MLAs led by Eknath Shinde, Urban Development and Public Works minister) fled to Surat in Gujarat and now to Assam, both BJP-ruled. And that tells a tale of how this "coup" has been engineered.

Needless to say, the Shiv Sena ought to have known better and exercised better control on its MLAs. It will now test the political mettle of Uddhav Thackeray, his team, his Congress-NCP allies and especially the astuteness and skills of Sharad Pawar. No one so far has bettered the wily Maratha leader and three times Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

Events are unfolding fast and it is not easy to predict how this will end. Given its control and power, the BJP may well succeed. The narrative being built is that the Sena went against the mandate of the people by breaking a pre-poll alliance with the BJP and forging a post-poll alliance with the Congress, a party that Uddhav's father Bal Thackeray opposed. Yet, the BJP equally knows that its game is to weaken the Sena and grow its own party, a gobbling-up strategy that has been at the root of the evaporating trust between the two parties. Even when the alliance



the alliance and even got a government sworn in with the support of Pawar's nephew in a 6 a.m. coup with the BJP-appointed Governor leading the oath-taking. But that didn't last beyond 48 hours and Uddhav Thackeray eventually stepped in to become the 19th Chief Minister of Maharashtra, taking the oath on November 28, 2019. Before this he was elected president of the newly formed coalition Maha Vikas Aghadi.

The Shiv Sena has known the BJP as only friends can, and since then it has set about systematically, and with particularly stinging narratives, attacking the party and seeking to destroy its carefully cultivated if limited reach in Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena supported the fight to protect the Aarey green belt in Mumbai, reversing the BJP-era stand. The Shiv Sena has asked difficult questions on the proposed bullet train project connecting Mumbai and Ahmedabad. The Narcotics Control Bureau working under the Central government was exposed for seeking to extort money by filing false cases. The party has accused the Prime Minister of "lies" in speeches to Parliament. One editorial in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamna' said: "When Modi first set foot in Parliament, he kept his head on the steps of Parliament and shed tears. Today, in seven years, the same Parliament and democracy will be shedding tears! So much anarchy has been created. The speechwriters of Modi seem to have taken a contract to turn him into a liar because the references in his speeches are wrong." The party has also attacked the PM over the migrants' crisis, and accused the BJP of starting riots on the issue of the 'hijab'.

In return, the BJP has been out to teach the Shiv Sena and its leader Uddhav Thackeray a lesson. Now, it

was forged first by Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray and BJP General Secretary Pramod Mahajan over three decades ago, there was some mistrust which was papered over by the promise of mutual benefits the two could draw from the relationship which became official when the two parties fought the 1989 Lok Sabha election together. Yet, when those benefits actually arrived (the Sena has not seen power at the State level since 1999), the problems acquired a new dimension. The BJP placed Devendra Fadnis as its Chief Minister in 2014-2019, and the Sena just could not tolerate handing them a second term. The party had worked out a 50:50 power sharing arrangement with the BJP and wanted to share the new term, starting with itself. If the BJP succeeds this time in toppling the Uddhav Thackeray government, it will get what it wanted in the short term but at the cost of displaying to the nation that the party is willing to go to any lengths to grab power and teach its foes a lesson. This cannot be good for democracy and cannot be good for the BJP either — the message for any potential partner of the BJP will be to keep away. It also builds the argument of many within the Shiv Sena that the BJP is about control and power, for which Hindutva is being put to use. It was barely a two months ago that amid the threats to recite the 'Hannuman Chalisa' outside the Chief Minister's house that the Shiv Sena attacked the Prime Minister again. The Shiv Sena has been vocal in its opposition, providing one of the most potent and aggressive voices against the BJP in the nation today. The BJP is out to silence that voice now.

(The writer is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Plebeian versus the blue-blooded

Editor,
This is a plea from someone whom the high society would call a plebeian. I would like to convey, through your esteemed daily, my earnest request that the stretch of road from the round-about at Mawlai Mawroh, which passes the Meghalaya Police Public School and Golf Links, leading to Polo, be made a NO ENTRY zone. This rather inconvenient request is made in the interest of protecting the leisure, pretence and vanity of the blue bloods in our society and also, as a side note, the safety of peasants and plebeians. We plebeians would often travel through the aforementioned route so as to reach our workplaces, where we have to toil and sweat from Monday to Saturday. We are expected to reach our workplaces on time, and hence we cannot afford to be delayed; for whenever a blue blood decides to ready himself or herself to hit the ball and score some points, all cars plying on the road

would have to stop. And why shouldn't they have to stop?

Recently, I witnessed an agitated plebeian, who when stopped by the assistants, for it was time for a blue blood to swing hard, protested and raged on, presumably to reach his work place on time. Such actions cannot be tolerated! How could this plebeian defy the high and mighty blue bloods? Therefore, I request the powers that be to consider this petition and do the needful as soon as possible, so that we plebes can habituate ourselves with new routes and the blue bloods can enjoy their leisure. It would do a great deal of good if the matter would be handled swiftly and promptly before a blue blood's blood boils beyond repair, and a plebeian gets a concussion.

Yours etc.,
Abdiel Susngi,
Via email

Travails of a car owner

Editor,
Driving has never been easy in Shillong and perhaps

it will never be in the future too. Cars are legion, roads are too narrow and to top it all there's huge shortage of parking places. If one is to reach a destination one has to think seriously about traffic jams and where to park one's vehicle. Every single day, especially during school hours one is doomed to be caught in a traffic jam. These days to cover a distance of about 3 - 4 kms it is imperative to leave at least one hour before the scheduled time. If it rains, then one hour too seems to be less. No matter how good a driver you may be or how well you are able to maneuver the vehicle, one is sure to face irritation, restlessness, high blood pressure, anxiety etc. before ultimately reaching a destination.

However, the ordeal is not yet over for those who need to find a place to park their vehicles. It is common knowledge that the number of vehicles are on the rise with every passing day while the size of the roads have been the same. As for parking places and parking lots, though quite a few seem to have emerged yet they are not at all sufficient. Take for

instance the small parking space at Dhanketi Point. Last week, I drove to Woodland's Hospital to visit the doctor at the OPD at 10:30 am. There was no empty space at all to park my small car in the hospital premises. So I drove out of Woodland's Hospital, hoping to find a place to park in the parking lot at Dhanketi Point. But to my dismay, this was not to be because the Parking Lot was packed with vehicles of parents and guardians who had come to pick up their children and wards from school. Fair enough, it is always better to park in a Parking Lot and pay a parking fee rather than literally throw one's vehicle on the roadside and face the ire of the traffic policemen or worse get one's car clamped and be penalised. But the point is that in case of urgency and desperate circumstances what does one do?

To continue with my narrative, I actually took 3 rounds of Woodland's Hospital hoping to find a place to park either at the Hospital premises or the Parking Lot at Dhanketi. With no luck, I drove towards Asom Kristi Kendra and spotted an

empty space on the roadside with few vehicles parked there already. I was in such a desperate condition for I had to see the doctor and it was raining cats and dogs. I snugly fitted my car by the roadside. Like the other vehicles parked there, I too parked my car by the sidewalk that would not disrupt the flow of traffic. At the back of my mind, I felt that my car would be clamped. My premonition came true. On my way back to the car, the traffic policeman had just clamped my car, taken pictures of it and was about to take off on his bike. I ran towards him and explained the reason for parking there. He was sympathetic towards me but also said that he had no other alternative as he was simply doing his duty and following orders that have come from higher authorities. He tried to help me by taking a picture of my license and sending me a challan via SMS. He then removed the iron bars and allowed me to go but to pay the fine and collect the receipt.

The point is that the common man is always a helpless, hapless lot. While the traffic police was bound to

do his duty we the general public are left in the lurch. May I request the higher-ups who are far removed from ground realities and who do not face traffic jams or have to worry about a place to park, to understand the trials and tribulations that a common man faces day in and day out. Can they be a little considerate and understand that we do not wish to break laws but are forced to do so when we are in dire straits. I definitely do not condone rash driving nor unabashed and indiscriminate parking of vehicles. But if parking one's vehicle at a place that does not disturb the smooth flow of traffic due to a dearth of parking places can those in authority be a little empathetic towards lesser mortals? Or an even better suggestion would be to provide more parking lots for the good of all.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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

"Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."

— Thomas Carlyle

The Shillong Times

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Who will hold ADCs accountable?

MUCH has been said about the profligacy of the autonomous district councils (ADCs) which have, over the years failed to get their accounts duly audited. Normally all public funds have to be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) so that public institutions which use such funds are held accountable for every rupee spent. But such is not the case with the three ADCs of Meghalaya which have all been defaulters. They are also not held accountable for collecting funds from illegal check gates, markets and forests. It is appalling that action has not been taken against corrupt officials in the ADCs but instead they have been shown leniency. Is it because there is a nexus between these officials and the MDCs?

The State Government as the main financier of the ADCs and which should have played a regulatory role has always winked at these misdemeanours. The ADCs receive funds from the Finance Commission on the basis of the schemes they prepare. It is expected that all such funds are to be accounted for, else they are treated as largesse by the Members of the Autonomous Councils (MDCs). Often the funds meant for different schemes are diverted to payment of salaries. The 125th Constitutional Amendment passed in February 2019 seeks to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the North Eastern region but with a rider that the ADCs will have to devolve power and funds to elected village municipal councils which would be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry. The Finance Commission will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.

In the case of Meghalaya where the State Government comprises a tribal majority and where the above-mentioned subjects are already being administered by the State Government, there is a possibility of overlap of jurisdiction. In fact, the role of the District Councils as per the Sixth Schedule was primarily to conserve the tribal customary practices and tradition since the Khasi & Jaintia and Garo Hills were then part of the Assam Government. Needless to say, upon Meghalaya becoming a full-fledged state the role of the autonomous councils has become infructuous as the District Council Affairs Department of the State Government was well able to take care of tribal affairs. But that did not happen for political reasons. The 125th Amendment seeks to empower and fund elected grassroots institutions for rapid economic development. This has not yet happened in Meghalaya. Why? Without that clause being fulfilled the ADCs would not be able to avail direct funding from the Finance Commission. That's a double whammy!

Letters to the Editor

Lessons from the NEHU incident

Editor,
Apropos, the news item, "NEHU VC tests positive for COVID" (ST June 24, 2022), it is highly irresponsible of the university's topmost official to risk the lives of students, teachers and staff in such a careless manner. The VC had attended two Yoga meets with quite a large number of students, teachers and staff in the run up, to him returning a positive result for Covid-19. It has come to our notice that he was shifted to the hospital in an ambulance and had been feeling unwell. If that was the case, shouldn't it be ascertained whether he was symptomatic or not? In that case, why was the VC attending events as Chief Guests in a large gathering? An educationist is expected to portray Covid appropriate protocols and a person of the stature of a VC, should be concerned about the well-being of others. Unfortunately, in this case, the head of an

Institution can well turn out to be a super spreader.
The Centre has done away with contact tracing and wearing of masks, however, one should not forget the fatalities and sorrowful events in recent memory of the Alpha variant. There have been numerous reports that the VC was usually out of station and had been visiting various places in the country which only amplifies the fact that the person was bound to contract the virus. This is a lesson for all of us, and the VC in particular, to restrict our movements and unnecessary travel as Covid is far from over. The Health Department should be proactive and do a test on all members of the Yoga celebrations who had come in direct contact with the VC in order to eliminate any chances of Shillong turning out to be the next Delhi or Mumbai due to the irresponsible behaviour of only one person. Lastly, I would like to conclude that having survived the virus twice, that if one is feeling unwell, one should immediately isolate and seek medical attention.

Hope the District medical authorities take cognizance of this case.

Yours etc.,
John Rymbai,
Via email

Mall / supermarket at MTC complex?

Editor,
The news regarding MTC complex being turned into a mall, which presently I believe is not genuinely required by the State will do more harm than good for the business community as most of the malls in Shillong are a failure due to very less foot fall, and will create more competition. Government should invest the money in more important matters, like roads, hospitals, engineering and medical colleges, other infrastructure through which youth could be employed, the Government shouldn't take such a harsh decision of evicting old tenants, whose family and staffs are dependent on the busi-

ness in MTC since decades, just to please some private company, what's the point in voting a government which is not sensitive towards people earnings, and favor a few. Government job is to see that all citizens shouldn't suffer, further there's ample space in MTC compound where Government can do additional construction without evicting old tenants.

Yours etc.,
Justin Roy
Shillong 2

ADCs have no accountability

Editor,
From missing fishes to non-utilization of funds to the extent of lower rung employees engaged in corruption speaks volumes of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council and its efficiency. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution under Article 244 empowers the state to establish Autonomous District Councils. However today they present a sorry state of affairs and the way the respective Councils across the State are currently

Agnipath: Between the lines

By Admiral Arun Prakash

So dreadful is the prospect of a military defeat, and so horrifying its consequences, that nations are willing to go to any length to avoid such an outcome. It is for this reason that national security has been historically deemed, worldwide - by economists and not soldiers - as "the first charge on the treasury."

Independent India, unfortunately, saw defence expenditure being relegated to the "non-plan" category, within the ambit of a Soviet-inspired, central economy. In another anomaly, the pension bill of veteran soldiers - a separate charge on the exchequer - was linked to the defence budget and its

eternal "guns Vs butter" dilemma, and has to find its own way to resolve, what the US military terms the "endways-means" conundrum. All major powers undertake a periodic (every 4-5 years) review of their evolving national security objectives, the options available, and the economic/military means available for achieving them. Such reviews automatically generate assessments of existing/potential adversary threats to national interests, as well as the state of own military's material/operational readiness.

From here, it is a short step

to emergent threats as well as to financial stringency in the security domain.

A second fact that we need to face is that our armed forces have remained in a 2nd World War time-war, as far as their organisation and doctrines are concerned. Half-hearted attempts at organisational reform have come to naught due to lack of political will as well as internal resistance from the services; with the constitution of a Chief of Defence Staff and creation of a Department of Military Affairs providing the latest examples.

However, the most trou-

bled the armed forces - already short of manpower - into turmoil, with a radical and untried new recruitment system. More so, when it is obvious, Secondly, such a scheme, in its present form, is suitable only for the army, whose large infantry component is not excessively burdened with technology. In case of the navy and Air Force, it must be recognised that at least, 5-6 years are required before a new entrant can acquire enough hands-on experience to be entrusted with the operation or maintenance of lethal weapon systems and complex machinery and electronics.

Thirdly, no matter how extensively the issue was dis-



(inevitable) growth trotted out as an excuse for the dwindling funds available for force-enhancement and hardware replacement/modernisation.

Thus, for years, governments dragged their feet, for "want of resources", over the army's demand for a mountain strike corps. But, ironically, the 2020 Chinese incursions in Ladakh resulted in the deployment of 50,000-60,000 troops - over a corps strength - and the outflow of a huge unplanned expenditure to support this indefinite deployment.

