

"Problems are not the problem; coping is the problem."

— Virginia Satir

The Shillong Times

Outlook for New Year

AS we have rung in the New Year, change is the 'mantra'. India's slow process of change is expected to carry forward with a general sense of stability at the social, political and administrative levels. Yet, hints in the national capital are that a reshuffle of the Union Council of Ministers is round the corner. With senior-level ministers seemingly doing a good job, there's no clarity as to which all heads could roll and who all could step in as new faces in the ministry at this late hour. The Modi government has an effective term of only a year left for governance, after which it could find itself in the lame duck form. The parliament elections would come calling during the first half of 2024. The build-up for the general elections would start this year at various levels.

The bi-annual national executive meet of the BJP is expected this month and Parliament would start its budget session by February 1. In between, the BJP might see a change of head as incumbent president JP Nadda's present term would end by January 20. With the saffron party losing the assembly polls in his home state of Jharkhand Pradesh as also the Delhi civic elections held directly under his nose, he may have a lot of explaining to do. Rumours are that Nadda could be drafted to the Modi government and someone else might take the party's leadership in the run-up to the set of assembly polls in about 10 states this year. Put together, this is as crucial as the 2024 general elections. This could put the entire year on election mode, followed by the onset of the parliament polls. While the Modi government talked about a 'one nation one poll' plan, whether some of these assembly polls could be clubbed with the parliament polls is worth a thought. When an idea is floated and it captures the nation's fancy, it is incumbent on the government to implement it. Configuration of LS and assembly polls across the states could not only save the exchequer much needless expenditure but also helps in political stability and a more planned execution of projects at the pan-India level in each five-year span.

This year might also face fresh situations of worry on the health front. Covid-19's new avatar from China is knocking on our doors. Experts warn the next two months are crucial in terms of a likely spread of the pandemic. On the positive side, the fear factor is less as the infections are reported to be mostly of a mild nature.

Letters to the Editor

No more wild parties on Christmas eve

Editor,
Appropos of the letter by Sali Gwalmsi under the caption "Christmas not for the holy parties" (ST December 31, 2022), I completely agree with the writer. In the name of Christmas one should indulge in such noisy parties and drinking spree. Given all rightly points out that such wild revelries are becoming very popular. This is unacceptable because it goes against the holy Bible and practices of Christianity. What is the purpose of being religious or practicing Christianity if our preachers remain mere spectators while immoral indulgences are being practised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? I would call upon all Christian leaders to take these carefree activities very seriously and consider banning them completely. I love to quote the last sentence of Gwalmsi, "Frenzied parties and prayers cannot go together."

Yours etc,
Robert Lyngdoh
Shillong - 2

Umroi Airport: Shocking revelations

Editor,
On September 20, 2022, the India Awakening Movement (IAM) comprising Banshar Marhaniang (Chairman), Churchill Sui-

enlich, Biazini Lapang and Jatun Kharmalati was the Director of the Umroi Airport. Mr Rashi Kant. The purpose of the meeting was to get a clear picture of the proposed extension plan of Airports Authority of India (AAI), the statutory body under Ministry of Civil Aviation. IAM has also received complaints of infrequent flights of smaller aircrafts only. At present the only city connected to Shillong airport is Kolkata. There are no extra-airs at the airport, thereby forcing passengers to use roadside restaurants apart from exorbitant taxi fares etc. The expansion so far has been dismal with only two small parking spaces and the perimeter wall being incomplete. The staff too complained of being understaffed with no roster system or relief on crucial days.

Why this attitude of the Government vis-a-vis the Umroi airport? The answer lies in the report of the Shillong Times where a few months back, the Government had flouted a notice of land which is scouting for land which is about 20 kms from the DC's office as the crew flies. Let's survey the feasibility of such a project. Around Myllim in the west the Eastern Air Command landing ground is already there. Towards the eastern side there is limited plan land with the Umroi valley around it. It is heard that the Directorate area is under scrutiny but it seems to have ended in controversy. To understand these shady deals the following revelation by the Director would

The issue of election freebies is not confined to Meghalaya alone. The two very recent and popular examples concern the Delhi government under Arvind Kejriwal and the central government under Prime Minister Modi. The former has offered a number of freebies such as education, electricity, medical tests, transportation, water, etc which was circulating in the news as revdi (sweet dish) culture; the latter has promised free ration every month to 80 crores Indians till December, 2023. These two examples show that all political parties look at freebies as a means to win votes. This underlines the fact that as long as the people are poor, one can prey on their poverty and propel oneself to power. The case of Meghalaya is more intriguing. While struggling on many socio-economic development indicators, the infusion of election freebies by candidates/parties is troubling. It depicts that politics in Meghalaya is not about vision and goals, growth and development, livelihood and transformation. In the perception of the candidates/parties, the voters can be emotionally and psychologically played with and it basically sends a certain type of message.

The gullible voter
In election campaigning we can commonly hear the political parties say that "the voters of this area are educated and wise". In one such campaign, a group of males were feeling proud on being referred to as "wise". However, the experience of recent years points to the contrary. As voters we all have to ask the question of election wisdom. To a large extent, the majority of voters are found to be gullible. As voters we are too quick to accept and believe what the candidates say. The practical applicability of the quote "public memory is short" can be seen during elections. In 2018 they said they would improve education and health, create employment opportunities, build world class sporting facilities, preserve the environment, etc. Till date none of these have materialised. Behold! Today they come

of office. No wonder most of the candidates have become so active in the recent six months. In many remote villages, the inhabitants claimed that they have not seen their MLAs since the election of 2018. Behold! These days they are appearing again. They are appearing with all promises and gifts. This is the case in all the constituencies of Meghalaya. If the voters are wise, then they would realize that these appearances and gifts are nothing but a feeling of guilt and the business of making up and seeking forgiveness

rationally through analysing the performance. For now, let us look at it from two angles. First, open practice of distribution of money. If a group of rational voters come together then they can pressurise such candidates to instead pool the money and establish an agri-produce collection centre at a centralised location. This will enable the farmers of nearby villages to bring their produce in bulk. The collection centre then acts as a bargaining chip for the farmers to get a better price from the middle-men of Meghalaya and Assam.

help reveal why the gov't is hell bent on abandoning the Umroi Airport. Time and again the Director has been overruling the Centre and the state govt to expedite the expansion, but all reminders fell on deaf ears. Rishi Kant had also given the proposal "Surveying In Expansion and Mapping Technology" worth Rs 7,800 crores to the State Government but the response was that the Government has no money. Another obstacle in the Umroi airport expansion project was because the KHADC denied the license to carry out the work at Umkitch and Umsamring areas as per advice of the DGCA. Hence it appears that the State Government and KHADC work in tandem to finally execute the plan for abandoning Umroi Airport. The International Airports Act of 1971 under the purview of Parliament, demands the expansion as planned by the DGCA. Three years ago the DGCA equipped with modern mapping systems complete with GPS support sliced one hillcock from the landing approach side (Umiam lake). On surveying they found that two more hillcocks needed to be sliced but three items remained to be addressed. First, Nil 6 needs reuniting for expansion of the runway (Baoing requires 12,000 feet for landing and a few more thousands for taking off). Second, a church needs demolition with a new one to be constructed and thirdly one high tension line too needs reuniting. All these would entail not more than Rs 100 crores. A new airport would cost

The meaning of election freebies

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

again with the same promises. If as voters we are indeed educated and wise, then their rhetorical assurances must be ignored. The effective way to ignore is not vote for them anymore. But the ground reality is something else. Candidates are holding football tournaments. It is frustrating as this tournament happens only once in five years. Even the world cup happens every four years. If the voters are wise then we would have rejected such an election tournament. Instead, ask the candidate party to assure proper grass turf on the field with stands for the people to sit and enjoy the game. This is the best time to reverse the trend of election gullibility.

I did not do my job in the past
If a candidate party goes to voters with freebies and trinkets such as blankets, chairs, utensils, sports tournaments, etc during election, it is basically an admission of guilt. It is the guilt of not having done their job during their term

The scientific tempered voter
In politics and especially during elections, scientific temper is important. It can be the difference between choosing the right representatives and good governance as against disaster. In short, scientific temper means "the ability to think

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from voters. As voters, do we forgive them? Forgive or not, the candidates have their own ulterior motives which is to fool the gullible voter again. If one shampoo does not work we shift to another. In politics, too, it is required to follow the same practice. So far, that has not been the case. This election, will the voters say no to freebies? Further, there is an alarming situation. If a candidate party has not done its job in the past, what is the guarantee that they would do so in the future? However, there is a catch. When the voters only look at present benefits, then any freebies of the candidates will cost valuable even at the cost of future development.

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rationally through analysing the performance. For now, let us look at it from two angles. First, open practice of distribution of money. If a group of rational voters come together then they can pressurise such candidates to instead pool the money and establish an agri-produce collection centre at a centralised location. This will enable the farmers of nearby villages to bring their produce in bulk. The collection centre then acts as a bargaining chip for the farmers to get a better price from the middle-men of Meghalaya and Assam.

Timely advisory by Antony

Editor,
Recently Congress leader AK Antony advised the Party to win over the Hindus if the Congress is to beat the BJP. He had issued a similar advisory to the Congress Party in 2014. Antony had advised the Congress Party to ignore the Hindu and also not to concentrate too much on minority votes but the Party did not heed his advice and faced the same crumbling defeat as that of 2014. Antony is amongst those leaders who had always remained loyal to the Party and his advice should be considered in its true spirit for the good of the country. Antony went further as to say that the Congress should not consider persons who are anti-party and vituperate on their foreheads as communalists. This is the second or third time that Antony has offered this well thought out advice to the Congress leadership. In 1993, while delivering the Mahai Manjoran Memorial Lecture at Press Academy in Ernakulam (a Kerala Government funded institute for media studies), Antony had reminded the minority communities in the country that they should be grateful to the

majority community for their safe survival and existence in India. "Love them and respect them. Your security and safety lie with the Hindu and hence do not create an impression that you treat them as a threat." Antony had told the august gathering. His words were the fall-out of the anti-Hindu feeling generated in the aftermath of the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya.

Rahul Gandhi is already on a long march the Bharat Jodo Yatra to spread the base of the Congress far and wide and reclaim lost spoils. But this can be fruitful only when all sections of society are taken along by the Congress. There should not be any impression that the Congress Party is anti-Hindu. Congress leaders should refrain from making unnecessary controversial statements. For instance, Meghalaya Congress leader compared Rahul Gandhi with Lord Rama and another leader made a statement that Rahul Gandhi is the real president of Congress and Mallikarjun Kharge is just a namesake president. Suffice it to say that a long march is not enough to achieve the target set by the Congress for itself. It has many remedies to cover to reach the destination and that destination is to capture power in Delhi.

Yours etc,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

As of now, many farmers are selling as individuals and this reduces their bargaining power. This can be seen in Laitkor-Nongkrem area itself. But when combined together as a group it will result in better outcomes for the farmers and their households. Second, analyse where the money and freebies are coming from. A candidate works with the principle of ROI (return on investment). All freebies that the voters get are in truth taken as an investment by the candidate. He/she will recover the amount in future, but, recover from where? They will recover from the rights of the voters. In future, instead of having ten development schemes, we would be benefited only from five. The only way for voters to make a wise decision is by applying scientific temper.

Think rationally and question all developments over the next two months.
In the end, election freebies are just an eye-meat to deceive. Till date, the only parties that are not using freebies for election gains are VPP and KAM Meghalaya. Experience shows that their campaigns have a different feel to it. It is not about 'vote for us' rather 'this is what is to be done and hence vote for us'. They are more into research and understanding of the ground realities right through the micro/unit levels. It all seems noble but it must be noted that they are new into politics. History has proven that all new parties have noble ideas and visions for development. This is the advantage of newness. That is not a problem. The real problem starts when they grow older and bigger. It is then that compromises happen to fit all and please all especially in coalition politics. HSPDP, KINAM and PDF are good examples of being instituted as an equal partner for the welfare of the tribal Meghalayan. Today, they are in decline. Alas, election freebies are used as a tool to fool and deceive the voters from the real issues. Well, it is time to get real!

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whether the objectives were achieved. This is particularly so as the court has found that the reasonable nexus with the objectives of curbing black money, terror funding etc. If it does not matter whether the objectives were achieved or not, what is the big deal in proclaiming that the objectives were all fine? The economy is estimated to have lost 1.5 per cent of GDP in terms of growth, which has been compensated as loss of Rs 2.25 lakh crore a year. Some 15 crore daily wage earners lost livelihood as thousands of SMEs were shut. Over a hundred people died while waiting in queues to exchange their hard earned money, while thousands had to pay with their lives in the aftermath of the crisis brought about by shortage of cash caused by the 'orphanel' decision.

An in terms of fighting black money, demonetisation drew a complete blank. In fact, the window provided by demonetisation offered an opportunity to regularise tonnes of black money. There was no success in regaining in counterfeiting as well. Compared with pre-demonetisation days, there was an increase of 35 per cent in counterfeit notes detected in the denomination of Rs 100, while there was a noticeable increase of 154.3 per cent in counterfeit notes detected in the denomination of Rs 50 in one year alone.

The big question that remains unanswered is who takes the responsibility for the huge human as well as economic cost, which is real as opposed to the academic interest of whether the Modi government had acted with due consideration of the consequences. If status quo cannot be restored, as reasoned by the court for not raising any challenge to the decision. Prime Minister Modi, who stumped the nation with his 'bet' from the blue announcement has not chimed any responsibility. In fact, he has never referred to demonetisation ever since it became clear

SC's verdict neglects human cost of demonetisation

By K Raveendran

The Supreme Court has by a 4-1 majority ruled that the demonetisation decision by the Modi government was technically valid, but apart from the concerns raised in the dissenting voice recorded by Justice Nagarathna, the verdict has failed to acknowledge the huge human cost of the draconian decision.

After declaring during the hearing of the case that the court will not be a 'silent spectator and sit quietly with folded hands only because it was an economic policy decision', it has refused to consider whether the heavy cost the nation had to pay in terms of both human suffering as well as economic losses was worth the results. In fact, the apex court has disappointed by stating it was not relevant

that it was a blunder of Himalayan proportions. The bench has taken cover under 'resurium' on the part of the court in dealing with administrative actions. "There has to be great restraint in matters of economic policy. Court cannot supplant the wisdom of executive with its wisdom," the bench pointed out while stating that the decision-making process cannot be faulted merely because the proposal emanated from the central government. This is a potentially dangerous position to take and runs counter to the stand taken by court in the past in effective interventions in forcing the government to act in dealing with the human tragedy in the long march back home by migrant la-

bourers and the covid vaccination programme. These interventions were based on the court's conviction that its wisdom must prevail when the government shows a lack of it.

But in the course of the hearing, the bench had made many references to the court's conviction in proclaiming that the objectives were all fine? The economy is estimated to have lost 1.5 per cent of GDP in terms of growth, which has been compensated as loss of Rs 2.25 lakh crore a year. Some 15 crore daily wage earners lost livelihood as thousands of SMEs were shut. Over a hundred people died while waiting in queues to exchange their hard earned money, while thousands had to pay with their lives in the aftermath of the crisis brought about by shortage of cash caused by the 'orphanel' decision.

Justice Nagarathna in her dissent held that demonetisation of currency notes was a serious matter and it could not be done by the Centre by merely issuing a gazette notification. She even declared it unlawful on legal grounds and was not quite impressed by the objectives, which any way remained unrealised. She pointed out that the RBI merely approved the government's decision without applying its independent mind and cited the desire by the Centre as justification for the approval.

While the judgment refers to parliament and the supremacy of people in terms of the rights of the executive in issue administrative decisions, the court's stand of a strict no-go into the domain of economic policies is not in conformity with the Supreme Court's rights of the executive in issue administrative decisions, although the context was different. With regards to the controversy about Collegium and the appointment of judges, the court had clearly stated that while the legislature had the power to make laws the judiciary's power for review was not at all contestable. (IPA Service)



A photograph of a traditional Indian temple structure with a dome and intricate carvings.

"The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about."

—Wayne Dyer

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Delayed discourse

FLOGGING a dead horse serves no purpose. It's a waste of one's precious time and effort. This was so with the set of 58 petitions that challenged the November 8, 2016 decision to ban high-value currency notes. The deed was done and the nation passed through a period of misery. The dust having settled down, a serious question could arise why a judicial post mortem now, six years after the epic late-night decision announced out of the blue by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A constitution bench of the apex court has finally ruled, hopefully once and for all, that the decision of the Union Government was valid. In a dissenting note, one judge took the stand that the decision was "vitiating and unlawful" though she admitted that it could not be rescinded now. The apex court, on its part, was duty-bound to go through the decision and pass a verdict. Yet, a question could arise why it took so many years for it to arrive at a conclusion and ring the curtains down.

The stand that the government took in support of the note ban at that time itself was that this was a strong step against the problem of counterfeit currency flow from Pakistan, loads of them, as also to curb the menace of black money, terror financing and tax evasion. The note ban was done without sufficient preparations and the government justified it by saying secrecy was of utmost importance. A huge sum of Rs 10 lakh crore was believed to have been wiped out of the nation's financial system. It took months to replenish the currency stocks in banks for normal transactions. A grim result was that the national economy went into a tailspin. The situation was worsened by the difference in sizes of the new notes and the banned ones. ATM machines could not reconcile with the size difference. Worse, the government resorted to a strange step - printing and releasing huge sums of newly introduced, highest value Rs 2000 notes. These helped more in the reverse manner - that it became easier for people to hoard money. That situation continues even today and expectations that the government would eventually ban this currency were belied. It's small comfort, though, that its printing has been stopped. It would have been better if the Supreme Court had gone into such aspects while considering the batch of petitions and issued necessary advisory to the government. It's natural that governments too err - but the apex court rightly said that it was in no position to "supplant the wisdom of the executive with its own wisdom."

Question one - are these automatic responses supposed to be? We've been dealing with the pandemic for the past three years. If we choose to heed them, we have sufficient time to guide our actions. What do we have in its place, though? We receive bureaucratic lenses that reiterate the flawed policies that brought much suffering and collateral damage. Ritualism has taken a pedestal of importance, leaving science to fester in the corner of the room. We may excuse the mistakes made in the early stages of the pandemic when there wasn't enough information. In contrast, if the same errors continue to be made after the information is accumulated and the virus is no longer a novel threat, they would represent acts of omission rather than omission. In our opinion, we have a huge population that live in

Letters to the Editor

Why the attack on Christians?

I am writing to express my concern and anguish at the recent violence against Christians in India. Thank you for covering these sad topics in your esteemed newspaper. It is incumbent upon every practicing Hindu to protest such violence. Hindu miscreants who engage in this type of vandalism betray and harm their own religion far more than the religions they attack. A nation in which the majority hully the minority is lawless and dysfunctional.

I have long wondered what converted the mild Hindu to militancy. In the aftermath of independence, one could argue that despite being a majority, Hindus were bullied by some minority religious groups. But surely the reaction in the last seventy-five years has been excessive and brutal? This kind of violence comes from Hindu identity issues - not from the practice of Hinduism, which is a simple, broad-minded, and generous religion.

Yours etc, Deepj Majumdar, Via email

Joining politics in order to corrupt

Corruption has become a

Ritualism Vs Science: Are we heading towards a fourth wave?

By Dr Saahil Naugram

After the biggest and most aggressive Covid-19 wave in China and a few rumourous of a fourth wave in India. National and state officials have had high-level discussions, practice drills, and issued some advisories based on speculations. Naturally, this has led to some apprehension and uneasiness among the general public forcing us to ask, "Is there a possibility that a fresh national Covid wave would hit India?" The XBB and BF.7 variants have been around for a while, and they haven't caused an upsurge in India and in the absence of a variety that is even more highly contagious another wave is highly unlikely.

A five-step plan of test-trace-treat-vaccinate and Covid-appropriate behaviour was used by India to restrict the spread of the coronavirus, according to a letter that the Health Ministry of India sent to all the states and Union territories on December 20, 2022. The letter draws particular attention to the operational guidelines for the updated and revised surveillance strategy, which were released in June, 2022 and calls for prompt identification, isolation, testing, and management of suspected and confirmed cases in order to identify and confirm outbreaks of new SARS-CoV-2 variants.

The letter also recommends that the states and UTs ramp up their genome sequencing efforts through designated laboratories to enable the prompt identification of novel variants that will aid in the implementation of necessary public health measures. The administration has also decided to reinstate random testing at the retail shops for visitors from outside.

All of this reads well, feels important and has awarded itself a lot of pleasurable means, but there are some of us who have an issue.

Question one - are these automatic responses supposed to be? We've been dealing with the pandemic for the past three years. If we choose to heed them, we have sufficient time to guide our actions. What do we have in its place, though? We receive bureaucratic lenses that reiterate the flawed policies that brought much suffering and collateral damage.

Ritualism has taken a pedestal of importance, leaving science to fester in the corner of the room. We may excuse the mistakes made in the early stages of the pandemic when there wasn't enough information. In contrast, if the same errors continue to be made after the information is accumulated and the virus is no longer a novel threat, they would represent acts of omission rather than omission. In our opinion, we have a huge population that live in

close quarters. Over the past three years, the majority of people who naturally contracted various coronavirus strains have recovered. With the "test, trace, isolate" approach, a very small number of infections were found, instead it was incredibly expensive, labour-intensive, and time-consuming, upending a lot of individuals who had no symptoms.

The "test, trace, isolate" routine is useless for determining transmission. It will only lead to a stigma and the exploitation of the common people. Panic at the population level might have negative health effects. The aim is to search for a needle in a haystack. Random airport screenings of international passengers will make the passengers and leave them open to abuse.

It is exceedingly irresponsible for authorities to provide directions that are unnecessary. The Indian experience during the second wave was mostly panic that caused a medical crisis resulting in countless fatalities. As we saw during the second wave in our nation, these are swiftly picked up by the 24-hour media to intensify the level of terror among the populace.

Low-fidelity rates reported from various socio-studies ought to have been extensively publicised to assuage public anxiety and terror. Such encouraging messages would also help to rebuild people's trust in public health organisations, which are currently at an all-time low, globally. Such evidence-based measures would undoubtedly be a big setback for those who make money utilising the "fear" of the "missing" data.

Covid-19 has frequently undergone mutations. Four circulating lineages, which are less severe than the initial SARS-CoV-2, are responsible for the common cold. A person is not invulnerable to colds indefinitely after contracting one of these viruses. The person may come into contact with other coronavirus strains or their immunity may wear off. Furthermore, because the viruses that cause colds are continually evolving, it is hard to develop a vaccine that is effective against every strain that is currently in circulation. Even if one were to do so, the immunity it would confer would not be permanent.

There is no reason to believe that SARS-CoV-2 operates differently from other coronaviruses, so it is likely that we are able to create an efficient and long-lasting vaccine, even if many are created and used in record time as was done in early phases during the present pandemic.

Whether or not anthropo-

centric humans like it, nature provides equal opportunity for survival to all living things. All having living things adapt to their environment according to Darwin's Law in order to survive. These adaptations occur via mutations brought on by unintentional replication faults and probably under selection pressure from widespread pandemic vaccinations.

Such flaws, according to the rules of successful parasitism, are advantageous to the virus and not to the people. Evolution makes the virus more likely to survive and spread, while others are eliminated in the natural selection process. A deadly virus does not travel far, die along with its unfortunate host, resulting in a terminal infection.

Even a variety with very serious symptoms, "control" because such patients will isolate themselves and avoid social interactions. They will eventually be more likely to die, and there is no chance for transmission. The less infectious strains do not kill the host and cause only mild illness with very little mortality.

Sterile mathematical models incorrectly anticipated the end of the world at the beginning of the epidemic, resulting in harsh measures, accompanying collateral damage, and economic devastation. Genomic surveillance and surveillance should cause us to panic and launch comparable, illogical catastrophic scenarios just as the pandemic BF.7 variant is spreading. While policy should be based on real-world circumstances, such as how frequently people are in contact, talks and intensive care units, genomic studies should remain academic exercises. Finding a genetic marker for asymptomatic and causing panic that leads to restrictive measures is unwarranted. Changes are not likely to occur, but they are imperceptibly spreading throughout the population before it is discovered.

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level. It is useless to pursue a rapidly evolving virus with a low fidelity rate, thus paying attention to the fundamentals, science has a propensity to become ritualistic. While geneticists are busy trying to become and offer comfort to the spirit, ritualism in science is not always good because interventions can be catastrophic in any country.

Care for our health and making sure to pay attention to our nutrition, regular exercise, and getting enough sleep are important for the day are imperative. All types of viruses can be eliminated by keeping our bodies and environment clean. When travelling we still need to carry hand sanitizers and wash our hands thoroughly, following the WHO recommendations. The virus spreads through the mouth and nose and eventually even secrete from there because this is a respiratory illness, regular exercise, and getting enough sleep are important for the day are imperative. All types of viruses can be eliminated by keeping our bodies and environment clean. When travelling we still need to carry hand sanitizers and wash our hands thoroughly, following the WHO recommendations.

People who have these strains are more likely to spread the virus, being off-spring widely. High lethality is inversely correlated with high transmissibility. Genomic benign variants will cause far more significant population-level immunity through multiple natural illnesses with very little mortality.

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Such flaws, according to the rules of successful parasitism, are advantageous to the virus and not to the people. Evolution makes the virus more likely to survive and spread, while others are eliminated in the natural selection process. A deadly virus does not travel far, die along with its unfortunate host, resulting in a terminal infection.

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Watching Covid-19 as we welcome 2023

By T Jacob John and Jagdish Rattanani

We are into the New Year but the pandemic, it appears, will follow us into 2023. If the world thought this would be the first Covid-free year since 2019, when Covid-19 became an everyday word, then the current suffering in China sends a reminder that it may not be so easy.

This is where it all began in China in late 2019 but the true picture of the epidemic was never fully shared with the rest of the world. It was reported that Italy had the SARS-CoV-2 infection then called just novel coronavirus during the last quarter of 2019, but it was discovered only after the RT-PCR test became available in Wuhan, February of 2020. Details about the origins of the virus and time sequence are still murky in the go political challenge was that many doors were closed to investigators looking for clues in China.

Once again, China was playing hide and seek with information during the winter months of 2022. The virus spread through the mouth and nose and eventually even secrete from there because this is a respiratory illness, regular exercise, and getting enough sleep are important for the day are imperative. All types of viruses can be eliminated by keeping our bodies and environment clean. When travelling we still need to carry hand sanitizers and wash our hands thoroughly, following the WHO recommendations.

People who have these strains are more likely to spread the virus, being off-spring widely. High lethality is inversely correlated with high transmissibility. Genomic benign variants will cause far more significant population-level immunity through multiple natural illnesses with very little mortality.

Sterile mathematical models incorrectly anticipated the end of the world at the beginning of the epidemic, resulting in harsh measures, accompanying collateral damage, and economic devastation. Genomic surveillance and surveillance should cause us to panic and launch comparable, illogical catastrophic scenarios just as the pandemic BF.7 variant is spreading. While policy should be based on real-world circumstances, such as how frequently people are in contact, talks and intensive care units, genomic studies should remain academic exercises. Finding a genetic marker for asymptomatic and causing panic that leads to restrictive measures is unwarranted. Changes are not likely to occur, but they are imperceptibly spreading throughout the population before it is discovered.

There is no reason to believe that SARS-CoV-2 operates differently from other coronaviruses, so it is likely that we are able to create an efficient and long-lasting vaccine, even if many are created and used in record time as was done in early phases during the present pandemic.

Whether or not anthropo-

centric humans like it, nature provides equal opportunity for survival to all living things. All having living things adapt to their environment according to Darwin's Law in order to survive. These adaptations occur via mutations brought on by unintentional replication faults and probably under selection pressure from widespread pandemic vaccinations.

Such flaws, according to the rules of successful parasitism, are advantageous to the virus and not to the people. Evolution makes the virus more likely to survive and spread, while others are eliminated in the natural selection process. A deadly virus does not travel far, die along with its unfortunate host, resulting in a terminal infection.

Even a variety with very serious symptoms, "control" because such patients will isolate themselves and avoid social interactions. They will eventually be more likely to die, and there is no chance for transmission. The less infectious strains do not kill the host and cause only mild illness with very little mortality.

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The Omicron variant defied predictions - it spread out many sub-variants; all of them defied immunities from previous infections or from two or even three doses of available COVID-19 vaccines. Reinfections were common, in some cases, in others more than once. We have already seen the BF-7 sub-variant, what should India be afraid of?

True, the SARS-CoV-2 has not followed the rules made by virologists, and caution is the watchword. Panic is certainly not called for. Full facts will take time to be known. But we know that there was a ruthless lockdown in Wuhan District in early 2020, obviously as they had a calamitous wave, and the government putting immense pressure on health-care, and causing very high mortality. While preparing for the lockdown, they let foreigners leave, and medical students returning to Kerala, even in January 2020. The strict and ruthless lockdown was initiated by India in March as soon as WHO announced the same, but even before the virus had begun spreading.

China had consistently been aggressive during 2020 to slowing the spread of the virus, yet kept up the image that all was well in the country. The Omicron wave went through the winter Olympics 2021. Then they had the 'Zero-Covid' policy, a vague up-and-down the end of November 2022.

All in all, many Chinese were protected from the infection and during 2020 and through the last quarter of 2022. But nothing can stop the transmission of BF-7, as the Chinese have been using the Omicron vaccines turned out to have low efficacy. Their killed-virus vaccine is with aluminium adjuvant, but the Indian adjuvant for killed virus vaccine is a novel one called adhydroxyginseng, a combination of amino acids to strengthen antibody response and ad-spec, innovative, molecule to markedly increase the immune response. What high immunity does is to protect from severe disease in spite of reinfection.

On account of earlier infection prevention interventions under the 'Zero-Covid' policy, a large proportion of Chinese were immunized. Now, millions of Chinese are getting their first booster shot. The current scenario in China with severe disease, Omicron disease is not a surprise - except in the elderly, the immunosuppressed due to malignancies, organ transplantations, immunosuppressive therapies, and particularly in the non-immune.

At present it is reasonable to predict that India is not anywhere near as vulnerable as the Chinese. We had our share of mortality during 2020-2021, the scale of which is disputed. The unmistakable fact is that we had no 'Zero-Covid' policy but let the virus spread at its will, we let re-infections happen too, and we have much more efficacious vaccines. Omicron (known as sub-variants) cannot do much harm in India in 2023. The advice of the experts is: Be cautious, not panic. Be alert, not in panic. Keep watching daily numbers and events to see the trend.

That as soon as it can get for 2023. It is advisable to be masked up in crowded areas. The practice helps prevent the virus from spreading as a simple and easy layer of protection that can be made mandatory should the situation turn out different.