The most disheartening aspect of this situation has been the fact that, the finance ministry, instead of finding ways and means of raising, essential, additional funds for national defence, has passed the buck to the armed forces, and demanded that they evolve measures for reducing the pension bill. One presumes that the "Agnipath" scheme, launched, recently, with much fanfare, is an outcome of this demand. But rather than engage in a critique of this controversial project, which has already seen much debate, controversy and even public disturbances, let me focus on two larger issues, which lie at the root of much that is wrong in our approach to national security.

Every nation faces the

to estimation of the military capabilities required, and the funding support that the nation will need to generate. Apart from providing fiscal guidance, this process also facilitates the evolution of a national security strategy. Our neighbourhood adversary, China, has, since 2002, been issuing, with unflinching regularity, a biennial Defence White Paper," which encapsulates all of the foregoing, and is available on the Internet; for the information of foes and friends, alike.

"The most disheartening aspect of this situation has been the fact that, the finance ministry, instead of finding ways and means of raising, essential, additional funds for national defence, has passed the buck to the armed forces, and demanded that they evolve measures for reducing the pension bill."

The government of India, on the other hand, has neglected to undertake any such exercise, in the past 75 years. It has, thereby deprived itself, and the taxpayer, of a holistic, national security picture of: (a) where we stand; (b) where do we want go; and (c) how do we intend to get there? Unsurprisingly, India is amongst the few major powers which has failed to issue a National Security Strategy or Doctrine, and is consequently seen offering fumbling responses;

scheme on the lines of Agnipath, appropriately constituted, and focused on enhancing "combat effectiveness" rather than "effecting savings" or "generating employment," could have triggered a reformative process. But a number of caveats need to be borne in mind in this context.

Firstly, given the parlous security situation, on the country's northern and western borders as well as the ongoing domestic turbulence, this is not the best time to cast

discussed in meetings or on files, a radical change of this nature should have been subjected to a trial before service-wide implementation. Ideally, a few units of the regular or Territorial Army could have been earmarked as a testing ground, and feedback obtained. Lastly, bitter experience of the past has shown that the Home Ministry has resisted induction of ex-servicemen into the armed-police and para-military forces, on the grounds that it would spoil the career path of their own cadres. Similarly, state governments and other agencies have blatantly ignored the reservations mandated for ESM. Therefore, if the Agnipath scheme has to offer a meaningful promise of post-demobilisation employment or education, this must be mandated by an Act of Parliament, on the lines of the "GI Bill" enacted by the US Congress.

In conclusion, seeing the detritus of burnt trains, wrecked buses and social turmoil, often seen in the wake of many recent pronouncements, one is left wondering whether dissenting opinions are tolerated and contrarian advice accepted or given any weightage in our high-level decision-making forums?

(Courtesy Indian Express and by arrangement with the author a retired Admiral of the Indian Navy)

Round The States

By Insaaf

Shiv Sena Thriller 'End' of MVA Govt?

The political churning in Maharashtra offers a ready-made script for Bollywood. The twist and turns in the Shiv Sena drama ensure a thrilling climax. Rebel Shiv Sena leader Ekanth Shinde put out a video on Thursday last showing 42 MLAs were with him so far (34 SS and 8 Independents) at Radisson Blu Hotel in Guwahati, since the first halt made in Surat with 32 MLAs. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is left with 13 MLA, has moved out of his official residence saying the kursi is not important. But the tripartite MVA government of SS, NCP and Congress is in deep crisis. The olive branch hasn't worked with Shinde, claims of some rebels returning are being made and there's even talk of Uddhav giving in to Shinde's demand of dumping the 'unnatural alliance' and go with BJP. The alliance partners have asserted continued support to Uddhav and save government. And so there are moves to disqualify 12-odd rebels so the split doesn't get legitimacy. Will Deputy Speaker of NCP do it? Will Shinde write to the Governor seeking a show of strength? Will there be a demand for dissolution of the Assembly? Nagging suspense, which the Director of the thriller, said to be the BJP, has to weave in. So far, it is alleged to have put majority of the SS MLAs on ED's radar and they are jumping ship to "get out of their predicament", while some others are being forcibly bundled to Guwahati. Replacement of the hero -- Uddhav with Fadnavis could be the climax. Not a happy ending for the audience -- the voters, for they get short changed!

Tribal President

From Raj Bhavan to Rashtrapati Bhavan. In a gap of a year, Droupadi Murmu, former Jharkhand Governor and Odisha's tribal leader in all likelihood shall move into her new home for next five years. From Mayurbhanj district she is NDA's candidate for presidential polls in July. Apparently, it will turn out to be a delay of five years as she was considered a contender after Pranab Mukherjee's term expired in 2017, but BJP zeroed in on Ram Nath Kovind, a dalit and present incumbent. A teacher, Murmu was councillor in Rairangpur Nagar Panchayat, vice-president of BJP's ST Morcha and twice its MLA, Minister of Commerce & Transport, and Fisheries & Animal Husbandry in BJP-BJD government. In 2015, she moved into Ranchi Raj Bhavan, becoming Jharkhand's first woman Governor. Yashwant Sinha is the Opposition's consensus candidate after Sharad Pawar, Farooq Abdullah and Gopal Krishna Gandhi declined the offer. With BJD coming on board, the NDA has 52% of the electoral college a clear win for Murmu. The percentage may go up as JMM in Jharkhand would find it difficult not to extend support. Her topping the list of 20 probable's is a shrewd move of the BJP, denting the Opposition further. And taking credit of giving the country its first tribal President!

Haryana's Reprieve

Haryana BJP-JPP combine heaves a sigh of relief. Notwithstanding, the State witnessing the worst protests against Agnipath across the country, the people have voted in favour of its candidates in the civic bodies' election held on Sunday last. The combine won chairmanship of 25 of 46 bodies, of which BJP alone won 12. The BJP won control of 10 municipal councils and 13 municipal committees, and 3 nominees and JPP won one committee and two municipal bodies. Though AAP made its debut in the polls in the belief that victory in neighbouring Punjab would yield results, it ended up with just one post. Congress stayed away as there was opposition amongst its ranks for not fielding candidates on the party symbol, but claimed that 19 Independents which won had its support. It also

claimed that there was a loss in support for BJP in cities as it got 26.3% votes as against Independents securing 52.2%. Be that as it may, the BJP is upbeat. The victory has relegated the loss of two Assembly bypoll seats to the background and interprets people's verdict approving its policies.

AIADMK Drama

Tamil Nadu goes through its share of internal power drama. The AIADMK General Council meeting on Thursday last lent overwhelming support to former Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, with his co-partner in the then government O. Panneerselvam having to stage a walkout halfway through. The fight is over having a unitary leadership, and that neither Palaniswami nor Panneerselvam would hold the posts i.e. coordinator and joint coordinator respectively. At the outset, the meeting unanimously rejected 23 resolutions, demanding a unitary leadership, as dual leadership had led to much confusion. The G.C. must only discuss the need for a single leader and set July 11 as the new date for a fresh meeting, wherein Palaniswami will be elected party General Secretary. In effect, supreme party leader. However, the next scene may well be enacted in the High Court and Election Commission as Panneerselvam faction has claimed the GC conduct was illegal. South Indian blockbuster?

Assam's Insensitivity

Assam would do well to adhere to the adage 'a stitch in time saves nine'. Every year faces the wrath of floods, but precious little is done to prepare in advance. Over 55 lakh people are affected across 32 of 36 districts with rising Brahmaputra and Barak rivers inundating fresh areas. The situation is 'critical' in three districts -- Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The big question is why does the Assam State Disaster Management Authority wake up so late and not prepare in advance? This time round, Chief Minister Sarma and Union Shipping Minister Sonowal follow the typical drill of visiting relief camps and await a Central team's visit to 'assess the damage, prepare a report and submit it to government for support and assistance'. The amount spent over the years could have been utilised to relocate the population, or even have permanent relief camps in place, among other preventive actions. The government takes pride it has set up 850 relief camps and 2,71,125 people given shelter. Can it measure the misery that people have to go through?

Gujarat Riots Dropped

Irrational 'textbook rationalisation' by NCERT! It has dropped 2002 Gujarat riots content from Class 12 Political Science curriculum, among other pages saying: "In view of Covid-19 pandemic, it's imperative to reduce content load on students. The NEP-2020 also emphasises the same... In this background, the NCERT has undertaken the exercise to rationalise textbooks for all classes." The removals include pages 187-189 which had paragraphs: "Gujarat riots show the government machinery also becomes susceptible to sectarian passions. Instances, like in Gujarat, alert us to dangers involved in using religious sentiments for political purposes. This poses a threat to democratic politics," and a blurb carrying then Prime Minister Vajpayee's statement 'one message to Chief Minister (of Gujarat) is he should follow 'raj dharma' and a quote "A ruler should not make any discrimination between his subjects on basis of caste, creed and religion." Pages 105 of book on history of "Naxalite movement", and 113-117 on "Contraventions during Emergency" too are deleted. Reasoning: "overlapping with similar content included in other subject areas in same class" and "content, which is irrelevant in the present context". Hindutva, guess would be relevant?? --/INFA

What a courageous decision

Editor,
Captain Monica Khanna, the pilot in command of the Spicejet flight SG723 that experienced an Engine Fire right after take-off on June 22 carried out an overweight landing at a highly constrained Patna airfield very skillfully. As per the experts, Patna airport is one of the most critical airports in India that has tall trees on approach to one end of the runway & railway line at the other end.

Captain Monica deserves all praise for her instant courageous decision and safe landing that saved lives of all passengers on board.

Accolades aplenty and appreciation innumerable for her gallantry

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay,
Via email

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

Yours etc.,

Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

Crème de la Crème

Premier chef inaugurates his campus in India

Alain Ducasse, founder of Ecole Ducasse and the world's most-awarded Michelin-star chef visited India to inaugurate the first Ecole Ducasse campus in the country.

Ecole Ducasse shares the know-how of its founder Alain Ducasse, one of the most iconic chefs. The only chef to hold 20 Michelin stars. He is known for his innovation, attention to detail and dedication to excellence, and strong technique, while never compromising on sustainability. His desire to pass on his vision and knowledge lies at the heart of Ecole Ducasse.

The campus is located at the Indian School of Hospitality (ISH), Gurugram. Alain Ducasse's strengthens the partnership between ISH and Ecole Ducasse, both part of Sommet Education's global network of schools.

Alain Ducasse recognizes the potential in Indian students passionate about culinary arts and his visit was an important milestone for the future of gastronomy in South Asia. India has seen phenomenal growth in the culinary space over the last few years. As per the *Food and Beverage Services Global Market Report 2022*, the global F&B services market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.2 per cent by 2026. Consumer behaviour is evolving rapidly and so is the number of students who are keen on pursuing a career in culinary and pastry arts.

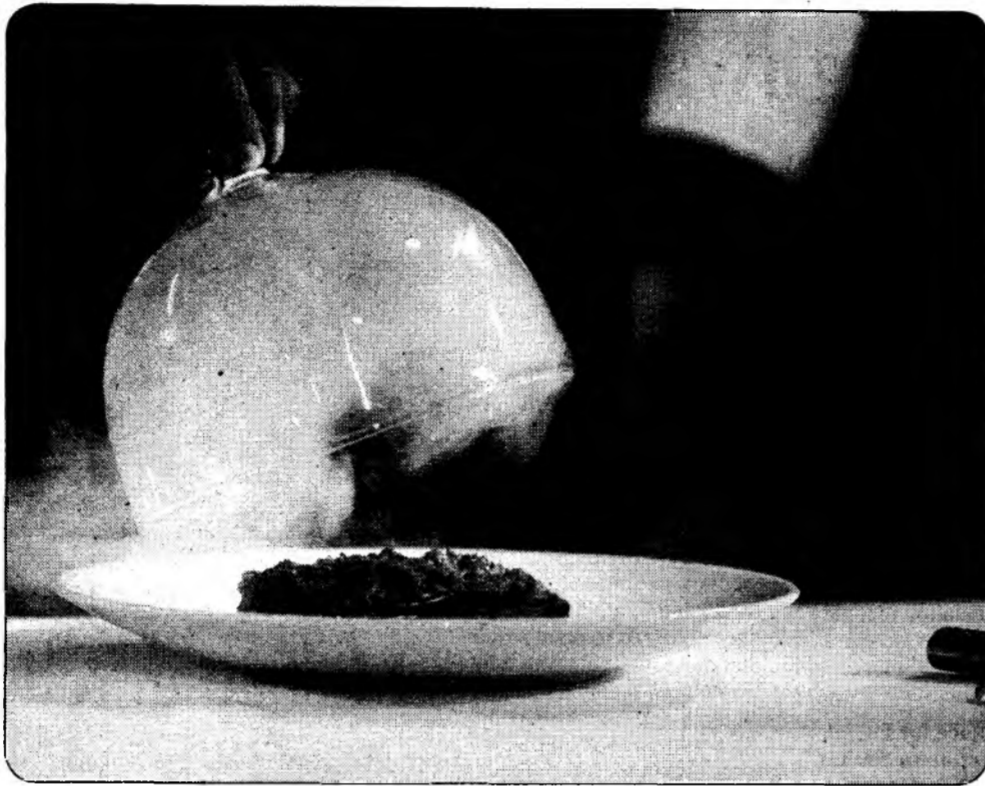
Culinary programs taught at Ecole Ducasse in India include an undergraduate degree, diploma, and certificate courses. Each of these combines technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial skills which enable culinary aspirants to master more than cooking.

The practical, hands-on training methodology of the programs offers food enthusiasts, career-changers, and professionals the perfect platform to establish themselves in the global F&B industry. The programs also offer students the opportunity to articulate to Ecole Ducasse campuses in France and study semesters as well as pursue internships abroad. An education with Ecole Ducasse makes students highly employable upon graduation and opens doors to a wide range of career opportunities in the culinary industry at a

worldwide level.

The Ecole Ducasse ISH Gurugram campus features 75,000 sq. ft of state-of-the-art facilities including modern training kitchens, sophisticated classrooms, and student experience areas. This campus marks the start of a broader rollout in India that will see the establishment of Ecole Ducasse Studios across key cities and a second campus over the next few years. The programs offered will jointly celebrate the rich heritage of French and Indian cuisine, while echoing global trends in contemporary gastronomy and the philosophy of the institute's founder.

Talking about his first visit to the country, Chef Alain Ducasse, Founder, of Ecole Ducasse said, "India holds one of the greatest culinary traditions in the world. The mission of our school is to give this asset



the worldwide recognition it deserves. India must become one of the influential voices on the global culinary scene. We want to offer to Indian culinary aspirants, new horizons abroad as well as in India."

Dilip Puri, Founder & CEO, of the Indian School of Hospitality, also shared his thoughts on the occasion, "Culinary education in India is getting its due recognition, and we're proud to be the



disruptors of this transformation. By introducing Ecole Ducasse in India at ISH, we're bringing the best of global education to students.