Dr T Jacob John is retired Professor of Clinical Virology, Ching Yellon, and past President of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics. Jagdish Rattanani is a Journalist and faculty member at SPJRI (IISER Personality) (Syndicate). The Billionaire (E-mail: editor@shillongtimes.com)

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 request to be published.

ethical impulses are about the only justification a sane individual can offer for this prolonged transportation of "old stock". It is disingenuous to admit that merely for the sake of extra income the bureaucracy are prepared for personal enrichment, and that by this corrupt means of legislators as an essential part of their existence, and it is even more disgusting to think that by this corrupt means of increasing their wealth they have to carry the disgrace of being branded as corrupt ones the type that can be changed and manipulated into a "Yes Sir - No Sir" grade that essentially is way below the Grade IV employees and most certainly the worst is that they declare that they can be price at which a man can be bought and that the higher and purer than money.

All are accomplices, and by all, I mean the State Officers, the Central officers and those of the Government of Assam as well for the simple reason that the permissible quantity of old auctioned coal is well known to all of them yet they blindly allow the movement of one consignment after another through their gates regardless of whether the permissible stock has exceeded, knowing fully well that if an audit of their records was done it would expose their whole damm not from start to finish.

It is unethical because in the present madness of a system which has checks and balances at many levels no one - not a single one - whose

duty is to prevent facts and figures to the people is doing anything about it and our State is being systematically "old stock". It is disingenuous to admit that merely for the sake of extra income the bureaucracy are prepared for personal enrichment, and that by this corrupt means of legislators as an essential part of their existence, and it is even more disgusting to think that by this corrupt means of increasing their wealth they have to carry the disgrace of being branded as corrupt ones the type that can be changed and manipulated into a "Yes Sir - No Sir" grade that essentially is way below the Grade IV employees and most certainly the worst is that they declare that they can be price at which a man can be bought and that the higher and purer than money.

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dominated by Christian ethics, ought to make clear to themselves and to their neighbours. Our position from 1970 to 1980 was to designate a category of workers above board and that our stance on knowingly submitting to the temptations of extra money is an impossibility not merely because we are required to maintain the ethics, handed down as a law because if we do not, the entire society of the Khasis the Jaintias and the Garos and posterity will migrate into this lawless state of anarchy and may be come out into the open. May our State be freed from those leaders who are leading the entire race astray, and may we awaken to the fact that the opportunity is not far - barely two months hence - when we can return to a state of grace, rationality, and virtue of the kind that we were always known for and the kind that our children incorporated in her children.

Yours etc, Gregory F Shullin, State Spokesperson, BIP Meghalaya, Via email

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"If you fell down yesterday, stand up today." — H. G. Wells

The Shillong Times

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'Rights' over development THE conflict between fundamental rights of individuals and the establishment's developmental push took center-stage again as the Supreme Court intervened and halted an eviction attempt involving over 4000 families from a railway land in Uttarakhand. The apex court on Thursday stayed an order of the high court there a fortnight ago, which called for the urgent evictions in a matter of a week. "There cannot be such an eviction in seven days," the apex court has ruled. The eviction was sought for railway development by arguing that the area, Haldwani, formed the railways' gateway to Uttarakhand state. The argument on the dwellers' side was that several of these families had been living there even before Independence, many of them had leasehold rights, and that some of these lands had been taken in formal auctions.

The apex court stressed that the government or the railways cannot ignore the humanitarian considerations. The issue was compounded by the fact that the authorities did not come up with a rehabilitation plan by citing a specious argument that there was no such "demand" from the occupants. It is incumbent on the part of the authorities to think of a rehabilitation plan, on their own, with or without a demand. A negative approach by them reeked of arrogance and abrasiveness and this compounded the problem. The apex court has rightly nailed the authorities on this count. At the same time, a common cause is involved in all developmental projects including those of the railways, the highways authority, or in the setting up of projects like a steel plant that benefit the nation.

The fundamental right of individuals cannot override national aspirations. Notably, the central government is giving lucrative compensations — more than the market value of land — in the matter of highway development in recent times. As a result, acquisition of land for NH projects is more or less a smooth process now. In the case of the railway land in Uttarakhand, the authorities rather look the rash route by only stressing on the right of the railways to reclaim its own land. In several such cases, the situation gets compounded by acts of politicians, who help people to grab government/railway land. Many who grab such lands could, on their own, not have resisted immediate evictions or uprooting of their temporary dwellings. Over a period, these turn into pucca (permanent) dwelling units or shops. The permissiveness of the political class and their attempt to turn such dwellers into their vote banks as also bribe-taking by officials in such situations cause problems for the future as was likely the case in Uttarakhand too.

Letters to the Editor

Public transportation alienated

Editor, The ban on buses moving towards Shillong and Mawmyn from December 23, 2022 for the purpose of reducing the chronic traffic situation in the city, has pushed me to introspect about the traffic condition within the city. I have now come to the realization that the Government is discouraging people from using public transportation simply because it lacks a management strategy for running public transportation.

With time the number of vehicles on our busy, meeky, adventurous roads, have increased and so too the hours spent getting stuck in traffic on these roads. Indeed, the decision on changing the bus routes was made as a solution to reduce the traffic congestion in these areas. However, given the current condition of the size of our city roads and their maintenance the traffic problem-defies solution. I believe if we had better public transportation and encouraged their use it could perhaps ease up the horrific voluntary stationary breaks we take on the way to any not every destination on a regular basis, since logically there is no easy

solution or permanent fix to the traffic congestion issue as of now. However, if as a solution to reduce the congestion on the roads, given that at present most families own at least one vehicle which in most cases is being used on a regular basis for short commutes. Admittedly it does seem more convenient to travel in our own private vehicles but with the present day population of private cars on the roads, it has conveniently inconvenienced every person, trying to get from one place to another, be it a pedestrian or a 2-wheeler.

Perhaps if we were more willing to choose public transportation over our private luxury, and if we had better if not the best public transportations, getting out of the house early and arriving at the destination early would no longer be a dream for the city folks.

The views expressed here are those of a Class 10 student who is concerned about the lack of public transport. I do not mean to offend any particular individual or group. Yours etc.,

Election 2023: The results will be blowing in the fierce February winds

By Patricia Mukhim

At the outset let me wish all readers a better year ahead. Let's hope Covid does not spoil the party, nay, the election extravaganza for that would be such a shame. We need a government that is short on promises and tall on delivery; a more mature cabinet with people who are intellectually competent, able to read the budget and understand balance sheets; the courage to question the bureaucracy and not take their word as distilled truth. Do we have in the present tribe of politicians people of such caliber? Yes, we do! And I am sure that many in the bureaucracy would not want such cerebral people to win elections. They would prefer ministers who they can softly prompt to take certain decisions. Whether these decisions are ultimately pro or anti-people time will reveal that it's the latter. Meghalaya has managed to place itself at the bottom of the pit in all human development indices. So there's nothing to crow about!

And it does not take India Today's - State of the State's annual ranking to tell us how poorly we are faring. So only a few top bureaucrats travel within Meghalaya. Their beat is Delhi and foreign countries as if all that matters happens in Delhi even while the party in the state they serve is in a shambles. Now how do I know this? It's the duty of a journalist to travel and talk to people not just before elections but through the five years. And what one sees is utter dismay and hopelessness. Poverty is growing by leaps and bounds even as women give birth to more children than they can provide and care for. Let's not even talk of education. Most kids at age 12 are helping their parents in the fields or have turned cowhands. I wish the school kids from the city are taken on an excursion of their own state so they can relate to what poverty actually is. They will see peers of their age already earning a livelihood because school is a leisure their parents cannot afford. A ten year old girl the other day was seen carrying a baby sister on her back. Her childhood is lost in such domestic chores. Where's the time to play?

And yes, it's also a journalistic brief to feel the pre-election pulse of the voters three months ahead. The tempo changes as the election date draws near. Seen elections will be announced and the inauguration jamboree will come to an abrupt halt. But what will decide the votes this time is also what people see on their smart phones. There's so much conversation, so many interviews with aspiring and sitting MLAs. Anywhere one goes, one sees a group of young and not so young people glued to their mobile phones. God knows what they imbibe from the internet but they have certainly become digital natives who need their fix of news, views and reviews. The online life has just got faster, quieter, harsher and louder and we are unsure of the impact of this new media on our brains and ultimately on our democracy and how far it decides election outcomes.

As it is we are now living in the era of unusual political competitiveness. Every single day MLAs are resigning and joining some other party. Such political party shopping has never happened in the past. The churning is such that it confuses and confounds the voter so much so when you ask which party their MLA is on today, constituents retort with, "How does it matter? How can we remember which party he is in now? Maybe we will remember only when the campaign begins. We voted for him as a person and we will do the same this time around." Please note that I am using the male gender because everywhere I have been no one discusses women candidates. So much for gender equity in Meghalaya!

Speaking about the influence of the internet during elections, I recently read Nicholas Carr's book, "The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains," published way back in 2011. Carr says, "The very way my brain worked seemed to be changing. It was then that I began worrying about my inability to pay attention to one thing for more than a couple of minutes. At first I'd figured that the problem was a symptom of middle-age mind rot. But my brain, I realized, wasn't just drifting. It was hungry. It was demanding to be fed the way the Net fed it and the more it was fed, the hungrier it became. Even when I was away from my computer, I yearned to check email, click links, do some Googling. I wanted to be connected."

If that was what Carr experienced in 2011 then what of the impact of the internet today and on those that have not developed the capacity to reason and judge between fake and real news and the plethora of views that bombard their brains! It's actually frightening. There are those who argue that as adults too to find our own demons to fight in our time but we got through without much scalding. I am not so sure if the challenges posed by the internet today, which actually gives us an adrenalin rush and whets our appetite for admiration, appreciation, better and more comments applauded are easily resolved. And mind you, as society we have hardly had any conversation on this issue unless it's a holy grail for our times!

But I am digressing. Let me come back to the politics of Meghalaya. Politicians who have shifted from one party to the other expect us voters to be so muddled in our beliefs on party ideologies that we are expected to shift regularly between the next election? The very idea of voting this time is bizarre. So caught up will we be in the blame game between political parties and politicians that we might forget some key issues. So it's time for us voters to take a pause and consider everything that has happened between 2018 and 2023. Among the negatives are the seams — the power scam, the scam, the police vehicle scam and the take contractor where Cherrapunji Thangkiew was eliminated. Where are we insofar as these seams are concerned? The government tells us, and the legislators in the opposition that there was no scam and we shut up. No one actually took the government to task. And now no one talks about the scam. So Satnam Global of smart meter clean walk away with a clean chit and so do all the other scammers. And frankly speaking I see no path beyond the negatives in the 5-year rule of the MDA Government, other than the commissioning of the long-pending Cherrapunji hotel now turned a 'Vivam'.

What does this tell us about democracy in Meghalaya? Does it even exist?

Christmas not for unholy parties? By Sali Gwalin, (ST December 31, 2022) I wish to express my views on this. So far as my personal knowledge of religion is concerned, wild parties and drinking spree during religious festivals is sacrilegious. In God's domain immoral activities do not get entry. But what we are witnessing now in the name of puja or holy Christmas is against religious tenets. This kind of religious development will be detrimental to the society also as clearly emphasized by Mr Gwalin in his letter.

Particularly during Durga Puja, we notice the puja committees holding various programs in which Bollywood vulgar dances are performed right in front of the idols of Goddess Durga. I think this is an INSULT to Gods and Goddesses. Better stop doing puja. During the puja festive occasions one also witnesses boisterous crowds of people, mostly heavily drunk, creating scenes at places and causing great inconvenience to the visiting devotees at the pandals. In some cases, devotees cannot reach up to the sanctum sanctorum to offer prayers and take prasid. How can we call this as puja? Why is the Central

Puja Committee (CPC) of Meghalaya keeping mum? I have not seen any believers of Christianity or Islam or Sikhism, organizing Bollywood dances within the premises of the Church or Masjid of Gurudwara till date. In the guise of puja celebration, we should not allow unedifying entertainment. This is against the guidelines of holy scriptures. Lastly, through this column I sincerely request the Central Puja Committee (CPC) to take this concern seriously. Let CPC take the initiative in this direction by calling respected religious leaders from other faiths as it does every year which is highly appreciated. I hope the Central Puja will be free from vulgar entertainment. The sacred Vedas and the Gita echo human beings irrespective of any faith, to keep away from materialistic thoughts and to be free from desires. I believe similar teachings are also enshrined in the Holy Bible and the Koran.

Yours etc., Rupesh Nah. Via email

Religious leaders and CPC should take initiative

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

Yours etc., Kenneth Nongstie, Via email

Appropos of the letter

G-20 Presidency: Hope on a difficult road

By G N Bajpai

India has taken over leadership of the G-20 and has said it wants to lead with a presidency of "healing, harmony and hope". It has been slow cooking for more than two decades. It was more than two decades ago that an academic paper picked up early warning signs as it called "public anxiety about globalisation and free trade is rising". In an increasing number of grassroots movements and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), proposals for new forms of protectionism against the social and ecological consequences of free trade and increased capital mobility are being discussed. ("Game, Set, and Match for Mr. Ricardo?" by Robert Wood in the Journal of Economic Issues, September 2000). Evidence of unrest later became plain for anyone to see, and the situation has only been deteriorating since the global financial crisis of 2008.

Yet, the idea of growth fuelled by globalisation has been very real in many countries have benefited. That memory is only too recent to be forgotten.

The total factor productivity (TFP) growth in



delegations, the biggest so far in the G-20, will be participating in the New Delhi summit in September. So, time is short and ambition is high.

This ambition comes at a time of heightened geopolitical volatility, a very real VUCA world that is showing signs of increasing volcanic activity, if that term can be used. Consider the rise of right-wing politics (the latest wins of Republicans in the US, where deciding a House speaker takes multiple votes because the hardliners within the party want to extract their price), economic nationalism, the attempt to shut borders rather than open them more freely, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and consequent economic turmoil, rising inflation worldwide, the continued toll of Covid-19 and new variants of the virus, particularly in China and the country's refusal to be transparent with information — all point to the world in a state that does not look like a peaceful and free of families, let alone "one family".

In that sense, India has a difficult task of leadership at hand. But this is also the time that can bring out the best, with the right leadership marked by a sense of purpose and the understanding that everyone suffers if the strains continue or escalate.

In order to meet these challenges, it may help to revisit the factors that contributed to the period of "great moderation" from the mid-1980s to 2007, when the global economy was growing and many were lifted out of poverty. These included broader geopolitical peace, conciliatory political leadership, low inflation, deepening globalisation and free movement of capital. David Ricardo's theory of "comparative advantage" which made the case for opening up global trade was at play along with a universal sharp focus on economic growth.

Unfortunately, all the building blocks seem to have crumbled and inequality and economic misery are

visible across geographies. The "surprising comeback of protectionism" hasn't been a sudden development. It has been slow cooking for more than two decades. It was more than two decades ago that an academic paper picked up early warning signs as it called "public anxiety about globalisation and free trade is rising". In an increasing number of grassroots movements and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), proposals for new forms of protectionism against the social and ecological consequences of free trade and increased capital mobility are being discussed. ("Game, Set, and Match for Mr. Ricardo?" by Robert Wood in the Journal of Economic Issues, September 2000). Evidence of unrest later became plain for anyone to see, and the situation has only been deteriorating since the global financial crisis of 2008.

Yet, the idea of growth fuelled by globalisation has been very real in many countries have benefited. That memory is only too recent to be forgotten.

The total factor productivity (TFP) growth in

"You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it." — Margaret Thatcher

The Shillong Times

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Tall poll promises

A flurry of inaugurations ranging from an incomplete stadium in Tura to a health centre in the distant periphery of South West Khasi Hills raises questions about the timing. Why now, at the end of the MDA Government's tenure in office? Isn't it prudent to have started these projects on time so that they see the light of day during this Government's term of office rather than to use these inaugurations as an allurement? Health centres are imperative in areas where there are no roads or the roads are eaten up by corruption, because ferrying patients to CHCs and Civil Hospitals located in district headquarters is a traumatic experience. So far there is no count of how many patients have died on the way to a health centre, more so of women in labour. This is a study that must be conducted by the State Government if the aim is better outreach and not a cover-up for poor governance. No matter how small the population in a village is, a health sub-centre is a must for people are too poor to travel from places with no public transport to reach a health centre.

In 50 years, Meghalaya has not set its priorities right. Development is unplanned because the Planning Board is arguably dysfunctional and packed with political hangers-on. In fact, the Planning Board should be dismantled because it has become a white elephant. So too the other non-functional Boards and Councils such as the Employment Generation Council and similar defunct bodies which simply gobble up meagre resources. In a small state like Meghalaya the priority should have been health, connectivity and education. Alongside, employment generation and boosting agricultural and horticultural outputs should also have been given a solid foundation. Today Meghalaya is performing poorly on the health, education and road communications front. A state that boasted that it could produce 3000 MW of power to supply to Bangladesh is today power-starved.

Unfortunately, none of these issues that are critical to human development are being discussed before the 2023 elections. There is too much noise and cacophony of job-entitlements and hoardings that make tall claims that the present Government is constructing 2.2 KMs roads daily even when the roads are not in sight. Such an election blitzkrieg by a ruling government has never been witnessed before. The noise and tall claims are intended to divert people's attention from mal-governance and scams that have rocked the MDA Government. Some road projects inaugurated two years ago to connect rural villages to the nearest town where they can bring their farm produce are still hanging fire. So why lie to people by inaugurating projects that the Government has no intention of completing? These are issues that need deliberation between now and polling day whenever that is. The MDA Government must give its 5-year report card to the people.

Letters to the Editor

A dying tradition

Editor, Our tradition of neighbours one another has always been one of our strengths and the most noble tradition, a tradition known as 'Singyil-liang ka Nangyil-liang' or 'Chunong Chong' among the Jaintias. This is a kind of neighbourhood social bonding. Historically, a neighbourhood appears wherever human beings live together, live next to each other, that allows an opportunity to form friendships based on components of proximity and reciprocity. Rural neighbourhoods usually maintain certain practices to serve the interests of the community. One example of long-held tradition in the rural neighbourhood - a practice still prevalent in an 'intimate community' is when a neighbour is in need, neighbours help him in ploughing his field, building his hut and guarding his sheep. Without expecting any payment in return, the neighbours reciprocate the same.

All this has changed dramatically over the centuries since the Industrial Revolution. In urban centres, neighbourhood friendships have relatively moderate cohesiveness. Moreover,

members of the community have the tendency to choose friends on the basis of similarity in backgrounds, such as socio-economic background, status, values and interests. Today we have neighbours that know each other only casually as acquaintances, and the only exchange between them is, "How are you?" There's nothing beyond this perfunctory greeting. This has eroded our sense of community for which we are called tribals.

Yours etc., Dr Omarlin Kyndiah, Via mail

Kudos to Sanbor Shullai of BJP

Editor, In the tumultuous times of the last week of December 2022 when churches were attacked in some parts of the country, BJP MLA, Sanbor Shullai condemned the atrocities on Christians. He needs to be thanked for what he did despite being a member of the BJP which has an antipathy towards minorities. It needs courage and conscientiousness to speak the truth. We also cannot forget the fact that Sanbor Shullai drew the wrath of the Centre for defending the

India's BoP crisis touches precarious levels under Modi regime Spurt in current account deficit in just one year a matter of great concern

By Prabhat Patnaik

India's current account deficit for the second quarter (July-September) of 2022-23 has reached a massive \$36.4 billion which is 4.4 per cent of the gross domestic product, higher than at any time in the last nine years. It is only in October-December 2012 that the absolute level of the current deficit had been \$32.6 billion which was 6.7 per cent of the GDP.

By contrast the current account deficit had been \$18.2 billion in the first quarter of 2022-23 or 3.2 per cent of GDP and \$9.7 billion or 1.3 per cent of GDP in the second quarter of 2021-22, i.e., exactly a year ago. In other words compared to the first quarter itself there has been a doubling of the current account deficit as a percentage of GDP which is a whopping increase, compared to the second quarter a year ago the increase in GDP percentage is more than three times.

Quite apart from the sheer size of the current account deficit, there are at least three reasons why the balance of payments is a cause for serious concern. First, the reason for the increase in the current account deficit, by as much as \$18.2 billion compared to the previous quarter, is an increase in merchandise trade deficit, that is, in the excess of imports over exports of goods. The merchandise trade deficit increased by over \$20 billion, from \$63 billion to \$83.5 billion between the first and the second quarters.

According to the Reserve Bank of India this increase was for two reasons: first, the increase in oil prices that has occurred in the wake of the Ukraine war and pushed up our import bill; and, second, the lackluster performance of our exports because of the slowing down of the world economy. Economic commentators in the media have adduced other factors, like the weak rupee and the revival of domestic demand, for the widening of the merchandise trade deficit, but these are erroneous assertions; a weak rupee should, if anything, improve rather worsen the trade deficit; and the revival of demand has not been so pronounced as to widen the deficit so much, since the GDP growth itself which is the primary source of income has been low.

The problem with the factors identified by the Mizoram government in the border imbroglio with Assam. Knowing that Shullai is one of the few winning candidates in the contest in a position to take action against Shullai.

Yours etc W Pasah, Via mail

Unfettered speech: boon or bane?

Editor, When the USSR disintegrated, people were concerned as to how they would be now there would be no restriction on their speech but after sometime they realised that it was only a mirage. They realised that even if they have freedom of speech no one listens to their problems. They also realised within a short time that no one is prepared to take their speech seriously and unless a person's or group's speech is taken seriously and leads to action, freedom of speech is worthless. Now we look at the decision of the Supreme Court on this subject matter. On the one hand is the Supreme Court decision on free speech whereas on the other hand the Gujarat Bill empowering the police to book protesters just got the

billion dollars being spent by the RBI in its efforts to stabilise the rupee. In the second quarter of 2022-23 itself there was a \$25 billion decline in reserves. The depletion of reserves therefore cannot be taken as a sign of rupee; what is more, as the level of reserves declines, speculation against the rupee will escalate, making matters even worse. It follows therefore that despite our large reserves India's balance of payments have become a serious cause for concern.

The third reason why the balance of payments situation portends ill for the economy is as follows: the yawning merchandise trade deficit has occurred in a situation of low GDP growth. The first quarter (April-June) GDP growth in 2022-23 over the corresponding quarter of 2021-22 had been 2.5 per cent, reflecting recovery from a Covid-induced trough. But the second quarter growth has been just 6.3 percent compared to the second quarter of 2021-22. The growth in gross value added (GVA) in the second quarter, which measures the actual increase in production, ignoring the effects of tax changes that GDP incorporates, was even lower, just 5.6 per cent. The reason for the slowdown in growth was a slowing down of the manufacturing sector which is not an encouraging development but a persisting one (People's Democracy, December 25). India's creeping industrial stagnation and depression which in turn give rise to an actual exchange rate depreciation by causing financial outflows.

Since neither of the factors mentioned by the RBI as underlying the widening trade deficit at present, is going to be affected by any exchange rate depreciation, its impact on the deficit will be marginal even after sufficient time has elapsed, in which case we are entering a period of freefall for the rupee. It is already being called one of the weakest currencies in Asia, but this state of affairs is going to persist, perpetuating inflation in the country through the cost-push effect emanating from imported inputs.

It may be thought that India's large foreign exchange reserves should prevent such a free fall of the rupee, but even the current fall has occurred despite nearly a hundred

statements in his official capacity, it can be viciously attributed to the government. Particularly, she emphasised that such a speech must not be allowed on the pretext of freedom of speech as it 'denies human beings the right to dignity' by making 'the foundational values by making the society unequal and also attacks citizens from diverse backgrounds'. Indeed, every person should measure their words before uttering them. Justice Nagarathna is vehemently against hate speech. She remarked that it violates the fraternity of citizens from diverse backgrounds. And said the sine qua non of a cohesive society is based on plurality and multi-culturalism. India that is 'Bharat'. She also pointed out that fraternity is based on the idea that citizens have reciprocal responsibilities towards one another. While Justice Nagarathna's intentions are laudable, her attack on hate speech seems a bit excessive. The reason is that in the last hundred years, a lot of creative and scholarly works have been banned or curtailed on grounds of blasphemy, immorality, etc.

Some of them can be brought under the rubric of 'hate speech'. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83), founder of Arya Samaj, was a bitter

critic of superstitions and useless rituals that have been the bane of Hindu society for centuries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi extolled him for this reason. In his magnum opus, Savartha Prakash, Dayananda wrote that 'idolatri is adharma'. Isn't it blasphemous from the perspective of millions of Hindu devotees? Should Savartha Prakash be regarded as hate speech? Hundreds of years ago, Kabir wrote, 'Laying rock upon stone a mosque is made On this climbs the mazzin to make his call to the heavens Is the Lord deaf then?' By any reckoning, this is deeply offensive to Muslims. He also ridiculed idolatry, which Hindus would regard as offensive. Emphasis should be on checking violence by anonymous persons on curbing free speech, which is already under attack from various quarters. As the issue had wide ranging impact so it should be exercised cautiously so that it may not widen the gap between different societies.

Yours etc, Yash Pal Rallan, Via mail

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

merchandise trade deficit is occurring not because of any pronounced boom in the economy but rather in the midst of a creeping industrial stagnation, thereby augurs ill for the economy.

Some may argue that there is nothing new in the current situation, that in 2012-13 the country had faced a similar predicament when the tapering off of bond purchases by the Federal Reserve Board of the United States, indicating a tightening of US monetary policy, had caused a similar widening of the merchandise trade deficit (as mentioned earlier) and a fall in the rupee; but that, while heralding a period of economic difficulties for the country, had not precipitated any insurmountable crisis. Why should a similar situation be a matter of such serious concern now?

There is a fundamental difference between then and now. The world economy is currently afflicted by high inflation unlike then, because of which there is a general rise in interest rates everywhere and the entire world economy is going into a precipitous recession. At that time the RBI had responded to the situation by raising India's interest rate, while other countries were not increasing rates, which was why the RBI's response succeeded in preventing a crisis. But now, a rise in the interest rate by the RBI simply works to work because all capitalist countries are raising interest rates; this general rise in interest rates will bring about a world recession and hence keep our export and disc trade deficit high for some time, thereby precipitating a continuing economic crisis in India as suggested above.

All this is indicative of the cul-de-sac that neoliberal capitalism has run into, and the severe challenges that the hegemony of western imperialism that has emerged World capitalism in short is currently in a state which creates new possibilities of transcending it. But if instead of seizing such an opportunity our economy remains stuck within a regime of neoliberal capitalism, and seeks to overcome its predicament merely by resorting to bailouts through borrowing, then that will only accentuate in future the crisis that the country is facing at present. (IPA Service/Courtesy: People's Democracy)

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completion of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir as one of its main poll planks, if not the main. Shah said the 'jagan-chumbi' Ram Mandir will be ready for a January 1, 2024 inauguration, just in time for campaigning for the 2024 general elections to kick-up a storm.

Amit Shah broke the news at a public meeting in the town of Sabroom in Tripura, bordering Bangladesh. Some people promptly linked it to Ra-

is over 80 percent Hindu. Therefore, "grand Ram Mandir" has the potential to sway voters in Tripura. Also, the RSS praise for Rahul Gandhi must have rattled the BJP. Enough for Shah to harangue the Congress, and Rahul Gandhi, for their anti-temple stance.

Shah charged the Congress for delaying the Ram Mandir "from the time Babur destroyed it and left" till "Modi came one

"Amit Shah broke the news at a public meeting in the town of Sabroom in Tripura, bordering Bangladesh. Some people promptly linked it to Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, which had come in for wholesome praise from some RSS leaders who are actively involved in the construction of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir. This would be too simplistic an explanation. For one, it's too ad hoc to digest."

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This would be too simplistic an explanation. For one, it's too ad hoc to digest. Then again, it cannot be left to chance that a date for the inauguration has been announced to the world at large the day after BJP took off from Delhi after a year-and-a-half hiatus, where temple politics is "Sanjeev" for the BJP.

Clearly, the BJP as it approaches election year 2024, doesn't seem sure about an electoral strategy. The Ram temple issue has been flogged enough. And attempts to make Gyanvanti and "Mathura" issues aren't working up to expectations. Also, something like Hatako requires a Pulswang. Besides, Pakistan also cannot be flogged ad infinitum. Not when Rahul Gandhi is keeping the Chinna pot boiling. Yet, Shah cannot stop from talking of "Pakistani intruders" and "Uri and Pulswang terror attacks". If only it was a fox, then the BJP is coloured indigo! (D/S Vivek)

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Amit Shah offers Ram Mandir as against Rahul's slogan for jobs

HM's announcement timed for his target voters during 2023, 2024 polls

By Sushil Kuty

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has spoken. And the timing is telling, just in time for a clutch of assembly elections in 2023, and the big one in 2024. Shah announced that a grand Ram temple will be inaugurated in Ayodhya on January 1, 2024. That means the Bharatiya Janata Party will go into the 2023 assembly elections, and the 2024 general elections with the successful



cold weather, it is praiseworthy. The young man is trying to understand the nation and walking for 3000 km. We will only praise it. Shouldn't such wholesome praise for the BJP's main political adversary make Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah nervous and jump?

That said, the Tripura assembly elections are due in March 2023, and Tripura

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New year resolutions: why your brain isn't wired to stick to them

New year, new resolutions. It is that time once again. A recent survey shows that almost 58% of the UK population intended to make a new year's resolution in 2023, which is approximately 30 million adults. More than a quarter of these resolutions will be about making more money, personal improvement and losing weight.

But will we succeed? Sadly, a survey of over 800 million activities by the app Strava, which tracks people's physical exercise, predicts most of these resolutions will be abandoned by January 19.

One of the main reasons why promises fail before the end of January is because they are vague. They focus on immeasurable qualities such as being healthier, happier (without defining what that means) or earning more money (without coming up with an amount or plan).

Vague goals do not provide us with sufficient direction. If we do not know exactly where we are going, it is difficult to know which path to take. It is impossible to know how far we have to go to reach our destination, what barriers we will have to overcome and how to prepare for them.

We also often set ourselves unattainable goals because we want to challenge ourselves. There is an inherent paradox - dubbed the "effort paradox" - in how much our brains love the idea of effort while in reality finding it uncomfortable. We want to think that we will feel more fulfilled if we challenge ourselves to achieve a difficult goal.

We think of the end point that we want now, in the present, but not the process or journey to get there. With such a narrow focus, it is easy to visualise this end point as closer than what it is when we start working towards it.

The lazy brain

To navigate the world, we form mental shortcuts creating habits. When these cognitive shortcuts have been hardwired in place, our brains find it easier to act without much conscious effort or



control. The longer we have had these habits, the more deeply entrenched the cognitive shortcuts behind them are.

For example, we may unthinkingly reach for the jar of biscuits when we park ourselves in front of the telly at night - it becomes a routine. Or we hit the snooze button when the alarm goes off in the morning.

Our brains are lazy and want to minimise cognitive load - meaning we repeat what we find pleasurable rather than consider many different and new options, which may be more or less pleasurable. It is simply easier to take these shortcuts that don't offer much resistance or discomfort. That is all, some people rely more on habits than others and they may find it harder to break them.

To achieve our resolutions, however, we often need to change these deep-seated habits and alter the neural pathways responsible. But as our brains

resist this discomfort, we are tempted to go back to a more comfortable place. That's a reason why we give up our resolutions. An aspect of this is known as the status quo bias. We are more likely to stay with status quo - our existing mindsets - rather than persist with changing these habits which takes time and effort.

The more we focus on the goal rather than the incremental steps needed to achieve that goal, the more likely we are to find it difficult to change our mindsets and create the habits needed to achieve it. It becomes a vicious circle because the more we get stressed about something, the more likely we are to fall back into a place of comfort, with our cognitive shortcuts.

When we engage in habitual behaviour, areas at the back of the brain, to do with automatic behaviour, are typically engaged. But to actively alter our neural pathways away from such activation, we

need to engage several areas of the brain - including the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in highly complex cognitive tasks.

A study using neuro-imaging revealed that altering our behaviour involves coordinated cross-talk between several brain regions, including speedy communication between two specific zones within the prefrontal cortex and another nearby stretch called the frontal eye field, an area involved in controlling eye movements and visual awareness.

This is hugely more cognitively taxing for our brain, and so we try to avoid it.

Better approaches

Changing habits requires being aware of the patterns of behaviour that we have learnt over the years and knowing how difficult it is to change them. And that's impossible if you are blinded by visions of the new, perfect you. But to succeed at changing yourself, you need to know the real you.

It is also helpful to set clear, achievable goals - such as devoting an extra hour a week to your favourite hobby or banning biscuits in the evenings only, perhaps replacing them with a nice, herbal tea.

What's more, we need to appreciate and celebrate the process of achieving our goals. Many of us are more inclined to focus on the negative aspects of the experience, leading to stress and anxiety. But had emotions demand more attention - this is called negativity bias. And the more we focus on negative things in our lives, and the negative aspects about ourselves, the more we are likely we are to feel down while missing the positive things.

The more we focus on the positive aspects of ourselves, the more likely we are to be able to change our mindsets.

So if you want to change, accept yourself the way you are - and understand why. Though if you do that, you may even find you'd rather stick to the motto "New year, same old me". There's nothing wrong with that. *(The Conversation)*

Teacher extraordinaire Savitribai Phule to get her first biography

By Anubhita Baidoo

January 3 marks the birth anniversary of one of the world's greatest teachers, Savitribai Phule. Recta Ramamurthy Gupta is set to release Savitribai's first biography, titled *Savitri and Fatima*, with a focus on her friendship with Fatima Shaikh. The announcement was made by Harper Collins in November 2022.

The question that remains is why is this the first book about Savitribai Phule coming 125 years after her death? Here's an interview with the author who also wrote the bestselling biography of Sanjeev Kumar in 2022.

Q: Why is the first biography on Savitribai Phule coming so late?

A: As a matter of fact, there are many books about Savitribai in Marathi. I have seen some compilations in English as well, but nothing that qualifies as a biography. I do wonder why there haven't been attempts

our democracy lies in being cognisant of our hard-won freedom and how precious and tenuous this freedom is! Savitribai Phule was an embodiment of the word 'feminism'. Her convictions and her actions were set in the 19th century, at a time where even basic rights were not available to women. She fought for their basic dignity and education. Her activism and her duty required real gumption. She not only rescripted her own life, she made it possible for untouchables and women to re-script theirs too.

Q: Is it possible to 'Rescript Your Life', as per your first book?

A: Yes, 'Rescript Your Life' is my first book, on which every other book is based. You become what you believe in, not what you want, is the message of the book.

If you read 'Stranger in the Mirror', Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's biography, he is someone who came from humble origins to become one of our greatest filmmakers.

If you read 'Sanjeev Kumar: The Actor We All Loved', the man lost his father at 12 and fell prey to heavy depression, before he rose to become one of India's finest actors. So both of them re-scripted their lives.

Q: Your book is titled *Savitri and Fatima*.

A: Yes, this is a story of a friendship between the two women. When Savitribai and her husband Jyotirao Phule founded the first school for girls (by a non-missionary or by someone who was not British), they were thrown out of their house. It was Fatima Shaikh who gave them shelter.

Fatima had taken her teacher training lessons along with Savitribai Phule and they developed a deep friendship. Fatima functioned as a dependable deputy to Savitri Phule's efforts. She offered to run all the schools and this gave Savitribai Phule the opportunity to confront other social issues such as widow remarriage and the oppressive caste system.

Yes, this friendship between Savitri and Fatima and their work together remains unsung and unknown. They had a dream, 'education for all', irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The spark lit by Savitri and Fatima had far-reaching consequences. As more and more Indians got educated, their minds opened up to the ideas of freedom, justice and liberty.

Q: When will this book be launched?

A: Later this year. But I do believe that after this book, Fatima Shaikh will be mentioned with the same reverence that we accord to former President and freedom fighter Zakir Hussain or former President and acclaimed scientist A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

Q: What next?

A: Another exciting story from the annals of Indian history. Another forgotten hero perhaps? *(HANSI)*

An ideal recipe book for folks affected by lifestyle disorders



By N. Lothungpeli Hlumsoe

According to the World Health Organization, around 422 million people worldwide have diabetes, with the majority living in low- and middle-income countries, and diabetes is directly responsible for 1.5 million fatalities each year. Diabetes has been progressively increasing in both the number of cases and the prevalence during the last few decades.

"Diabetes is a chronic, metabolic disease characterized by elevated levels of blood glucose (or blood sugar), which leads over time to serious damage to the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves. The most common type 2 diabetes, usually in adults, occurs when the body becomes resistant to insulin or doesn't make enough insulin.

"In the past three decades the prevalence of type 2 diabetes has risen dramatically in countries of all income levels. Type 1 diabetes, once known as juvenile diabetes or insulin-dependent diabetes, is a chronic condition in which the pancreas produces little or no insulin by itself. For people living with diabetes, access to affordable treatment, including insulin, is critical to their survival. There is a globally agreed target to halt the rise in diabetes and obesity by 2025". - WHO

"Lifestyle is an all-encompassing term that has the power to transform your life within weeks," says Khushboo Jain Tibrewala, founder of The Health Pantry, Nutritionist, and Diabetes Educator. *HANSI* spoke to Khushboo, author of 'Everyday recipes for Diabetes,' to better understand the disease and how to deal in order to achieve the global objective of ending the chronic disease by 2025.

What prompted you to create a free ebook?

Khushboo: If you actually see each of the recipes, you'll notice that most

of them are normal everyday dishes that we all eat at our homes. I may have tweaked them here and there but it is more a curation of Indian home food than recipes written by me. I made this book free for all because I wanted people to see at the end of the day all they need is normal home-style meals.

Our traditional foods have everything we need to stay healthy, we just need to learn how to tweak the basic recipes as per our health goals. This book will find itself useful in almost every Indian household no matter where in India they are from or where in the world they live today. This one had to be free.

What are the most prevalent issues that your association with Diabetic patients has revealed?

Khushboo: There are quite a few! But one of the most common ones is the role the rest of the family plays. In some homes, the remaining family members identify that these are lifestyle disorders and they may all be at risk as a family. They make dietary and lifestyle changes as a family.

Such patients see an almost magical response. Because there is no stress around their food at home. In homes where the remaining family members refuse to support the patient, results are slower and there are higher chances of dropouts.

How does your book help individuals suffering from conditions such as Hypertension, PCOS, High Cholesterol, Weight Loss, and Type 2 diabetes?

Khushboo: This book is perfect for anyone who has these lifestyle disorders. Each recipe is gluten-free, low glycemic index, is high in fibre, rich in phytonutrients and is plant-based. These simple traits make sure that your glucose levels are more stable and stabilising blood glucose levels is the one trick that helps each and every lifestyle disorder including the ones

mentioned here.

How does your book differ from the numerous others on the market that discuss Diabetes and other topics?

Khushboo: As mentioned before, this book is a simple curation of recipes from Indian homes. What makes it unique is the addition of a Nutritionist's perspective. I have labelled each recipe as per its glycemic index, the culinary skill required and whether it can be used as part of weekly meal prep. Also, I have created some simple formulas to help the reader personalise the recipe and use locally available ingredients. For eg., there is a chela recipe that can be made with most commonly whatever you have at home, you just need to stick to my proportions. Similarly, there is a mixed greens saag recipe that is again just a formula that can be used to make a saag out of whatever greens you have at home.

Share one recipe with an interesting backstory?

Khushboo: What makes this book so special to me is that literally, every recipe has a special story and a special person to thank. The Satru recipe comes from my Nani, the Kanji from my Dad, there is a salad that comes from all the lunches at my best friend's home. Mangodi pulao is my mother's recipe. One that I am most excited about is the Methi ki Chutney. Growing up, Aloo Bedmi and this Chutney was the standard Sunday breakfast at home. Back then we would buy this one special brand from Delhi that we would never find in Mumbai.

Cut to my life as an adult, when I learn that methi seeds are actually fantastic for type 2 diabetes. So while most nutritionists ask you to soak the seeds and eat them every morning, I wanted to find a tastier way of incorporating methi seeds. I recreated the recipe for that chutney and now, this simple recipe has become part of all my clients' lives. *(HANSI)*



to write her story in English before or whether I might have missed them.

Savitribai Phule is a part of every listicle on the world's greatest teachers. She's one of the greatest revolutionaries and guiding lights to have been born in India.

Q: Which again brings us to why there's no book about her?

A: Destiny maybe. Also, remember that there is an awakening of sorts in our country at present. India's writers, filmmakers and business leaders are reclaiming India's history in a decisive manner. I also see India taking pride in its own stories and artists like never before.

This unapologetic pride is possible because on the one hand, we haven't been acquisitive or predatory towards other lands. On the other hand, from Gandhi to Buddha, Narendra Modi to Rishi Sunak, Mukesh Ambani to Gautam Adani, and Mother Teresa to Priyanka Chopra, some of the world's most inspirational icons across different fields are from India. India has come into her own.

Q: Why did you pick this subject?

A: Every Indian woman, anywhere in the world, who can read and write, owes a debt of gratitude to Savitribai Phule. I wanted to bring her to the front and centre of public consciousness because the preservation of

"It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."
—Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Hello Oxford, welcome Harvard

THE ball is finally set rolling. World-renowned universities are being invited to come and set up their campuses in India. The University Grants Commission (UGC) says it is taking baby-steps in this direction and has released a draft legislation for public feedback and fine-tuning of the concept. If all goes well, such campuses would materialize in about two years' time -- in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 released by the Modi government. Universities like Yale, Oxford and Stanford might step in on a promise that they will have autonomy -- meaning, they can decide on fee structure, recruitment of students and faculty. Students from within, aspiring for education on such campuses, would themselves be many and this strength could be complemented by arrivals from other countries like Nepal or Bangladesh.

Notably, a sizable segment of Indian students who go to foreign universities -- mainly from rich families as also those with educational loans or scholarships -- might continue to prefer a study abroad. Fact is, many of them mean more than a study and go mostly to lesser-reputed universities in the developed world. Nearly seven lakh Indian students went abroad for higher education in 2022, mainly to the US, Canada, UK and other European nations. Clearly, their principal aims are the ample after-study job opportunities and chances for a permanent living there. The educated youth, especially the well-endowed ones, are not comfortable with life here for obvious reasons. They seek an escape from boredom as also better working and living conditions.

The present decision is also seen in the context of the poor performance of Indian universities in global rankings, year after year -- a progressive fall in esteem to ludicrous levels. A couple of Indian universities / institutes figure in the first 200 among a ranking of over 1,500 entities worldwide. This, in a land known in ancient times as the world's centre of learning and scholastic pursuits -- as exemplified in the Nalanda and Takshashila (now in Pakistan). India ranks 101 among 133 nations as per the Global Talent Competitiveness Index-2022 another steady fall. All these must be seen in the wider context of the gradual erosion of strengths of every system after a head-start in the planning for a modern India under a visionary leader like Jawaharlal Nehru. Politics at the center of the growth process is itself vitiated by multiple factors, which amply gets reflected in the poor quality of the nation's governance. Bringing foreign universities here -- rather than the other way round, ideally -- is by itself a small step in the overall cause of empowering/revitalizing the nation.

Letters to the Editor

Women are human beings too!

We were not even able to come out of the trauma of Aafab Amin Poonwala strangulating his live-in partner Shradha Walker and chopping her body into pieces in May 2022, when there is another draconian inhuman incident in Delhi on New Year's eve, where a 20-year-old woman died a painful death after her scooter was hit by a car and she was dragged under the car for twelve kilometers. Her body was tampered, her skull fractured and brain matter missing. Very little has changed on the ground since the Nirbhaya gang rape case that happened on December 16, 2012. In fact, we can only say that it has worsened. Emotionally and mentally upset by reading such horrendous news, knowing this is the story of every woman in India irrespective of religion, age

Moolamyliang: An Oasis in the coal mining desert

By H.H. Mohrmen

Moolamyliang is a village located about 100 kilometers from Shillong the capital of Meghalaya. It is located near Sunga and is perhaps, one of the oldest villages in the region. It is very close to Laitryke the temporary headquarters of Saipung block and about 20 kilometers from Khliehriat, the District headquarters of the East Jaintia hills district. I was also lucky to have the confidence of the leader of the church to edit the history of the Presbyterian Church from which I learned about human-tiger conflict in the area. The incidents of tigers attack were because the village is not far from the Saipung Reserve Forest and royal Bengal tigers were roaming free in the region in the past.

Moolamyliang is now famous for the Christmas decorations that the village installed during the season before Christmas till the beginning of the New Year. Recently, the village under the leadership of the Waheh Chhng Apnon Pachhang has been in the news for the many bold innovative ideas that the village has undertaken. The village with about 170 households was part of the Saipung block in the East Jaintia hills district. But what is not known about this village is the fact that the community has taken concern concerning coal mining.

Not surprisingly like any village in the area, the residents of the village were and some still are, engaged in the coal mining business. In the past coal mining is being operated even in the village, but things took a change for the better when the community decided to discourage coal mining in the village. This change of heart amongst the villagers happened even before the NGT banned coal mining in the state. Since the beginning of the year 2006 Moolamyliang had gradually done away with coal mining.

The decision even though it is located right in the heart of East Jaintia hills which is the major coal mining area in the state of Meghalaya.

The leaders of the community along with the villagers have been able to protect their village from the drastic effects of coal mining by doing three things: The village did not allow coal mining within the boundaries of the village and also prohibited dumping or stockpiling of coal in the vicinity of the village. The leaders of the community also encouraged tree plantation in the village and its vicinity by collaborating with the District Forest Officer, West Jaintia hills district. It was in one of the three plantation programs that were organized by the village in collaboration with the Department in the early part of 2006 that I first came into contact with lead-

ers of the community that included Ma Dame Rymbai and others. By doing so, the village was able to keep its surroundings free of pollution and more importantly, the water around the village remains clean and fit for human use. The trees people planted makes the village look green and the ability of the community to keep the village

Moolamyliang is now famous for the Christmas decorations that the village installed during the season before Christmas till the beginning of the New Year. Recently, the village under the leadership of the Waheh Chhng Apnon Pachhang has been in the news for the many bold innovative ideas that the village has undertaken. The village with about 170 households was part of the Saipung block in the East Jaintia hills district. But what is not known about this village is the fact that the community has taken concern concerning coal mining.

clean makes it unique in its way. The villagers are also trying to reclaim Wah Kwai which was once polluted by coal mining activities.

Clean and Green
This makes Moolamyliang like an oasis in the middle of the coal mining desert in the East Jaintia hills district. Now if one visits the village one would not only see how clean the village is but the village is also made beautiful by the

Moolamyliang is a classic case of community-led environment conservation at its best, which is also the reason why the conservation effort is successful. Moolamyliang conservation could also be a model for the other mining villages in the state. Next time when we visit Moolamyliang to witness the Christmas decorations please also remember the conservation story in the village which was the starting point of the change that is happening in the village. It is the story that proves that Moolamyliang has indeed become an oasis in the middle of the mining desert of the region.

trees that have been planted all around the village. The village with well-trimmed trees is a feast for the eyes. The village is kept clean all year round and the magnificent church in the middle of the village also adds to the beauty of the village. It is perhaps the cleanest village in the East Jaintia hills district. C. Synti also said that to make the village beautiful, the trees were trimmed by the community twice a year.

Closing the mines
The people in the village not only stopped mining and

also disallowed dumping and stockpiling of coal in the village, but they went a step ahead and looked for ways to close the exhausted mines. Dame Rymbai one of the leaders of the village last year during the Jowai town waste imbroglio had offered to the government to dump the waste in his abandoned mine. When even the government has not contemplated

the leaders of the village spent lakhs of rupees every year to beautify the village during the festive season. This year they spent not less than fifteen lakhs rupees on decoration.

To make the celebration more attractive the organizing committee of the dorbar chhng also organized a Christmas concert on Christmas eve and a New Year concert on New Year's eve. This year on average about 2000 visitors visited the village daily to see and enjoy the striking Christmas decoration. On Christmas eve the village was packed with visitors and about 5000 tourists visited the village.

Plans for the Future
The villagers were not disheartened by the fact that till today the government has not provided them with any kind of support. Despite the challenges next year they plan to extend the decoration much further to cover not only the facade of the village but the entire village. This also means that the community will have to increase its budget next year.

The leaders of the village wish to make their village a tourist spot that can attract tourists all year round. They wish that the village could attract tourists to the village not only during the Christmas and New Year seasons, and for that they need to have activities that can attract tourists for those who wish to undertake eco-tourism in the village that is yet to be explored is the river Kwai. River Kwai which is part of the village can help enhance the potential of the village to attract more tourists, but the river has to be reclaimed first. The people of the village have already started the process of reclaiming the river which was affected by acid mine drainage from coal mines upstream of the river. The village is also close to Nongklich which I call the cave capital of Meghalaya, hence it can also be a base camp for people who wish to undertake cave tourism in the region.

The beginning and the basis of the story
The conservation efforts in the village started with the community and it was carried by the people of the village without any external support. Moolamyliang is a classic case of community-led environment conservation at its best, which is also the reason why the conservation effort is successful. Moolamyliang conservation could also be a model for the other mining villages in the state. Next time when we visit Moolamyliang to witness the Christmas decorations please also remember the conservation story in the village which was the starting point of the change that is happening in the village. It is the story that proves that Moolamyliang has indeed become an oasis in the middle of the mining desert of the region.

the uniqueness of this village is also because once a year on the arrival of Christmas the village is decorated with colorful lights which attract visitors from far and wide. The light decoration is kept till the beginning of the New Year for people to come and enjoy the sight. C. Synti one of the leaders of the village said that it was not in their mind to attract people to the village when they started the Christmas decoration. Since they started installing the decoration in 2019, the community and particularly

If a candidate with financial clout wins the election, people from other parts of the state will view the people of Nongkrem Constituency as morons who are easily deceived by money. However, if a candidate with principles and with no financial might wins the prestigious seat, it will go down in history as an election where people exercised their mandate with a free mind and a clear conscience. True democracy will triumph, and it will serve as an example for the state and the nation.

What does the Nongkrem Constituency need? Nongkrem Constituency is the gateway for other districts to enter Shillong. It has the potential to become one of the flourishing constituencies in the state, but our leaders have failed to realize it. Our Constituency needs Government Schools, Government Colleges, land support for the farmers, water, etc. Water is one of the problems which Laitok faces, and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) have come and gone

India's North East gets big infra push with 57 km railway line to Bhutan

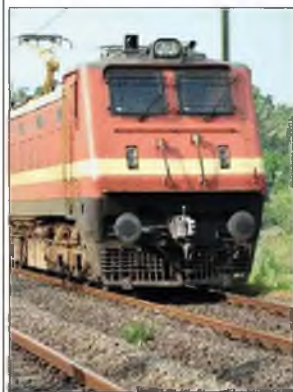
Border transport needs a boost to meet Chinese challenge

By Arun Kumar Shrivastav

India's North-East has seen several major infrastructure projects in the past few years. The latest is a 57 km broad gauge railway line between India's Kokrajhar and Bhutan's Gelephu, for which the work is going to start this year. This would be Bhutan's first railway project and one of the five railway projects for which India and Bhutan had signed an MoU in 2005. The Kokrajhar-Gelephu railway line project's estimated cost is \$130 million and the preliminary engineering work is about to complete.

So, the news is India's North-East is gradually moving from obscurity and neglect to spotlight and prominence. If we consider the infrastructure being built across the border in China, and the multi-modal transit hub involving India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, there is a significant uptick in how that entire region is being enabled to harness its potential.

While China's road and rail infrastructure close to India's borders is a serious challenge for Indian security establishments, in a peacetime environment, they can significantly improve the mobility of people and



was opened in 2021, passes a short distance from Arunachal Pradesh. Another Chinese project in that region, the 250-km Lhasa-Xigaze railway line, will cross a close distance from Sikkim. As if these were not enough for India's discomfort, an 825-km rail line connecting Xinjiang in southwestern Xinjiang and Ruojiang in northeastern Xinjiang will pass close to Ladakh.

These rail lines promise to connect China's remote areas with high-speed electrical railways. But they also pose serious strategic challenges for India and provoke global sensitivity on Tibet.

Meanwhile, in 2014, Arunachal Pradesh was brought to the Indian Railway map for the first time by linking Nahaingang. Now, three new rail lines are being built in the state. These are the 248-km North Lakhimpur-Silapahar line, 378-km Bhalukpong-Tawang line, and the 227-km Pasighat-Rupai line. Together they add nearly 800 km of new railway tracks in India's remotest outpost.

In April 2021, the 35-km Juyang-Karta section of the 67.7-km Juyang-Bijalpur-Bardibas rail project was inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Other cross-border rail projects involving India include 15-km Agatala-Akhura (Bangladesh), which is almost ready. The 18.6-km Joghani-Birainagar (Nepal) railway line has also made significant progress with the first 8-km stretch ready except for civil construction work for which contracts have been awarded.

Lessons for voters: Beware of another NPP-led Govt

As per the National Crime Records Bureau report, 4,28,278 cases of crime against women were registered during 2021, showing an increase of 15.3% over 2020 (3,71,503 cases). The majority of cases under the IPC for crime against women were registered under 'Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives' (31.8%) followed by 'Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty' (20.8%). 'Kidnapping & Abduction of Women' (17.6%) and 'Rape' (7.4%). The crime rate registered per lakh women population is 64.5 in 2021 in comparison with 56.5 in 2020. The question that we need to ask ourselves is, why are the women of this country not safe in their own country?

Since the Agricultural Revolution, most human societies have been patriarchal societies that valued men more highly than women. So there needs to be a complete overhaul of the system -- to seams and to scoundrels. The duties of five and ten thousand cannot change a person's

Poll battle between financial might and policymakers

Nongkrem Constituency is the subject of a lot of discussions right now, and there are various claims that money has been utilized to influence voters in order to win the upcoming elections. The election campaign in the Nongkrem Constituency will focus on two themes: 'the people's free will' and 'improving influence from money.'

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.

"Celebrate what you want to see more of." — Tom Peters

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023

Ethical tourism imperative

THE 34-page draft tourism policy of the Government of Meghalaya released in 2022 comes 11 years after the Tourism policy of 2011. In the intervening period so much has changed and so many new destinations were discovered and promoted. The Draft Tourism Policy is comprehensive and looks after every detail involved in promoting sustainable and responsible tourism. The Government has sought public responses, especially from tour operators and communities running tourism infrastructure. Undoubtedly, tourism in Meghalaya is booming and as of 2019 there were 12.7 lakh visitors of whom 25,000 were foreigners. In between Covid had dampened the tourism and hospitality sector but they have slowly recovered. According to government estimates tourism provides livelihoods to about 50,000 people.

In 2013 the Meghalaya Rural Tourism Cooperative Federation Limited (MRTCFL) was incorporated to provide financial support, guidance and technical and tourism management skills to primary tourism co-operative societies in the tourist destinations. This works well because the communities themselves become the primary stakeholders and the Tourism Department can work through these societies. The MRTCFL is a critical institution as destinations in rural Meghalaya are much sought after and a vibrant community-led tourism model is most viable in the circumstances. The Tourism Department has been working with these registered societies and supporting the creation of accommodation, viewpoints, toilet facilities etc.

Since Meghalaya cannot sustain manufacturing industries that are highly polluting, tourism is the best and most sustainable form of livelihood provided the destinations do not exceed their carrying capacity and are ultimately abandoned by high end tourists. Carrying capacity is therefore an issue that the communities need to be aware of because it is not the government's responsibility to restrict footfalls. That is the brie' of the tourism co-operative societies.

The other point that merits serious discussion is the pricing of tourism products. For instance, the mesmerising sunrise at Nongrieng which is awe-inspiring cost a visitor only Rs 30. This is what turns a destination into a mass tourism product. Hence training in product pricing is integral. Communities should guard against the temptation to increase footfalls without being able to provide the tourists their 'aha' moment or irremovable memories. The ability to create narratives around tourism destinations is what is missing in Meghalaya. If there is one issue that poses a danger to tourism in Meghalaya it would be over-exploitation of some of the beaten tracks to the point that communities themselves feel a sense of intrusion and no longer welcome the sight of tourists. This happens especially in small villages when people's lives are disrupted by noisy often drunken tourists. On Saturday morning the Umiam viewpoint was choco-a-blox with visitors arriving in buses. The tourists stood at the viewpoint but there was not a single tour guide to explain to them the genesis of the Umiam Lake. The Draft Tourism Policy envisages to carry out carrying-capacity studies in eco-sensitive destinations. This is timely so that mechanisms can be developed to ensure the sustainability of tourism as a livelihood.

Letters to the Editor

Pujas are not for vulgar parties

Editor, First of all my kudos to Sali Giewli for raising the genuine issue regarding violation of the sanctity of puja and spiritual celebrations through his letter. "Christmas is not for unholly parties." (ST Dec 31, 2022) I find the letter very thought-provoking. I could not stop myself from writing to your column. Fully agreeing with Robert Lyngdoh and Rupesh Nath for their valuable feedback, I also want to put across my humble opinion. My firm belief is that if we do not raise our voices the situation will go from bad to worse.

Nowhere in any religious holy book can one find anything at all that encourages negative activities in the name of celebrating a religious festival. The Bhagavad Gita strictly mentions that any type of sense gratification and God's devotion cannot happen together. They are completely opposite phenomena like the "devil and God" or "night and day." Hence the Hindu scriptures prescribe during Durga Puja that a devotee should observe complete fasting without even taking solid food, except fruits and water. The purpose behind

this is not to overburden the biological organs. This results in the purification of the mind and heart. Modern science also has proved that occasional fasting increases the human immune system missing mental calmness and patience. Devotion to God's through a pure mind and heart finally leads to awakening our consciousness. There is no bigger sin than to incorporate vulgarity and sense indulgence in any suspicious occasion. I have been observing this immoral development for over a decade and it is getting more worse with each year passing. I must confess that many of my Muslim and Christian friends put me in a difficult situation by asking questions about why during Hindu puja, Hindus enjoy Holiwood dances and hold drinking parties. They are right because such rowdy parties often end up in brawls. Instead of peace and harmony, we witness violence during puja and police intervention is needed. Is it not shameful? All these facts have disturbed my mind for many years. Hope this letter with my viewpoints based on religious scriptures, will be read by our CPC members. Being a human being, one should be able to differentiate between sin and virtue. Puja organizers should not encourage any negative activities. Hence, they do not

organize the puja function if the organizers cannot impart values to the believers. Hence my humble submission to the Central Puja Committee and religious leaders from other faiths is to completely ban immoral activities and entertainment during puja or during Christmas as requested by a previous writer Rupesh Nath and Robert Lyngdoh. Yours etc., Suraj Biswa, Shillong

Flights should stop serving alcohol

Editor, This has reference to the incident of peeing by a passenger on a senior lady co-passenger in an Air India flight. It's unfortunate that everyone is pointing towards the actions or inactions of the AI pilot and staff and raising issues of regulatory framework for controlling the unruly behaviour, but no one is raising questions about the root cause of the incident - which is alcoholism. Why should anyone in flight be allowed to drink alcohol in any class? What's such a great need? Why can't alcohol lovers restrain their urge for a few hours? Why should someone who

doesn't even like the smell of the alcohol, be made to suffer by sitting next to a passenger who has an insatiable appetite for alcohol? Like smoking, a time has come when drinking alcohol should not be permitted on flights. India, being the land of Mahatma Gandhi, should take a lead in setting that example. Yours etc., Anoop Kumar Srivastava, Via email

Old pension scheme (OPS) vs New pension scheme (NPS)

Editor, We may hear recall that pension systems had been first introduced by our British administrators way back in 1881 for the social welfare of their employees and their respective families, enabling them to live a dignified life and thereby avoid a hand to mouth existence post retirement and having dedicated a creamy part of their youthful life serving the government. Evidently, it was after a prolonged gap of 123 years that the BJP government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee valiantly distinguished with this serviceable package hitherto availed by the white collar personnel? The

India has had a tradition of conducting a national census, every ten years, for more than a century. It is one of the few countries in the world, not just among developing ones, to have had and maintained this hallowed tradition. The data that is collected is fairly authentic, and the exercise is done with a great deal of integrity. Research using India's census data has produced thousands of doctorates, new insights into historical policies (both blunders and successes), assisted in various fields, and areas besides which the census data has also provided a reliable economic history of the nation. The decadal census not only captures increases in population, households, family units, but also gives detailed granular data on distribution of age, literacy, fertility and migration.

The 2021 census also through light on economic status indicators such as employment and income, although the latter is in the domain of the National Statistical Office (NSO). The conduct of the census is under the Registrar General of India, which is under the Home Ministry, whereas the NSSO is under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI).

The 2021 census of India was to be carried out in two phases, the first is counting of dwellings and houses, and the second is enumeration of the population. The government notified its intent via a gazette in March 2019 of conducting the once-in-a-decade census. Before a census exercise commences, it is important to freeze the jurisdictional limits such as towns, villages, districts and census towns. The first phase was to be conducted from April to September 2020, and the second phase thereafter, so that by mid 2021 the preliminary numbers would be ready for release. The pandemic upset this timetable. Initially the freezing of boundaries was postponed till the end of 2020, and then again till the end of 2021. There have been three postponements since then, and the latest notice from the Registrar General of India (which is under the Home Ministry) says that the deadline for freezing boundaries is extended to the end of June

2023. Given that it takes about ten or eleven months for the census exercise to be properly conducted, it could interfere with the national elections due to be held in April or May 2024. Effectively it thus appears that the 2021 census has been put off by four years, using the pandemic and vaccination drive as an alibi. It will be difficult to conduct the census unless a much shortened and hence an imperfect method is used between July 2023 and March 2024. But that is unlikely. This has huge consequences. Firstly, the Na-

tional Food Security Act mandates that 75 percent of rural, and 50 percent of urban households be covered by the Act. The government recently made NFSA entitlement free for 81 crore people. But this number is based on the 2011 census. Population projections till 2022, suggest that the number is short by at least 10 crore. That has serious implications for the food security and nutrition status of a large number of households, especially the children. Secondly, various other government schemes, like pensions for the elderly (National Social Assistance

Delay in Conducting Census & its Consequences

By Ajit Ranade

Program) could miss their target by a huge margin since accurate census estimates are not available. The budgeting for these programs needs to have an accurate estimate of the size of the beneficiaries. Thirdly, India badly needs accurate information about migrants. A migrant is defined in the census as one who works in a place different from the place of birth. How many migrants are there? How many seasonal and how many long term? The covid lockdown revealed lakhs (or maybe crores) of people who were migrant city workers had

since its data is authentic and verifiable, it can throw an effective spotlight and serves as a tool for ensuring accountability from the government.