Through international programs and

pathways, and a state-of-the-art campus, we're not just sharing the vision of Chef Alain Ducasse with culinary aspirants in India, but also reimagining culinary education in the region." (IANSLife)

Connecting artworks and cultures globally



Microsoft and the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru, launched a new artificial intelligence-powered platform to connect artworks and cultures around the world. The platform, 'Interwoven' is rooted in MAP's vast collection of South Asian textiles and was developed as part of Microsoft's AI for Cultural Heritage initiative, which leverages technology to empower people and organizations dedicated to the preservation and enrichment of art and culture.

Previous projects under the initiative have involved improving accessibility through the Open Access collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the digital restoration of 'Ancient Olympia', in collaboration with the Government of Greece.

The MAP in Bengaluru is the first project under this initiative in India.

Speaking at the launch, Kamini Sawhney, Director, MAP, said: "Covid 19 and the lockdown really forced us to reflect on how people interacted with the online space. Right from week 1, we began look-



ing at how we could engage with our online communities. After the pandemic, a primary aspect of our mission is to use the digital realm to connect with people across the country, and the world. We're rethinking the idea of museums. They cannot be mere repositories

of objects. MAP will not just be a collection of objects, but a space for ideas and conversations that are initiated through our collections. Interwoven fits securely within this vision?"

"Interwoven is a project that is deeply impactful to society, culture,

and heritage. The project interweaves technology with art, using AI to find shared histories in artistic traditions from different corners of the globe, particularly pertaining to something as rich and complex as textiles. Our approach to AI centres around meaningful innovation and this project beautifully allows art to be more accessible and inclusive for people around the world. We stay committed to using technology to help celebrate and preserve culture as part of our AI for Cultural Heritage initiative," adds Rohini Srivathsa, National Technology Officer at Microsoft India.

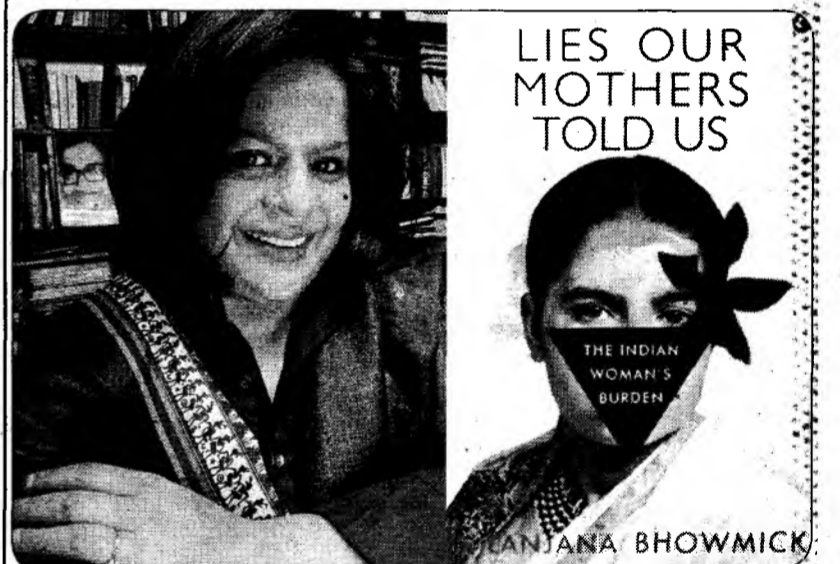
The platform works by providing users with two options. The first (Curated Journeys) allows the user to view predefined journeys, created primarily by MAP's educational and research arm, the MAP Academy.

These combine relationships between global artefacts suggested by the AI, which are then researched and expanded further by individual curators. It is an explorative model for how AI might be used in museology and art historical research. These cover a range of themes and subjects, from ideas of anti-imperialism to representations of women, to explorations of leisure. One of the journeys, for instance, even traces the forms and functions of handbags across different cultures and time periods, shedding light on their associations with ideas of community, convenience, and haute couture.

The second option (Custom Journeys) invites general users to explore the platform to stumble upon meaningful and sometimes even surprising visual connections. It provides a new way to engage with culture and learn more about the history of textiles and fashion and their relationship to global exchange.

As part of the project, the MAP Academy has also developed a free, introductory online course on South Asian textiles, for a global audience, to further contextualize the enduring impact and relevance of textiles, addressing everything from fashion, to the environment, and global exchange. (IANSLife)

Unravelling India's superwomen



Savitribai Phule, Mahasweta Devi, Amrita Pritam, Medha Patkar, Kamla Bhasin, and countless others have, since the 19th century, fought for and won equal rights for the Indian women in a variety of areas - universal suffrage, inheritance and property rights, equal remuneration, prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, and others. Pioneering feminists believed that due to these hard-won rights, their daughters and granddaughters would have the opportunity to have rewarding careers, participate in the social and political growth of the country, gain economic independence, and become equal partners in their marriages. On paper, it would appear that the lot of Indian women in the twenty-first century has vastly improved but, in reality, the demands of capitalism and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes have meant that they continue to lead lives that are hard and unequal, especially when compared to their male counterparts.

The Indian women are among the most overworked in the world -- they spend on average 299 minutes on housework and 134 minutes on care-giving per day, shouldering 82 per cent of domestic duties. They are burdened with work from such

a young age that many are forced to drop out of schools, leave the labour force, and give up dreams of financial independence.

For those who have the privilege of choosing to have a career, the only way they can make this viable is by doing a "double shift": women are expected to do most of the housework, childcare, and care-giving, whether they have jobs or not.

While these problems apply to all women across the country, those in India's middle class face an altogether unique challenge because middle-class families have mastered the art of simulating an environment of empowerment in their homes.

"Lies Our Mothers Told Us" (Aleph) dares to ask and evaluate if, in our patriarchal society, the assertion that "women can have it all" comes at too high a price. Taking a unique look into the state of women in India's middle class in the 21st century, the book uses the available data and in-depth interviews to reveal the real lives of Indian women across the country.

Authored by a brilliant award-winning journalist with over 20 years of experience in the field, Nilanjana Bhowmick's book is an epiphanic read for every aspiring Indian woman. (IANSLife)

World's longest river cruise

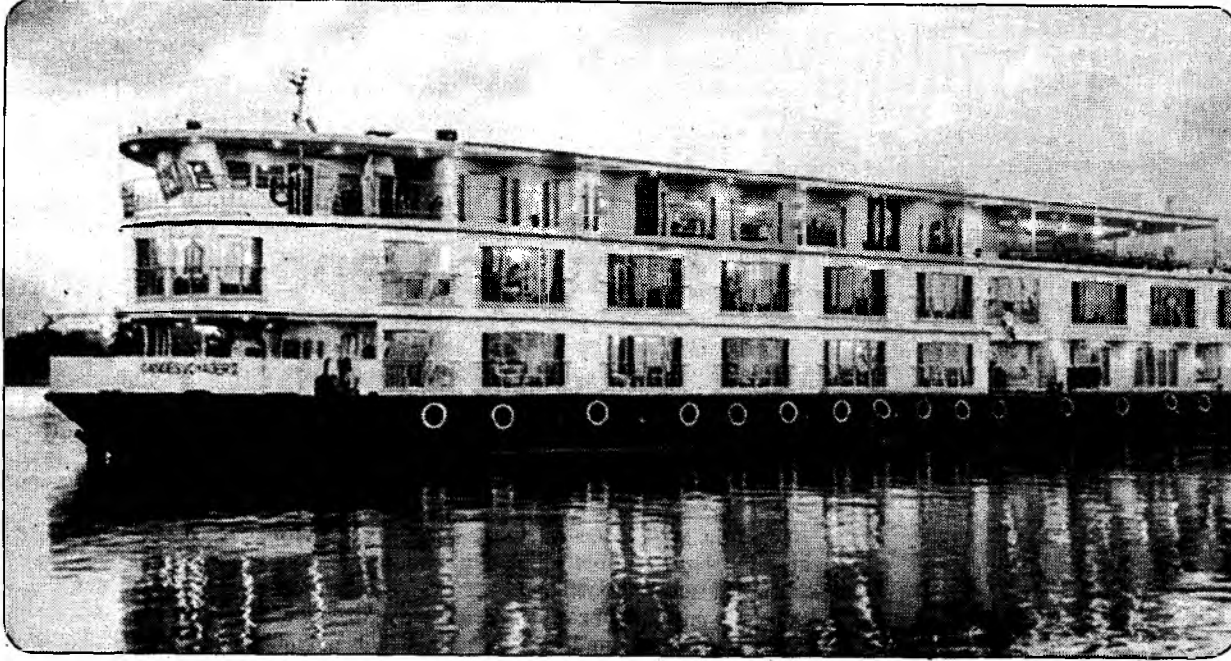
From Kashi to Dibrugarh

In December 2022, the world's longest river voyage, an epic 51-day cruise along the Ganges and Brahmaputra will be launched by Antara Luxury River Cruises. From Kashi (Uttar Pradesh) to Dibrugarh (Assam) via the Sunderbans and Bangladesh, you can sail on 27 small rivers, 5 states and 2 countries.

The 51-day cruise aboard Antara's newest Art Deco boutique ship, Antara Ganga Vilas, is a fantastic opportunity for those wishing to explore South Asian culture in some of its oldest regions and systems. Ideal for vacationers, history buffs, culture buffs, and nature lovers, the cruise also offers a hop-on hop-off option for those who only wish to travel on certain segments.

Commenting on this unique itinerary, Raj Singh, pioneer in luxury river tourism and Founding President of Antara Luxury River Cruises, said, "Each experience has been personally reviewed by me and designed for fellow avid travelers. The historic route has been completed with the backing, support and cooperation of the governments of India and Bangladesh working together to ensure a smooth journey between the two countries." Mr. Raj Singh is also a recognized authority on Indian wildlife and has respected written guides to the mammals, birds and aquatic life of the subcontinent.

During the trip, each day will have an experience at sea and an experience on land. Beginning in Varanasi, with short day trips to sights along the way, the cruise meanders the waters of the Ganges, stopping at World Heritage sites and ancient sites in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and in West Bengal for an in-depth look at its colonial influences and regional traditions. Sail-



ing through the largest mangrove forest in the world, the UNESCO-protected Sunderbans, the ship arrives in Bangladesh. Shopping from the floating markets of Barisal to Bagerhat, home to the famous 60-

domed mosque, to Sonargaon, the country's historic city. The journey continues from Dhaka to Jamuna in northern Bangladesh, turning east to return to India at Dhubri, embracing the Brahmaputra for the Assam

leg of the journey, sailing through wilderness and many sites culture along the way.

Explaining the wealth of experiences offered by the trip, Raj Singh adds, "Our guests visit Matiari,

where they see how brassware and textiles are handcrafted in the villages, and they walk the same site to archaeological sites that are over 2500 years old. We visit Vikramshila, one of the largest Buddhist universities alongside Nalanda and Bhagalpur for its centuries-old traditions of Tussar silk weaving, the fascinating colonial, Dutch and French influences and the architecture of Inner Bengal, the wild and unspoiled beauty across the border from Bangladesh to Bangladesh. India the Sunderbans, precious arts and crafts tours where guests can engage and converse with them - we have so carefully curated the entire trip, every stop and every experience.

A real insight into understanding this special region while exploring the river landscapes to the phenomenal that the revered enjoy the offerings of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra."

Annapurna Garimella, art historian and director of Antara Cruises, reflects on the artisans and crafts-

manship that lived along these ever-changing but seemingly eternal shores, adding: "Life and civilizations began along these rivers, and artistic expression is its strongest reflection of a culture."

The cruise explores so many of these facets, whether in food, textiles, architecture or agriculture. Navigating through this vast landscape is to immerse yourself in the culture of this country that we now call India."

Built in a mid-20th century modern style, the 18-suite Antara Ganga Vilas is a luxurious blend of refined structure and understated elegance. Each room is inspired by a color square painted by Bauhaus and Black Mountain teacher Josef Albers, and all fabrics, linens, furniture, and tableware are made in India, some even along the river. Large floor-to-ceiling sash windows offer enchanting river views throughout the ship's vast spaces, enhancing the feeling of walking inside while observing a moving river landscape. (IANSlife)

'STAR - GAZING'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 26, 2022

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon parallel Mercury on your solar return chart. You will get excellent results. Health will remain good but be careful about what you eat and drink. You need to be regular in your physical exercise schedule. Keep your cards close to your chest and don't reveal your secrets to anyone. Keep an eye on your rivals and enemies' activities as they will be quite active. You will get full support from your family members. You will get embroiled in some debate with elders. Students will study hard for exams. Your good thoughts will be beneficial for the common people. Your loved ones will arrive from somewhere and give you a lot of solace. This week for you!

Aries : (March 21 - April 20)

This week will be full of joy and cheer. You will remain devoted to your work and will finish your work in time. Your peers and bosses will have high expectations from you and you will disappoint none. You will also interact with lot of people and will be able to make new friends. You will be never sort of funds. Your income too will rise. Peace and harmony will prevail in family ties. There will be better understanding between husband and wife. You will get positive results in the work that you had been wanting to do since a long time. Your enemies and opponents will get active but will be unable to harm you. Money will come in. Results of examinations will come as per your expectations.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21)

Your efforts will bring in lot of money and your prestige and respect will increase. You will receive money that you had given as loan. Love birds will have an amazing time. You will understand the feelings of your partner. You will progress fast in your job. You will take vital and firm decisions relating to your business. There is also possibility of meeting some important persons. You will buy valuable items for your house. You may become victim of a conspiracy so you need to remain careful. Property related matters will entangle you but will get resolved easily. Students will take interest and focus in their studies. Most of your time will be spent in entertainment. There is a need to be cautious about problems in life.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21)

You will get marital bliss and happiness. The relationship between husband and wife will be very cordial. Both will understand the feelings of each other well. You will extend a hand of help towards a needy friend or relative. Foes and enemies will be active so you better watch out their intentions. You will suffer some losses in business hence make correct decisions. There will be tensions regarding the future and marriage of your child. You will be able to resolve it. You will also attend a party or function. The placement of Jupiter in your house of profession will enhance your luck. Your political sphere will become strong. You will make contact with new people. You will give maximum time to your family.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22)

Your luck will shine and people will understand you better. You will make a lasting impression on one and all. Your efforts will get recognized too. Your financial resources will open up. You will make use of your talent and also earn lot of money. You will get new job/business offers. You will get good news from some relative or friend. Negative thoughts will come to your mind. Your enemies will get defeated. There is no need to lose hope and get desperate. Success is waiting in the wings and is just round the corner. You will get the support of your partner in all spheres of life. You will also get the blessings and life lessons from your elders. There is a chance of promotion in your job.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23)

There will be major gains for you this week. Your business activities will gather momentum. You will establish contact with influential persons. You will be very busy in social/business activities. You will have monetary gains. You will also give time to your family. You will be happy in the company of your closest ones. You will get invited in marriage/birthday functions. There will be many achievements but you will be busy with your family members. Students will get success in competitive exams. You will be financially stable and secure. The misunderstanding that you were having with your bosses will come to an end. You will not come under the influence of third person. You will take your decisions intelligently and collectively with your trusted ones. You will put your best foot forward and do your best.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22)

You will get victory in court cases and government related matters. The marriage of a family member will get fixed.