That is why the 2001 report of the Dr. Rangarajan Commission report on an overhaul of India's Statistical System is very important. It has recommended the establishment of a permanent commission on Statistics to serve as a nodal and empowered body, answerable to Parliament and not to the government. That is still an unfinished business in spirit at least. An empowered NSC (National Statistical Commission) would work in coordination with the Registrar General of India (RGI) who is responsible for the census and is under the Home Ministry.

Credible, authentic data is like a public good. Hence its collection requires a great deal of integrity, but also economy and predictability. A lot of public and private planning as well as economic activity depends on public data, be it on population, GDP, consumption, movement of migrants or distribution of income and wealth. A few years ago, the detailed survey-based data on consumer expenditure, conducted under the authority of NSC was suppressed. In protest or otherwise, all members of the NSC resigned. Now the NSC has been reconstituted. But this is reason for disquiet. The basis for authenticity and reliability of public data, be it census or economy is the trust people place in the bodies entrusted with collecting the data. Any delay or abrupt suppression is cause for distrust. Even if there are imperfections it is best to release the data for the public at large, and experts to analyse and dissect it. The present delay in conducting the national census, when even our South Asian neighbours have conducted theirs, despite covid difficulties, is cause for concern. It is best if the government finds a way of shortening the process, using modern digital techniques to quickly and in real-time triangulate and validate the data, and release preliminary data into the public domain at the earliest.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist (Syndicate, The Bhillon Press) Email: editor@thebhillonpress.org)

is the status of the Prime Minister's Awas (housing) Yojana? How many toilets built under Swachh Bharat are functioning? What is the status of piped water supply to households? Thousands of such questions can be answered when we analyse granular data from the census. The census is not a substitute for the elderly audit or a social audit. But

Vajpayee government postulated that pension funds contributed to the market under NPS would go a long way to pay rich dividends to the Government employees but such a pipe dream has now no takers among a large section of the later given that Sensex while upping a two-digit fold between 2004-2022, the cumulative financial returns penalizing on the employees have been far from expectations. This is amplified by the glaring fact that an employee drawing a basic scale of Rs 35,500 per month under NPS will receive a lamentable sum of around Rs 2,400 as pension! Contrasting this to his/her counterpart who retires under OPS and will earn a pension of Rs 15,300 per month or thereabouts.

Markedly, such gargantuan disparity has unleashed unprecedented dissatisfaction in the rank and file of the prospective employees. Incidentally, it also ironically connotes that a Grade IV staff like sweeper, mail, chawkidar, who superannate in the process of OPS can be in a much higher financial leverage than an officer retiring on NPS regime!

In short the NPS zcoses in on the fact that when the government employees retire all governmental liabilities towards such incumbents end up lock stock and bar-

rel. It is reported that there is a pan India movement amongst the government employees against the NPS. Taking the instance of our state of Meghalaya, in my fortuitous correspondence with large section of employees, who have joined services after 31 March 2010, have stated that the axe of NPS mechanism will fall on them by mid 2030s onwards when they shall have attained superannuation. Thus, ending in a financial cataclysm of sorts. Virtually all the non-BJP ruled states have reverted to OPS like Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Punjab and counting.

As Meghalaya Assembly elections will be held sooner than later, some political experts have opined that if BJP, NPP and for that matter even the prominent regional parties capture power the restoration of OPS could become next to impossible as the political players are one of the components of the NEDA, overall remotely controlled by the Saffron government at the Centre.

Jerome K Dinguah, Via email

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in Srinagar with every passing day on the lead, some of the Congress leaders who stalked out of the party with Ghulam Nabi Azad have returned to the Congress fold, proving they're confirmed turncoats. In fact, there was talk of Azad himself set to return.

That did not happen. Azad scotched the rumours. The real breakthrough of BJP is that more and more of the Congress rank and file are impressed by Rahul Gandhi's BJY, and inclined to join him on the road to Congress revival. Tens and thousands of them are trailing the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Congress grassroots who have been galvanized by the new-look Rahul Gandhi with his newfound assertiveness.

The biggest BJY-effect is in the fresh perception that Rahul Gandhi is not the "Pappu" he was made out to be. Today, after more than 3000 km on the move, the Gandhi seems is a "person of substance", somebody who knows his mind, and who speaks his mind. The "Pappu" image on which the BJP had invested time, has been nudged on its side and is gone with the BJY wind.

There are also the Congress leaders who feel betrayed by the BJY. Ageing Congress' netas' who feared their time was up. Leaders like Azad and Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal and others who were quite used to Rahul's "Pappu-image", had and rurtured it in their own small, little ways. If Azad and Sibal left the Congress, it was because they saw no future in the Congress, and for the Congress. But, now after what we see of Bharat Jodo Yatra, there must have been "return" signals. However, those signals haven't been projected. On the contrary, Congress leaders like Kamalnath have made it clear that those who betrayed the Congress and the Gandhi family have no place in the Congress, even if they came with folded

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Rahul Gandhi's BJY contributing to Congress revival Congress may finally benefit when dissidents reconcile with their leader

By Sushil Kuttu

Has Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' achieved what it set out to? What was it that Rahul Gandhi wanted to unify? His party went to pieces here, there and everywhere, wherever it had lost elections, and in states where the Congress was robbed of its hard-fought victories by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's central investigative agencies? Then, there were individual Congress leaders, like IKK Jhansi, who took off with a bunch of the like minded, which also left the grand old party broken if not decimated.

Now, as Bharat Jodo Yatra closes the gap between the Gandhi and the Congress, the Gandhi destination Lal Chowk



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There are also the Congress leaders who feel betrayed by the BJY. Ageing Congress' netas' who feared their time was up. Leaders like Azad and Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal and others who were quite used to Rahul's "Pappu-image", had and rurtured it in their own small, little ways. If Azad and Sibal left the Congress, it was because they saw no future in the Congress, and for the Congress. But, now after what we see of Bharat Jodo Yatra, there must have been "return" signals. However, those signals haven't been projected. On the contrary, Congress leaders like Kamalnath have made it clear that those who betrayed the Congress and the Gandhi family have no place in the Congress, even if they came with folded

Jerome K Dinguah, Via email

Also, that rebel cabal, the 623, has disappeared, remaining only in title. Nobody talks of the 623 any longer. It's as if the group was never there. In fact, most of the 623 have come out in praise of Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra. Some, like Shashi Tharoor, have actually walked alongside Rahul Gandhi. The fact is, one of the other Nehru-Gandhi has always led the Congress without conditions attached. Today, Rahul Gandhi is getting the same acceptance.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra, doesn't matter whose idea it was, has returned the Congress to the Gandhi family. This after a sense



of furchoding that the 137-year-old party was slipping out of the Nehru-Gandhi family's grip, especially after the 623 wrote the obituary of the Gandhi family's hold over the Congress in a letter to Sonia Gandhi leaked to the Press.

Today, the Bharat Jodo Yatra is making people and political parties sit up and take notice. At home and abroad. There are questions being asked. For example, what if the Bharat Jodo Yatra had been "Kashmir to Kanyakumari"? What if, instead of a straight-line path, it had taken a zigzag route covering more states, and lasting a longer length of time?

And how has the Bharat Jodo Yatra affected the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Modi government? The Bharatiya Janata Party has continuously acted as if the BJY was of no account. But the manner in which the Narendra Modi government has behaved gives clues that the BJY has disturbed the Bharatiya Janata Party.

With Rahul Gandhi on the road for over a 100-plus days, and the optics it has given to the country at large, the BJP is nervous, and confused. The nervousness is showing in the BJP spokespersons. They cannot get their minds off Bharat Jodo Yatra. And their tongues around the right words! The BJY is consuming them. So far, the BJP has no concrete plan to halt the BJY's progress. The Covid-19 excuse was stillborn. As of now, the Bharat Jodo Yatra is unstoppable.

If anything, the Bharat Jodo Yatra appears to have caused fissures in the Sangh Parivar. Suddenly, RSS functionaries and Sanghi priests are coming out in support of BJY, and are praising the "young man walking for 3000 kilometers". All of a sudden, the BJP is unsteady, it's committed Hindu base, Rahul Tapasvi's Gandhi's 'abhyudaya' is giving the BJP sleepless nights. (IPA Service)

"The sudden disappointment of a hope leaves a scar which the ultimate fulfillment of that hope never entirely removes."

— Thomas Hardy

The Shillong Times

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Caste and census

THE Bihar government is currently holding a caste census even as a debate on its advisability is on. Political calculations are obviously behind this move by chief minister JDU chief Nitish Kumar with support from his alliance partner, the RJD. Ideally, the society should rise above considerations of caste, creed, race and religion. At the same time, in a nation where many aspects are decided on the basis of caste, as in the case of reservations to deprived sections of the population, caste cannot be wished away. This is a fact of life and the grip of caste over social life is increasing, rather than decreasing ever since Independence. Caste-based parties are functional and there's no bar on them. They are wielding power, as is also the case with states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the prominent regional parties are led by the Yadavs. Evergreen Nitish Kumar who repeatedly held the CM's post in Bihar also has his mainstay with some backward castes including his own Kamma. Caste is the basis for several political establishments, either overtly or covertly, across India.

This being so, it needs a clarification as to why the central government has avoided doing a caste-based census and argued against such a step in the Supreme Court. The government may have its own reasons, which should not be ignored either. What it told the court was that this was not a practical proposition, though this had not been elaborated in detail. Moreover, the central government under the UPA II and the two NDA dispensations under Narendra Modi too held back the caste-based data collected during the 2011 Census. An allegation is that the forward communities are wary of such a census as it could lead to provisions for more benefits to the backward communities, who form more than 50 per cent of the population. The BCs, though, are a divided lot and split into different communities that are inimical to each other when it comes to gaining governmental benefits. The Yadavs in UP and Bihar allegedly gained more benefits under the rule of SP and RJD, while other backward communities were largely ignored. This led to the fall of their governments and the BJP stepped in with the promise of "inclusiveness", meaning mainly the inclusiveness of various Hindu communities.

With due regard to all these, a caste-census is not a bad idea. Other states might follow suit. Facts are sacred and benefits to each segment of the population should not be provided, based on the whims of those who govern the nation.

Letters to the Editor

Why crimes against women go unreported

Editor,
I am writing in response to Dr Omkar Khyndab's letter, "Women are human beings too" (ST Jan 9, 2023). In my opinion, fear is one of the reasons why such crimes go unreported. It is this stepped iregulation and culture, it has become the inherent mind of the people. I am sure there are unreported cases of rape, molestation and domestic violence because women are afraid to come forward to report such cases. They are discouraged from doing so. Some are fearful of social stigma and what awaits other family members in case of a crime reported, resulting in silence from reporting. According to report by Livemint, about 99 per cent of cases of sexual violence go unreported. This suggests that the absence of a strong law against rape and

assaults is the only factor behind the low reporting. There are other factors at play, including trust deficit in the law enforcing agencies and low conviction rates in such crimes that prevent women from reporting sexual assaults. Change should start from home and at the level of the clan, then the locality, village, state and the country.
Yours etc.,
F J J Syngia,
Via email

BJP a confused party

Editor,
BJP had launched a new program which indicates that the Party is in a confused stage and does not know how to tackle the goodwill being created among the common masses on account of the Bharat Jodo Yatra being carried on by Rahul Gandhi. The Party's state of confusion can be judged from the name of the program 'Bind India' which is the English version of Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Supporting agriculture in Meghalaya: The way ahead

By Bhagoram Mawroh

The dates for the 2023 Meghalaya Assembly elections will be shortly announced. Concurrently, many parties have also announced their first list of candidates. Very soon the final list will be released as well. While there is greater clarity in the identity of the candidates contesting the upcoming elections, the manifestos of the different parties are yet to be released. This is very crucial because it will reveal the vision or lack of it among those aspiring to form the next government. Nevertheless, whenever these are released agriculture will have to be an important item and the manifestos must inform the public about the proposed roadmap for the future. This is important for many reasons.

The 2011 Census revealed that around 80% of the population in Meghalaya is rural. Updated figures are not available since the 2021 Census has not been conducted. But extrapolating from the past historical urbanization rates in India, it is fairly safe to assume that more than 70% of the population will continue to be rural. This population, whether directly or indirectly depends on agriculture. When it comes to contribution to GDP, though, agriculture and allied activities contribute only 19% albeit making up almost 90% of the total contribution from the Primary Sector. This, however, is an underestimation.

When the agrifood food value chain is considered, which includes not just the agricultural value (the wages, rent and profit for producing an agricultural commodity) but aggregates it with the processing value, manufacturing value, wholesale value and retail value, i.e., all the stages from the farm to the consumer, the actual contribution of agriculture is much higher. This is known as the "tower of value added" approach and has been explained very succinctly in the 2022 FAO report 'The Future of Food and Agriculture: Drivers and Triggers for Transformation'. Put simply, the "tower of value added" approach reveals that "a fundamental level, agriculture and other raw materials sectors are the foundation of the whole economy". Hence, considering the proportion of the rural population and the value it creates for the economy, agriculture should be an important issue in the upcoming assembly elections.

The ruling MDA (Meghalaya Democratic Alliance) has a head start compared to others when it comes to a roadmap for agriculture. Launched in September 2021, the FOCUS (Farmers Collectivisation for Upscaling Production and Marketing System) Scheme requires the farmers to make Producers Groups which is then given a financial assistance of Rs. 5,000 per member to be used as seed money to help scale up their business operations. In 2022, FOCUS+ was launched as an expansion of

with an average of Rs. 62,237 per group. Since the amount is in the form of grants the danger of debt is removed which is a big benefit for the farmers. However, it cannot be denied that in some, may be most cases, the amount might not be used for the intended purpose, i.e., for investment in the business. Some members might use

the money for consumption purposes (buying items for household needs). But even then the money is going to help the local economy as these farmers are not going to use the money to buy Lamborgin from Delhi (?) but will spend it in the local markets. This increased consumption will increase local demand providing income to local businesses and with it tax revenues will also be augmented, which in turn will increase the financial resources of the State. The freebie argument ignores all of this. Coalition partners of MDA have complained that the Scheme is being given where farming is not possible (i.e., given to people who are not farmers) and the NPP (National People's Party) is taking all the credit by ignoring its allies. Personally, if a resident of Meghalaya is getting the amount (because it will improve local demand) I am not bothered about who gets the benefit or who takes the credit. That is a matter of politics and an issue for the concerned parties who feel left out to sort out during the next term, if they get one. As long as no misappropriation is detected the Scheme should continue.

But the question is what lies beyond FOCUS and FOCUS+. Business can only expand (main aim of the Scheme) if the potential in the local economy has not been exploited as a farmer market is being tapped. On both fronts there is ample scope. Meghalaya is still very much a food importing state which means that local production is insufficient to

meet local demand. Upscaling of the business can look to fulfill this demand while at the same time shortening the food value chain which will also have positive environmental benefits. Catering to a bigger market, i.e., a pan-India market is also an option but will require additional steps to make that possible. Notwithstanding the recent regressive move by the Government of Meghalaya to lift the ban on chemical fertilizers and give 50% subsidy on it, most of the farmers in the State are organic by default. This is particularly so for those in traditional farming systems like Jhum or shifting cultivation. However, because of the 2023 polls Assam Chief Minister Mr Himanta Biswa Sarma heads the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of governance, the Government has announced a special focus on Natural Farming which includes a certification system. However, the guidelines do not take into consideration local farming systems like jhum and bun which are rotational in nature. As such many of the local farmers will be excluded from the benefits of the Scheme. Demand for non-chemical food, especially among the affluent section of the Meghalaya can be one of the sources for meeting that need. Therefore, whenever forms the next Government needs to make sure the Guidelines do not ignore the local farmers. As for those farmers that are using chemicals, the Government can use the PM-PRANAM (Pradhan Mantri - Promotion of Alternate Nutrients for Agriculture Management) Scheme to help them wean away from it. The scheme incentivizes states that use lesser amounts of chemical fertiliser by providing incentive grants at the rate of 50 per cent of the total amount of subsidy saved by using less fertiliser. The Government can use these grants to support the farmers while they are in the transition stage, i.e., from chemical to natural/organic farming.

To conclude, agriculture is the backbone of Meghalaya's economy and the Government and the contesting parties must reflect that. Anything less than the blueprint for a robust agricultural policy will be a big disappointment and an important opportunity missed. As voters we must make sure that does not happen.
(The views expressed in the article are those of the authors and do not reflect in any way their affiliation to any organization or institution)

Editor,
The United Democratic Party (UDP) a regional based party which often boasts and calls itself as the so-called 'strongest' in any government should at least have some shame left of having high hopes. It is horrendous for any reader on Facebook to find the UDP as the most ridiculed party for all the ills committed by the present government which UDP is part of. In Pynursia con-

dition for example when Mr Nohma Saiting stood and fought from the UDP ticket against the sitting MLA, Deputy CM Presone Tynsang of the NPP, there were elements like Handari Lyngdoh, Anjani Dikhar and some more within the inner circle who allowed his defeat and were in close coordination with the NPP to make the NPP candidate win by a margin of 2000 plus votes. The treachery by the members of the UDP is greatly increased in this coming election. The loss of the enquiry report on the rice scam is one clear indicator that this party has set sail left where it even smuggles food meant for the poor. Hence like the NPP the UDP too should be shown the door in the forthcoming assembly polls.
Yours etc.,
Dombok Syngkrem,
Farmer UDP Organizing Secretary Pynursia Constituency

UDP's duplicity exposed

Editor,
The United Democratic Party (UDP) a regional based party which often boasts and calls itself as the so-called 'strongest' in any government should at least have some shame left of having high hopes. It is horrendous for any reader on Facebook to find the UDP as the most ridiculed party for all the ills committed by the present government which UDP is part of. In Pynursia con-

Religio-ethnic tensions mark election campaign in Meghalaya

BJP bats for Hindus while TMC backs Christians and Tribals

By Ashis Biswas

With most major parties adopting an ethnicity-based approach in their pre-poll campaigning, voting in the coming Assembly elections in Meghalaya could be sharply polarised, according to observers. Intriguingly, such a trend may be less noticeable in Tripura.

The involvement of Assam-based political heavyweights leans with elections in neighbouring Meghalaya, which used to be a part of the larger Assam state in the past, is a significant factor in the 2023 polls. Assam Chief Minister Mr Himanta Biswa Sarma heads the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of governance. Mr Sarma's style of overall involvement in Assam so far and his approach towards the religious minorities, he pointed out, Indian citizens enjoying the same rights as anyone else.

There has been no official response from the Meghalaya government or the Governor's office on the matter. However, the fact remains that in Meghalaya, the considerably large mixed non-tribal voters, too, have been complaining of harassment and discrimination, but they feel that their grievances over the years have not been effectively addressed. Long time Sikh residents have complained of harassment from authorities and anti-tribal groups over the location of their settlement and other issues. Bihar labourers have complained of exploitation, harsh working conditions and treatment by their employers in local mines and other places of work. Old Bengali citizens have been denounced by tribal organisations as 'ill-legal' Bengalis.

Most non-tribals also strongly complain of official discrimination from authorities in Meghalaya, in the matter of receiving routine help from the police.

"As for Muslims, the religious minority that finds itself at the receiving end of some controversial administrative decisions in Assam ruled by Mr Sarma -- they have been automatically aligned within the broad non-tribal group of voters"

Hindu votes (its opponents call this Hindu vote), wooing the majority community among voters, the TMC has emerged as the new champion of tribal Christian interests in Meghalaya. Its state leader strongly condemned recent attacks and acts of vandalism targeting the Church in BJP-ruled states at a news conference. The BJP was only keen to divide common people and rule, but the NE region was free from such tendencies, they said.

The TMC would fight the BJP's 'divisive' ways all the way and not just as mute spectators either, they told media persons some days ago.

So far, TMC has announced the list of fifty two candidates out of the 60 seats in the assembly and the party is far ahead of other contesting parties in the campaign. The ruling NPP-BJP Alliance is having tensions over BJP's policy regarding Uniform Civil Code. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has announced that his NPP is open to UCC and his party will fight it even among the voters in the campaign. There is no joint rally of NPP and BJP.

But Meghalaya elections are not just about mobilising political support among Hindu (non-tribal) or Christians (tribals). There are also forces, not perhaps as apparent as the BJP or the debutant TMC, to speak up for Meghalaya-based non-tribals (Bengalis, Sikhs, Biharis), too. The initiative came from Mr Debabrata Saikia of Congress, the leader of opposition in the Assam Assembly.

In a recent letter to Meghalaya Governor Mr B.D. Mishra, Mr Saikia strongly deplored an attack in broad daylight by an aggressive tribal outfit in Meghalaya while it was protesting against unemployment. Some of the marchers beat up non-tribal passers-by in full public view as the local police did not manage to help. The incident was duly reported in Shillong-based dailies.

Mr Saikia recalled to the Meghalaya administration to ensure peace and social harmony and prevent the recurrence of such incidents. He also called for the punishment of miscreants involved in the incident. The non-tribals living/working in Meghalaya, he pointed out, Indian citizens enjoying the same rights as anyone else.

There has been no official response from the Meghalaya government or the Governor's office on the matter.

However, the fact remains that in Meghalaya, the considerably large mixed non-tribal voters, too, have been complaining of harassment and discrimination, but they feel that their grievances over the years have not been effectively addressed. Long time Sikh residents have complained of harassment from authorities and anti-tribal groups over the location of their settlement and other issues. Bihar labourers have complained of exploitation, harsh working conditions and treatment by their employers in local mines and other places of work. Old Bengali citizens have been denounced by tribal organisations as 'ill-legal' Bengalis.

Most non-tribals also strongly complain of official discrimination from authorities in Meghalaya, in the matter of receiving routine help from the police.

With Mr Saikia boldly speaking up for the non-tribals in Meghalaya, other ethnic groups have been assured of some form of political backing, at least in theory. Congress had won the highest number of seats in 2018 Assembly polls in Meghalaya, with non-tribals providing it with major support, before the BJP was only keen to divide common people and rule, but the NE region was free from such tendencies, they said.

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"We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end." — Blaise Pascal

The Shillong Times

No political ideology in Meghalaya THE rate at which people are resigning from one party to join another shows that politics in Meghalaya is bereft of any ideology. Quite a number of contenders for legislative positions including sitting MLAs have resigned from the Congress party, joined the Trinamool Congress and now joined the National Peoples' Party (NPP). What justification are these turncoats going to give their electorate unless they are also bringing a substantial number of supporters with them? The reason for joining the NPP is a calculated one. First, the Party that has been in power for five years also has the required funds to throw wot voters. There is no such thing as a fair electoral battle fought on issues but on how much a candidate is able distribute largesse. Truth be told, it is a difficult proposition to try and get votes based on an honest appeal to the voters that the candidate will serve the constituency to the best of his/her ability. The electorate have become so calculating that they don't even shy away from citing a price for their votes. Hence, we get the government we voted for. There is no point lamenting the badly constructed roads, the poor healthcare system, dry water tanks etc., since the MLA has already compensated the voters.

It is said that in a democracy people should have enough education to make informed choices. An informed choice is one where the voter is not under compulsion to surrender his/her freedom of choice to a candidate because he/she has accepted money from that candidate. The distribution of money takes different forms. It can be made to look like a government scheme especially where sitting MLAs are concerned. Mere literacy without the ability to weigh in on politics and what drives it, and, without the agency to question and hold the sitting MLAs accountable is not real democracy. It would be wrong therefore to pretend that Meghalaya has been and will be participating in a democratic process where each vote is carefully considered because the voters understand that their votes will determine the quality of governance in the next five years.

A political ideology is a set of commitments from a political party which aim at the highest good of the voters. An ideology also sets the tone for the political party to pursue those set of values listed as its predominant goals. An electorate has to know what ideology it is rooting for lest that ideology backfires. Is the political ideology of a party respectful of individual and collective rights and freedoms or does the ideology circumscribe only certain rights that voters can enjoy? But forget about the voters, even the candidates don't read the ideology of the Party they join. And we still expect good governance?

endless. The present life of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly expires on March 15, 2023. With elections around the corner, the Meghalaya electorate, especially the youth, must show the doors to all those parasitic politicians draining the economy of our state's development fund. Of course, corrupt people elect corrupt leaders. It is also seen that only when election approaches that the politicians bend over backwards to satisfy the citizens of the state. As a result, the electorate tends to calculate that instead of giving the right vote to the correct politician they should sin and wait to see who gives the best price (money) for their vote. Yours etc., Marsanlang Rymbar, Via email

Corrupt voters elect corrupt government

Editor, During Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's time, visitors to the BJP office at Ashoka Road, New Delhi would recall the signboard with his face on it and emblazoned below his words "Zero Tolerance to Corruption". When party President Bangaru Lakshman was caught in a sting operation accepting lakhs of rupees in cash, he was out as was the sign board. The 2004 elections confirmed that the Vajpayee government had lost its losing spectacularly to Congress.

That bill of history bears relevance to the Conrad Sangma NPP-led MDA government. With a scam about illegal transportation of coal rocking the mining Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma effected a Cabinet reshuffle, stripping his elder brother James Sangma of the Home portfolio. Saubhagya scam-Rs. 149 crores, Power scam-Rs. 100 crores plus, Rice scam-Rs. 9 crores, Mivom scam-Rs. 3 crores are burning examples of sky-rocketing corruption and mismanagement in the administration. The list is

Meghaaya: @5 in 2023!

By Lamsiwa Kithok Nongrum

poles in comparison to Mizoram's 75.77. While the State ranked 2nd on the National Governance Service Delivery Assessment 2021, it came in 29th in the Ease of Doing Business rankings. It also ranked 27 amongst 36 States and UTs in the Direct Benefit Transfer Performance rankings. Coming back to the Memory Crates. Out of respect for the people of Meghalaya in 2022, this writer hoped that an honest account and not a waxed lyrical one would be placed in the Memory Crates. After all, the government had said that the Crates would be enclosed in a glass case to be placed in the New Legislative Assembly building.

Dome or doom? A Dome traditionally represents absolute power, and is the generally accepted architectural symbol for democratic politics around the world. However, the ugly protrusions had been written on the wall for democratic politics in Meghalaya. On January 9, 2021, an infomemo consumed the old Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building. And then two decades later, what would have been a resplendent symbol of democracy for the State, came crashing down in a mannered wreckage of steel and concrete. The official statement issued in a design titled 'HT Kawabhat' which had been tasked to carry out a safety audit, reported that a lack of coordination between the executing agencies had caused the collapse. It even advised a dome of CGI sheets be erected in place of the collapsed one, in an inadvertent note of sarcasm. So much for symbolism!

The collapsed dome incident is, perhaps, the embodiment of a middle-aged state with an established nexus of various interest groups, resulting in a total lack of accountability. And without any political consequences during elections, domes will continue to come crashing down under the sheer weight of More importantly, the fate of the 9900 who were not recruited should have merited more discussion in the public domain. The problem of unemployment is real. According to CMIE, the unemployment rate in Meghalaya is 2.3 percent as of September 2022. However, government data revealed vacant government jobs in the state government service, which could not have accumulated over any one five-year term of government. Government Employment Exchanges are yet to reform their original purpose of connecting a limited supply of, in an instance, with all interested parties. The Meghalaya Industrial & Investment Promotion Scheme 2016 which pro-

vides subsidies and incentives to capitalists, in exchange for a preferential recruitment of local labour, is implemented in a very one-sided manner. And when the youth come out to demand for their rights, the agenda gets hijacked and is paired with communal colours. Such a dire situation could only have resulted from the inherent inability and reluctance of the elected political class to address the problems of an economic nature in the last few weeks there have promises of dole-outs and lavish ceremonies in favour of foundation stones and ribbons. Extravagant pageantines to present politicians akin to those of star footballers who transfer to other clubs, rather than for the money rather than the possibility of human achievement - have become fashionable. And as election day approaches, the shrill rhetoric on emotive issues would be expected to reach deafening levels and inundate the warnings that have stared us down for decades. More embarrassingly, Meghalaya politics will still be dominated by short-term symbolic gestures - typically the woolen blanket, liquor and cash!

The underlying issues would then resurface to plague any in-coming Government. And many will take to bureaucracy - bashing as a panacea for all our political ailments, rather than fix accountability on the elected representatives. The finger, hence, must point squarely on the "honourable" men and women who would become the Mai-Ikaap of our constituency, they would be representing!

Notably, Meghalaya has had its share of disappointments and collapses that are unflattering of a State that had been self-governed for the last 50 years. Some may even argue that Meghalaya is a failed State, which is increasingly being sold to the highest bidder. Yet for the sake of our children and their children, this writer would prefer to see the State Hope that the voters of the State will awaken from the slumber imbued by the power of short-term, popularity contests which have become the defining feature of the elections in Meghalaya. And that we may not wake up like Ravi Kankwile, who, when asked how he voted in the election that has just been held, declared himself a loyal supporter of King George VI, unaware that the Anticolonial Revolution had taken place in his absence.

This writer had resigned from service after working for the Government of Meghalaya for almost a decade and is now a social entrepreneur and activist. He can be reached at ulamsiwa@kithoknongrum@gmail.com

to appear on the ground and on buildings on such ground. In layman's language Joshi-ma is sinking and becoming uninhabitable, because of the inability of the land on hill slopes, to support the artificial load placed upon it either by heavy concrete buildings or by continuous disturbance on the land caused by blasting etc. A general panic is taking place in the area with the Government and administration bent on immediate dismantling buildings and structures that are considered unsafe and with its occupants protesting that in such an event they had nowhere else to go. With climate change in the wind and other states of man-made disasters becoming daily news items the world over, the only word one can come up with is - it appears to be hell bent on destroying himself whenever he can!

When one looks at the Shillong landscape, the possibility of such a disaster happening or perhaps even worse can easily be imagined. I shudder when I gaze at the steeply rising hillsides in the Lumphrang and Malki slopes. Tall, heavy concrete buildings are becoming the norm in these areas. Question is has any soil testing been done; any geological analysis carried out when the downward dis-slipment of the earth's surface. This causes cracks

and is putting people's lives in grave danger. During heavy rainfall during in the monsoons my greatest fear is of seeing a whole of Lumphrang sliding down the hill into the Umshyryi. My only hope and prayer is that my fears do not come true. Yours etc., Toki Blah, Via email

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

Biodiversity Pact Landmark initiative

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

In the realm of environment, which is obviously the centre point of focus in the world today, the climate and biodiversity conventions last year have been landmark agreements. A Loss and Damage Fund in the former and a target to bring at least 30 percent of terrestrial, inland water and coastal and marine areas under effective conservation and management by 2030 in the latter have enormous bearing on the environment. Around 190 countries approved a sweeping UN agreement and to take a slew of other measures against rampant biodiversity loss which, if left unchecked, jeopardizes the planet's food and water supplies as well as the existence of untold species around the world. It may be mentioned here that currently 17 percent and 10 percent of the world's terrestrial and marine areas respectively are under protection. For India, the figures stand at 5.26 percent and 0.2 percent respectively. Less than 10 percent of terrestrial protected areas in the world are both protected and conserved.

The agreement, which is considered as equivalent to the Paris Agreement, comes as biodiversity is declining worldwide at rates never witnessed in human history. Scientists have projected that a million plants and animals are at risk of extinction, many within decades. The deal lays out a suite of 23 conservation targets. Countries also agreed to manage a remaining 70 percent of a plan to avoid losing areas of high importance to biodiversity and to ensure that big businesses disclose biodiversity risks and impacts.

This is indeed a highly significant agreement as it would go a long way to halt and reverse the destruction of nature. It is understood that the biodiversity summit has agreed to four goals and 23 targets. The goals include protecting 30 percent of the world's land, water and marine areas by 2030, as well as the mobilization, by 2030, of at least US \$200 billion annually in domestic and international biodiversity-related funding from all sources, both public and private.

There is also a pledge to reduce subsidies deemed harmful to nature by at least \$500 billion by 2030, while having developed countries commit to providing developing countries with at least \$20 billion per year by 2025, and \$30 billion per year by 2030. One is inclined to refer here to the Living Planet Report 2022: the most authoritative study of trends in the realm of biodiversity revealed an average 69 percent decline in species population since 1970. During this period, it is reported that half of the world's corals have been lost and are losing forest areas the size of 27 football fields every minute.

The Minister of Environment and Forests informed the Rajya Sabha in mid-December that 73 species in the country, including 18 birds, 26 reptiles and 20 amphibians are critically endangered, up from 47 in 2011. Obviously, rapid global warming and unprecedented rate of extinction are two of the basic reasons for this state of affairs.

"In some locations, it can mean the loss of the very land where coastal communities live," the report pointed out around 137 square kilometres of the Sundarbans mangrove forest in India and Bangladesh has been eroded since 1985, reducing land and ecosystem services for many of the 10 million

people who live there, the analysis showed. "Climate change in India will impact key areas, such as water resources, agriculture, natural ecosystems, health and the food chain," Ravi Singh, Secretary-General and Chief Executive, WWF India, had rightly observed in analysing the report. It is a well-known fact that climate change coupled with habitat loss, pollution and development have hampered the world's biodiversity, with one estimate in 2019 suggesting that a million plant and animal species face extinction within decades — a rate of loss 1,000 times greater than expected. It may be noted that humans use about 50,000 wild species routinely, and one out of five people of the world's eight billion population depend on those species for food and income, the report said. It is thus obvious that experts have highlighted the need for a paradigm shift in our approach that can put us on a more sustainable path and ensures that the costs and benefits from our actions are socially just and equitably shared. Climate change is not only an environmental issue, but economic, development, security, social, moral and ethical issues too. As has been emphasized again and again with statistical data, industrialised countries are responsible for most environmental degradation but it is developing nations that are disproportionately impacted by biodiversity loss. The WWF identified six key threats to biodiversity — agriculture, hunting, logging, pollution, over-consumption and climate change — to highlight "threat hotspots" for terrestrial vertebrates. A nature-positive future needs transformative, game-changing shifts in how we produce, consume, consume what we govern and what we finance," highlighted the Living Planet Report. The present agreement is thus a fall-out of the report as it has set targets which need to be achieved in the coming years. However, though biodiversity loss cannot be allowed to continue, there is another aspect of the problem that also needs to be considered. Our estimates are estimates by economists suggesting that the carrying capacity of the planet is about five billion humans at the most, without irreversibly running down natural resources. Other estimates of the carrying capacity of the planet for humans, average around eight billion. But we have already surpassed the figure and providing food thus becomes a big challenge, especially for the populous countries of the Third World like China and India. There is thus a need to balance preservation of biodiversity with increased food production in the coming years. Neglecting biodiversity cannot be the answer to the requirements of human beings and a judicious approach is called for in this regard. As far as India is concerned, there is a need to concentrate on biodiversity conservation while also exploring ways and means with the help of technological innovations to increase agricultural productivity, especially in areas where it is below national averages. Sooner the better. —INFA (The author is Sr. Consultant & Guest Faculty of Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Kolkata; an avowed writer and speaker on issues relating to environment, development, environment, Gandhian thought and peace studies.)

sincerely thanks go to each of them. I realized how people are disillusioned. What if I had not raised my voice, including the Shillong Times editorial on the same day under the heading -- "Of rowdy Christmas celebrations?" This leaves to our discerning readers to judge.

Well, Lord Krishna continuously coaxed Arjuna to fight against those who were supporting or encouraging immorality in society. He even convinced Arjuna that his own Gurus and uncles were equally blameworthy for remaining mute when Draupadi was disrobed by cruel and arrogant Duryodhana. Why did God himself raise these questions for Arjuna at his own kith and kin? It may sound paradoxical to many. But it was intended to defeat ADARMA (evilness) and establish DHARMA. It also implied that when EVIL rears its ugly head, conscience people should raise their voices lest they too can had karma as sinners.

Thus, celebrating the days associated with Gods and Goddesses with vulgar entertainment and drinks should be disapproved of and put to an end. The absence of criticism hastens the societal slide from bad to worse. The feedback triggered by my letter "Christmas not for whooly parties" (ST Dec 31, 2022) was encouraging. My

thought, and flip through the pages of Veda and Puranas. Over the years, we have joyfully incorporated all vulgarity that has not only polluted society but also pushed it to the brink of degeneration. Violent quarrels and drunken brawls that mark the auspicious day have only invoked curses from heaven. What really pains is that people from other faiths just laugh at us. Oh God, how long will you let your spiritual sermons be drowned out by the boom-beom of Bollywood and rowdy rags? On earth, actors and actresses are becoming more popular than you are. Yours etc., Saill Gwail, Shillong

How safe are certain areas of Shillong?

Editor, I was watching the news when a discussion on what is happening in the town of Jishimant, C. Khamti district, Uttarakhand was aired on the news channel, Mirror Now. It happens that Jishimant has been declared as a landslide subsidence zone according to the District Magistrate. Land subsidence is the term used when the downward displacement of the earth's surface. This causes cracks

"As long as inequality and other social problems plague us, populists will try to exploit them."

— Kofi Annan

The Shillong Times

Vol No 54, No 141 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2023

Judiciary, bad apples

VICE President Jagdeep Dhankar has zeroed in, boldly, on a subject of prime importance to the nation, namely the need to preserve the sovereignty of the parliament...

The argument in support of the apex court decision was a former judgment of the same court in the 1973 Kesava Bharati case - that the basic tenets of the Constitution should not be violated.

The move to have a system to induct the best brains in the judicial system through a national recruitment process was well-conceived. But, when it comes to the crunch, there's a deficit in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's level of assertions.

Letters to the Editor

Needed Let's vote with qualified metas! our conscience!

Editor, In 2018 a book under the caption 'Examination Exercise-25 mantras for tackling the stress of Examinations' penned by Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi was released. Indians sit for a wide range of exams after their education such as the All India civil services, the armed forces, public sector banks, and so on.

Yours etc, Kevin Phillips Shillong - 19

Preachers and schemers

Editor, Politics seems to be an area where schemers thrive. In fact, the more astute and shrewd the politician is in

Who will lift Meghalaya from the dumps

By Patricia Mukhim

As someone who has been privileged to use this space since 1987 before the privileged, entitled millennials were born, I can assure you that this paper it is very heartening to receive some well-researched, incisive articles critiquing the MDA government...

Many have pointed out the pathetic human development indices. It is only a matter of time before Meghalaya will see that 'development' is a word that's foreign to them.

chunks of land are now in the possession of the urban elite from Shillong. There is no control or regulation over sale of land. Community land is a scarce commodity today but no politician will ever raise this issue!

There is no doubt at all that the MDA Government has been able to bring several schemes which were generously funded by the MDA Government at the Centre. But the BJP is part of the coalition. The question is whether these schemes have been monitored and evaluated and who is doing that?

Sinking of land at Joshimath a fallout of reckless construction activities Comprehensive review of all infrastructure work needed

By D. Raghunandan

It appears that nothing short of a total disaster will convince authorities, especially under the present government, that reckless development without addressing environmental or social issues, does not lead to progress.



Construction workers at a site in Joshimath.

Political observers would have noticed that the Minister for Environment and Forests hardly speaks. He preaches in action more than words. But what are the actions? That is a question that must be answered by the MDA Government.

This kind of transformation as a community of Christians in Meghalaya needs not just individual repentance, realignment of goals, and change of thinking and behavior, but also mental and spiritual change of the leadership participating in promoting these changes for individuals and organisations.

James Oliver Lyngdoh, Shillong - 8

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

"There are no secrets that time does not reveal."

— Jean Racine

The Shillong Times

Vol. 52, No. 151 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2023

No state policy on environment

POLITICIANS and citizens speak of everything but the environment. Yet what has happened at Joshimath in Uttarakhand where land is sinking at several parts due to human-induced activities should create tremors in Meghalaya too. One of the reasons for the land subsidence is the reckless destruction of aquifers which then flood the downstream areas and cause loss of lives and property. In Meghalaya, there is no respect for environmental regulations and bodies created for assessing the environmental feasibility of a project are there just to facilitate mining of coal, limestone, stone and sand quarrying etc. not to curb these activities. The dilbi gigs is that these are traditional livelihoods and hence stopping them without providing alternative employment is not tenable. If the governments past and present had engaged enough on this issue and recognised the environmental concerns that threaten our long term water availability and stability, by now alternative sources of income would have been created. At least all governments have only a five-year plan and don't care what happens thereafter. This shortsightedness will cause major environmental impacts in Meghalaya.

Vast stretches of what was once forests have been denuded. This is visible on the way to Smit, Mawkynnu, Mawngant and on the road to both East and West Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills too. It's the same story in the Garo Hills. Politicians have either capitulated to the sand banking, quarrying and mining lobbies or are part of the caucus themselves. Most rivers in Meghalaya have become sluggish drains loaded with garbage but no one loses sleep over this. The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) is just an office clearing files that give a free-for-all to mining lobbies. They have never once taken any action to try and awaken communities to care for their rivers. Surely they have enough wherewithal for consistent awareness programmes and also the mandate to take action against polluters. Why has not a single action been initiated by the MSPCB? Is it because there is a nexus between this institution and those who are hell bent on destroying the environment for mining money?

The Forest Department too is an apathetic on-looker to the slow death of forests on account of charcoal production by the hundreds of tonnes daily. The three district councils too have never been held accountable for the rapid destruction of forest which they claim is under their watch. Incidentally the rivers too are under the custodianship of the district councils. But when has the Forest Department and the district councils last had a joint strategy to conserve our dwindling forests. Will any political party care to include the environment in their manifesto even if it is not a sexy agenda?

Letters to the Editor

Needed a single-party government

Further to my letter under the caption "Change demands hand work" (ST Dec 31, 2022), we all are aware that a strong government requires a powerful head of the State. Presently, we have such a disposition in the Central Government where the Prime Minister is very powerful. He is capable of taking hard decisions, capable of removing his subordinate ministers if they do not deliver to their optimum capacity or fail to meet the public aspirations. This is possible because the central government is governed under a single party, an absolute majority ruling party.

In contrast, in our state, we have a coalition government, where no single political party is in the majority to form a government of its own. As a result, the leader of the party leading the government has to depend largely on the will and wishes of the parties supporting it. The CM cannot take effective corrective action against any of his subordinate ministers, especially those from the coalition partners. Through-out his tenure as a CM, he is apprehensive about the fall of his government and therefore has to always appease his allies. We have experienced earlier as to how our government was toppled several times in a single 5 year span, probably because the CM then could not please

all at all times. So, one can imagine how difficult it is for a CM to run the administration in a coalition dispensation. In such a scenario how can we expect a decisive and result-producing head of the state.

Thus, in order to avoid such a bitter experience of having a weak coalition government, it is necessary that we bring a single party to power. This is possible only when we cast our votes for such a candidate, in our respective constituencies who is from the party having a pan-state presence and also has contested an adequate number of assembly elections and which is capable of forming a single party government.

Yours etc., K Chetri Shillong-2

A well-timed answer

A big thank you Mr Charles Pynogore for having brushed aside all the angles of xenophobia against Bengalis. From the Siachen glaciers to Kanyakumari from Tripura to Gujarat, BJP could look at the vast land that belongs to it. But 2000 km South East lies West Bengal and there the hinge of fate has turned. Four months of campaign by three BJP stalwarts ended up in smoke. The CAA is defeated. The injured tigress had fought back and sundewberry tigress are world renowned like those of Kumaon. And look at all leading

Governors vs CMs: Raj Bhavan must know its limits

By Rajdeep Sardesai

In a national capital with the maximum number of political VIPs, here is an intriguing question: who is the Big Boss of Delhi? Is it the union home ministry which controls the sprawling Union Territory of Delhi? Is it the Lieutenant Governor as a representative of the Centre who is the final authority? Or is it an elected chief minister who has the powers to run the city? Amidst legal ambiguity and escalating political conflict, there are growing concerns over the hyper-partisan role being played by non-elected constitutional functionaries residing in plush Raj Bhavans across the country.

The most recent example in Delhi of the stand-off between the Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena and chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is the fracas over the important Mayoral election for the city. The LG unilaterally nominates his 'aidmen' (nominated members) to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and decides on a presiding officer of his choice bypassing the elected state government, leading to total pandemonium in the civic body between the Aam Aadmi party and BJP councillors, eventually resulting in the mayoral election process being stalled.

Several charges have been exchanged by both sides of which the most serious is quite simply this: is the LG acting as a neutral umpire between the competing political forces or is he a twelfth man playing for one side by usurping the powers of an elected government in a manner that renders the Kejriwal government almost irrelevant, if not impotent? Under the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act 1992, the LG is expected to act on the aid and advice of the council of ministers except in matters of police, public order and land. The concept of a governor acting on the 'aid and advice' of council of ministers means that executive powers are vested in the elected government and not in an unelected LG. Any other interpretation should be

seen as a constitutional perversion. However, in March 2021, the BJP-majority parliament pushed through amendments to the GNCTD Act which have effectively whittled down the decision making powers and autonomy of the elected state government and has given the LG supervisory powers over almost any decision taken by the state cabinet. The amendments say that the Government of the Capital Territory of Delhi means the Lieutenant Governor-Administrator. A definition of sleight of hand that allows an LG to bypass the state government at his discretion.

Which is exactly what has happened ever since Mr Saxena took over as LG in May last year. On almost every issue, he seems to be engaged in a

between a dominant Modi government at the local mohalla level. The AAP's political ideas and style of functioning can be contested but the popularity of its leadership is undeniable. The BJP has been unable to combat Kejriwal's appeal despite frequent changes in its state leadership. A politically partisan LG seems to be there for one primary purpose: to play to cut the AAP leadership to size.

This misuse of constitutional functionaries is not unique to Delhi either but is part of a clear emerging pattern that has ominous portents for elected governments and democratic

"As the state and civic body elections have shown, Kejriwal has emerged as Delhi's netu number one, the AAP having built a strong connect at the local mohalla level. The AAP's political ideas and style of functioning can be contested but the popularity of its leadership is undeniable."

head on public collision with the Kejriwal government, virtually taking over the administrative functioning of the state capital. The reporting structure of the bureaucracy appears now to be directly to the LG office, often sidelining the chief minister and his cabinet. That a three-time elected chief minister twice with thumping majorities would be sidelined by a non-elected government official is a travesty of constitutional democracy: could anyone countenance a situation where tomorrow the President of India were to dictate terms to the political executive at the Centre? How does one hold the Kejriwal government accountable for promises made at election time if his ministers are rendered powerless?

Unfortunately, for eight years now, the citizens of Delhi are caught in this unsensical political tug of war

processes. Across the country, opposition state governments find themselves in the cross-hairs of Raj Bhavans acting as political partisans instead of unbiased guardians of the constitution.

The unprecedented action this week of Tamil Nadu governor, RN Ravi in delivering a speech that deviated from an approved text and then staging a walk out from the state assembly is typical of the total disregard for constitutional conventions. Here is a governor who is sitting on a bulls' head and making a series of politically loaded statements, even calling for Tamil Nadu's name to be changed. If the Kejriwal government is the high-profile governor Arif Mohammad Khan has been engaged in an open war of words with chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan in Punjab, the governor refused to summon a special session of the assembly.

RSS will be completing a hundred years in 2025 and is at present running about 60,000 shakhas (daily assemblies) which it intends to increase to one lakh which is well nigh impossible. Such statements are meant to gear up their cadres at the ground level. It is also a false notion that with the increase of RSS workers seats of BJP will also increase because maximum RSS shakhas are in Kerala yet there is only one MLA and no Lok Sabha member from there.

The RSS doesn't speak much, or publicly so when it does the context is crucial. The ambiguities are rife and much can be lost in translation. Sarsangchak Mohan Bhagwat's interview to editors of the Panchjanya and Organiser, both RSS-affiliated journals, is, therefore, a valuable peek into what lies at the heart and mind of the Sangh Parivar or which India's ruling party is a member. It shows signs of softening, on the question of LGBTIQ rights and freedom of expression, and on dialling up of the divide on the Hindu-Muslim issue.

On the first, the RSS chief's comments: "We have no issue with the LGBTIQ community. It is also a human being having an inalienable right to life." Bhagwat's statements now can be read as the RSS taking a small, significant step towards tolerance of a sexual minority that faces popular discrimination. His statements about a "war for the year 2025" are disquieting for their portrayal of a society under siege and engaged in unceasing hostil-

Now Tehri, Mussorie crumble Apathy sinks Himalayas

By Shivaji Sarkar

Heaven is literally falling to human greed. It is just not Joshimath but even Tehri Garhwal, Karprayag, and Mussorie are also sinking and so may be many other parts at the crest of the Uttarakhand Himalayas. The Rs 12,000 crore Char Dham (CD) all-weather road projects spurring real-estate are gobbling up all.

Latest reports say that the earth movers are digging around Joshimath and other areas even as over 4000 persons have been evacuated and most houses have crumbled. Tragedies do not stop the road to hell. In 2013, Uttarakhand had sought Rs 61,000 crores for seismic reconstruction post the Himalayan deluge. It seems to be the catalyst for the present disaster in the state. The Tehri district is the latest to sport cracks and land subsidence. An IIT Roorkee team is studying the reasons. Chamba in the Tehri, around a CD tunnelling is the worst hit with houses crumbling. Scorpions at Tehri dam, common reports of National Institute of Hydrology. Now a road from Mana to Liphlek through sensitive hills with rare skirunk Auli. The trunk itself cost Rs 83 lakh and today earns Rs 4.5 crore a year but is termed a hazard. The 10-meter-wide CD road decays hills amid severe devastation with felling of large number of trees, destruction of aquifers, shrubs and fauna habitats.

Quicer is the norm for planting trees. Trees felled on the hills are replaced with planting trees in a 10-meter-wide CD road in the country. The official files do a wonderful ecological balancing act. In 2010, the UNH Garhwal University said tunnel boring machine punctured an aquifer on December 24, 2009 releasing the image of spreading deity, Dhar Devi before the June 18, 2013 cloudburst. The CAG reported 42 hydro projects in 2009. It noted that over 200 more projects were coming up almost at every 5 to 7 kms. They were forming Uttarakhand the "Ujja Pradesh" has led to reckless development.

Ravi Chopra, former head of High Powered Committee for CD roads mentions that a bypass around Joshimath was opposed by the townspeople. The 10-acre-wide road all around the state weakens the hills with digging, blasting, removal of green cover and aquifers.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi the gateway to heaven, Satopanth, from where Yudhishtira went to swarg; the pearl of Adi Shankaracharya, winter camp of Mahatma Gandhi at Tehri Badrinath, is as per legend may be emanating the end of an era. The policy failure and greed to generate thousands of crores of profits has led to a disaster evolving for decades and hastened by rapid activity of hydel tunnelling, road constructions, and puncturing aquifers ill-suited for a delicate fragile region, the crown of the Indian subcontinent.

Ancient wisdom ordained for least activity around tenuous hills that are shaken with the mildest vibration. No wonder even the British resorted to the least activities and built lighter by trains where possible. They avoided wanton destruction that the swadshi gold diggers have delved into. The broad gauge railway being extended beyond Rishikesh could have been avoided.

The prophecy of the Nar and Narayan hills merging with the Badrinath temple vanishing seems coming true. It predicts the submergence of the temple with the Alaknanda and other rivers either vanishing or changing course. The Himalayan shrines may have contributed to wanderlust and develop-

ment of the livelihood of the locals. In itself it has culturally been supposed to be a sustainable but not large economy. Religious trekking from Rishikesh upwards added to the adventure and charm of the pilgrimage. It was for the spirit and not for the Independence the road constructions started threatening the fragile region with more landslides. With each decade, greed sharpened and the massive Tehri dam was built even against the wishes of scientists and ministers.

These shrines were considered sacred not only for their spirituality but as a constant reminder to tactically sensitive regional controls the subcontinental climate.

Joshimath is an instance of heretofore safe areas for all ill-planned messes. Yes, Joshimath, facing literally a Himalayan disaster itself has been a thriving economy with a mere bank investment of a petty amount of Rs 900 crore! That is the total debt entire Joshimath owes. Surprising that with a population of about 30,000 serving pilgrims and tourists to Badrinath, Valley of Flowers, Kumaon and skirunk Auli. The trunk itself cost Rs 83 lakh and today earns Rs 4.5 crore a year but is termed a hazard. The 10-meter-wide CD road decays hills amid severe devastation with felling of large number of trees, destruction of aquifers, shrubs and fauna habitats.

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On celebrating religious festivals

Editor, This is with reference to what Sati Grewal wrote (ST Jan. 13) on the mode of celebration of important religious festivals. The moral issues he raised in his letter deserve attention and implementation. Such raising of voices against the evils of our society makes us aware of what we are doing and what we ought not to do. Sad to say, that such write-ups in the form of articles and letters in your esteemed daily do nothing more than make us feel guilty of what we are doing. But should not such guilt compel us to repent of our evil deeds and help us resolve not to commit such wrongs again? Well, that did not happen in the days of Krishna and Arjuna, and is not happening today. This will go on till God Himself comes to destroy the evil and the evil does in His time. Till then let us lend our

sensitive ear to the advice of people like Sati Grewal who give us unsolicited advice. Their desire to bring about a social change is commendable. The law of the land and the truths found in the religious books and the police force and the good education in our society can do very little if we do not humble ourselves and surrender our all to God who alone can change our wicked heart. Let's learn to live for others as we live for ourselves. We need to use our sacrificial love (which God has already given us) and only then will we find the desired change in our society that noble people like Sati Grewal are talking about in their writings. Yours etc., Omkar Luther King, Delhi-34

Undesirable statement of RSS chief

Editor, Any statement made by the RSS chief carries weight and cannot be ignored as we had seen the impact of the statement in Bihar assembly elections. During the last assembly election in Bihar the RSS chief had made the statement on review of reservation policy. Due to this one statement the BJP lost this assembly elections. Mulayam Singh confirmed in the Lok Sabha that due to one statement of Mohan Bhagwat BJP lost the assembly elections in Bihar. That one statement is made has its own weightage. The

Articles and Letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times. Yash Pal Bhanu Via email

Five must-read books on inclusion and diversity

By Pritisha Borthakur

WE can learn so much through books, and they can also widen our horizons and introduce us to new ideas. They have a method of evoking empathy in readers by allowing them to empathise with characters that may be unlike themselves or with other characters in the novel. One of the finest ways to approach such weighty and complicated themes is through children's books that celebrate variety. Representation is important. People will always wonder things like "The one here?" and society truly reflects everyone. Thankfully, there are now an increasing number of multicultural children's books that address issues of race, religion, inclusion, tolerance, and empathy.

Consider these five excellent reads by Indian authors that celebrate diversity and are a great way to teach your loved ones the beauty of our multi-coloured and multicultural globe!

How I Taught My Grandmother to Read?

(By Sudha Murty)
Sudha Murty being an author, teacher and a social worker comes across with many people with different way of thinking and unique mindsets. This book consists of short stories where Sudha Murty recounts her real-life incidences. What do you do when your grandmother asks you to teach her the alphabet? 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read' has all the experiences, life values, and learnings which a person should have at any age. Through this book the author tells the readers that learning has no age bar, there is always a start at any age, and that nothing is impossible. Funny, spirited and inspiring, the story teaches a valuable lesson about the importance of doing what you believe is right and having the courage to realise your dreams. Author Murty writes in the simplest of languages, yet each word tugs at your conscience. It is apt for 8 years and above.

Puhar and Niyor's Mural of Family Stories

(By Pritisha Borthakur)
'Puhar and Niyor's Mural of Family Stories', written by a journalist and mother, Pritisha Borthakur, is a powerful progressive children's book that aims to inspire curiosity, raise awareness, instill compassion, entertain, and show a unique glimpse of the diverse kinds of families found in any community. The book begins with an introduction to Puhar and Niyor, two brothers making a mural, telling the stories of different families. It shows Puhar and Niyor's family as being a nuclear family, with a mom and a dad. These twins demonstrate there are all sorts of families - children with two moms, two dads, a single mother, a multiracial family unit, foster and adopted children; pet parent and more - none more important than another, and all of them are beautiful in their own unique way.

The story progresses with adding to the mural an illustration of each unique story. In the end, the small community, made up of various kinds of unique families, teach each other about different types of people every day, and to not judge others based on their race, gender, sexual identity, disability, or anything else. They embrace their differences and paint a beautifully coloured mural that is beautiful and colourful as the community itself.

The Unboy Boy

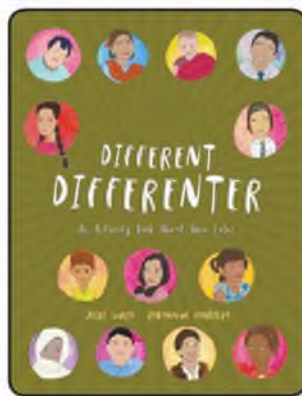
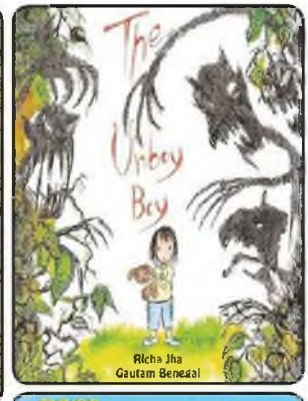
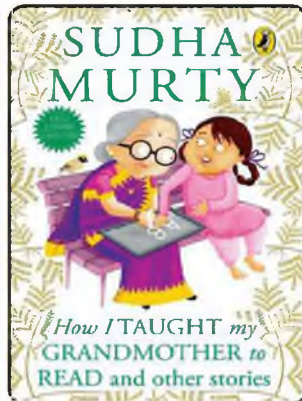
(By Richa Jha)
'The Unboy Boy' is a gentle story of Gagan who is at ease being what he is. And he has enough tricks up his sleeve to show the world that there are no boy boys or un-boy boys. Just boys. And just girls. Every child has a right to embrace who they are, no matter where they may lie on the spectrum of gender. Richa Jha's tale deconstructs this idea of gendered expectations, and emphasises on the right of every child to be who they are, and to be loved in their entirety. No more, no less. Unusual and heart-warming, this book is a must read for any young child who is trying to find their feet in a complicated and prejudiced world, and need to learn how to love and accept themselves no matter what anyone else may say.

Why Are You Afraid to Hold My Hand?

(By Sheila Dhir)
Most people are confused about how to react to those with disabilities. Their questions, misconceptions, doubts and fears are answered here - simply and straight from the heart - by a child with cerebral palsy. The child responds in verse - simple and straight from the heart. Sheila Dhir's childlike line drawings are just as simple and powerful as the short verses. As a differently-abled child's dialogue with society, the book offers a sensitive and sensible way of helping children understand disability, and the strengths of those who are differently-abled. Apt for 6 years and above.

Different Different

(By Jyoti Gupta)
This is an activity book for children that thoughtfully addresses everyday skin color consciousness and bias in a way that's easy to understand. Children's rich observations and questions about colour, caste, and race elicit accurate yet straightforward responses. Jyoti Gupta's art-and-craft-based book takes you on a playful and creative discovery to find answers that work for you and your family - while creatively introducing facts of history and 15-plus new words. It's a beautifully-illustrated, educational tool that sets the context for hard conversations about self-awareness, color, and identity. Subjects in the book include biology of skin (e.g. melanin); culturally-related aspects (e.g. food); colorism's social impact (e.g. bullying) and solutions (e.g. bystander intervention). (IANS/Hfc)



Genius guitarist: Jeff Beck & his unorthodox techniques



THE praise Jeff Beck, who has died aged 78, received from indebted musicians during his lifetime already read like unbridled eulogies. Eric Clapton had called him "the most unique guitarist", Steve Lukather (Toto) "God's guitarist", and Joe Satriani "just a genius". Jazz great John McLaughlin described Beck as "the best guitarist alive", Steve Vai as "unique in the most superlative use of the word", and Noel Redding (Jimi Hendrix Experience) as his "personal favourite". Queen's Brian May said Beck "radically changed" his view of the guitar.

Beck's fame was not drawn from a catalogue of hit songs (though there was, of course, Hit No Silver Lining), nor from a cushy decades-long residency in a mega-band (though there were many supposed offers). Instead, he was a guitarist's guitarist who seemed to be the humble protagonist at the centre of a plethora of seminal moments in pop history.

Those moments included the 1960s UK blues invasion, the pop-jazz movement of Stevie Wonder, 1970s funk fusion and "world fusion", and millennial rock, pop and film music. He drew upon styles including jazz, reggae, Bulgarian folk, western and

Indian classical music, and influenced artists in an even wider circle of styles.

Beck's only tool was the electric guitar and its ecosystem of pedals and amp. Despite evolutions and augmentations, this toolkit has largely stayed the same for guitarists over the past 60 years. Beck's standard-tuned Stratocaster - with fuzz, distortion and echo pedals through Fender and Marshall amps, with just a little customisation to preserve tuning amid his vigorous string bending, about as classic and established as it gets.

So how did Beck use this common instrument to create such stylistic range, personality and depth of expression?

It's useful to consider not only what differentiates but what is shared by all these styles. In its most reductive form, music can be seen as the manipulation of the fundamental dimensions of rhythm (where musical objects are placed in time), pitch (individual notes and harmony) and timbre (the identifying quality or tone of a sound - its attack, volume, grittiness etc).

These are all open to all degrees of precision, rigidity and creative freedom. Rhythms can be precise

but simple, or extremely nuanced and off-grid. Pitch can be treated as exact steps or a smooth continuum, and a musician can opt for an unchanged timbre or manipulate it extensively.

Various skills can be seen as intersections between these dimensions, such as phrasing (pitch and rhythm), rhythm guitar (harmony and rhythm), articulation (timbre and melody), gesture (rhythm and timbre) and so on.

Diverse styles explore these dimensions in differing ways. Blues tends to have a simple (but not easy) harmonic and scalar context, allowing high sophistication of articulation, pitch inflection, timbre and phrasing. Funk's cyclical rhythmic and sometimes-only-one-chord context invites a deep connection with subtle rhythmic shifts. Pop requires ruthless commitment to melodic accessibility. Indian classical music has a drone and no harmony, allowing expressive engagement with a single pitch melody.