Libra : (September 23 - October 23)

There will be lot of fun and frolic this week. You will be full of vigour and enthusiasm. You will have monetary gains. You will also get a chance to rise in your job/business. You will spend lot of time with your family. You will also get an opportunity to attend a marriage/birthday function. Happiness and profits will be in abundance. You will also take inspiration from someone and will easily achieve your objectives. Your efficiency and capability will improve. It is the time for achievements. There will be various activities in all directions. You will get your thoughts highlighted through the medium of writing. Your focus will be on beautification and decoration of your house. You will try to enhance your business by talking to people. You will be victorious in official matters.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22)

There will be something to cheer you up. You will get opportunities to earn lot of money. You can start a new project/work. You can make some travel plans too. You will get success in your business. Time will be the best for contact and meetings. You will gain full opportunities to gain profit. Married couple will be happy in married life. Your opponents will try to hurt you and to show you down also. Be careful in financial matters. It will be best time for students. You will take out time for entertainment and exercise. You will be a bit sensitive too. But God's blessings will be with you.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21)

The entire week will give excellent results. You will get lot of peace and happiness. You will take up new projects. Your enthusiasm will be high. These are the days to reap benefits. You will be praised by high officials in your company. More than your relatives, your colleagues and friends will support you. The advice of some special friend will be helpful. Love between life partners will increase. There will be small changes in your business. You will take financial decisions carefully. Your efforts will bring in excellent results. There will be focus on travels.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20)

It will be a peaceful time. Your attention will be focused on family and official matters. You will get success in your business/work. You will also feel that family is important for stability and success. You will have financial gains. The interaction with people will be beneficial. You will take the right decision with regard to marriage, romance, investment etc. Money wise you will get the best results. Your status will improve. Your children will follow you and your popularity will increase. The circumstances will be favorable for you. You will like to spend time with your family. You will like to help your friends and they will also in turn help you.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18)

It will be the time to acquire something good. You will enjoy a sudden change of luck. Things will start falling in place. You will cope up to the expectations of your bosses. Those students who are studying will complete their task nicely. You will get lot of money due to your achievements. You might also begin some new work. You will successfully earn money. You will receive good news. You will also become busy in everyday routine. You will also have the desire to learn something new. You will also get the benefits of your hard work. You will get double profits in business and you will be praised. You will enjoy yourself at the workplace.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20)

There are chances of success in your work. Planning and ideas will also be formed for higher education and children. You will receive awards for your hard work and efforts. Your entire focus will be on your business and work at the moment. You may plan to go out with your family. You will receive great results and profits in your business. You will also find the solutions to problems arising in your work with your wisdom and patience. You may also receive an expensive gift from someone close. You may also receive your struck money from somewhere. You will meet one of your old friends. You will be happy on remembering some old events.

Historians to decide when Agra was born



The Agra Municipal Corporation wants to celebrate the birthday of this great historical city with half-a-dozen spectacular monuments that draw millions of tourists round the year.

Three Mughal structures are world heritage monuments -- Fatehpur Sikri, Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal -- while two others, Et-maudaula and Sikandra, are in the pipeline.

The city of monuments is shortly to be declared a heritage city and a proposal is under consideration of the Supreme Court.

Agra Mayor Navin Jain has constituted a committee of "nine jewels" to decide on the date Agra city was born. The committee includes eminent historians, senior

mediapersons, and academics.

The task is not easy, as reliable historical documents give no clear indication how and when the city came into existence, and how it got its name.

Jain said Agra is a very ancient city with more than 40 Shiva temples, some as old as the Mahabharat.

Bateshwar town, which has 101 Shiva temples in a row along the bend of river Yamuna, was the seat of power during the reign of Vasudev, the father of Sri Krishna. If mythology is to be believed, Agra was 'Agrvan' (frontier forest), one of the 12 forests of Braj Mandal, the 'leela bhoomi' of Sri Krishna.

Some historians say Agra was part of the Kannauj empire of the

Chauhans, while another group claims Agra was a 'pargana' of the Bayana Nawab. Archaeological findings suggest Agra was the extension of the Mathura empire.

In 2004, some heritage conservationists and local hotels along with tourism bodies had planned grand celebrations to commemorate 500 years of the founding of Agra by Sikander Lodi in 1504. But due to a controversy, the plan was put off.

Some Hindutva historians claim that Agra got its name from sage Angira, some 2,000 years ago.

Jain hopes that once the date is decided, big celebrations could be organised. The city folks must take pride in their history and heritage. (IANSlife)

"Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance."

—George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

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States big and small

SPECULATIONS are rife that Prime Minister Modi and the ruling BJP are toying with the idea of a large-scale bifurcation of states. A proposal is to have around 50 states in place of the existing 28 states and 8 Union Territories -- the present clusters being minor and periodic improvements from what was prescribed in the 1956 state formation act. UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana got divided over time. Punjab, Haryana and the Union Territory of Chandigarh came into being in 1966. Delhi got a status change in 1991 but is not a full-fledged state.

While the state re-organization was executed in 1956 based on language frontiers, the situation more or less remains so except for the fact that the Hindi belt has different states and Telugu-speaking people have two states in the form of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh now. The Atal Behari Vajpayee term saw bifurcation of UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh with additional states emerging, like Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Yet, the dichotomy between states remains glaring. Uttar Pradesh, for instance, has a population of 20.5 crore, while the smallest state Goa, which got a status upgrade in 1987, has just around 18 lakh people. Maharashtra has a population of nearly 12 crore. Vajpayee started with a process that was not carried forward. State reorganization is not an easy task. There are bound to be protests from sections that feel they were the losers one way or the other. For instance, a grant of independent status to Mumbai will rob the rest of Maharashtra of the huge financial benefits they gain from the western metropolis. Yet, the people of Vidarbha region, which has a functional winter capital status by virtue of holding of the assembly session there in this season, will appreciate a full-fledged state status.

True, the protests can mostly be neutralized if a reorganization plan introduced for the sake of administrative convenience and equitable regional development is effected nationwide. This carries with it a strong message that will not be easy to challenge. What this requires is grit and determination on the part of those who govern the nation. A painstaking study before such an action is a must. The Opposition must be taken into confidence, unlike the scenarios in the past like the introduction of the farm reform legislation. The eight years of the Modi government have left most ailing areas of national life untouched. Several sectors cry for change, reorganization and reforms. The past two years of the Covid-induced lull cannot be the excuse for inaction in the long term.

U Daloi Manik Pakynteñ

By H H Mohrmen

U Kiang Nangbah was given a title 'the rebel Daloi' by the British, however U Kiang was also elected the Daloi by his followers. After the British annexed the Jaintia kingdom in the year 1835, the dalois of the different elekas who used to represent the king in the hill regions of the kingdom, automatically became the agents of the government. The British realized that there is already an existing system in place to govern the region and kept the office of the daloi for their own interests. Manik Pakynteñ who was the Daloi of eleka Jowai then, had to toe the British government line.

In the oral narrative Manik Pakynteñ was also called 'daloi Tyngker'. He was perhaps called daloi Tyngker because of his height and body which was

It is not only in the eleka Jowai that the rebels elected their own daloi because most of the dalois were already in league with the government. They did that in other elekas too because most of the dalois sided with the British. In the case of eleka Jowai U Kiang Nangbah was unanimously elected the daloi of the eleka by the rebels.

U Kiang by virtue of him belonging to the Sookpho Khadar Wyrnai clan, had the right to be elected as the daloi of eleka Jowai but although elected he was seen as the rebel daloi. While Manik was recognized as daloi of eleka Jowai and used by the British, U Kiang was not only recognized as a leader of the rebellion but he was their daloi. U Manik was

cleared the name of u daloi Manik Pakynteñ especially with regards to the source of information which led to the arrest of u Kiang Nangbah. Neither Dunsford nor Walcott named Manik Pakynteñ as the informer or co-conspirator with u Long Sutnga to provide the much needed information about u Kiang's health condition and his place of hiding where he was being treated for ill health. The correspondence has instead named the daloi Nartiang as u Long Sutnga's co-conspirator to provide the information which led to u Kiang being apprehended by the British. Oral narratives were not kind to daloi Tyngker.

In the letter No. 43 dated December 31, Dunsford said that U Kiang Nangbah when questioned as to the

forsook the cause he had championed and returned to the government to retain his position as the daloi of eleka Jowai.

In his statement to the Commission, U Kiang Nangbah cleared Daloi Manik Pakynteñ of all allegations that he had betrayed the former. But oral narratives allege that u daloi Tyngker with Simon Phareng were part of the conspiracy with Long Sutnga to betray Kiang Nangbah. In fact the information about u Kiang's hideout was shared to Sadlier by Long Sutnga at Nartiang and it was also the place where the conspiracy to capture him was hatched. U Manik was in Jowai and had nothing to do with it, but he had from the very beginning betrayed the rebellion by choosing to side with the British government. Simon Phareng who was alleged to

Meghalaya and the new bureaucracy

By Avner Pariat

On the May 27, 2022, Patricia Mukhim wrote a rather timely editorial, "Meghalaya Incorporated: Where are the shareholders?", in which she shone a light on the role played by the Bureaucracy in the mess called Meghalaya. This was something quite rare because the public generally thrives on blaming the politicians, and not the much vaunted IAS. Now, I must quickly say before anything else, that I am very grateful to the IAS, IES, ICS and other iterations of the civil services which this country has had. My own family's material and immaterial comforts are all owing to their inclination for and love of government service. For this I am grateful, but, again, I must say that Kong Patricia was not totally off the point when she decided to highlight the activities of certain IAS officers who run their Departments like a corporate entity.

One such officer who I have met a few times is Dr Vijay Kumar. In meetings, I always found him to be knowledgeable, modern and energetic—all admirable traits. As a young person myself, I look out for those qualities in people. I was very impressed by him. I suppose I was not the only one. Many of his staff hold him up to this same level of esteem. It is evident that the present Chief Minister thinks this way as well. Perhaps, because of this, Mr Vijay Kumar now holds sway over the following departments:-

Commissioner & Secretary for Finance Dept, Planning Dept, CM's Secretariat, Tourism Dept, Cooperation Dept, Sports & Youth Affairs Dept, Soil & Water Conservation Dept, and the Agriculture Dept. In addition to this, he is Director-General, MIE; Chairman, MSWC; Deputy Chief Executive Officer MBDA; Commissioner of Division, Garo Hills; CEO, MSSDS and Chairman, MSWDA. That is a lot of work to heap on one person's shoulder! (By the way, this information is from the Official Government of Meghalaya website.)

A cursory look shows that these are vital roles in any government. The Finance Dept itself is arguably the single most important department within any setup. This list also highlights how everything in the state, in effect, needs Mr Vijay Kumar's go-ahead in some way or form. Is it really humanly possible to hold on to so many portfolios and do them all justice? Why do we expect superhuman abilities from our IAS officers?

But this case, though strange in Meghalaya, is hardly an outlier. Today, across the country, there is a new breed of IAS officers who seem obsessed with turning the sarkari office into a corporate boardroom. It is, perhaps, associated with the consumerist cultures these individuals encounter in their own lives and respective societies. Or maybe it is a new component of their training at Mussoorie. In any case, this is happening throughout the country.

As part of the steady corporatisation of the Government, we have seen more and more IAS officers foster and favour agencies where they have a free hand, and where they are not encumbered by the political appointees and laid-back salaried staff who are ubiquitous in government. Agencies like MBMA, FOCUS, MIDFC, etc allow officials, like Mr Vijay Kumar, to exercise complete control without the interference of the political class. Now, this might be considered desirable given that political interference is usually detrimental and self-serving, but with no checks and balances, these agencies become too powerful for their own good. Most of them tap into Open Market Loans (World Bank, ADB) which are taken in the name of the state but which the state really has no say in, except for, say, a few

Cabinet ministers.

In my opinion, these agencies are a big cop-out and a let-down when we remind ourselves that one of the most important functions for any IAS officer is to REGULATE wayward activities in government departments. For instance, FOCUS cannot fix the gaps and pitfalls of the Agriculture and Horticulture departments, it can simply give a nice shine and polish to certain "success stories", but it has neither the mandate nor the authority to interfere in the Primary Sector. That right is reserved for the government department; Government of India does not recognise FOCUS, it recognises the government department in charge of that sector. Yes, the departments are filled with slow-coaches and nuisances, but I fear this escapism will be the downfall of these officials. Please Mr Vijay Kumar and others reading this, get thine hands dirty and clean up the mess in the departments; don't shy away from the muck. There is no need to always innovate, nor to re-invent the wheel. Being an "ordinary, old school" IAS officer might be boring but it is a vital task nonetheless.

Many people will be annoyed with me and will point to the hard work put in by these agencies as proof of their viability. I am in no doubt that a tremendous amount of hard-work goes into many of these agencies; but I am asking if the actual work is worth doing in the first place. I'm being philosophical. We all say that we are busy people; we run, run, run but is it actually useful work? Does it serve the greater good? I can sweat a lot in one day and sift through dense piles of data and give a wonderful summary and whatever else I wish to convey based on the data, but does it actually HELP PEOPLE? Does all this money which is being talked about actually reach the people at the last point of the last line on the last mile? Or is it still obscurantism by other means?

This government claims to be building 2 kilometres per day of road, but empty stomachs are more important, no? This government claims they are building epic infrastructure on a huge scale, but not one labourer has become a millionaire, only the NPP contractors seem happy. So I direct this question to the officials especially Mr Vijay Kumar: Are people becoming better off materially? Is poverty on the way to extinction in Meghalaya? If not, then we should halt all the "business" and review what it is that we must do to achieve these goals.

My uncle, WMS Pariat, served as an IAS officer for a very long time. He was very different from Mr Vijay Kumar in many ways. He was old-school. His track-record as an officer must be reviewed by unbiased persons unlike myself. But one thing I always remembered was that Mr Pariat always made time to meet people. He did not give his secretarial staff gate-keeping powers. It was not impossible to meet him even when he was Chief Secretary of the State. As Public Officials, IAS officers must meet people and not just their consultants; they need to be in the field not just the CM's Secretariat. I think the criticism around Mr Vijay Kumar is around this rather moot point. That not only is he super-powerful now (which should not be encouraged in a democracy) but that he is also super-inaccessible. We commend talent and ability but no man is an island. In closing, I want to say that this article was not written to offend anyone. I would gladly have said all of it in private if I were permitted to meet the person in question once in a while!