In general, music theory and tuition tends to see these dimensions in exact grids (a lattice of even rhythms, pitches and simple timbral markers), ignoring the vast expression between the cracks. Beck, however, engaged deeply with all of these dimensions, using their fullest range and internal nuance. His unorthodox technique was sculpted in an ego-less service to their creative expression.

He had an intuitive musical ear and technical control for sophisticated jazz harmonies, pitch inflection and melody, as well as a wide timbral finesse - from a barely audible fragile touch to a wall of dense noise. He interacted with amp feedback to turn the guitar's usual "pluckiness" into anything from mechanical growls to uncannily vocal timbres, to other-worldly sustained flute sounds.

Beck's commitment to these dimensions manifested in his idiosyncratic technique. He abandoned a plectrum for direct contact with the strings, ensuring that every note was distinct, different and mattered.

He would simultaneously control the whammy bar, volume and tone control of the guitar which with the combination of harmonics, off-free slide and left-hand inflection - explored an orchestral range of sonic possibilities. Always pushing and never complacent, each record explored new territory and musical affordances.

Beck's innovations in lead guitar tone with the Yardbirds inspired a generation, but fans could never predict what his next album or group would sound like.

One thing remained constant, however - his unique touch shined through every note. Beck's diffident, vegetarian, ever-curious and youthful demeanour belied a deep musical wisdom, reminding us that musical creativity and individuality comes from a desire not to impress others, but to express ourselves. (The Conversation)

Puppetry is universal: Viswanatha Pulavar



Renowned puppeteer Viswanatha Pulavar said on Friday that those who refuse to acknowledge what is being said, no matter how significant the matter may be, listens to the same with full focus when it is told through puppets via movements and expressions.

"This is the universal relevance of puppetry as an art form," said Pulavar.

The puppeteer was giving an introductory talk at the three-day workshop on 'Tholpavakoothu' (shadow puppet play), highlighting the universal tricks involved in the art form, at the ongoing Kochi Biennale here.

Pulavar hails from a lineage that has practised puppetry for 13 successive generations, and every member of his family is currently active in the field.

His wife Pushpalatha, son Vipin and daughter-in-law Ramya are also conducting training sessions at the workshop alongside Pulavar.

"The workshop aims to enrich creativity in people regardless of age through Tholpavakoothu. Training will be given on the different steps involved in the art form, beginning with drawing the images on paper, then copying them into the puppet skin, readying the script, and then finally presenting it," said Pulavar.

Saying that earlier deer skin was used to make puppets, Pulavar said, "With the ban on deer hunting coming into effect, puppets are now made using goat and bull skin. Artworks will be depicted on such animal skins after cutting and shaping them to suit various characters with great precision, even on the most minute elements. In the world of puppet play, most artworks are used in puppets belonging to the Kerala tradition."

"Puppet plays are used a lot in the field of education in foreign countries," added Pulavar, who has presented plays using leather puppets in 32 different countries.

"Puppet plays help in eliminating classroom boredom, make things easier to understand, and help in nurturing creativity. They are also the most practical medium for creating awareness against intoxicants," Pulavar said. (IANS)

Prince Harry's memoir Spare: A lesson on 'complicated grief'

Prince Harry's reflection on his mother Princess Diana, who died unexpectedly when he was just 12 years old, appears in his memoir Spare, released officially this week.

In fact, the bestseller is marketed as a story about the "eternal power of love over grief".

The book's revelations, retold in high-profile TV interviews and featuring in his Netflix series, are the subject of much media coverage. These revelations chart the prince's experience of mourning the traumatic death of his mother in public, media intrusion, and its long-term impacts.

On face value, Prince Harry may share typical symptoms of people suffering "complicated grief". But not everyone agrees with how he "shows" his grief so publicly.

THE MYTH OF 'TIME HEALING ALL WOUNDS'

It's been more than 25 years since the traumatic death of Prince Harry's mother after a car crash in Paris. And with his family's immense privilege, it's easy to assume the need to explore the layers of grief that shape his experiences has passed its use-by date.

But the idea of "time healing all wounds" is a myth. Pain is ongoing. And by silencing someone's pain, this can happen. The public, health professionals, the media and family can all silence someone's grief by minimising discussions about the impact of losing a loved one.

Twenty years working with grieving people and researching grief reminds me of the countless people in my counselling rooms reflecting on the stinging words someone says to them: "it's time to move on".

Counsellors urge people to make meaning of the life lost with those still living. This can involve sharing memories with



family members about the person lost, remembering happy times, imagining their inclusion in life currently, and always creating space for conversations about their absence.

If people struggle to make meaning of the new life they are forced to live due to their loss, this can lead to long-term reactions known as complex or complicated grief.

WHAT IS COMPLICATED GRIEF?

Complicated grief is a severe, persistent and pervasive longing for the deceased. If the death is sudden and unexpected, the prolonged impact will be greater.

People who experience this intensity of grief struggle to engage in everyday life. This profound distress can affect their physical and mental health, and the relationships around them,

for years. Prince Harry has been candid about his struggles with mental health since his mother's death and his fractured relationship with his wider family. He's openly admitted to drug use to help him cope with his loss.

We see these types of effects on people suffering with complicated grief, as well as the associated trauma when the loss occurs suddenly.

IT WAS SO YOUNG

Grief isn't just about what was lost, but when the loss occurred. Prince Harry was just 12 years old when his mother passed away.

Psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson tells us this period of development between childhood and adolescence oscillates between a child seeking a sense of identity versus confusion about

where they "fit" in the world.

It's a time when young people explore values, beliefs and ideas about who they might become as adults. But this stage of development is impacted with the loss of a parent to guide them through this period.

When a significant loss happens at his stage, this can destabilise the child for significant periods — well into adulthood — especially when the death is related to an external cause, such as an accident.

Prince Harry has shared this destabilising effect and the strain between himself and his surviving parent. Not all siblings experience grief the same way. There may be conflict with the wider family.

Long-term studies in the United States show children who have lost a parent do eventually grow to be resilient and forthright indi-

viduals. Yet traumatic memories of both the event and the impact of that loss remain just under the surface.

Prince Harry's accounts of his experiences are reminders of what can happen for children who have experienced trauma.

His perspectives about the ways his wife was treated in the media and by his family, may have activated reminders of this past trauma.

SO WHAT HELPS?

Grief will have long-term impacts on people's wellbeing throughout their lives, especially if they were only a child when the loss occurred.

When we look back on what helps children to manage their childhood grief, personal agency is key. They want to choose how they grieve, and their voice needs to be a priority.

This may mean choosing not

to attend performative activities, such as funerals. This may mean openly sharing their experiences in a way that suits them — at school, work or with families. This may mean getting angry.

An evidence-based national grief program for children in Australia, Seasons for Growth, emphasises the importance of agency. This includes choosing how to accept the reality of their loss, and finding ways of voicing the emotional impact of that loss. This won't always be through calm, reflective sharing. It may be through frustrated, angry voices, that suddenly emerge later in life.

Even with all the access to therapy, or even family members to speak to, grief will eventually show up in our thoughts, behaviours and actions. There is no discreet way to do it. Grief is both hope and sorrow.

(The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, JANUARY 15, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'
Moonshine: Set on your birthday chart. You will be victorious in everything. You will complete your financial matters at this time and will get desired results. You will be surrounded by people whom you admire and you will get rid of one or more enemies from your life. People will be attracted towards you because of your strong personality. It will enhance your prestige. You will get promotion in job. Those who are giving departmental tasks will get bonuses. You will make progress in business. You will also spend happy moments with your parents and family. You will also plan an outing with family. You will get full support from the officials. Seeing your work being praised by others, your boss will be happy and will promote you.

'This week for you'
Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be an amazing week for you. Your destiny will have something good in store for you. Parents are loving you a lot. Good news related to progress will be all around. You will be going good job offers. You can also start a new business venture in real estate or partnership. Good financial gains are indicated. You will also make plans to buy a new vehicle or property. You will be in an uptick. Please note that you will spend a family life. Students will focus on their goals. Concentration will be high. Results of competitive exams will come in your favor. Goodwill will bring a wonderful time.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) It is a very favorable time period. You will receive financial support. There are chances of progress in your job work. You will take up new and old to receive handsome rewards for it. You will take up your capabilities and capacities to their fullest. You will also receive good news regarding progress of your children. The results for go related exams will be favorable. You will get success in competitions and contests. You will also be able to establish your life relations. Your colleagues will help you in your work. You will receive blessings of your elders. Religious activities will bring you success. Money will flow in the direction.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) It is going to be a week full of accomplishments. It will talk about fate. It is a very favorable time period for you. You will take up subtle and important decisions in business. Many new projects will get planned. Money will flow in the direction. There are chances of promotion in job work. But here work and diligence must be put for the completion of tasks. Placement of capital will bring education and career. Many human relations leading to marriage are indicated. There will be an increase in your respect, honor, reputation and prestige. You will also develop interest in religion and spirituality. You will be known as influential person in the society.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You will be leading a lot of better and will spend quality time with your loved ones. You will be able to do your job and will be considered important in your family members. You will work selflessly and expand your circle of friends. People will listen to your views and you will be able to get your work done with ease. A special person can fall for your charms and can lead to a very warm and fulfilling relationship. You will make progress in your job and your talents will get overseas opportunities. You will be able to convince your colleagues with your intelligence and hard work. Everybody will admire your intelligence and capability. Do your job and meditation. It will enhance your memory and you will feel good. You will get a chance to meet an influential person who will open the doors of progress for you. So you should grab this opportunity with both hands.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) The doors of progress are going to open for you. Your income will rise. You will have achievement in your work life. Everything that was stuck till now will gather momentum. There are chances of buying movable and immovable property. Your boss and seniors will be happy with your work. You will overcome everyone's heart with your work. Your enemies and competitors might overcome you, some of your work will get lost, but you will not be affected by it and keep on doing your work with all sincerity. You will receive good news regarding career and progress of your children. You will enjoy excellent relationship with your spouse/brother.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You will receive some good news from a relative. It will all your spin. Something will come to the fore that you wanted to keep a secret. Money might be stolen. But you will make all efforts to obtain your aim. Changes in your attitude and behavior will take you towards betterment. You will be active for achieving your aim. Go to the market. You will be busy in welcoming them. You will make plans to buy a new house. The differences

that were continuing between husband and wife will get resolved. You will develop contacts with new people. You will also take some permanent work in hand. You will also get money from unexpected sources. You will be interested in religious works. Although busy you will be involved in social work. The blessings of elders in the family will help you to move ahead.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) You will be sharing your feelings with your closed ones. Your chance meeting with an influential person will give the very success for you. You will do all your work with sincerity. You will be given a new responsibility at work. There will be moving gains from someone. You will also reach new heights in the business of your company. The best results positions will prove fruitful in the near future. They will get completed. You will also learn to people's limitations very dynamically and try to find solutions to them. You will meet an old friend, relative and feel happy. You will get people from works. Your work will get completed soon due to your team efforts. Long pending disputes and problems will be settled.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) Your dominance at your workplace will continue. You will decide to do something you will be able to do it at any cost. There will be an increase in your fame and respect. You will work hard in your field and win everyone's heart. The blessings of elders and support will help you in making progress in your career. And financially also you will be strong. You will complete all works on time to the great of God. There will be a significant change in your daily routine. Your efforts will be fruitful. Money has been struck for a long time will accrue to you. You will be busy but will retain the amicability in personal relationship. Most of your time will be spent in amusement and entertainment. In government matters you are moving towards success. The worry that was there for a long time will be out of rest.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) The week you will get business in diverse circumstances. You will have positive but solutions too. Your one may really bring you but you will remain unfulfilled. You will also be able to establish your dominance over others. Your financial condition will be strong. You will also spend quality time with your family. And will enjoy life to the fullest. You will also improve your lifestyle and buy something new. You could spend on regular household and clothes. You will be enjoying the whole process. The latter part of the week will be particularly fruitful days. You will be determined to achieve your aims. And this is the right time for earning money, having unexpected gains and getting money from someone.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) A spouse with a double one may seem to run out of control. You may have some work obstacles too. Things may start looking tough but you will manage the situation well. You will hold one to one talks with persons involved and with your gift of the gab be able to resolve your differences. Your domestic and professional responsibilities will increase but will not affect you. Things will get better with time. You will feel a bit success in your job. Your self confidence will also increase. You will impress one and win their work and behavior. You will learn the skill to keep everyone happy.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) A spouse with a double one may seem to run out of control. You may have some work pressure too. Things may start looking tough but you will manage the situation well. You will hold one to one talks with persons involved and with your gift of the gab be able to resolve your differences. Your domestic and professional responsibilities will increase but will not affect you. Things will get better with time. You will learn the skill to keep everyone happy. Your investments will yield good results. Loved ones will have a wonderful time. You will learn something new.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) The whole week is an indicator of victory for you. You will remain calm in your approach and complete your task in style. You will get success in whatever you do. You will also meet new persons from different fields. You will also enjoy your life and also earn good money. Pleasurable activities may attract you. You will also get interested in matters related to self realization. You will also do your work very sincerely. You will also remain interested in your work. Your natural leadership will make you very positive in your attitude. You will also enjoy more authority at the time than before. Loved ones will have a wonderful time. You will also take your eyes to reform in your professional and personal decisions.

Hindi Language users are 'Feeling the Love'





Since language is a representation of common human experiences, it instantaneously binds individuals together emotionally. ShareChat offers information and community access to Indians in 15 regional languages in order to strengthen this bond even in the social media sphere. Due to widespread availability of smartphones and fast internet, local content producers have begun to tap over the Indian content market. The language-first strategy is enabling the Bharat audience to produce content, build communities, and consume interesting information in their favourite language, greatly enhancing and engaging their social media experience.

With 52.8 crore speakers, or 43.6 per cent of the population, utilising Hindi as their primary language of communication, it is the most widely spoken language in the nation. To keep its essence in the digital realm, thousands of individuals are now selecting Hindi as their favourite language when using social media. The App sees nearly 45 million users of the Hindi language each month, with Delhi NCR, Lucknow, and Jaipur topping the list. Here are some fascinating findings from its review of the consumption habits of the Hindi-speaking audience in 2022.

'Romance and Relationship' is the most loved content genre among the Hindi-speaking audience on the platform, followed by Music and Devotion.

Love, Romance and Relationship
With over 80 billion views in 2022, romance and relationships turned out to be the most viewed category in the Hindi language at 43 per cent of the overall Hindi users. More than 3 lakh creators created over 30 lakh content pieces from cities such as Delhi NCR, Lucknow, and Jaipur. @divan007, has garnered a total of over 1.9 billion views for all their posts on the platform in 2022, making them

the topmost creator in the romance and relationship category in the Hindi Language.

Music & Dance
As music and dance unite people from different cultures and backgrounds, the category garnered over 44 billion views with 20 per cent of the Hindi users. The music category captured audiences the most, with creators from Delhi, Lucknow, and Jaipur. Over 32k creators from these cities created over 1.1 lakh content pieces in the category each month, with @amir.ari write, single-handedly garnering over 280 Million views and being crowned as the top creator in the genre.

Devotion
The third most loved category among Hindi consumers was devotion. More than 15 per cent of the Hindi language users on the platform follow the category. The Hindi content related to devotional songs, places of worship, festivals, and spirituality garnered over 70 billion views on the platform. More than 1.8 lakh creators posted over 18 lakh content pieces from top regions including Delhi, Lucknow, and Jaipur. @kanha_ki_pagli ended the year as the leading creator in the category, with over 570 Million views on the content created by them throughout the year.

Humour and Fun
Laughter is the best medicine, and the Hindi audience on platform is ruling this category with 8.8 per cent actively enjoying the content in Hindi. With more than 40 billion views, comedy content category in the Hindi language across the country. Cities such as Delhi, Lucknow, and Jaipur saw 1.2 lakh creators who uploaded close to 10 lakh content pieces in the category, with Pankaj Khanna topping the creator chart, with over 2 billion views on their content. @ANSTJc)

"You can't do it unless you can imagine it."
—George Lucas

The Shillong Times
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Modi and minorities

NOBEL laureate Amartya Sen is not an Oracle of Delphi. His own understanding of India, from a distance is not wholesome and he at times misses the woods for the trees. Having lived and worked in the academic field in the UK and US for several decades since the early 1970s, his perceptions are shaped by his own exposures to the West; and his eminence in welfare economics and pro-poor initiatives are well-appreciated. In a media interview, he has observed that the Modi government is one of the "most appalling" in the world. To pass such a judgment in the superlative was, on the face of it, an overkill. At the same time, the point Sen sought to press home was that the present government here is following "communitarian and majoritarian" policies which he termed a "national disaster."

As Sen has stressed, Modi who heads the BJP government failed to give reassurance to the minorities that his government treats them all with equal dignity and justice. The Muslims, especially, got a raw deal from this dispensation and even from the previous Congress governments. The only Muslim minister in the present central government has been removed. There is hardly any Muslim in the BJP ranks in Parliament or state legislatures even as this community forms one-fifth of the population. True, the Congress party had taken care of Muslims at the political level but this sense of inclusiveness was not evident even in the administrative apparatus.

Muslims are understandably incensed over the 2002 Gujarat Riots that saw the killing of large numbers from the community. Fact is also that Gujarat was prone to such riots for decades before Modi's arrival on the political scene. Muslims collectively tried to run down Modi and the BJP at every election thereafter, but met with limited success as in the West Bengal polls. Fighting with the establishment will have its price to pay. Muslims as a community must ponder whether it is advisable for them to keep fighting Modi and the BJP as both are going strong. The RSS has recently held out an olive branch to the Muslims and claimed it would treat all Indians as a part of the wider Hindu family. India is a mosaic of cultures, races, religions, castes and communities. The only way to exist here is to co-exist and the way forward is to give each segment of the population their due. India's developmental urges require it to forge unity as a prerequisite and tap the energies of its people, turning these into a synergy. Divided we stand, united we fall.

Letters to the Editor

Train your guns well

I congratulate Mr. James Oliver Lyngdoh for the latter part of his letter "Preachers and Schemers" that appeared in your newspaper. The latter part of his letter highlights the need for individuals to have a critical and biblically inclined mind and to not put on an indolent pedestal those who are in the forefront of religious and spiritual matters. A critique of the church leadership is very much appreciated and very much in need as it would remind the "elders" that they are not beyond public criticism, and that they are actually accountable to the laity and to the LORD.

However, there are certain elements in the first half of the letter that I would object to. Mr. Lyngdoh, in his attempt to advise the electronic, largely by name the leaders of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), particularly, Mr. Saker Gokhale and Mr. Abhishek Banerjee, cautioning the electorate about the "opportunities that is too good to pass up" as offered by the AITC, undoubtedly referring to the WE Card and specifically the MYE Card, which in Mr. Lyngdoh's opinion would possibly mislead the

youth. It is here that I would like to remind the readers that there is a great and vast difference between a commitment and a lie that misleads. It is the natural function of any political party to make promises and commitments, and taking into account the prevailing debate that has manifested itself in the various socio-economic problems and recent unpleasant events that the people of the state are facing, because of the inadequacies of the present government, it is only natural and even moral for the AITC to work towards finding solutions and presenting these solutions as healthy alternatives and remedies. Therefore, to assume that promises are necessarily lies, without examining the overwhelming positive responses of the public, and also without considering the fact that the AITC is not part of the ruling coalition, is too cynical and an exercise akin to a carpet bombing of accusations.

Furthermore, if one seeks to objectively warn the electorate of lies and misleading claims, it is only proper to train one's crosshair at the party in power. The party in power and its coalition partners in the MDA are directly responsible for the formulation of policies and for providing the leadership in the implementation of policies in

The MDA government is in the last leg of its race before it reaches the finishing line which is the next election to the state assembly. And not surprisingly the government under the leadership of chief minister Conrad Sangma and deputy chief minister Prestone Tyson is racing against time to inaugurate projects, half-finished projects, and lay foundation stones for projects which are still in the pipeline. In the process, the last few months of the MDA government's tenure are like a never-ending festival throughout the state. If there is no inauguration and launching programs organized somewhere in the state, there would be some sort of festivals and gigs organized by the government elsewhere. Since the last few months, the state is in some way or the other in a perpetual state of joy and festivity.

Foundation stone laying ceremony

One very certain thing is that the public has lost count of the number of foundation stones that the chief minister, the deputy chief minister, and the ministers have laid in the last few weeks. At some point in time, it seems like the chief minister and the deputy chief minister are competing as to who can lay the maximum number of foundation stones in one day. It was reported that a few weeks back, the deputy chief minister laid seven numbers of foundation stones for equal numbers of projects at Jowai. The local news portal reported that it was a record of sorts that in the history of the state, it was the first time when the foundation stones of as many as seven projects were laid in one day by the same person. Not to be outdone by his deputy, in a few days it was reported that the chief minister, elsewhere in the state, has laid more foundation stones for more projects than the deputy chief minister. Now the chief minister holds the record for the maximum number of foundation stones laid in one day by a single person. By the end of this term, how many citizens will remember the number of foundation stones that were laid by whom and where?

Another news item that bewildered the public is the number of districts and community and rural development blocks that the government has created in the last few months. I for one have lost count of how many districts and blocks the government created immediately before its term ends. For instance, the government has created a new Naphub block

headquarter of the block. Lalyke is also very near to Klichhriat and it does not make sense to still call the block Saipung C&RD block when it does not operate from the place it is supposed to. The Saipung C&RD block was created for the sole purpose of reaching out to the far-flung and neglected areas of the state, but the plan turned futile and the entire infrastructure created was left unused. Today Saipung

MDA's last leg

By HH Mohrmen

in the east Jaitia hills, in addition to the Klichhriat, and the Saipung C&RD block. It may be mentioned that the creation of the Wapung block was also announced by the last government. The district website showed that there are only two C&RD blocks in the district with Klichhriat C&RD block having 104 villages and Saipung C&RD block having 89 villages. If the Naphub C&RD block with its headquarter in Lamchung is to become a reality, it has to include villages from either Saipung or Klichhriat blocks. The question is how convenient it is going to be for the vil-



Foundation stone laying ceremony for a project in the state.

lages from these blocks to travel to Lamchung if they are going to be included in the list of villages under the Naphub block. The chief minister may not know that Saipung C&RD block is currently operating from Lalyke and not from Saipung which is the official

headquarter of the block. Lalyke is also very near to Klichhriat and it does not make sense to still call the block Saipung C&RD block when it does not operate from the place it is supposed to. The Saipung C&RD block was created for the sole purpose of reaching out to the far-flung and neglected areas of the state, but the plan turned futile and the entire infrastructure created was left unused. Today Saipung

area which is the home of the Biate Biate and the Inar people remains the most neglected area in the state. Another C&RD block was also created in the West Jaitia Hills district. The new Namdang C&RD block was inaugurated in the presence of the local M.L.A. West Jaitia Hills district, which has a total number of 293 villages. And as per 2011 provisional census, the district has 34,401 households. West Jaitia District has three C&RD blocks. Antiamrang which is also a civil subdivision has 92 villages, Lashed 83 villages, and Thalsakhen with 116

villages. The challenge for the government is that the villages that are to be included in the Namdang village. The most important question now is if the government has enough resources to run the new C&RD blocks or districts and whether there are enough villages as required to

run the last mile of its tenure, the government is also seen to be busy organizing festivals and gigs. The festivals and gigs were as usual organized only in Shillong and Tura and other towns in the state were not on the radar of the government. The festivals were organized in the last leg of its tenure, it is also seen that the government is planning a literary festival, it should be well planned like other famous lit fests. If these festivals are also planned to attract tourists, they should be planned in such a way that they at least coincide with the tourist seasons in the state like spring and autumn. Gigs organized by the government this year also included famous bands from abroad. Unfortunately, some of the festivals and gigs that the government organized this year had to be abruptly stopped due to the unfortunate incidents at Mukroh. How effective are these festivals and gigs in attracting tourists to the state is a question that begs the answer.

No common minimum program

In the entire five years term, the state was literally in the free reign of the chief minister. It seems like the coalition government was single-handedly run by the NPP and the other coalition partners had no say. The mistake the junior coalition partners the UDP, the PDF, the ISPD and BJP made was that they did not insist on coming up with a common minimum program that would otherwise guide the function of the coalition government. Because of the absence of any kind of common agenda or agreement between the coalition partners to steer the direction in which the government would take the state forward, the NPP has a free hand in the way the government functions. The blame is not on the NPP but on the coalition partners for insisting on some kind of common minimum program before they left their support to the NPP-led MDA government.

And now most partners are walking and blaming the NPP for all the wrongdoings in the Government but with no impact. This clearly shows how much ahead of the others, the NPP is in terms of its ability to showcase its achievements. 2023 March is the moment to wait and watch and see who the people of Meghalaya will give the mandate to rule the state for the next five years to.

Yours etc,
Obhajit Lamshwa
Lamara,
Via email

An example for our lawmakers to follow

Editor,
On January 14 last, the legislature of Tamil Nadu has adopted a bill (Tamil Nadu Government Servants (Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2023) to make Tamil Language paper compulsory for recruitment to State Government service. This bill aims to ensure that only Tamil youth are recruited to all government departments and public sector enterprises.

The passage of this legislation serves as an example for Meghalaya legislators who care about the youth of the state. The lawmakers in Meghalaya can take a similar step by mandating the requirements of the Khasi and Garo language papers for recruitment in all State government services. This will guarantee employment for our youth and the preservation of the Khasi and Garo languages. It will also be taken up as a means to push for the Khasi and Garo languages to be included in the 8th Schedule of the Con-

stitution of India. Yours etc,
Kenneth Nongsiej,
Via email

On qualified leaders

Editor,
I agree with Dr. Gmarlin Kundiah that our leaders must be qualified. "Needed, qualified netas" 4ST, January 13, 2023. Unqualified leaders could be the cause of various problems. Again, one with a streak of obstinacy and odd clumsiness is a major disappointment. He can hardly cheer up his burrowers. How awful that an academically poor leader could bring the academically rich IAS officer to his knees. Many officers find this beneath their dignity and self-esteem but he has to endure the indignity.

Apart from academic qualifications, one wishes our leaders were well-versed with a high degree of moral rectitude. Even a top leader with higher academic qualifications could be hypocritical, some even aggressively violent. There is no shortage of such examples in the country. Under the cloak of academic proficiency and dignified persona, "some" qualified leaders could only scheme on methods to loot the public exchequer.

Needless to say, the moral

bankruptcy among some leaders is clearly taking a toll on governance in modern times. It is because they seldom betray those who trusted them. Such leaders readily empathize with the hardships of the underprivileged and shed genuine tears for them. Albert Einstein once said, "The most important human endeavor is to strive for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it." It is truly a profound thought. How one wishes that as we have incorporated E=mc² in our technology, we could also incorporate the experienced observation of Einstein in our conduct. After all, it is a human that deals with another human being. So it would be a great blessing to have a compassionate leader who stands firmly on the robust ground of ethics. They alone honestly put efforts into alleviating the sufferings of the citizen? They alone strive to save society from disaster!

Yours etc,
Sillit Gwali,
Shillong

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Constitution faces vicious attack from Modi govt. BJP Supreme will of people higher than limited mandate won through election

By K Ravendran

Vice-president Jageedup Dhanekar and law minister Kiren Rijju are decidedly waging a proxy war on behalf of the Narendra Modi government. The Collegium happens to be just a prop and the real target is the Constitution, which the ruling party considers as a hindrance to the pursuit of its totalitarian agendas. While it began as posthums on the judiciary, the fight has transformed into a full-fledged war, with the vice-president lately taking direct aim at the Constitution. And it is the most vicious

loyal bhaktis of Narendra Modi seem to believe. The will that adopted the Constitution is much larger than the will given expression through election. The basic structure of the Constitution has been given to us by the Constituent Assembly, which is not a partisan body and cannot be capriciously fractured will mandated through an election. This is where Dhanekar, in spite of having been a lawmaker as well as a lawyer, has made a grave error. A government voted to



at attack on the statute since the inauguration of the Modi government.

power for five years cannot usurp the rights and privileges of posterity and its mandate is limited to administering the nation for the limited period of its tenure. It will be gross injustice to the future generations if the present government decides their affairs on the basis of its limited wisdom and outlook. Such policies have to be formulated after broad discussion and consultations, similar to the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly.

Addressing the All India Presiding Officers Conference the other day, Dhanekar did not disguise his displeasure against the judiciary, which he considers as an adversary in his idea of parliamentary democracy. He asserted that parliamentary sovereignty and autonomy are quintessential for the survival of democracy and cannot be permitted to be compromised by the executive or judiciary.

Addressing the All India Presiding Officers Conference the other day, Dhanekar did not disguise his displeasure against the judiciary, which he considers as an adversary in his idea of parliamentary democracy. He asserted that parliamentary sovereignty and autonomy are quintessential for the survival of democracy and cannot be permitted to be compromised by the executive or judiciary.

The Raza Sabha chairman had in his maiden speech to the House described the Supreme Court's action in striking down of the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act in 2015 as a severe compromise of parliamentary sovereignty and disregard of the will of the people. At the presiding officers meeting, he went a step further and challenged the basic structure doctrine, established in the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati case verdict, which mandated judicial review of all laws made by legislatures to ensure they were in accordance with the basic structure of the Constitution.

According to him, the Kesavananda Bharati case verdict set a bad precedent of the will of the people. If any authority questions parliament's power to amend the Constitution, it would be difficult to say we are a democratic nation. "If any institution on any basis strikes down the law passed by parliament then it will not be good for democracy and would be difficult to say we are a democratic nation," he asserted.

There is no doubt that the will of the people are supreme. But the will that Dhanekar has in mind is a fractured will that is valid for only five years for which the people have elected a government. People can change that will after five years and there is no permanency to it as the vice-president and the

and not on the basis of what the ruling party may be thinking at a particular point of time.

It is a dangerous proposition to consider the limited mandate given to a government as a blank cheque for all times come. Parliament cannot pass a law for self-annihilation, even if the ruling party enjoys 100 percent majority in the house. No single legislature can claim to represent the entire body of people, which is comprised of diverse elements that do not lend themselves to a single approach, faith or party affiliation. A democracy allows play for each of these and majoritarianism is the very antithesis of democracy.

The basic structure doctrine was established in a 7-6 verdict by a 13-judge Constitution Bench which ruled that the basic structure of the Constitution is inviolable, and cannot be amended by parliament. The power of judicial review enjoins on the courts the mandate to strike down any law that is found to damage or destroy the basic features of the Constitution. It takes sustenance from the concept that the fundamentals of the Constitution are beyond the means of legislatures elected for limited periods. The ruling itself was the result of a series of confrontations between the judiciary and the executive during the dark days of Indira Gandhi's Emergency. (IPA Service)

"The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time." —Dean Acheson

The Shillong Times

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Money power in Meghalaya politics

UDP Working President, Paul Lyngdoh is rightly pointed out that money power is in crude display in the run-up to the 2023 elections scheduled to be held on February 27 next. It has become the norm for those wanting to retain their seats to use money power to the hilt and this is evident in the conversations across the state especially in the rural areas where poverty has reduced people to unquestioning, obsequious followers of candidates who offer them the highest amounts. Instead of asking people to come forward and testify against the candidate paying money to voters (at least three months before the elections are announced), the State Election Commission (SEC) should have been on its toes and spontaneously sent feelers around to detect such subtle attempts to bribe the voters. Does the SEC believe that anyone will come forward and testify against a benefactor especially if the beneficiary is a poor, voiceless, decrepit voter reduced to penury and without a guaranteed means of livelihood? This is expecting too much and even the SEC itself knows it is just completing formalities since there have been complaints by rival candidates about the 'gold rush' that the 2023 elections should be termed as.

In constituencies like Nongkrem the role of money is overpowering. If only the SEC could employ spies it would have yielded the results it is looking for. But since the Election Commission of India (ECI) is reduced to an institution giving out advisories and with the 'noble' aim of conducting free and fair elections without the wherewithal to detect money changing hands between voters and candidates, elections will continue to be what they are in this country. And money will continue to play a major role in deciding winners and losers, especially as citizens become more desperately pushed to the status of those living below poverty line (BPL) which in Meghalaya is a whopping 37%.

In Meghalaya we are looking at an unquestioning, cynical, uneducated voter with very little choice to vote for change. A similar situation exists in the outback of Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. All forms of religious institutions that claim to put the fear of God in their adherents seem to collapse like a pack of cards during this season. At times there is active connivance to campaign for one of their own, despite the person's faults and failings. In fact, the whispering campaign in religious circles had started months ago. The churches are obliged to the MDA Government for agreeing to put the brakes on their casino project as if casinos are the only evil and poverty, negative human development indices and illiteracy are not worse than some rich folks gambling away their ill-gotten wealth. Clearly there appears no hope at the end of the tunnel for those hoping for change in Meghalaya post March 3, 2023.

Letters to the Editor

Why no leadership in Meghalaya's politics?

Editor, In the beginning, we should understand that there is a big difference between leadership and politics. Today's system produces politicians, not leaders; the politicians we call leaders are not true leaders. Firstly, most of our politicians are busy making money, and money becomes their top priority. They forget that their primary task is to serve the people. Every politician wants to be served through the money earned illegitimately from the funds meant for the people. Secondly, what we exercise is politics without principles. Although sometimes few politicians stand by their principles, it does not last long as many of these principles are compromised which it comes to money matters. Thirdly, many of our politicians stress on power politics. What they do in 5 years is to gain power; they take power from

the people instead of giving it to them. It is miserable that politicians overlook one of the best qualities of a leader, which is to empower the people. Authentic leadership always tries to empower rather than gain power for themselves. Fourthly, the politicians are more concerned with the elections than of our younger generation. Politicians are not interested in the next generation; if we ask them what their vision for our generation is many will be silent because they are not interested in our future generation. Their primary interest is in elections. They have no time for our future, security, or employment of the youth. Fifthly, our politicians like to shout from political platforms with so many promises during the elections that they forget that the purpose of development is to bring a change in the state. How will we expect a better and brighter Meghalaya if these politicians come to power? It is miserable. Many of them lie and have not fulfilled their promises. People have the power in the name of democracy to change the situation. Let us unite and

How to defeat the BJP in 2024

By Derek O'Brien

Opposition must convert Lok Sabha poll into aggregate of state elections, target government on price rise, unemployment.

The year 2023 will be a lot like 2022. The first week into the new year and media channels and the co-system that sustains them are spreading the myth that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is invincible - that 2024 is already a done deal for him. The only point of debate, according to this flawed narrative, is the

(TMC) won, immediately energised the Opposition ranks, which had turned listless and despondent after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The Bengal win showed quite unequivocally that the BJP election machine could be made to stall by focusing on local issues and by delivering on promises made and kept to the electorate of the state. The BJP won 18 seats in

unemployment and the lack of communal harmony—all of which add up to incompetent governance. This will be the primary messaging from the Opposition. For any kind of communication, political or brand, or public service, there cannot be two primary messages. The Opposition parties would also need strong secondary messaging (don't get me wrong when I say secondary) and an equally important focus (but less mass appeal)



margin of his party's victory. Simply put, this is a (mis)reading of the political tea leaves. The BJP can be defeated in 2024. The way to do this is to convert the 2024 Lok Sabha polls into an aggregate

West Bengal is the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. You don't need to be a TMC partisan to wager that "the world's largest party" will be lucky to win half-a-dozen seats from Bengal in 2024. That's minus 12 for BJP and plus 12 for the

egy in place for 2024. Strong competent Chief Minister(s) or ex-CMs versus a Prime Minister who has failed to deliver on his promises, all of which missed the self-declared deadline of 2022: houses for all. A five trillion-

which will be the breakdown of institutions: Parliament, investigative agencies and the media—to name a few. So, these will be the two focus areas when the Opposition parties take the BJP government head-on in 2024.

The BJP can be defeated in 2024. The way to do this is to convert the 2024 Lok Sabha polls into an aggregate of state elections. Let's look at the data: the BJP has fared poorly wherever it has faced a strong party in a region (no, I'm not using the term "regional party", because some of these are, in fact, recognised national parties). If you extrapolate the Assembly results of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, or Telangana to the national level you'll find the BJP struggling to touch the 240-seat mark.

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Opposition, a net gain of 24 seats. The prognosis for the BJP in Bihar is similar. The results in these two states alone will take the BJP's tally below the majority mark. You do not need a grand one-size-fits-all Opposition alliance with a "face" at the national level. You need strategic alliances with the right parties in different states. For example, in Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray must be the face of the Shiv Sena-NCP Congress alliance. In Tamil Nadu, MK Stalin and the DMK must be the lead player in a combine that includes the Congress and the Communists. Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party will have to be the party in Uttar Pradesh. And in Rajasthan, Kamalika, Chhat-

dollar economy, the Bullet Train, electricity water in every house and more. Let's examine the broken promise to double farmers' income by 2022. To achieve that, incomes needed to grow by 10 per cent every year from 2015 to 2022. Adjusted for inflation, the actual growth in farmer incomes has been just three per cent. Or take the hot air on jobs. The reality is that 22 crore people have applied for government jobs since 2014, and only seven lakh got jobs. These are not my numbers; these are figures tabled on the floor of Parliament by the Union government.

There will be naysayers who will say that's not the only point them in the direction of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. That, too, was an aggregate of state polls. Then, like now, there was no "national face" to take on Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was at the peak of his popularity and widely expected to return to power. There's another similarity. BJP's "New India" slogan now is eerily similar to its "India Shining" slogan then. The people of India had then rallied to elect the BJP. Narendra Modi would not have forgotten that.

Of course, he is beatable. You all know what happened in May 2021 in West Bengal. Make no mistake, the faces of the BJP campaign were Modi and Shah. The near three-fourth majority that the All India Trinamool Congress

and machine hearts. They are concerned more about money than humanity, and we need kindness more than cleverness; we need humanity more than technology. Many politicians lie to the people; they treat them like sheep, cattle, and machines. Corrupt politicians are not machines; we are humans. Let us fight against politicians who enrich themselves by enslaving the people.

Even as the faces that confront the PM will vary from state to state, the issues raised will be the same—price rise, enforcement Inspector under Transport Department on December 16, 2021. However still date the result has not been declared leaving the aspiring candidates dejected. I would request the MPSC members and Transport Department to kindly look into the matter and to declare the results at the earliest.

Managing the House has been easy. Digital presentation of replies makes it easier to keep noise against a low level behind the necessary benches to get its work done smoothly. In the open fields too it tries to get over the voices to carry forward its goal.

Meghalaya voters, do we want to be ruled by the politics of greed, hatred, intolerance, and the politics of cynicism? We hope it will be a big NO. My humble appeal to the voters is not to sell, surrender, and submit themselves to these political brutes. Do not allow ourselves to be dictated to by these politicians, who sell us what to do, what to think, what to feel. We believe that the election of 2023 will give a massive lesson to many politicians. Let us remove the present corrupt government which has distorted the image of the people of Meghalaya based on religion, caste, creed, and community. People let us do away with the Delhi rubber-stamp government. They have several artificial politicians, machine men, and women with machine minds.

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Every political leader should think before he/she speaks. But the question is whether we even have 'leaders' or simply individuals wanting to win elections and rule the State and its people even while they become wealthier every time they win.

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How will we expect a better and brighter Meghalaya if these politicians come to power? It is miserable. Many of them lie and have not fulfilled their promises. People have the power in the name of democracy to change the situation. Let us unite and

Delay in declaring MPSC results Editor, The MPSC had conducted an interview for the post of

Do we really have leaders in Meghalaya? Editor, As we approach the voting day political leaders are busy and the down method. We, the people, must ensure that he/she is a man/woman of principles and will never go back on his/her words.

Sheshphang Marwit, Via email

RSS poll machine, new mosque gives edge to BJP

By Shivaji Sarkar

Nine states, 350 Lok Sabha seats, reaching the marginalised communities is the goal of the BJP in 2024. It's a tall order but the party, RSS cadres and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have the capability to do it. They have created an organizational structure that is in a 24x7 election campaign mode. The strong cadre of the party and its coordination or the repository of leadership in the RSS is its strength. It has a thinking set-up that continuously re-strategises its working mode to capture seats, more seats and change government policies accordingly.

It is perceived that about 2 percent Muslims even now vote for the BJP. But it wants to multiply that with more pasmanda (backward - Muslim votes numbering about 14 crore as per 2011 census, the new modern mosque at Ayodhya may show its friendly face to the Muslims.

Contrary to the opposition charges of being reckless, the BJP takes every step in a calculated manner including even how it has to raise its noise level, a successful tool to draw the voices in the Opposition. It helps to keep the Opposition off the public mind and penetration in the people's perception becomes easier. That makes it a little callous about its approaches. Rabble rousers do the rest. Deviator from standard protocol is an effective tool to carry forward its vijay yatra even in the portals of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The chairmans moved away from their standard format of being neutral in Parliament

Many smaller tribes, caste groups and farming classes are not its voters. If they join the BJP, votes may go up from 22 crore of a total of 91 crore in 2019. About 7 to 10 crore new voters join the electoral list every five years. Even half of it can do wonders to increase its tally in a 100 crore electoral college.



So is the BJP not bothered about the Congress whipper? The BJP and its parent body are careful. They have never ignored the Opposition. They know how to tackle and splinter it. Its masterstroke of withdrawing the three farm bills are testimony of how it confused the opposing farmers to not act in unison, giving the Party an edge in the supposed western UP stronghold of the farmers. Already it has announced the chairmans moved away from their standard format of being neutral in Parliament

to acting for the ruling party. Unlike some of the previous Speakers, who even quit their party membership officially to have a semblance of neutrality, here there is no pretence. It is not different. Those who were neutral also had been soft towards the ruling group.

Among the nine states going to polls this year, the BJP is in power in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Tripura and it's a part of the ruling coalition in Nagaland and Meghalaya. Mizoram is friendly enough. It feels NE is easy to manage except to some extent Tripura. The other five states (Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka) would see sharp turns and surprise moves from the BJP.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has shaken but not rattled it. It makes its moves sharper as the January 16 road show of about 700 metres exemplify. In the party's perception Modi has got the mileage more than the Long March has achieved. A simple stroke has put the achievements of the Government to the fore of everyone. Party men wonder at the calculated mechanism that makes it achieve more with less effort.

Despite that possibly as BJP President Nadda says it would sail through and capture most of 160 LS seats that are not with it. Intense electioneering has already started even before the Delhi National Executive Council meeting. The Opposition has yet not even strategized.

But voting records also show that the BJP's strike rate in terms of seats is lower than its Lok Sabha performance. Madhya Pradesh is a post-poll maneuver and Telangana polls are likely to be mangular.

Let us remove the present corrupt government which has distorted the image of the people of Meghalaya based on religion, caste, creed, and community. People let us do away with the Delhi rubber-stamp government. They have several artificial politicians, machine men, and women with machine minds.

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"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation."

— Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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Destination Delhi

THE fight for the 2024 Parliament Polls would, by all indications, be bitter. This despite the ruling BJP and its mascot Prime Minister Narendra Modi towering over others in terms of national appeal and mass support. A restive Telangana chief minister K Chandrababtu Naidu, who converted his regional ruling party the Telangana Rashtra Samithi into a whimsical 'national' outfit the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, fired the first shot. The mass rally he held in Khammam in Telangana saw a line-up of four chief ministers on Wednesday. In neighbouring Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed up the next day to launch a slew of development projects as the assembly polls there would also be nearing. The Election Commission, meanwhile, announced the first set of assembly polls of the year -- for Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. The entire year would see the political temperature rising, with assembly polls in six more states, followed the next year by the General Elections.

As most states have strong regional parties, the BJP cannot hope to have a cakewalk. However, the hint that has come from the KCR-show in Khammam was music to the BJP's ears. Even the regional forces remain as fragmented as ever. Top faces like Mamata Banerjee, Nishith Kumar and Sharad Pawar were nowhere to be seen. Kumar made it clear he was not an invitee and that he was not enthused at the KCR push. KCR on his part shifted gear from the Jai Telangana slogan to Jai Bharat, just as PM Modi had sought to transform himself before 2014. The message is loud and clear.

Granted that the non-BJP parties fighting the polls under different groupings somehow win a sufficient number of seats to form the next government at the Centre, the logical next step is to choose the Prime Minister. The BJP or the Congress can nominate one easily. On the other side, each greedy shark among the regional chieftains would propose himself for the post. After a hard bargaining, whoever picks the mantle would -- as past experience showed -- bear a crown of thorns. Leg-pulling from the wayward leaders would begin from day-one and the new government's lifespan could be numbered. The reason why the regionalists do not want to keep the Congress in the forefront for such an anti-BJP alliance is clear: they need the bargaining power to grab the PM's post. Aiming high is not a bad idea, but these are men with feet of clay. Their personal interests would spoil the show from the very start, leading to the collapse of the government sooner than later.

Letters to the Editor

Elections in Meghalaya

The General Elections in Meghalaya has been announced by the EC on Wednesday, January 18. Below are musings on the background and the way forward as conscious voters. As a person who is still travelling around in the State, I get the impression that generally people of the three main regions of Jaintia, Khasi and Garo Hills are absolutely fed-up with the corruption tainted MDA government. If Dr Mukul Sarma and his friends had remained in the Congress there would have been no chance for the NPP to return to power. But with the break-up and birth of the TMC in the state, now it's anybody's guess as to who will carry the torch. As for the UDP, it simply has, time and again, proved to be a parasitic party clinging onto any party so as to feed on the perks of powers and to hell with ideology! VPP, a new party with laudable declarations and largely educated candidates (a party I would have felt comfortable with), is again a new entity and it's

anybody's guess as to how it will perform. The BJP may improve its position, but they will not cross 5 seats at the most.

The way forward is to vote for a party that has the greater chance of more winning candidates so as to throw out the NPP that led a shamelessly corrupt government and was flirting with a divisive party like the BJP. Yours etc., Eugene Thomas, Shillong-6

EVM: The unfinished agenda

Editor, Now that the Election Commission of India (ECI) has visited Meghalaya and told candidates to identify themselves and declare themselves free of any criminal charges, there remain two unfinished agenda. First, in 2018 quite a few EVMs experienced glitches in some polling booths. At many polling stations voters became impatient and were discarded by the long wait so they left without voting since they could not sort

Election 2023: Money, money, money & The winner takes its all

By Patricia Mukhim

Two Abba songs 'Money money money' and 'The winner takes it all' come to mind during this election season. The first song goes, 'Money, money, money. Must be funny in a rich man's world but it can buy so much for the poor voter. Money is the poor woman's need. Even Rs 2000 will go a long way to ensure she has rice for at least two months and some money to pay the school fees when classes begin in February. And in this open season, the more candidates the better!

It's pointless denying that with time, money, power in elections has taken precedence over issues. Why should anyone care about issues anyway? Issues are good for intellectual sparring. For a poor person who knows that his vote will continue to have a raw deal five years down the line, it's now or never. Hence the conversation these days whether in the market place or public transports or some adda like a tea shop where people sit and chat over chat and samosa, the banter revolves around, 'how much did you get from...?' 'I got so Rs... but I believe the other candidate gives more.'

As far as issues are concerned, they are the same old, cliched ones anyway. Education, Health, Roads, Power, Water, Agriculture etc. Haven't these same issues figured in the last elections? Were they addressed? Do we have better schools? And why should schools matter when a good chunk of rural kids are not even in school when women will die of childbirth complications which are no longer issues in the developed states. And infant deaths? Who cares? When there are already so many kids in the family one death is just a number.

As far as mads are concerned, the affluent have their SUVs so it doesn't matter how bad the roads are. The less fortunate ones relying on public transport or small vehicles can break their hearts and deal with their problems and nag the insouciant government for the next five years. After all they were all paid before the elections to shut their traps for the next 5 years.

The rich don't need government intervention in education. They are all in private schools and a good number study outside the state. Those forced to study in government funded schools and colleges don't get the right kind of education that can get them to think and question authority. Their's is a case of memorising and vomiting out facts during an exam. That's the breadth of their education. So meaningless is the education imparted (book knowledge) and so

only think differently but also have different voting behaviours. Generally, the Garo people decide who forms the Government in Meghalaya hence we have had more candidates from the Khasi-Jaintia region. The Garos do have bitter political combats but in the end they close ranks to contribute of their own to become the state leader.

Democracy itself is not so straightforward. Voting is not just a matter of people thinking, questioning, realising citizenry that can hold the elected to account. That's only possible with educated (not just literate) voters who are not victims

of patronage. Anyone who has been reduced to a position of having to queue up at the MLA's home early in the morning (which is a common sight these past few months) and beg for crumbs can hardly exercise free choice. Their choices are already decided when they surrender their EPICs in lieu of money. Some voters may not receive money from candidates but they vote on the basis of personal relationships, religious and clan affinities and many other factors.

Let us admit one stark reality and that is that we live in alternative universes. Our expectations from the MLAs are different. Some believe in immediate gratification either look for the long-term benefit of the State. But the second category are too few to make a difference. The reality is that we live in different worlds, desire different things and have almost nothing in common. This is reinforced by a partisan media environment that is heavily consumed over mobile phones. And such media outlets that operate in a very cruelly competitive orbit deliver news like a consumer product. No wonder, every citizen has an existential dilemma with each party looking at the other as a mortal enemy and each party then trying to woo the voters.

At the end of the day therefore the media plays a very influential role in deciding the democracy we are living with. Solutions to our governance problems

Modi's outreach to Muslims and Dalits has many faultlines

BJP leadership's target of 400 seats in 2024 polls a daydream

By Sushil Kutty

The problem with Prime Minister Narendra Modi is that he thinks and dreams elections, only elections. Winning elections. And setting electoral records! Not that setting a record in elections has helped the people who voted the BJP or helped those who did not vote the BJP. Like the Muslims of India, both 'Pasmanda' as well the 'Ashraf'.

To begin with, neither Muslim group trusted Modi. Very few Muslims gave away their votes to Modi's party, the trust deficit going back to 2002, when Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi did not do his 'Rajdhama', not differentiate or discriminate between 'subjects'.

Chief Minister Narendra Modi allegedly fell short of the ideal. Come 2014 and

Now, with elections in nine states in 2023, and the all-India elections in 2024, the 'laharthi' free rations scheme has been extended for another full year for 81 crore beneficiaries. At the end of the day, pure and simple bribery. Proof that India has 81 crore poverty-stricken households. Modi was admitting to his government's failures. A cover-up of electoral promises not delivered, like two crore jobs, etcetera, etc.

Modi's blatant mirroring of the BJP keeping busy at the Congress all the time, has crossed all boundaries. 'We should be in front of a church on Sunday. We should reach out to the Sikh community,' he told the BJP workers at the national executive. 'Our

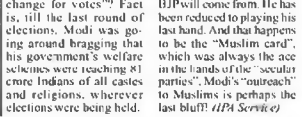
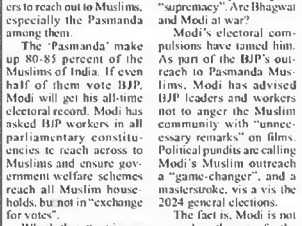
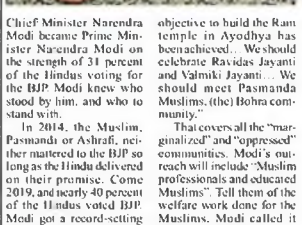
objective to build the Ram temple in Ayodhya has been achieved... We should celebrate Ravidas Jayanti and Valmiki Jayanti. We should meet Pasmanda Muslims, (the) Bohra community.'

This covers all the 'marginalized' and 'oppressed' communities. Modi's outreach will include 'Muslim professionals and educated Muslims'. Tell them of the welfare work done for the Muslims. Modi called it 'Bharose Ka Rishi'.

In the year when India has assumed the G20 presidency Modi wants no communal tensions to spoil the day for his government. Fellow G20 heads of state shouldn't take home stories of communal disharmony in Modi's 'New India'.

The question boils down to have the Muslims come round to trusting Modi, and the BJP? Modi's call to reach out to the Pasmanda Muslims comes on the heels of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat asking Muslims to eschew any feelings of 'supremacy'. Are Bhagwat and Modi at war? Modi's electoral compulsions have tainted him. As part of the BJP's outreach to Pasmanda Muslims, Modi has advised BJP leaders and workers not to anger the Muslim community with 'unnecessary remarks' on films. Political pundits are calling Modi's Muslim outreach a 'game-changer', and a masterstroke, vis a vis the 2024 general elections.

The fact is, Modi is not sure where the votes for the BJP will come from. He has been reduced to playing his last hand. And that happens to be the 'Muslim card', which was always the ace in the hands of the 'secular parties'. Modi's 'outreach' to Muslims is perhaps the last bluff! (APP Service)



and approached the Presiding officer because his seal was stamped on another symbol like the bicycle! The EVM is completely different from a ballot box and before the elections the EVMs should have been checked in case they malfunction. There were three people who complained to the EC regarding the EVM malfunction. The former Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi had twice ordered the EC, Mr Aurora at the time to look into the complaints but there was no response until the poll results were declared. The doubts and fears of voters, be they of any status in life should be addressed so that it would inspire confidence in voters and they would feel that justice is served.

W. Paishang, Nongkrum

Unresolved issues in Jowai

Editor, In Jowai Town, there are two abandoned buildings as far as the eye can see. One such building is the hostel of the Government Girls H S School. Once upon a

time, the cook of this hostel was the late Kong Pomolun Gaisah. May her soul rest in peace. Attending her funeral, which was two days ago, got me thinking about the conditions of the hostel. What was once an affordable hostel for so many students outside of town is now sadly an abandoned building and a hub for juvenile delinquents. In 2019, reports made by various online news media is that the dilapidated hostel is not in a stable condition to accommodate students. Four years have passed and we are yet to see the required renovations to be done. The other building left orphaned by the government is the market building in Jawmujing Jowai. The building was made by a certain politician five years ago. The fruit of those promises are now seen by the eyes going in and out of the lawmusing market. It is just another unfinished construction. Currently, the said building looks like a garbage dumpster. One can only imagine the pathetic sight of a market that co-exists with a huge pile of garbage. Perhaps the eye can see. One such building was again as an election gimmick this year. Lastly, huge piles of gar-

Why does Nepal's aviation industry have safety issues? An expert explains

A Yeti Airlines ATR 72-500 aircraft crashed in Pokhara in central Nepal on January 15 2023, killing at least 68 passengers on board. The aircraft was on route from Nepal's capital Kathmandu to Pokhara, the country's second largest city, situated under the picturesque Annapurna mountain range.

While the picturesque landscape of the country appeals to tourists, it poses significant challenges to aviation operators, who need to embrace and navigate the challenging environment.

The air crash on Sunday was Nepal's worst aviation disaster since 1992. The country has been working to overcome its challenges in aviation.

A challenging landscape
Topography has gifted Nepal with picturesque landscapes, but poses unrivalled challenges to flight operations.

Nepal, situated between India and China, is home to eight of the world's 14 highest mountains, including Mount Everest or Sagarmatha. For flight operations, it's an almost unrivalled, harsh environment with sudden weather changes that can make for hazardous conditions.

Airports built in mountainous regions often need to have shorter runways that can only accommodate turboprop-powered regional aircraft, rather than large jet airliners that can access larger cities in Nepal.

As a result, aviation carriers in Nepal have a variety of aircraft on their fleets. These craft vary in condition, presenting potential safety hazards.

The ATR 72 aircraft is one typical aircraft used by Nepali carriers. It is a turboprop-powered

regional aircraft with a capacity between 44 and 78 passengers. These aircraft are manufactured by a joint venture of Airbus in France and Leonardo in Italy.

The aircraft involved in this crash had been in service for 15 years, a fairly typical age for an aircraft.

The final report on what happened to the tragic Yeti Airlines flight will take over a month to complete.

A growing and fast-changing industry
Nepal has welcomed private investment into its aviation sector since 1992. Yeti Airlines is one of 20 domestic carriers. The airline, headquartered in Kathmandu, flies to ten domestic destinations using ATR 72-500 aircraft. In addition, 29 international airlines operate into Nepal's capital too.

With air travel in Nepal becoming more accessible and affordable, airport infrastructure development has remained far behind compared to the growth of air traffic. This has resulted in increasing congestion at airports, fierce competition between airlines, and decreased safety records.

In fact, the country has recorded at least 350 casualties associated with aeroplanes or helicopters since 2000, which has raised questions about the effectiveness of its aviation safety regulations.

The aviation regulator in charge is the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, a government agency established in 1998.

Working hard to improve
Nepal became a member of the UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in 1960. This membership obliges the



country to abide by international conventions, ICAO's regulations, standards, and recommended practices in aviation safety.

While Nepal's aviation industry has made significant efforts to improve safety, unfortunately the safety record still doesn't match up with the requirements of other civil aviation authorities.

In particular, the European Union banned all Nepali airlines from operating in the bloc's airspace in 2013 after ICAO raised a red flag. That ban still hasn't been lifted, and Nepal remains on the EU Air Safety List.

Despite the tragic casualty record, Nepal has stepped up its efforts to improve aviation safety. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal has been focusing on improving safety in Nepali aviation — such as building improvements at airports, upgrading safety equipment, and fostering a positive safety culture by encouraging hazard reporting.

Nepal's considerable improvement in safety measures and compliance with international standards was recognised by ICAO in 2018. However, the country must continue work on its aviation reform to make its skies safe for everyone. *(The Conversation)*

Lukla: World's most dangerous airport

Lukla Airport is located in Lukla of eastern Nepal, a small town at the foot of Mount Everest. Lukla Airport in Nepal is ranked first among the top ten dangerous airports in the world, and is titled "Runway on the Roof of the World". The airport is the only passage between Kathmandu and Lukla town, with 30 flights taking off and landing here every day. There is no doubt that this is a very small and busy airport. You might wonder why the most dangerous airport is so busy. That's because the airport of Lukla is the only gateway for travelers from Nepal to Mount Everest.

Lukla Airport, also Tenzing-Hillary Airport, was built in 1964 by Edmund Hillary, the first person to summit Mount Everest. Lukla Airport is nestled among the mountains.

The airport is called "the most dangerous airport in the world" because it sits on a mountainside at an altitude of 2,830 meters and its runway is a very short runway. The asphalt runway is only 457 meters long and 20 meters wide, with 12 degrees slope from north to south.



Nothing wrong with re-examining history, says William Dalrymple

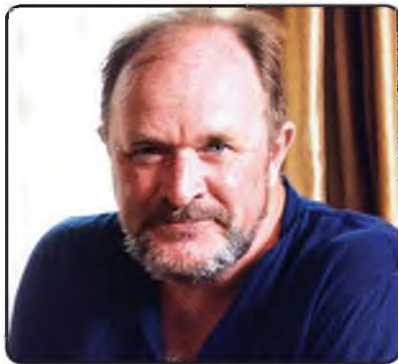
By Sukant Deepak

Stressing that it is the job of the historian to take note of new research, historian and author William Dalrymple says there is nothing wrong with re-examining history in light of new evidence.

"It is a good thing that history must be re-examined by every successive generation: relooked at and rethought and discussed over again. I personally believe that it is not at all a bad thing for history to be looked at from the ever-changing perspectives of the present. Such discussion and debate is entirely legitimate, but it has to be firmly anchored in the facts found in the primary sources and not just be an expression of political opinion, nationalistic muscle-flexing, or religious orthodoxy."

"Sadly, there is often a tendency in this country to reduce history to binaries: a world full of great heroes and great villains. In reality, human beings are rarely black or white: we are all different shades of gray," he tells ANS at the 6th Kerala Literature Festival organised by the DC Kizhakkemuri Foundation. "It's the historian's job to research and express those subtle nuances. In history, nuance is everything."

Currently working on his next book *The Golden Road*, the story of Indian influence spreading out over Asia — Buddhism going up to China and Hinduism and Sanskrit going down to South East Asia, and India numbers and mathematics going West, Dalrymple, born in Scotland wrote his first book *In*



Xanadu: A Quest at the age of 22 and moved to Delhi in 1989.

Spending five years researching his best-known *The City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi*, his other bestselling works include *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium*, *The Age of Kali*, *White Mughals*, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857*, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, *The Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan* and *The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire*.

Stressing he chooses to write

history at this moment, though he loved writing travelogues in his twenties and could go back to them one day, the author says he has often considered writing a sequel to his 2010 bestseller, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*.

Also a photographer, Dalrymple says that writing and photography use different parts of the brain: Photography is immediate and about the instant moment, while writing is slow, and considered and involves much editing, re-writing, and rethinking.

"They both give me different pleasures. I am also doing a

podcast titled 'Empire' with Anita Anand. It's been a surprising hit since it started in August and there are now a million downloads a month. Earlier, it was just British, US, and Australian audiences, but now it's doing really well in India too."

The author, who has also collaborated with singer-composer Vidya Shah for literary-musical acts (*The Last Mughal* and *White Mughals*) feels it is interesting to divide his time between different forms of creativity and believes the variety keeps him fresh and engaged, always wrestling with new challenges: "While my main calling is history, I am also a photographer and have been a travel writer, a foreign correspondent, a festival organiser, and a podcaster. Next year, I am taking up a visiting fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford. If you keep yourself fresh and interested you're more likely to keep your audience engaged."

In his research process, the best part is visiting the places where the events he will write about took place.

"It is more like a holiday — going to the ruins and the temples and the battlefields. Yes, the archives are a slog. But the hardest bit is writing... putting pen to paper. The first two-three months are especially tough but then you see the pile of paper building, and the writing improving through successive drafts and that feels very satisfying. It is exactly because of that difficulty that finishing a book is such a uniquely satisfying moment," he concludes. *(ANS)*

Jaipur lit fest returns to Pink City after a break

The 16th edition of Jaipur Literature Festival has returned to Pink City after a year ushering in a festive feel as it brings along 350 speakers from across the globe associated with literature, music, art and film from across the world. This unique festival shall continue from January 19 to 23 at Hotel Clarks Amer in Jaipur.