In his statement to the Commission, U Kiang Nangbah cleared Daloi Manik Pakynteñ of all allegations that he had betrayed the former. But oral narratives allege that u daloi Tyngker with Simon Phareng were part of the conspiracy with Long Sutnga to betray Kiang Nangbah. In fact the information about u Kiang's hideout was shared to Sadlier by Long Sutnga at Nartiang and it was also the place where the conspiracy to capture him was hatched.



without shape. 'Tyngker' means tall with an oversized body. U Manik Pakynteñ was one of the very popular names in the oral story about the Jaintia rebellion. There are many stories in the oral narrative which has connection with Manik but the most important story was the allegation that he along with Long Sutnga and Simon Phareng were involved in providing information to the British which led to the arrest of u Kiang Nangbah. It is also true that u Manik collaborated with the British and because the daloi sided with the government, the rebels decided to have their own daloi and u Kiang was their natural choice. The rebel U Kiang can also be called the daloi on the run.

blamed for imposing taxes on the locals and was responsible for the misunderstanding between the government and the people with regards to the unceremonious halt of the pastie (dance) at Ialong and confiscation of the swords and shields used for performing the dance. The situation is such that there were two dalois in the eleka during this particular time. U Manik was the daloi recognized by the government and u Kiang Nangbah was the daloi elected by the rebels and recognized by them as one.

In the oral narrative Manik was also blamed to be the co-conspirator along with U Long Sutnga who provided the British with the information about u Kiang Nangbah's hideout. However, the British correspondence

cause for his rebellion, took a sacred oath and attributed it to the Income Tax levied by the British as one of the reasons for the rebellion. He also said the interference of the British with their religious rites was the last straw that sparked the battle. Morton also said that U Kiang had stated that Manik Pakynteñ the duly recognized daloi of Jowai elaka said that he was directed by the Government to announce that they should no longer perform their religious ceremonies or burn their dead as they used to. U Manik also recommended that they do not pay any taxes and this compelled them to take the extreme recourse to fight against the government from the jungle. Sadly, u Manik daloi immediately

be one of the betrayers of u Kiang could not be traced.

At the end of the day u Manik Pakynteñ was just being what he was supposed to be, the agent of the British government. After the kingdom was annexed to the empire, the king was given a pension but the government still needed the services of the daloi to govern over the highlanders of the Jaintia kingdom. The daloi then became a useful link between the British government and the common people, apart from carrying on with tradition.

(This is another article in a series related to the Jaintia rebellion to mark the 160th anniversary of the execution of u Kiang Nangbah the leader of the rebellion on December 30, 2022)

More focus must be given to social science as it deals with welfare of society. Human life evolves around its social, political, economic, cultural and religious aspects. We cannot forget this.

Hearty thanks to Patricia Mukhim, Glen Kharkongor, Uma Purkayastha, Ms P. Toi and others for their eye-opening write-ups on these issues, especially in a state where it is said that women are placed in a high position. There is a saying in Sanskrit, "Striya Jotro Pujyonte, totro romyante debota," meaning "God is pleased in that place where women are respected." Hope Meghalaya will come out of this nightmare if we all work collectively, because where women suffer, children suffer automatically and society suffers as a whole. As a teacher of Meghalaya, I suffer when I see my students, the children and youths are suffering along with their mothers.

Yours etc.,
Reeta Ghosh
Shillong -4

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

Letters to the Editor

Stop this racism & xenophobia!

Editor, The recent incident wherein two students from Kerala were assaulted in a tea shop at a locality in Shillong yet again highlights the persecution of the non-tribals that is rampant and has been present in the state for as long as I can remember. All this overlaps with racism and xenophobia. It is vile. It is disturbing. Yet people of this State have lived in denial of this shameful reality for decades now. Xenophobic-driven shameful mistreatment of non-tribals has existed since the 1970s and not just with outsiders but even with local residents and citizens of the State as well. The persecution of non-tribals in our State is turning out to be subtle like a snub and blatant like a riot. As a citizen of Meghalaya it is embarrassing to see and hear of such incidents where non-tribals and outsiders are persecuted, bad-mouthed and beaten up for no reason. Thousands of students come here to study,

work. Imagine having to be constantly on guard and ever aware of the dangers lurking in public and online spaces. It's absurd. Also it's not just the outsiders that face this but the non-tribal insiders as well! Imagine having to live with the generational trauma of persecution.

On one hand - the Government is opening up the Tourism industry, where thousands of locals are getting employment and increasing their purchasing capacity by running various small scale and medium scale tourism driven enterprises and businesses. On the other hand, a section of the society is inclined to vile, xenophobic activities that are a hindrance to the overall economic development of the State. Such incidents will only deter tourists from outside the state to visit Meghalaya because of the fear psychosis.

We need to denounce violence and defeat it. This 'Shoh dkhar' and 'Beh Dkhar' attitude must end. There's an emphasis on using our voices to say that racism is not alright and will not be tolerated. Nothing has ever changed by being silent. We can all use our gentle but

firm voices, whether we are directly impacted or not. I have a voice, but it's a voice I want to use effectively to promote awareness and to gently move towards a society of tolerance. If this letter causes any discomfort or makes anyone defensive, please know that I wrote it as honestly and as mindfully as I could.

Yours etc.,
Manisha M Pala
Shillong.

Need for societal introspection

Editor, Your esteemed daily publishes many valuable write ups, news reports and letters to the editor regarding the incident of a father Jeofferson Jana murdering his own children. This incident has shaken the civil society of Meghalaya in general and Shillong in particular. Many right-thinking people have expressed their shock and anguish in the last few days. Violence against women and children in Meghalaya is increasing. This is a seri-

ous concern for all Meghalayans as Uma Purkayastha has rightly pointed out and it is not only confined to any particular community.

The question that arises is, 'Which society are we living in today, where a father 'The Rakshak' (protector), becomes 'The Vakshak' (killer /destroyer)? Human civilization has progressed but in some areas we have regressed. Family is the prime institution of civilised human society where father and mother are the protectors of their children. This bond develops with the feelings of security supported by trust, love and care.

After the intervention of the Chairperson, Meghalaya State Commission for Women, Ms Phidalia Toi, it is revealed that the killer father is an alcoholic. This is another matter of serious concern. Research will reveal that many crimes committed here are done under the influence of alcohol or drug abuse. New wine stores are coming up here, as the Government is dependent on the revenue from this source. Alcohol is available in every nook and corner. Easy availability of alcohol tempts people to

consume it. Now the Govt is also contemplating revenue generation from Casinos. At the end of the day women and children will suffer.

While agreeing that addiction is an illness and rehabilitation centres are there for their treatment. But post rehab when they return home, they are bogged down by the same environment of poverty, broken family, unemployment, peer pressure etc. This pushes them back to their old habits. Only a few problems are mentioned here. There are many more societal problems that need to be unearthed. The Social Welfare Department, Education Department, Health Department, Traditional and Religious Institutions, NGOs and right-thinking individuals across caste, creed and community must jointly work on these burning issues. The State and Central Women and Child Welfare Departments have special responsibility to address this societal crisis.

Merely shedding tears will not work. The root causes are to be identified and remedial measures suggested. Social sciences have been neglected so far due to excessive technological advancements.

"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

— T. S. Eliot

The Shillong Times

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Lawlessness and Police Response

THE incident of assault on young scholars from Kerala who are in Shillong on an internship with some NGO as part of their course, is a slur on the image of Meghalaya. But this is not a one-off incident. A particular locality in Shillong has seen a series of such targeted attacks on non-tribals who are either passing through the area or are there on work related agenda such as the maintenance of hospital equipment or to deliver online purchases. What is not understood is why the Police are unable to nab the culprits and if nabbed why they are released due to political pressure. This practice is a death knell to policing. But what comes under scrutiny here is the role of the Dorbar Shnong which asserts its authority on all matters of local governance from civic affairs to maintaining the rule of law within their jurisdiction. It is an unwritten code that police first have to inform the Rangbah Shnong (headman) before they enter any locality to nab any criminal element. It was this that had given a fillip to militancy in the past because militants that were holed up in particular localities were tipped off to make their escape before the police land up for their search and strike operations.

The problem with Meghalaya is the inability of its citizenry to call "crime" by its name. It's not possible for crime to be committed in a particular area as a matter of routine and that the culprits are not nabbed unless they have protection from powerful quarters. Ugly truths call for ugly terms. This congenital hatred for the non-tribal has been planted in the hearts and minds of the young early in their lives. An image of the non-tribal as someone who will pounce on the share of the tribal (jobs and education) has been the political plank of pressure groups that have catapulted a few politicians to the State Assembly. The demand for the Inner Line Permit by pressure groups is also built around the non-acceptance of a shared Indian identity and the need to insulate the tribe from outside influences.

However, what is a greater cause for concern is that many students and job aspirants from Meghalaya are today spread across the length and breadth of the country. These are tribal students with a competitive mindset. They dare to compete on a level playing field. These courageous young men and women might face the brunt of reverse racism when news gets around of how visitors to Meghalaya are treated. What is needed is firm handling of the situation which the Home Department seems to have lost its grip on. After all, the police take their orders from the top.

Tribal Health in India: Re-Presented by Others

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.

This quotation, from Karl Marx, referred to peasant consciousness in France during the mid-19th century. Quite far removed from its original context, the quotation has become an exemplar of many causes. The most notable uses have been by Edward Said in his seminal book "Orientalism" and in Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The former uses the quotation to characterize the mis-depiction of Eastern peoples by Western scholars, while the latter uses the same quotation to find resonance in subaltern movements, including feminism. Both these works allude to the influence of colonialism, so pervasive even today. In the current era, however, the purveyors of colonialism are mostly native.

Tribal health in India was the theme of a recent webinar, one of a series conducted by the South Asia Institute of Harvard University and the Lancet Citizens' Commission on Reimagining India's Health System. Lancet is a leading medical journal with an international outlook. The Commission, composed of medical academicians, corporate figures and health activists, plans to release a report by August 15, 2022, with a view to providing a boost to India's goal of Universal Health Coverage by 2030.

The panelists at the webinar included two tribal representatives, who presented their data, experiences and perspectives on tribal health. The commendable initiative to include tribal speakers was taken by Dr Thelma Narayan of Sochara, a prominent public health training and activist organization based in Bangalore. Such invitations are a rarity. Tribals are hardly ever called upon to speak at public fora or in expert committees that deliberate on tribal matters. In fact, they are often brought in only as ornaments to decorate such events, to beat a drum or sing in their colourful costumes. "The Adivasi Will Not Dance", a popular book published in 2016, is a satirical riposte to the assigned place of tribals in Indian society. The book, nominated for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2016, has been translated into many Indian and European languages.

Tribals are not a pocket community

There are 105 million tribals in India, about 8.5% of the population. If it was a country, it would be the 14th largest country in the world, about the size of the Philippines or Egypt, larger than any country in Europe, apart from Russia. Indeed, if you put together the 350 million indigenous peoples of the world, with whom we share many health and other social characteristics, it would be the third largest country after China and India.

Even seventy-five years after Independence, this large segment of the population continues to suffer from dismal health indices. While improvements may be cited, the gap between tribal and non-tribal populations has widened. Tribal infant mortality has halved over the last 25 years, but the gap with other social groups has increased. Malnutrition during pregnancy and childhood remain very high, along with high prevalence of communicable diseases like malaria and TB, and non-communicable diseases such as cancer, mental illness and substance abuse. A major problem is teenage pregnancy and high fertility rate, yet sexual health and sex education are hardly mentioned.

The expert committee report on Tribal Health in India, published in 2018, has many insightful observations. The report asks what it calls a glaring question: "Nearly seven decades after Independence, why do the tribal people still suffer from inequity in health and health care compared to others?" The report makes three admissions: Tribal health is abysmally poor, separate data sets are not collected, and tribal culture is not on the health radar.

Data and aggregated data
That the lack of sufficient data on indigenous health has been a limitation to developing appropriate strategies and programs has been noted by Lancet in 2009. Other researchers have pointed out that national or state-wise data are not generally disaggregated for tribal populations and data from tribal majority states include non-tribals.

Generally any discussion on health begins with looking at data. If one is considering tribal or indigenous health, there is compiled data on the WHO website, or in special issues such as what Lancet brought out in 2009 and 2016.

Then there is national data in the National Family Health Surveys and the National Sample Surveys.

Aggregated data of course serves its own function of informing national policy, special health schemes and budgetary allocations. This is where the usefulness generally ends. Aggregated data is a big homogenizer. The more than hundred million tribals in India are very different in culture, social structure, and economic capacity. While it is sometimes considered that all tribals suffer from low health indices, this is not always true. For example, among the hill tribes of Northeast India, the Mizo tribe ranks near the top of the country, but our state languishes at the bottom. If we attempt to take aggregated data and apply it to a village, there may be a misfit.

Cultural unfamiliarity
The Tribal Health Report says "A lack of understanding of tribal culture and an imposition of schemes and mechanisms that are culturally alien to the tribal people, have exacerbated the problem." However, under the ten challenges outlined in the report, cultural understanding is not mentioned.

For a researcher, counselor or health worker, data on health challenges are best obtained by sitting around the fireplace, sharing a cup of tea, and for women researchers, talking about children. Health and well-being begin with cultural comfort. Data collection needs to go beyond the one-on-one interaction of a survey. We are a collective society.

Culture permeates mental health. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual DSM, the bible of mental health included cultural distress only in its fifth edition (2013) and the WHO International Classification of Diseases listed cultural syndromes only in its 10th edition (2016). The Tribal Health Report calls mental health the third most important burden, but if we don't take cognizance of cultural factors, we will hardly make a dent in mental health.

What do we need?
We need focused community-specific strategies that concentrate on flagship health problems. Each problem must be taken alongside its social and cultural factors. For example, antenatal care must address single mothers, abandonment of women and the customs that permit these.

Malnutrition in children must be taken along with poverty, loss of traditional diets, and deforestation which have depleted wild edibles, still collected by one-third of the rural population.

The key to unlocking the dilemma of poor tribal health is culture. No doubt poverty and other factors need to come in, but you can trace many problems to the by-passing of culture. They are a few pockets of tribal health success such as Gadchiroli, Bissamcutack and Gudalur, which demonstrate a cultural approach, but these are just a few islands in the ocean of tribal health misery.

Neglect of tribal agency
A member of the audience at the webinar asked the question of whether "The term 'security' in tribal health security would mean elements of force, as in being forced to test for Covid and get vaccinated, 'surveillance', as in being surveyed for malaria-blanket screening and TB-active case finding, and 'prescriptive practicing', as in being asked to follow remedies that are culturally acontextual or run counter to the adivasi way of life." He went on to say that "This in itself is at odds with the 'coverage' part of Universal Health Coverage which assumes that all Adivasi people would get insurance cards and then access treatment in (pre-prepared) packages." So the question on the table is, "How can we build in elements of agency and autonomy so that tribal peoples can co-participate in discourses that pertain to their own situation, rather than being represented by the state establishment, its policy actors and knowledge generators."

At the webinar we were shown an inscription by Prof Amartya Sen, praising the Tribal Health Report. The remarks of the eminent and empathetic Nobel Prize winner, himself a champion of health equity, are much appreciated, but it might have been more meaningful to have obtained the imprimatur of the tribal community for a report on their own health. The 12-member expert committee contained only two tribals. Nehru's Panch Sheel for tribal development included the dictum that the "people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them". Perhaps we don't need to be handheld, shepherd or spoken for any more. Maybe we can write our own script.

Prospects for India in a World Heading to Stagflation

By Ajit Ranade

Germany is the current chair of the group of seven richest nations called G7. This group is meeting in the Bavarian Alps, hosted by the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz who took charge just six months ago after Angela Merkel's tenure of sixteen years. India is an invitee to the meeting along with Indonesia, Argentina, Senegal and South Africa. Even though the agenda for the meeting covers many topics like food security, health, climate change, terrorism, gender equality and even democracy, clearly the most important worry on everyone's minds will be the war in Ukraine and its impact on the world economy. Prime Minister Modi who is attending, tweeted that he looks forward to interacting with world leaders, but he too would like to gauge the international mood on the economy. India is very vulnerable being dependent on import of energy, mainly crude oil. Oil prices have remained stubbornly high, and are not likely to come down. India wants to take advantage of a steep discount being offered by Russia on its oil exports. In doing so it will earn the ire of all the members of G7, who want a complete boycott of Russia, in order to put economic pressure on the country to withdraw from Ukraine.

But Germany, and other west European nations are learning the hard way how

wan, Ladakh. Imports from China into India continue to soar, and for the third year in a row, Indo-China trade will grow strongly.

Meanwhile the global economic outlook continues to become gloomier. The World Bank recently reduced its global growth forecast for this year, from 4.1 to 2.9 percent. That is a downgrade of 1.2 percentage points, which translates to a lower income of trillions of dollars. Both the U.S. and Europe are expected to go into recession, i.e. decline in GDP for two consecutive quarters. India's growth forecast too has been reduced by one or two percent by many economists. That translates into reduced national income of about 3 to 4 lakh crores, and perhaps 5 to 8 million fewer jobs. India is counting on a 'vigorous growth in exports for next year too, to reach closer to 500 billion dollars in merchandise exports. But that would need the world economy to be in better shape than what seems to be the case.

Since most economies are facing very high inflation (forty year high in the U.S., thirty-year high in India for wholesale price index inflation, record high in U.K.), most central banks are increasing the interest rates and tightening money supply. This tightening is causing investors, especially those in stock markets, or private equity funding future unicorns and startups, or

"In this awkward geopolitical position, some people are questioning the wisdom of erstwhile, and much venerated leader Angela Merkel, during whose long tenure, Germany's energy embrace with Russia became tighter. Now Germany has started to ration the supply of gas causing much hardship."

much energy dependence they have on Russia, whose oil export and particularly gas pipelines have become Europe's lifeline. Switching to coal-based energy is not easy nor desirable. In this awkward geopolitical position, some people are questioning the wisdom of erstwhile, and much venerated leader Angela Merkel, during whose long tenure, Germany's energy embrace with Russia became tighter. Now Germany has started to ration the supply of gas causing much hardship.

Apart from energy, even food prices are at a record high, because of the Ukraine conflict. The inflation is also affecting other consumer items and producer inputs. One additional reason for persistent inflation is due to shortages created by the lockdowns in China. During the recent and new outbreak of covid, possibly a fourth or fifth wave, China adopted a zero-covid policy, imposing very harsh lockdowns even in big cities like Shanghai. This has caused the ports in China to be clogged by ships bound for the west await their consignments.

As a consequence, inflation and shortages in western economies are being blamed on Russia and China for separate reasons. And of course, both President Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping are not invited to the G7 summit. The G7 summit is also determined to show a unified front of all democracies to counter the actions and stance of Russia and China. But putting up this show of unification is not easy. For instance, India wants to have the freedom to import cheaper oil from Russia and will simply not join any call for boycott or blockade. After all Russia has always been a very dependable ally in the supply of military hardware, technology and support for several decades. Similarly, India has been conducting several rounds of high-level talks with China (fifteen and counting) to sort out border disputes, after the bloodshed and deaths in Gal-

hedge funds, to become risk averse. The foreign portfolio investors have pulled 40 billion dollars out of India in the past six months. No wonder the stock market has crashed. The much-celebrated initial public offering of the Life Insurance Corporation has seen its stock price come down and value erosion of nearly 1.2 lakh crore rupees. Much of this is because of foreign and global investor sentiment. Even the domestic retail investors in India, whose systematic investment plans (SIP) used to pour ten or twenty thousand crores into the stock market every month, are now reducing their participation.

The world is heading to stagflation, and India will not remain immune from the effect. It must pull itself up on the strength of domestic demand and fiscal support. Money supply is getting tightened for now but can provide some relief if inflation eases. A good monsoon is badly needed. As of now the June rainfall is barely one fourth of the long-term average, i.e., normal monsoon. To add to all this, the political instability in a large, industrialised State like Maharashtra is not helping. Instability means inaction or even paralysis in decision making, since policy makers are distracted in tackling the political situation. Private sector investors in new factories, new businesses, in housing and other consumer industries might also prefer to wait and watch. All this adds to the sluggish growth environment. However, compared to the western economies which are entering a recession, India will have some positive growth, but perhaps not as high as needed. That is of course small comfort for a developing economy, for job creation and growth which is imperative. Policy makers have a tough time ahead in the next six to twelve months.

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

Letters to the Editor

On POC SO cases and respondents

Editor,
Regarding POC SO cases, there are systems in place that have facilitated prompt action against perpetrators and all required assistance for children who have been abused. There are the District Child Protection Units in the 11 Districts of the State, with the District Child Protection Officers (DCPO) in charge and other functionaries of the Social Welfare Department looking after the welfare of Children. The Child Welfare Committees (CWC) is the final authority to dispose of cases for the care, protection, treatment and rehabilitation of Children as well as to provide for their basic needs and protection of their Rights. The District Child Protection Officer is the Member Secretary of the CWC in the respective Districts. The other active partners in the Child Protection Services are the Police Department. Feedback from all the DCPO's of 11 Districts affirm that they have a close working relation with the Police.

The Police personnel have been prompt in responding to and co-operating with the DCPO's at all levels. The police are actively involved as mandated in the POC SO Act. The coordination between the DCPO and the CWC is fairly smooth. The issue that often presents itself is the delay in imme-

diately reporting cases to the CWCs. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) are not often adhered to by newly inducted Officers. Transfers of Investigating Officers in the midst of investigation hampers and delays the investigation and disrupts the established rapport between the Social Welfare Officers and the Police.

There is a felt need to constantly sensitize and upgrade the skill sets of Police personnel regarding the POC SO and the Juvenile Justice Acts. A word of appreciation to other stakeholders besides Social Welfare Officers and Police personnel and to the Press and concerned citizens who are prompt in reporting to the Commission any untoward incident and violations relating to Child Rights and Child Abuse.

Yours etc.,
Iamon M. Syiem,
Chairperson, Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.
Via email

Need to revisit State Reservation Policy

Editor,
It is understood that tinkering with the State Reservation Policy is like shaking a hornet's nest and no one wants to be bitten by hornets. Kudos to the Meghalaya High Court which literally forced the State Govt. to come up with the Roster

System in order to implement the Policy. It is common knowledge that this is a complicated matter and not that easy. Moreover, it will satisfy no one. There are simmering against the Roster System. I agree with late P.A. Sangma Ex-CM who proposed doing away with the Reservation Policy. He believed that our students can compete with the rest of India. Many are employed in the metros on merit. Someone had remarked that Sangma was ahead of his time. The time is right now.

After 50 years of statehood our students still want to be cocooned in their mother's nest. It's time to stretch out our wings and fly in the free air of competition. Let us reserve 15% for People with Disabilities (PWD) and permanent non-tribal residents of the state. The rest 85% will be open competition purely on merit, no manipulation, no white ink and no back door entry. We shall get the best and at the same time save professional seats which were abandoned halfway by those students who have no capacity but got selected by the faulty reservation system.

To be fair and impartial, examinations and tests should be outsourced to reputed testing agencies outside the state. With the latest testing techniques using Multi Choice Questions (MCQ) they test not only book knowledge but attitude and decision making capability like the GRE, NEET etc. Personal interview may perhaps

be necessary in case of a tie. This will also cut the time frame in job recruitment. One may argue that this will advantage the urban students. Studies have shown that rural students in recent years have excelled and many are Master's Degree holders and Ph.Ds. When the system is fair, unbiased and above board, no one will object. In fact all will welcome when at long last merit is recognized and takes centre-stage.

Yours etc.,
Torist Mark,
Via email

BSNL's pathetic service

Editor,
For the past one month the FTTH internet system in Chandmari, Tura which is maintained by BSNL Tura has been highly erratic. The reason for this poor connectivity is that whenever there are power cuts which happens a lot frequently due to the inclement weather, the internet connection also gets disrupted. The backup system is supposed to kick in automatically, but since the BSNL Tura has failed to replace the batteries which are as good as dead, the internet system is starved of power and the FTTH system collapses.

The BSNL office in Tura has been approached to replace the damaged batteries, but telling the people concerned is a sheer waste of time. Nothing gets done. The department gets cracking

only after a show of strength is made or somebody takes the law into his own hands. The BSNL faithfully issues bills each month but it's service is despicable. Most of the officers and employees lack pride in their work except for a handful of dedicated line men. The majority of them are deadwood.

When is this Central Govt department going deliver satisfactory service to the citizens of Garo Hills? I would like an official response to this letter from the BSNL (Tura) officer.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone D'Brass
Tura

Political Game - Changers

Editor,
The politics of Meghalaya calls for game-changers, as many players are already there on the field. The state's citizens believe it is time to emphasize the youth's abilities in the game of politics derived from their training, skills, fairness, determination, talent and responsibility. I pray that people recognize the youth as political game-changers and that citizens assume their authority in a democracy to elect youth. People have noticed the problems of navigating political decisions which lead to governance failure in actual development. Youth should underscore the need for "citizen involvement" or "citizen engagement." Placing the needs of the people first will have a significant

impact on society. It is a major catalyst for change and transforms the connection between the government and the governed. A thoughtful youth makes it possible for the two to collaborate in a novel partnership to translate political campaign pledges into practical transformation for progress in all its forms.

For game-changers, politics is not primarily about having money or power. The present youth's mentality is not what normally used to be. Today they intend to cause a socio-political shift. The only political strategy that will last in the current scenario is "politics-by-consent" instead of "politics-by-force" or "politics-by-money." We hope that citizens of the state would encourage the youth to practice openness, integrity, attentiveness, availability, and tolerance as the ingredients for radically changing the game of politics in the state. People will serve genuine leaders through auto-suggestion due to their readiness to serve other humans; it is what they deserve. Politics is about caring for the constituents and not just commanding them. Society is more noteworthy than a position that one holds in as a perks of political office.

Yours, etc.
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong-2

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*"Struggle is a never ending process.
Freedom is never really won, you earn
it and win it in every generation."*

— Coretta Scott King

The Shillong Times

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Reliance, Gen-Next

INDIA'S top business brand, Reliance Industries, is effecting a generational change. At age 65, Mukesh Ambani has stepped aside as chairman of the Board of Jio Infocomm Ltd and installed his son Akash there. The message is loud and clear: that new blood is vital for the global conglomerate's forward march. Having set the ball rolling, Reliance can be trusted to carry forward the process of reinvention in a more sweeping manner as time passes. Dynamism is what takes an enterprise forward; the Reliance Industries that was a relatively new entrant in the business horizon, starting in 1973, diversified from textiles to petrochemicals to natural gas, retail, and telecommunications in a span of half a century. It was the first Indian company to cross the 100 billion dollar mark in terms of revenue earned. The Reliance empire split in 2005 when Mukesh and Anil parted ways. Anil Ambani was the first to venture into the telecommunications sector but burnt his fingers. However, this did not hurt the Reliance brand.

The dynamism with which the Reliance Industries function under Mukesh Ambani is a continuation of what founder Dhirubhai Ambani had inspired the entity from its very start, from a tiny two-room apartment in South Mumbai. He kept his sons on both his sides from then on, forming a threesome that wove a success story on the lines of a fairy tale. What the Ambanis, and now the Adanis, have been accused of are their close and perhaps questionable engagements with the powers-that-be. Fact is, large numbers of Indian businesses grew and thrived by virtue of their closeness to the various governments. The socialist mindset in India, since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, was anti-enterprise. India suffered as a result. It was only after the Liberalization since the early 1990s that Indian businesses began growing fast and making a mark in the global arena. Communist China did precisely this; and it encourages private enterprise that had been frowned upon during the Mao Zedong era. China learned lessons from capitalism, effected a turnaround in its national economy and is on track to emerge as the world's largest economy.

Companies in the growth mode know the importance of a generational change. Businesses cannot hold themselves on to archaic styles; they need to constantly improve and reinvent. It's only natural that Mukesh Ambani has begun the process of a generational change. A message from this must reach India's political class too. Old hats must step aside and give a chance to the next generation that's in wait. Else, they would only be doing a disservice to the nation.

Letters to the Editor

Understanding what drives addiction

Editor
I watched a little bit of your YouTube presentation on the drug menace in Meghalaya. Your persistent question on what actually causes addiction was great. But the answers, I thought, were typically modern — too scientific and external, more about brain and body — in short, covering everything but the soul of the addict — especially his loss of inwardness and faith in his powers of self-control. If science alone could explain addiction, then addiction would have been endemic to human nature and visible in all generations. But that is not the case, right? We are not our bodies, and certainly not our brains alone. Consciousness and the soul cannot be explained in terms of the brain alone.

So what makes an individual transition from mere

desire, to addiction? I have a different explanation. I think it is the terrible nihilism of our times and its chief consequences — which are, loss of inwardness, lack of meaning in life, loss of faith in our powers of self-control, etc. Succumbing to the appetites, without boundaries imposed by self-control, leads to a devastating loss of self — a self-prone to self-destructiveness.

We all have desires. But we do not become addicts. Many young people have a lot of pain in their hearts. Loss of faith and genuine belief in a higher being, makes them deal with pain through addictive forms of self-destruction. Human nature, unless redeemed by self-control, is self-destructive.

So maybe we need more than just sympathy. Here in Northwest Indiana I see this regime of sympathy (nothing else) as really devastating to the recovery process. Recovering addicts, I am sure, have more faith in therapy than in themselves. This is a tragedy

In the backdrop of looming unemployment in the country, recent available data reveals that in 2019 and 2020, vacancies in Central agencies, excluding Armed forces, have touched 10 lakh, over double from previous four years. In 2020, there were nearly 8.9 lakh civilian vacancies in Central government and another 1.1 lakh in Central forces that come under Home Ministry, while in 2019 the unfilled positions were over 10 lakh. From 4.7 lakh in 2016, vacancies crossed 7 lakh in 2018 and 10 lakh in 2019. These vacancies saw a steady increase from 5% in 2001 to 16.2% in 2013 but dipped below 10% in 2015 and 2016 and then increased sharply to cross 20% in 2019 and 2020.

The government had informed Rajya Sabha that there were an estimated 8.72 lakh vacancies in various Central ministries and departments as on March 1, 2020, in respect of regular civilian employees. MoS Personnel also claimed 2.65 lakh Central government posts had been filled up between 2018-19 and 2020-21 through recruitment agencies like SSC, the UPSC and Railway Recruitment Boards.

Amidst this bleak scenario, the government recently announced its decision to recruit 10 lakh people in Central government departments and ministries on 'mission mode' by December 2023, a deadline close to Lok Sabha elections. The initiative for hiring has come from the Prime Minister himself. It is understood that nearly 70% of the hiring will be done by Home Ministry in paramilitary and police forces, railway ministry for technical and non-technical staff, education and health ministries for faculty and non-faculty staff, postal department and defence ministry.

Additionally, the government announced 'Agnipath' scheme wherein soldiers will be recruited in the Army, Air Force and Navy on a short-term contractual basis. The idea being to hire 46,000 Agniveers of which 34,000 will leave service after four years with lumpsum benefits of Rs 11 lakh. The ultimate aim is to have regular soldiers and Agniveers in a 50:50 ratio. This will reduce their average age from 32 years to 26, a huge improvement since younger soldiers are fitter and tougher. This new approach may not be limited to the 1.2 million Armed service personnel but the para-military and civilian security forces too.

Experts fear that demolishing so many gun trained youngsters in an era of high unemployment may lead them into crime, terrorism

or other forms of violence. This is not without reason and must be seriously considered as Agniveers' future will be entirely uncertain. Though the aim of the government is to cut the ballooning salary and pension bill, the scheme has come in for criticism from all quarters. Several senior retired Army personnel have observed that keeping in view the requirements of the Armed forces as well problems of unemployment and underemployment, economic considerations can't be the sole criterion.



Military life and career can't be evaluated from money saved to the exchequer.

Major General Satbir Singh (retd) said the scheme will adversely affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the military as it was not in keeping with the erstwhile military tradition and ethos. A retired brigadier pointed there was no rationale behind doing away with the age-old established practice

"Experts fear that demolishing so many gun trained youngsters in an era of high unemployment may lead them into crime, terrorism or other forms of violence. This is not without reason and must be seriously considered as Agniveers' future will be entirely uncertain. Though the aim of the government is to cut the ballooning salary and pension bill, the scheme has come in for criticism from all quarters."

in recruiting soldiers: "This Agnipath scheme is going to destroy the single-class regiments like Rajput Regiment, Sikh Regiment, Jat Regiment, Gorkha Rifles etc."

Thus, it's quite natural that youngsters, hoping to get into the Armed forces, are understandably angry with Agnipath post four years, as unemployment looms large. The government may need to re-consider the entire issue and fix tenure of these Agniveers to say 7 years that was there till 1977. Moreover, at least 40 to 50% should be the retention ratio.

development challenge that the country faces. While the link between economic and job growth is well-recognised, uncertainties remain. Experts believe that more jobs needs to be created by new, young and small enterprises or large/established firms? Secondly, will more jobs be created in mega cities or Tier 2/3 cities? And, thirdly, how will the fourth industrial revolution and artificial intelligence impact job creation?

India also still has one of the lowest entrepreneurship rates in the world for its stage of development. What

Employment Drive

No short cut, plan long term

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

can promote entrepreneurship? Improving the business climate, less regulation, lower taxes, and scaling up investments in physical and human infrastructure are seen as factors that drive entrepreneurship even in developed countries.

Empirical evidence from districts suggests that anticipation of abnormally high returns on investment, less regulation and business environment are not key drivers of entrepreneurship. The critical factors are investments in human and physical infrastructure. Districts that have improved their infrastructure, provided a supportive industrial structure for input and output markets, and those that have small local suppliers have shown a faster growth rate in entrepreneurship and jobs.

This pattern is seen in both the manufacturing and service sectors. Urbanisation and job growth moved in tandem in early 1990s, but this changed during the last decade. Mega cities and their outskirts have become too costly, forcing manufacturing enterprises to move to Tier 2/3 cities to remain competitive. Unfortunately, India's spatial development process has been too slow to accommodate the transition of manufacturing hubs to medium-size cities.

Questions arise whether the fourth industrial revolution has impacted the pace of job creation in India? Unlike China, which has been a formidable exporter of manufactured goods, India has acquired a global reputation for exporting services. It has leapfrogged the manufacturing sector, going straight from agriculture into services — a path which offers hope to late-comers to economic development.

Besides, due to its cost advantage, India can export healthcare services in a big way. Setting up educational institutions and strengthening existing ones can help create a large number of jobs down the line, such as in leisure, arts/entertainment and housing. Computer scientists/engineers, IT administrators, architects, carpenters, plumbers, construction workers, and machinery operators will continue to be absorbed in large numbers. While energy and climate change may too create some jobs, urban India will continue to absorb a large number of domestic workers, both men and women.

To create 100 million additional jobs is a tall order. Raising entrepreneurship, investments in human and physical infrastructure are policies which need top priority. Short-term goals may help win elections, but not the country. —INFA

Let us be the change we want to see!!

By O. R. Shallam

After weeks of incessant rains that caused rivers and streams across the state to burst out causing havoc and mayhem destroying life and property throughout the state, the level of water bodies has been pumped up and risen way beyond the normal level. However, a day after the weather pushed back to normal the Office of the MeECL is all set for the load shedding or power regulation in the town and its surrounding areas. As a layman I totally fail to understand how when there is less rainfall that causes rivers to shrink away from the desired level, there will be load shedding because of a power shortage and whereas during this time load shedding is because the river level is way beyond normal. However, those reasons may be too basic for the consequences we face. Therefore, on careful collection of all the facts

ing. From Secondary to Higher Secondary schools and even in Sub-Divisions and District levels, all Heads are being deputed or appointed on officiating basis for reasons best known to the Department. Well-experienced, skilled and intellectually brilliant and deserving in-services candidates are being discriminated against and deprived of their right to being promoted as this Government feels that they do not meet the criteria. Hence, officiating basis is the new method the Government has invented for the personal gain of those in power. Reforms and policies within the Department seem to be dictated and controlled by the Powerful.

Now the monsoons have just lasted a day or two, however it has exposed the government's false development in terms of the quality of roads. Internal roads



and figures, it was revealed that the Generator Stage IV Power Station at Nongkhylen which is of 30 MW has been out of order since 2019. Further, the 30MW Generator Stage III Power Station at Kyrdemkulai is non-functional since 2021.

It is to be noted, that at both stages the generators are left unrepaired by the Power Department ever since. To add to the ongoing trouble, it was learnt that the 42 MW Power machine at Leshka Power Station has been out of commission

in every nook and corner of the region and the state itself are devastated, while maintenance and repairing work had been done just a few months ago. Today the roads are worn and torn and full of potholes as large as a mini ponds, disrupting the traffic flow, causing road accidents and most importantly proves risky to pedestrians and school going children commuting daily on these roads. What has the PWD been doing all this time while repairing the roads? Filling the holes with soil

"It is to be noted, that at both stages the generators are left unrepaired by the Power Department ever since. To add to the ongoing trouble, it was learnt that the 42 MW Power machine at Leshka Power Station has been out of commission since mid June 2022. So to summarise, the State unnecessarily loses a total of 102 MW power during the rainy season and that too with rivers at their maximum capacity."

since mid June 2022. So to summarise, the State unnecessarily loses a total of 102 MW power during the rainy season and that too with rivers at their maximum capacity. So, how do we blame for this mess?

Mr. Power Minister, are you aware of the figures mentioned above? Mr. Chief Minister are there any other new projects or ventures your Government plans to announce while the existing development gives us nothing but issues and problems?

Let us take a look at the recent HSSLC and SSLC results recently declared by MBOSE. Everything went fine but the fact that Government schools are out of the top 20 (Twenty) list in both the examinations calls for serious introspection. Why and how this has happened calls for an explanation from our Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui. Ironically, while all the Heads of Government Institutions are appointed on a permanent basis, teachers are a deputed and appointed as "officiating." This has become the latest trend the Education Department is implement-

and pebbles at the most and giving the contractor the utmost liberty to carry out the repair work at his/her own free will without proper supervision?

From garbage issues to power cuts, to sub-standard roads, education and healthcare services, Jaintia hills region is one which has become a victim to this government's exploitative methods in the name of development. What have all the seven (?) MLAs representing us been doing? Are you chosen by the people to simply get busy inaugurating granite stones while boosting your own personal businesses?

To conclude, I appeal to all the voters from Jaintia Hills region to wisely and responsibly exercise their franchise while taking the final decision of who to choose to represent us in 2023. We certainly do not want to remain backward in terms of progress and development. So, let's stop choosing politicians or persons who simply speak for themselves and let their own business gains. Let's bring a new change in the interest of development of the region. Only then will we prevail.

a lot of inconvenience to people, particularly the ones who are working from home for private companies. When there is darkness, one can buy candles or even have a solar light. However, when there is no connectivity, the only solution will be to get an inverter that not all can afford. We hope that the Power Department will empathise with what the citizens are going through and resolve the issue at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Genia Dohling,
Shillong — 3

NEHU fails its students yet again

Editor,
It is with great distaste and disgust that I am writing this letter, to let the public know of the prevailing covid scare in NEHU, Shillong. We are all aware of the VC testing Covid positive post Yoga Day events after which many students from

the same Yoga Day celebrations have developed symptoms and have been asked to get tested. My niece too had been feeling unwell and we, hailing from Silchar, Assam have been at our wits end on how to offer our support given the recent deluge in the Barak Valley. Her parents, my brother, in particular has not even been told of the prevailing situation in NEHU due to his hypertension. What compels me to write this letter is, how can a university in the 21st century and with the reputation of being North East's highest seat of learning have a leader with utmost disregard for Covid protocols and social distancing? If he was symptomatic and had been feeling unwell, with what state of mind did he attend the Yoga Day observance by putting at risk the lives of hundreds of students and indirectly making their families suffer too during the already tense times of flooding and property losses? It appears that a photo-ops is more important for the VC instead of making

sure that his students who have no access to humongous reimbursements and hospital care which Central Government officials are used to, are not exposed to the risk of Covid.

This is a total administrative failure on the part of NEHU to deal with the pandemic which is far from over. When students are asked to return negative RT-PCR results when returning to hostels, why can't the Vice-Chancellor not be asked for the same given his country-trotting escapades as reported in different media? I think the entire system of Covid handling, especially of NEHU and the State Government needs a relook given this disastrously cataclysmic approach of a "VIP Centric" Covid culture.

Yours etc.,
A Deka
Silchar, Assam.

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"Why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than the imagination when awake?"

— Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times

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Ad-hoc Teachers in Grave Distress

THAT about eight thousand ad-hoc teachers of Meghalaya literally had to rough up and sleep on the streets in front of the State Secretariat to raise the consciousness of not just the MDA Government but the civil society as well, speaks of a collapse of conscience among those governing the state and of the Education Department in particular. True this government has inherited the problem of payment of salaries to ad-hoc teachers from the past but the role of any government is not to blame the past but to address the problems here and now. All that the teachers are demanding is a hike in salaries from what they are getting at present to Rs 18,000 a month with 5% increment a year which is Rs barely Rs 900.

On Teachers Day, empty tributes are paid to teachers which are forgotten the very next day. Yet teachers are what build the minds of several generation of youth who now assume leadership positions in politics, academics, law, bureaucracy and many other professions. Their first introduction into the world of books and knowledge gathering was through their teachers. Yet these same students who now occupy important positions in government are unable to resolve this pernicious problem that has plagued the teachers of Meghalaya for many decades now. Initially the Primary Schools were managed by the District Councils which failed to pay their salaries. Teachers protested and later the administration of Primary Schools devolved to the State Government. Mr PA Sangma as Chief Minister had evolved a scheme of taxing a certain percentage from fuel and part of the royalty from limestone and coal and to put the amount as salaries for teachers. Many of the industries in Meghalaya could have been taxed with a certain percentage to supplement the teachers' salaries. In fact, the State Government has to use its wisdom and discretion to raise taxes on some luxury items and put that to good use by paying teachers better.

Rs 18,000 a month is just a small fraction, perhaps, one tenth of a bureaucrat's take-home salary or that of a teacher in a University. Why should there be so much disparity in salaries between those that build minds and futures and those that now govern over them. It just shows that there is not much thinking in the government. Why should the cabinet break its head over naming streets and not over how to raise revenue for paying teachers. That the matter could not be solved over three cabinet meetings makes us wonder whether the ministers even had their thinking caps on at the time of deliberation. Meghalaya is truly at the crossroads and primary education is set to suffer a major blow.

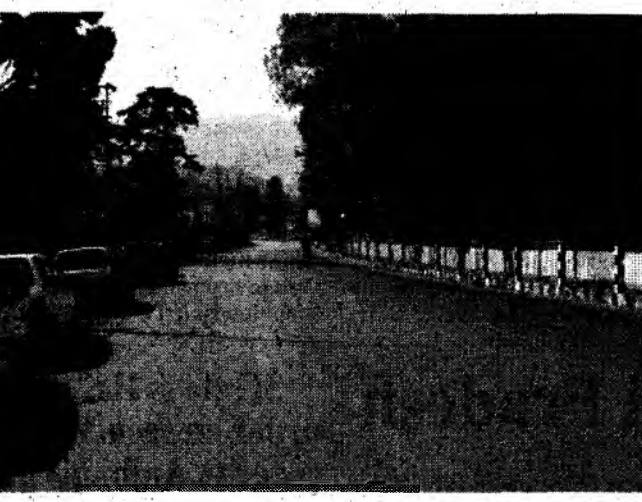
Renaming roads adorned with the poetry of my ancestors

By Toki Blah

If today's viral news item flashed by so many social media messages is anything to go by, then one should not be overtly surprised if the reader should walk away with the impression that the Government of Meghalaya, or more to be precise the Cabinet itself, has time hanging heavy on its hands. It would appear as if they have run out of work or issues to discuss and decide upon, for them to spend time on renaming more than 20 Shillong roads, footpaths and Institutions. By Jove! It might have been quite a taxing agenda item for the Cabinet and perhaps rounds of tea and hours of precious working time must have been spent on deliberating upon this weighty piece of statecraft, namely, restructuring names for the roads of this beautiful city, Shillong. I bet it must have been the result of a massive brainwave of some genius of the Urban Department. It must really have been a masterpiece of legislation to have impressed upon the entire Cabinet to spend time on approving such a weighty proposal or conversely it might just be that its importance lies not on its socio-economic importance but the impact a Mall-stricken VVIP wished to make upon his cabinet colleagues. Come to think of it anything for the absurd seems to be the forte of this MDA Government so don't be surprised if the rumour above is true.

For most of us who now limp along life's timeline, recalling the beautiful and romantic monikers that were once associated with roads, localities, footpaths and even shnongs of The Scotland of the East, has become a pastime that now sadly has been reduced to mere memories we regale our grand-children with as folktales of Once upon a Time. There was this dreamy cobbled stoned stairway of a footpath, lined on both sides with green drooping trees, that sighed and whispered in perfect rhythm with the passing breeze. The most ideal ambling stroll for moon struck couples, holding hands as they made their way back home to Laitumkhrah after a tryst with some romantic film at Kelvin cinema. And the indulgent citizens of those times aptly named this climbing footpath as Jacob's Ladder and the name fitted the place to a Tee. It was a dreaming walkers paradise! There was no St Anthony's College then at the start of Jacob's Ladder. Instead, the hollow it began from was called "Wah pom ngiem" in Khasi, meaning "The rivulet where the bear was hacked". A reference perhaps to some human encounter with this denizen of the wild on some

long forgotten incident but the place was romantically identified as such for all future references. These were names of places that stuck to the mind because of the romance, the legend, the adventure and the sense of 'Tribal' identity it conveyed. It exemplified tribal folklore at its best. I really doubt that a Cabinet was needed to sit and deliberate on a name then. Perhaps we then had Dorbars of wise elders who deliberated on the value of principles and ethics in governance. Names of places perhaps just came by naturally in their recounts of tales of chivalry and adventure. We seem to have replaced this epitome of wisdom with a political system that ensures an incessant supply of businessmen turned politician whose only forte is to count votes and money. But then I also have a strong suspicion that our



wise elders in their Dorbars had more important things to discuss and debate about, than on what names should be given to potholed roads and rutted bylanes. And then the names of localities and shnongs that dot the Shillong landscape. There is Pynthor-Um-Khrah that, now goes by the handle of Pynthorbah. Pynthorbah does not carry much of a meaning while on the other hand the mental image it recaptures is of an unplanned slum struggling to survive within another larger unplanned slum called Shillong. Pynthor-um-khrah on the other hand at once brings in a mental picture of pristine and green waving paddy fields serviced by a winding, gurgling, crystal clear streamlet called the Umkhrah; the symbol or miniaturised version of a larger entity of what would in 1972 be christened as Meghalaya, "the abode of clouds". To be honest that was what the place once used to be during our childhood. Wahingdoh as a locality comes along with another historical backdrop. Way before Independence and perhaps in the early 1990's or late 1890's there was this Khasi family on the slopes of present Wahingdoh

that were butchers by profession. They dealt with beef and to ease the cleaning and washing of the meat they had their butchery alongside the Wahumkhrah. People usually came to buy meat from there and so the locality got its name Wahingdoh because of "the -house -with -the -meat -situated - along -the -river". How typically Khasi and wonderful such names were! So appropriate and so romantic.

Then there's this place near my old locality Qualapatty. The locality is called "Wah -thap -bro" not "Wah -thap -bru" as non-Pnars are wont to call it now. Now don't get confused as "bro" here has nothing with the colloquial Black American slang for another coloured person. In Pnar the meaning of the word 'bro' denotes a slave. 'Wah' means stream, rivulet or river and 'thap'

means to place or forcefully shove into. The literal translation of the name from Pnar to English would come out as the 'Rivulet where slaves are shoved into'. Now this is an old settlement of Pnars in Shillong and is situated just across Iewduh with the GS Road running between the two. In days gone by, I am given to understand, the Syiem of Myllem had his own police force to look after the security of the law and he also had a stockade where convicted criminals of the Hima were locked up. These convicts were invariably sentenced to hard labour and the labour they performed was free, usually confined to cleaning up the Bazar and the areas nearby. They were not paid for their work; the working conditions were probably below standard and in the night everyone was chained and shoved back inside the stockade to be locked up for the night. Their work was not so dissimilar from that of slaves. Most probably the stockade was located in the area now known as Wahthapbro. It is more than probable as there was a small stream for the daily water needs plus a public latrine for prisoners to relieve themselves

as hygienically possible as those times permitted. The point I'm driving at is localities were aptly named as per the work or profession they harboured. It was easy; apt and practical.

Let's take Lumparing for instance. One of the oldest shnongs in Shillong and situated on the steep slopes that overlook Laban and Garrison Ground. It's still famous for its steep steps though they are now in concrete and a blacktopped road, now connects Lumparing with the rest of the world. Well in days gone by, its so steep and the climb uphill must have been so strenuous and tiring that at times, perhaps especially during the rainy season, travelers had to be literally dragged up the muddy and slippery pathway to make it. Lumparing in Khasi means "The hill where one is hauled up". Makes perfect sense, doesn't it.

Then there is the story of Sardar Khuswant Singh when he visited Shillong some times in the 1980's. Government of Meghalaya deputed a senior SI of Police from the SB branch to escort him from Gauhati Airport to Shillong. They drove along the GS Road while the Sardar was full of praise of the greenery and landscape he was passing through. He reached Barapani and asked the driver to stop while he feasted his eyes on the beauty of the lake. He turned to his police guide and asked him what they called the place in the local language and the cop answered him,

"without batting an eyelid, 'We call it Damsite!'. What a letdown; an anticlimax to what could have ended up as an op-ed page in India's then most read magazine The Illustrated Weekly of India. The stupid guy probably forgot the Khasis call the place "Ka Wah Umiam" or the River of tears. Why, no one knows but just imagine the human tragedy, pain and heartbreaks that must have taken place for the Khasis to come up with such a name. The name could even have inspired a fertile local mind to come up with literary works of art to equal that of Thomas Hardy whose works were influenced by the wild beauty of Dorset and Berkshire counties. What a romantic Tribal name for a water body instead of Damsite which sounds so-trite, hackneyed and vulgar. Now to get to the point, with all these exquisite, legendary, indigenous and poetic names of places inherited from our ancestors, why does a cabinet of dim-witted businessmen have to spoil the aesthetic beauty of Shillong by renaming such quixotic places, roads and lanes with worthless words that only a blind, vote-hungry politician can find any aesthetic value in. Words fail me!

Agnipath: Part of a larger process of defence reform and modernisation

By Manish Tewari

From the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 till the end of the First World War in 1918, military strategists had convinced themselves that once a general mobilisation for war was ordered it must culminate in a full-scale conflict. For, rolling back a fully marshalled army from going into battle had grave internal consequences including and not limited to regime change.

In May 1892, in a memorandum to the Russian Foreign Minister Nikolay Girs, the Adjutant General of the Russian Army Nikolai Orbuichev explained why the traditional method of determining casus belli of war had been overtaken by modern technology. What mattered most now was who mobilised first and not who fired the first shot. "The undertaking of mobilisation cannot be considered as a peaceful act. On the contrary, it represents the most decisive act of war," he opined.

Within a month of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, on June 28, 1914, the doomsday machine of general mobilisation unleashed itself. Once Austria-Hungary and Germany started to mobilise, other European powers followed suit and World War I commenced. By 1918, this Armageddon had left 17 million people dead.

The Second World War was triggered by the imperatives of the alliance system. In 1938, German troops annexed Austria before occupying Sudetenland, a part of German-speaking Czechoslovakia. However when the Nazis marched into Poland on September 1, 1939, Great Britain, according to the terms of the Anglo-Polish Pact, declared war on Germany on September 3. France followed suit and the war dominos were in full play. By the time it was all over in 1945, 85 million people were dead and large parts of the world lay in ruins.

The alliance and mobilisation templates were carried forward into the Cold War till the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the calculation of war planners on both sides, the principal land battle in Europe would be fought on the northern German plains fit for attacks by mass concentrations of heavy armour. This again necessitated the deployment of large conventional armies. Added to this was the MAD doctrine - mutually assured destruction - inserted into the dynamic of war by nuclear weapons.

However, by 1975, US defence experts chastened by the checkmate in the Korean War and defeat in Vietnam, seriously started rethinking the structure and contours of a future armed force because they correctly anticipated that the landscape of warfare would rapidly transform itself given the swift technological advances taking place.

Moreover, nimble and mobile North Korean and Vietcong forces had effectively repulsed a conventionally superior US military power over long standoffs. The long-serving director of the office of Net Assessments in the Pentagon Andrew Marshall provided the intellectual heft to this process of restructuring.

By the time Donald Rumsfeld assumed the mantle of US Defence Secretary again in the George W Bush administration, there had been a veritable revolution in military affairs encompassing a multitude of technological progressions in computing, communications, space know-how, and transformative changes that were unfolding even in the manufacturing domain.

Coupled with the rise of transnational non-state actors, the nature of conflict and warfare was also evolving rapidly.

The US was the only country that saw the coming revolution in military affairs. Even Soviet military theorists, way back in the early 1970s, had started applying themselves to military-technical revolutions. By the mid-1990s, even China, fuelled by a decade of economic growth, had commenced a fundamental restructuring of both its force and command structures.

The trigger for the reforms in China were the twin projections of power by the US, namely the Gulf War of 1990 and the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995. The Chinese Communist Party leadership recognised that it lacked the technological prowess to wage a modern war that could proscribe foreign powers from intervening in the region. They adopted a three-pronged approach by exponentially ramping up defence spending. It involved investing in new weaponry, enhancing anti-access area denial tactics, and establishing programmes to boost the Chinese defence industry.

However, one of the fundamental changes they initiated was to develop an integrated fighting force with first-rate naval and air capabilities. As the other services expanded, the army was shrunk to around 9.75 million from an approximate three million in the mid-70s and the higher defence management paradigm was reorganised into theatre commands by February 2016.

In the wake of the Kargil War in 1999, India also started seriously thinking of reforming and modernising its defence forces and command and control structures. Among a slew of reforms that the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) recommended, one pertained to the recruitment practices of the armed forces. It stated, "The Army must be young and fit at all times. Therefore, instead of the present practice of having 17 years of colour service (as has been the policy since 1976), it would be advisable to reduce the colour service to a period of seven to ten years and, thereafter, release these officers and men for service here".

In 2000, a Group of Ministers (GOM) endorsed the KRC's recommendation stating that, "in order to ensure that the armed forces are at their fighting best at all times, there is a need to ensure a younger profile of the services. However, this is a highly complex matter. While the army desires a younger age profile, so do the central paramilitary forces (CPMFs)".

The Nareish Chandra Task Force on National Security set up by the UPA government in 2011 also addressed this issue. Its report, however, is not public so far. Thus the Agniveer recruitment reform must be contextualised in the backdrop of the larger canvas of defence reforms that include the appointment of a CDS, reorganisation of the armed forces into theatre commands to promote jointness and synergy.

The future of warfare entails a lighter human footprint, but soldiers equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry, supported by cutting-edge technology to fight a war in a highly informationised environment. This recruitment reform would help in right sizing the armed forces provided it gets dovetailed into the imperatives of fifth generation warfare.

(The writer, a lawyer, is a Congress MP and former I&B Minister. Views are personal. Courtesy Indian Express)

Letters to the Editor

Monocrat Bureaucrat or Mediocrat?

Editor, Meghalaya in the past few days has been divided into two clear sections. The 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Those who 'have' developed a hatred for a particular bureaucrat and those who 'have not' yet developed the symptoms. But let's accept one fact, either of the two sections, 'must have' watched at least one South Indian flick of Vijay Master and were awed by it!

It is well known that negative campaigning, specifically 'attack' advertising, has been analyzed and discussed widely concerning possible implications for voters. Now with the Chief Minister getting his shoes and trousers caked in mud while touring Garo Hills post rains, we need to quell our desire for complaints and who next if not a bureaucrat (also because no Minister is buying a new vehicle). Who doesn't enjoy some constructive criticism but abusive ad hominem fallacy?

Well that takes the cake before elections.

"You are bad, I am good. You may be good but this is how it should be" is the one liner summary of all the 'Dear Diary' moments that as a reader I am forced to read. Thanks to one bureaucrat, our thirst for 'celebrity gossips' is quenched. For a town with no wood (did someone hear deforestation? This was in the lines of Hollywood..Bollywood), let's watch some Secretariwood. A newspaper to me is "public space". Personal complaints and grudges are nothing but irrelevant spray painting on walls. Who wants to know if someone got an appointment with a Dr? As far as the ones who got it, they say this Dr has his clinic open from Monday to Saturday for a mere 12-14 hours. Patient patients are what we need (emergency aside).

RTI (Right to have Inquisitiveness answered) is an amazing tool that people should try. If FOCUS never had FOCUS, if MIDFC was Meghalaya's Interest in Developing Financial Crisis and if MBMA was Meghalaya's Biggest Money-making Agency, what is stopping

anyone from re-enacting the Battle of Verdun (Season 2 Episode 1) and stopping a major Government offensive? Problem is one does not require a sword license in India and hence pens, which are mightier than the sword are being used irresponsibly.

By now the State is gratefully aware of the furniture this bureaucrat sits on and the car that he drives about in. How did we miss details on his clothing brand and the fruits he loves to eat for breakfast! Now this is important because we can then draw a line if he is wearing indigenous fabric (promoting the State) or draping clothing from multinational corporations (for which we need to know how he affords them). Sadly, he isn't Commissioner and Secretary of Textiles (yet) else we could all have had some good gossip. The fruits for breakfast are still relevant as it will help analyse if they are procured from the market or delivered to him in his capacity as Commissioner and Secretary, Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare.

Views of the editor are mostly rooted in facts hence

the opening act of any 'paper essay' is "Apropos the wonderful article written by...", why can't we have more of that? Oh! wait a minute, (calculating...), aren't we a few months away from polls! Ah that explains the 'independent' articles of aspiring candidates.

Yours etc., Benedict Lyngdoh Via email

Images should be true to life

Editor, As per the news item in a section of the media 2022, the Traditional Heads along with several social organisations have requested the Transport Minister, Daksahiat Lamare to allot land at Lad Nartiang for erecting a life size statue of U Woh Kiang Nangbah, a legendary freedom fighter of the Pnars. This is a very noble request indeed which should be accorded. The only point of contention here is that while working on the figure of U Woh Kiang Nangbah, adequate research must be carried out with regards to the attire worn by him while

he was alive.

It is really an eye sore to see that the statue of U Woh Kiang Nangbah at Lad Civil Hospital, Shillong, East Khasi Hills District, has the patriot wearing an attire that does not identify with what men-folk would have worn during those times and period. It rather looked like some kind of a skirt and this is inappropriate because images and pictures of the freedom fighter have him wearing a "jain boh" or ka "yu slien" that was worn those days by men. The statue of U Woh Kiang Nangbah at Syntu Ksiar is in fact impeccable. Therefore, one urges upon those who have such noble intentions to take extra care in this regard and make no such errors.

Yours etc., Helen Dkhar, Via email

Electricity: Curse or blessing?

Editor, On Wednesday June 29, 2022, right from 1 am till 5 am, there was 4 (four)

hours of continuous power cut or load shedding which is completely unnatural, in our area of Mawprem and its vicinity. Every morning we face power cut of additional 1 (one) hour from 10 am till 11 am. The Almighty, created the night for us to rest. But power cuts in the dead of night create a climate of insecurity as we are at most vulnerable to thefts and burglary. And if earthquakes or other natural calamities arise who should be accountable? Again, it is tough for the sick and the elderly to manage to move in the darkness of night when there are prolonged power cuts. As I watch the light of our Creator breaking through the window and promising a new day, what promise should we expect from humans in the MeECL to us ordinary humans?

Your etc., Joydeep Sharma Shillong-2

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