The inaugural ceremony on Thursday was addressed by Nobel Laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah in Front Lawn. The theme for this year is 'Utsav' celebrating the colours of Rajasthan and displaying bright colours. Indian weddings make statements with its vibrant colours, extravagant celebrations, resonating music and sharing the happiness of a new start.

With its decor, Jaipur Literature Festival 2023 tried to replicate the same joy for the audience which they take away from an Indian traditional celebration. The entire decor and theme for this year is an amalgamation of Indian cultural heritage and its vibrant nature.

Producer of Jaipur Literature Festival, Sanjoy Ray, said that this time the festival is being organised on the green concept in which no card is required. People will be able to attend the festival by just showing their barcode after online registration.

Gurnah in which Nobel Prize winner Abdulrazak Gurnah will be in conversation with British publishing legend Alexandra Pringle. Gurnah fled Zanzibar as a teenager following the Revolution of 1964. His striking and formidable works include *Memory of Departure*, *Pilgrims Way*, *Dotter, Paradise*, *By the Sea*, *Desertion*, and his most recent, *Afterlives*, which examines the German colonial forces in East Africa and the lives of Tanganyikans — as they work, grieve and love — in the darkening shadow of war.

The other sessions include Seven Moons of Maali Almeida in which Shehan Karunatilaka will be in conversation with Nandini Nair. Sustaining Democracy: Nurturing Democracy in which Shashi Tharoor will be in conversation with Tripuradaman Singh.

Overall, 350 speakers will participate in the festival. A total of 21 Indian and 14 international languages will be presented in the 16th edition of the festival. Speakers and panelists include last year's International Booker Prize winner for *Jomb of Sand* Gitanjali Shree, Gulzar with Booker winner Bernardin Evaristo, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Shobha De, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Shashi Tharoor, Ananchal Malhotra, Amish Tripathi.

Well-known faces like Sudha Murthy, Ashwin Sanghi, filmmaker Onir, Nobel Laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah and former Special Director of the Indian Intelligence Bureau Amarjith Singh Dalal will also mark their presence in the event. *(ANS)*

"The real and lasting victories are those of peace, and not of war." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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Pakistan as paradox

YEARS ago, Pakistan was rightly defined by author Christophe Jaffrelot as a paradox. Proclaimed as an Islamic Republic in 1956, some 10 years after it won Independence alongside India, Pakistan is in turmoil. Its economy has collapsed, social tensions have heightened and its future remains unpredictable. Its collapse, sooner or later, is a strong possibility with grave implications to India and others in the neighbourhood. Jaffrelot had linked the cause of reigning instability in Pakistan to three contradictions -- the "tension between the unitary identity of state versus ethnic identity of regions, the complex relationship between civilian politicians and military institutions, and the role of Islam in the governance of Pakistan."

Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Muhajirs are among the prominent ethno-linguist groups there. Punjabis like the Sharifs and Sindhis like the Bhattos ran Pakistan in iterations while the military the other times either directly or from behind. The Muhajirs, comprising largely of immigrants from India and the Pashtuns whose ancestry is linked to Afghanistan are largely sidelined. The conflict of interests between these segments causes the main social wedge even as all these are die-hard Muslims. The Sunni-Shia conflict is another cause of strain. Add to this the huge corruption at the political and military levels and the loot being clandestinely shipped abroad for decades. This was similar to what was witnessed in India during the UPA periods. The Modi government has sought to apply brakes to it. In the free-for-all, with the military constantly undercutting democracy and the governments tottering and failing to complete their terms and ousted by machinations, the hapless nation is at the edge of a precipice. A part of Pakistan close to Afghanistan is irrevocably under the full control of terrorists. Separatist movements are gaining steam in Gilgit Baltistan and Balochistan while, curiously, strong pro-India sentiments are evident in the 'Azad Kashmir' region. Islamabad blaming India for encouraging such tendencies evokes guffaws of laughter.

Faced with extreme odds, Pakistan has slowed down its play of mischief on the Indian side of Kashmir -- after strong steps by the Modi government like the abrogation of Article 370 ending the special status for Jammu and Kashmir in August, 2019. The surgical strikes followed by the zooming in of IAF jets into Pakistan close to the military headquarters in Rawalpindi in February 2019 -- after the Pulwama terror attack -- not only silenced but also shamed Pakistan's military brass. The tone and tenor of prime minister Shehbaz Sharif's urgings to the UAE rulers during his visit there as also to Saudi Arabia seeking emergency financial support are proof of Pakistan's sad plight.

Indigenous communities are by tradition hygienic. They keep their surroundings clean because they believe that nature is sacred. But it is rather heart-rending that what rims our hills which were once green and clean are gradually losing their fame and shine. The reason is we have mercilessly littered our front yards and backyards, and garbage has accumulated in our villages, towns, and cities. It is rather unbecoming for indigenous people to mistreat Mother Nature by littering all over the place. The most important reason for this change of heart and change of mind amongst the tribal people is because they have distanced themselves from nature and we have forgotten our culture and tradition.

People were able to maintain cleanliness in the past because they lived a simple life that is also close to nature. The traditional way of life of the indigenous involves generating very less waste. Even the waste produced is biodegradable and has no negative impact on nature. Non-perishable waste as we know, it today like plastics originated very recently. Forty or fifty years ago, almost all the waste generated was biodegradable but everything changed once plastic came into the picture. The main factor that contributed to having dirty villages and towns is the lack of civic sense as people are careless and they dump their waste anywhere.

Kitchen garden and natural composting
In the past, it was a tradition that every house in the village also had a kitchen garden. Farmers not only plant many fruits and vegetables in the garden, but they also have a composting unit in the garden. Garden has a natural composting unit that helps convert waste to compost and at the same time helps people do away with their waste.

Biodegradable utensils
The other factor which helps in making the place clean is also because of the kind of utensils people use there. Apart from metal, the other utensils that people used were made from natural items like bamboo, wood, and stones which are also easily degradable. For grinding, people used stones and wood which are biodegradable. Much of the utensils that people used were made from biodegradable products. Now for the sake of convenience, we switch to plastic utensils which are the main cause of

By H H Mohrmen

the waste problem. Our food habits have changed. People were able to maintain cleanliness in the past because they only ate fresh foods and not packed food. Fresh foods which are produced locally do not have to be packed as products that are brought from distant places. Foods that are being transported from far away, need to be wrapped carefully and using locally-produced food does not have to be packed. This minimizes the generation of waste which has become a major problem nowadays. The waste problem is because of our eating habits and most of the waste generated was from foils, sweet wrappers, and chips packets. With the waste that we generate, we

backyard only. It is a common sight to see beautiful and clean houses in the locality, but the street of the same locality is littered with waste. We do not care how the streets and lanes of the village and the town are, as long as the surroundings of our houses are clean. Some people make so much effort to clean their houses and then dump the waste they collect from their houses on the street sometimes in front of their own houses. Not only are the streets littered but, they even turned their streams and rivers into dumping places. It is indeed ironic that the community that not only calls nature their mother but even held rivers in high esteem is turning their rivers into a garbage dumping area. This is the kind of mindset that we have now because we have lost touch with nature and are disconnected from its values.

The common good
The Khasi Pnar people have this saying which goes, "ka bhlang ka imlang shilang" or "ka khla ka mia shabun balang," which means that the common good of all is what the Hylnhew Trep people hold in high esteem. This is not only a statement of belief of the Hylnhew Trep people but it is, in fact, the philosophy that governs their life and the way they live their day-to-day lives. If one looks around then one would see that everything they do is for the common good of all, but sadly that has changed now and people have become selfish and think of their own interests only. The need of the hour is also to help inculcate in the mind of every citizen and young people in particular, the need to remind ourselves of this important tradition.

Community cleaning drive
The main reason that the community today continue with the tradition of maintaining our surroundings clean by organizing cleanliness drives is because it is true to some extent and the community in the form of a dorbar shong or other entity organizes itself to ensure the common good in the community. The main problem is the lack of consistency. Localities and villages may remain clean for a few days, but then waste starts to appear in the area. To maintain cleanliness we need to be consistent in our efforts so that we can make our villages and towns clean all year round. The only way to make the situation again is for the people to go back to their roots and reconnect with nature.

Mind my backyard
The tendency amongst people now is to mind their own surroundings. The solution to the problem is to an local food which does not need extra wrapping and minimize the generation of plastic waste in the state. Of course, it is healthy too. The other factor which helps in making the place clean is also because of the kind of utensils people use there. Apart from metal, the other utensils that people used were made from natural items like bamboo, wood, and stones which are also easily degradable. For grinding, people used stones and wood which are biodegradable. Much of the utensils that people used were made from biodegradable products. Now for the sake of convenience, we switch to plastic utensils which are the main cause of

By Shivaji Sarkar

Internet giants are having fortunes in India for weak anti-trust or monopoly laws. Google alone reports a net profit of Rs 64 billion or \$79 lakh in 2021. In contrast, Microsoft earned Rs 9475 crore. The Competition Commission of India (CCI) found Google has a monopolistic anti-competitive policy edging out others in competition and slapped R-2274.2 crore penalties in two separate cases. It moved the Supreme Court, which refused stay on one penalty payment of Rs 1337.76 crore for abusing tech giant's dominant position in the Android system and Play Store policies. This has raised a glimmer of hope against checking the malpractices of internet giants.

The watchdog CCI's order issued in October 2022, is an indication of how the country is being bled by tech giants of billions or more every year. It calls for a massive overhaul of the competition, monopolistic practices, trade practices and related laws. India as it liberalised replaced the MRTP Act 1969 with Competition Act 2002 and implemented it in September 2009.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkatraman and senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared before the CCI, said the CCI has replaced the MRTP Act 1969 with Competition Act 2002 and implemented it in September 2009. The CCI's landmark order swoops down on the internet giant for virtually preventing a competitive atmosphere or having monopolies for earning higher profits.

The European Commission in 2020 told Google to pay Euro 8 billion for anti-trust breaches in three cases. In yet another case, the EC found that Google's favouring of Google Shopping had a negative impact on consumers and innovation. The Google has faced many such cases against it, including from the Microsoft since 2009. India is learning from the EC rulings. The US Justice Department's lawsuit, filed by the Trump administration alleged that Google violated anti-trust law in how it maintained dominance in search engines and advertising.

The CCI order is only indicative of the losses that the internet giant's activities caused to the Indian users of the search engines. The practitioners find that it denies them access to another system and even disseminates against various other players like Yahoo or a device of mobile marketing systems even prevents joining various conference appointments or registrations.

This apart, each of its applications demanding access to critical personal contact and other details breach privacy, personal safety and is hazardous. The apprehensions are that such provision data boosts profits and incurs heavy losses to each user. Even otherwise the Telecommunication Department can act to prevent the irrational and illegal demands of the apps to access personal contacts, photographs and sensitive documents. The CCI, in its October 20 press release said that it examined various practices of Google licensing of Android mobile operating system and various patented applications of Google (e.g. Play Store, Google Search, Google Chrome, YouTube, etc.).

The CCI found that Google contravened provisions of the Competition Act and perpetuated its dominant position in the online search market resulting in denial of market access for competing search apps in contravention of Sec 41(2)(c) of the act preventing abuse of dominant position.

In real application this gives a company an advantage and prevents benefits that could have accrued to other players. The CCI order is a pointer to the need of stricter implementation of the law to safeguard the interests of the users. It wants Google to follow the same as the compliance in Indian market as directed by European Commission (EC) in July 18 on a finding of dominance by Google in the Android ecosystem.

The company has 64 billion more complaints in the EC, including Microsoft-backed PR firm, Infocision (Kongem) since 2009. Since 2010, the European Union has investigated several antitrust complaints against Google alleging abuses of its dominant position in breach of the EU's competition laws - relating to Google shopping, the Android operating system and to Google AdSense.

The apps, according to an online survey, can rake in billions of dollars each year though it claims that "majority of apps don't make any sort of money at all." Each year Google earns \$4 billion from India. In 2018, it had the highest earnings of Rs 64 billion. In worldwide operations, Google in 2016 earned \$19 billion or 22 per cent, or about \$366 a minute. In 2021, it earned \$76 billion. The EC actions are to check aggressive and non-competitive practices that may be paying it huge dividends.

Each time Google faces such cases it seeks time for implementation of orders. It has done it in Europe and India. In India, the lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi sought 45 days from the Supreme Court to comply with its orders and to provide a choice of search engines to allow customers default search engine. He said it needed four months citing that even in Europe the companies are given nine months to comply with its orders. The customer's choice is not foolproof as it would be offered only once at the time initial device set up, as per Singhvi's submission to the court. The customer's choice is not foolproof as it would be offered only once at the time initial device set up, as per Singhvi's submission to the court. The customer's choice is not foolproof as it would be offered only once at the time initial device set up, as per Singhvi's submission to the court.

Letters to the Editor

Roads to a better tomorrow

Editor,
The health of Shillong town is deteriorating day by day and the ever-increasing number of vehicles being one of the main causes. Firstly, what makes the government continue to allow more and more vehicles on the roads? The same narrow roads have existed for ages; hardly a few of them have been widened. The resulting jam, the regular sights in the city are also the prime cause of the slow pace of economic development. Moreover, how could we expect efficiency from this sluggish traffic?
We can draw an analogy between the network of road communication and our food pipe or alimentary canal. We must eat the "right amount" of food every day. What will happen if we eat indiscriminately and excessively? We will have indigestion and vomiting. This way, if we continue consuming heavy food for a longer period, we will develop dyspepsia and ulcers, affecting our overall health.
Almost the same thing is happening with Shillong town. It is literally suffering from traffic gastritis, including smog and pollution. So, let's come together and put reasonable pressure upon the respected leaders

to include the traffic issues in their respective election manifestos. Come what may, there should be a permanent solution. What is most important is that the government should immediately stop granting fresh permits for new vehicles for at least ten years. The widening of roads and construction of over-bridges, ropeways -- wherever viable; and compulsory use of school buses are a few other points to be included in the public demand list. This is a sane demand, not exploitation.
Indeed, smooth road communication only makes way for swift economic growth. This will also give a boost to tourism, creating more employment opportunities. Moreover, are there not all that the aspirant leaders are promising us now? Then why the hesitation? This bargain is for the state, this slogan is in the larger interest of the public. Each vote should be for the "sunshine of development", not just for a blanket.

Yours etc,
Salil Gwalin,
Shillong

Meghalaya Voters: Lessons from History

Editor,
Democratic principles and values are under threat with

today's generation of unmindful voters, heavily into frolics before the model code of conduct (MCC) stepped in. A glimpse into the past 48 years, especially the last 4 years would help voters to a great deal in exercising their franchise wisely so that they don't cry over spilled milk. In 1975, President Fakhuddin Ali Ahmed empowered by Article 352 of the Constitution of India declared emergency from June 25 June 1975 to March 21, 1977.

The consequence was that the Congress Party lost in the next elections but Indira reported to come back to power with a thumping majority in 1980.
Voters of Meghalaya have witnessed the drama on coal mining since 2014 when the NGT banned mining and transport of coal though it was too little too late. The MDA gov of 2019 declared 32 lakh metric tonnes of coal having already been mined since 2014, baffling the scientists and technocrats on weights and measures of what is a tall claim of coal barons from Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and Gano Hills? No one read or tested the lines that with 32 lakh tonnes of coal declared already mined, the higher echelons in the MDA could continue to transport coal until February 27, 2023.

The Kram mines, Krcm Iule and Shillong saw the death of pool miners. Two activists were thrashed at Wang Spur in 2018 November even while the MDA Gov refused CBH enquiry into the matter. The incessant pounding of the 12 and 16 wheeled trucks have tortured the poor Bailey Bridge of Dwardkund till it snapped into two. Sadly, no one questioned the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) how the three bridges from Dwardkund to MEGHIRIMS bifurcation were executed by them, while leaving the Bailey bridge to the mercy of a private contractor. Is NHAI not aware that Meghalaya is a border state and with China flexing its muscles, this bridge would hamper speedy movement of troops and other logistics should an emergency arise?

At the intervention of the Deputy CM, Prestone Tynsong, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) repaired the bridge while the NHAI Council in league with the coal mafia, things have just gone haywire. The ones who suffer most as truckers who before 2014 had to pay road tax, pollution test to MSPCB et al and had no option but to force themselves in between the trucks already identified digitally to the enforcement agencies till Jorabat where the Meghalaya jurisdiction ends.

Will Meghalaya coal levying asside CAA, ISK, Mule Mule on contested borders, health care, roads, education, dome collapse, propped casinos, rich and poor divide bring down the MDA?

It all depends on our voters who hopefully are not affected by Alzhemers or dementia or old age. The needs to be cleared. No one can give a verdict on voters whether to betray the rough weather philanthropist a year before polls or not that again need to think of the future generation and of children yet unborn.

Yours etc,
W. Passan,
Nongkrem

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.

Monopoly helps Google India Earnings up by Rs 64 bn a year

By Shivaji Sarkar

Internet giants are having fortunes in India for weak anti-trust or monopoly laws. Google alone reports a net profit of Rs 64 billion or \$79 lakh in 2021. In contrast, Microsoft earned Rs 9475 crore. The Competition Commission of India (CCI) found Google has a monopolistic anti-competitive policy edging out others in competition and slapped R-2274.2 crore penalties in two separate cases. It moved the Supreme Court, which refused stay on one penalty payment of Rs 1337.76 crore for abusing tech giant's dominant position in the Android system and Play Store policies. This has raised a glimmer of hope against checking the malpractices of internet giants.

The watchdog CCI's order issued in October 2022, is an indication of how the country is being bled by tech giants of billions or more every year. It calls for a massive overhaul of the competition, monopolistic practices, trade practices and related laws. India as it liberalised replaced the MRTP Act 1969 with Competition Act 2002 and implemented it in September 2009.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkatraman and senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared before the CCI, said the CCI has replaced the MRTP Act 1969 with Competition Act 2002 and implemented it in September 2009. The CCI's landmark order swoops down on the internet giant for virtually preventing a competitive atmosphere or having monopolies for earning higher profits.

The European Commission in 2020 told Google to pay Euro 8 billion for anti-trust breaches in three cases. In yet another case, the EC found that Google's favouring of Google Shopping had a negative impact on consumers and innovation. The Google has faced many such cases against it, including from the Microsoft since 2009. India is learning from the EC rulings. The US Justice Department's lawsuit, filed by the Trump administration alleged that Google violated anti-trust law in how it maintained dominance in search engines and advertising.

The CCI order is only indicative of the losses that the internet giant's activities caused to the Indian users of the search engines. The practitioners find that it denies them access to another system and even disseminates against various other players like Yahoo or a device of mobile marketing systems even prevents joining various conference appointments or registrations.

This apart, each of its applications demanding access to critical personal contact and other details breach privacy, personal safety and is hazardous. The apprehensions are that such provision data boosts profits and incurs heavy losses to each user. Even otherwise the Telecommunication Department can act to prevent the irrational and illegal demands of the apps to access personal contacts, photographs and sensitive documents. The CCI, in its October 20 press release said that it examined various practices of Google licensing of Android mobile operating system and various patented applications of Google (e.g. Play Store, Google Search, Google Chrome, YouTube, etc.).

The CCI found that Google contravened provisions of the Competition Act and perpetuated its dominant position in the online search market resulting in denial of market access for competing search apps in contravention of Sec 41(2)(c) of the act preventing abuse of dominant position.

In real application this gives a company an advantage and prevents benefits that could have accrued to other players. The CCI order is a pointer to the need of stricter implementation of the law to safeguard the interests of the users. It wants Google to follow the same as the compliance in Indian market as directed by European Commission (EC) in July 18 on a finding of dominance by Google in the Android ecosystem.

The company has 64 billion more complaints in the EC, including Microsoft-backed PR firm, Infocision (Kongem) since 2009. Since 2010, the European Union has investigated several antitrust complaints against Google alleging abuses of its dominant position in breach of the EU's competition laws - relating to Google shopping, the Android operating system and to Google AdSense.

The apps, according to an online survey, can rake in billions of dollars each year though it claims that "majority of apps don't make any sort of money at all." Each year Google earns \$4 billion from India. In 2018, it had the highest earnings of Rs 64 billion. In worldwide operations, Google in 2016 earned \$19 billion or 22 per cent, or about \$366 a minute. In 2021, it earned \$76 billion. The EC actions are to check aggressive and non-competitive practices that may be paying it huge dividends.

Each time Google faces such cases it seeks time for implementation of orders. It has done it in Europe and India. In India, the lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi sought 45 days from the Supreme Court to comply with its orders and to provide a choice of search engines to allow customers default search engine. He said it needed four months citing that even in Europe the companies are given nine months to comply with its orders. The customer's choice is not foolproof as it would be offered only once at the time initial device set up, as per Singhvi's submission to the court. The customer's choice is not foolproof as it would be offered only once at the time initial device set up, as per Singhvi's submission to the court.

“Extreme inequality is no temporary blip. It is hard-wired into our economies.” — Winnie Byanyima

The Shillong Times

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Dangers of Over-tourism

THE word Over-tourism was coined in 2016 by a writer at media company Skift. Over-tourism happens when the number of tourists far exceeds the capacity of a place to sustain the ecosystem. In the long run the destination becomes unsustainable. Also, when there are too many visitors especially to little hamlets which is what is attracting tourists to Meghalaya, the quality of life for the local communities can diminish, their early morning silence is broken by the cacophony of visitors coming at unearthly hours of 4 am to watch the sunrise. The surrounding natural environment can be negatively affected, and the quality of the tourists' experience can decline. Also, the fact that there is as yet no robust garbage management system at these places is a huge worry.

The Government of Meghalaya takes pride in the number of footfalls touching Meghalaya which was to the tune of 15 lakhs in 2019. The pandemic years saw a decline but tourism has now picked up. For village tourism the Government has decided to rely on local communities to develop their destinations while only playing the role of facilitator and helping communities to build toilets, viewpoints and homestays etc. This is a good practice except for the fact that communities are largely untrained. Only a few people within the community have the wherewithal to interface with tourists. There are no clear guidelines for tourists on what they can and cannot do. Hence tourists adopt a free for all attitude. It is unfortunate that every tourist destination is littered with liquor bottles, plastic water bottles and more. These are eyesores for the tourists with aesthetic sense. Community tourism demands that the community take charge of the tourism in their village and they actively participate as stakeholders who earn either by producing local artefacts, selling food or running homestays. Young people in that village can be trained to be qualified guides. In this aspect the Institute for Hotel Management (IHM) Shillong has been training different batches of young people to manage tourism in their villages. Perhaps the IHM needs to tap the youth from different tourist destinations. Community tourism puts people (the entire community) at the centre of decision-making so that tourism benefits the entire community and not just a few organisations.

Community-based tourism is a contrast to large-scale tourism. Local people in general do not have enough information, resources, and strength in solving various decisions. Often the locals are mere objects and are vulnerable to exploitation. Hence the State Government needs to step in to build the capacity of the communities where tourists have started flocking in hordes even before the communities are prepared. Also, each community must decide whether it actually wants to attract 'tourists' who come to stay and spend money or just 'excursionists' who visit and leave without spending anything except the pittance of Rs 30 or 50 as entry fees into the village. There's much that the Government has to do to ensure that mass tourism does not kill Meghalaya's tourism prospects.

Urban 20: City Diplomacy at the G20

By Vincent H Pala

The G20 is one of the world's key forums for global diplomacy. Apart from its summit, the heads of state and heads of government, it comprises ten engagement groups - such as the Civil 20, Women 20, Youth 20, and Urban 20 amongst others. Of these, the Urban 20 (U20) is remarkably positioned as it is the only one that comprises elected officials and gives the U20 unique political legitimacy. The U20 revolves around a Mayors' Summit, which brings together mayors and governors of the major cities of the G20 countries. It results in the creation of a communiqué - an action-oriented document that is collectively prepared

globally and improve urban planning, management, and governance to ensure that future cities are inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

The first U20 summit was launched in 2018 in Buenos Aires at the invitation of Mayor Horacio Larreta. More recently, this year at the U20 in Indonesia 2022, twenty-eight City Leaders endorsed the communiqué. An additional sixteen City Leaders joined as observers at the summit. For the first time, India was a participant as an endorser to the communiqué and was represented by the Commissioner of the

most vulnerable sections of society. The pandemic period has also witnessed social upheaval from citizens being unable to pay rent due to increased joblessness. There is an urgent call for increased attention toward affordable & accessible housing by recognizing the right to housing.

For cleaner and greener cities, there must be an eventual transition to sustainable energy. India can particularly play a critical role in foregrounding this issue and steering action toward clean energy. Our initiative to lead in the International

to all. This expansion of education and skill-building must include workers' welfare, upholding work-life balance, job security, and fair wages. In particular, low-skilled and gig workers must receive livable wages. Increasing digitalization, the introduction of 5G, and rapidly growing mobile use allow India to promote its cities as destinations for opportunities & global exchange, as well as emerge as a leading innovation space for data-centric governance models. In addition to this, it is important to meet the cross-cutting challenge of cities' access to finance. It is now well-established that future infrastructure



and endorsed by U20 participating cities.

A large proportion of the world's population (about 68%) is expected to live in urban areas by 2050 (UN projections). Cities command a significant portion of their countries' respective Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In India, cities are expected to contribute 75% of the national GDP by 2030. There is a growing recognition of the importance of the urban sector for achieving national aspirations of economic prosperity and for improving the quality of life for a substantial proportion of the population. Importantly, the push towards 'net zero' development must also be driven by cities as over 75% of the growth in GHG emissions will take place in urban areas. Cities will be at the forefront of driving climate change adaptation and resilience. As per UN-Habitat, the cost of not building multi-hazard resilient cities will be around \$300 billion every year by 2030. The collective political potential that they wield, and the central role they often play in driving growth & innovation in their home countries, provide a strong rationale for including them in the G20 conversation. There is a need to collectively deliberate and foster innovative urban development approaches

Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation. Previously, we participated as an observer at the Rome-Milan U20. As India gears up to assume the presidency of the G20 summit, we must now look forward to setting the agenda and the direct on for the upcoming summit.

The agenda must also lead cities in a direction of sustainable, fair, just, and inclusive development. India must keep its eyes on past

Solar Alliance allows us to pilot solar energy as an efficient alternative to fossil fuel use, particularly in the tropical regions of the world. This, combined with other forms of sustainable energy also aligns with the Paris Climate Agreement's goal of limiting global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius below pre-industrial levels. Transitioning to sustainable energy sources will not only help the cities themselves

development has to be environmentally sensitive and resilient. Therefore, building conducive policy environments for instruments such as climate finance, must remain a key agenda in U20. It is imperative to foster collective efforts of the city representatives under U20 and the G20 Finance Track to accelerate financial inclusion to promote economic well-being, prosperity, and sustainable development.

“As India gears up to assume the presidency of the G20 summit, we must now look forward to setting the agenda and the direction for the upcoming summit. The agenda must be about leading cities in a direction of sustainable, fair, just, and inclusive development.”

visions of the U20 and add to them. We must also lead by contributing our creative indigenous solutions to the issues at hand. As the world emerges from the ravages of the pandemic, health and related infrastructure continue to be in focus. We must upgrade to more resilient and transparent health systems to guard against future pandemics, natural disasters, and other crises. At the same time, mental health must receive increasing public investments, particularly for

but also the environment at large. Similarly, achieving water and food security will substantially aid our efforts toward creating sustainable cities and communities.

As India's service sector and knowledge economy continue to grow, it provides us an opportunity to collaborate with cities around the globe in developing and implementing education, training, skill-building, apprenticeship systems, and employment programs that are inclusive and accessible

Inequality, like pollution, must be reduced

By Ajit Ranade

On the first day of the Davos summit in Switzerland this year, Oxford International published a report titled "Survival of the Richest". The timing of the publication is deliberate, and Oxford does this every year in January at the inaugural of the Davos meetings. This is done to gain maximum publicity, on the sidelines of a conference where the world's elite from the business and political world congregate. Reportedly the participation fee per person this year was more than 120,000 dollars although it is never published. More than three thousand paying delegates attend, and many other speakers are also invited. The conference this year was held in the shadow of a looming recession which has been forecast by both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for developed economies. There is also the long shadow of the war in Ukraine which has lasted for a year with no end in sight. The theme this year was "Cooperation in a Fragmented World". The fragmentation refers to the de-globalisation tendency due to trade wars, and now disruption due to the Ukraine conflict, and consequent inflation and recession.

The other big fragmentation is the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The gains of economic growth increasingly are captured by a smaller fraction of the population. The Oxford report this year highlights the trends in

special report focused on India. It says that during 2022 the number of billionaires rose from 102 to 166. The wealth of the richest 100 Indians is now about 660 billion dollars or about 55 lakh crores. Two thirds of the wealth gains in the past two years have gone to the top 1 percent globally. A similar trend is evident in India. This means that the wealth and income inequality is getting worse. If you think in terms of education access, the UNICEF last year reported that more than 600 million children remained affected by partial or full school closure, even at the end of two years of the pandemic. As late as September last year the estimate was 244 million still out of school as per UNESCO. In India too probably 100 million plus students have had a setback in their education thanks to school closure or inadequate access to online tools, bandwidth or infrastructure. To rebuild this has lasted for a year with no end in sight. The theme this year was "Cooperation in a Fragmented World". The fragmentation refers to the de-globalisation tendency due to trade wars, and now disruption due to the Ukraine conflict, and consequent inflation and recession.

The other big fragmentation is the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The gains of economic growth increasingly are captured by a smaller fraction of the population. The Oxford report this year highlights the trends in

“As we celebrate the seventy fourth Republic Day, let's remember the foundational values of fraternity, liberty and equality.”

inequality and poverty all around the world. This year's report shows that both poverty and inequality have worsened. These two measures are different. The former measures how many people are getting two square meals a day or can meet minimum needs. The latter measures the gap between the rich and the poor. It is theoretically possible that a society may have negligible poverty, and yet have very high inequality. For a growing economy poverty tends to subsides while inequality may increase. But usually there is some correlation. This year's Oxford report says that for the past two years the wealth of the top 1 percent has increased by 26 trillion dollars, more than twice that of the bottom 99 percent. Most of this wealth is presumably due to rise in the stock market and in housing. Income gains are substantially going to the very top. On the other hand, nearly 1.7 billion workers have seen their wages rise slower than the rate of inflation, which means their purchasing power has eroded. Thus, poverty has increased. Even the World Bank's 2022 report says that global poverty has increased from 8.4 percent to 9.3 percent. The WB uses the poverty level of 2.15 dollars a day. By the end of 2020, due to the pandemic an estimated 7 crore additional people were pushed below the poverty line, of which 5.6 crore are in India alone. India was mindful of the impact of the pandemic, especially on the poor, and hence ran a free food program for two and a half years, which covered 81 crore people. That program has been extended by one more year, implying the continuing need to protect the poor and ensure food security for the 81 crore of high food inflation.

What about inequality? Oxford has published a

er growth widens that gap. But as some state we have to pause and ask, how much inequality is acceptable to us as a society. Just like the modern industrial age will always have pollution, thanks to electricity, transportation and construction, but we have to curb on pollution. As a society we have imposed requirements to switch to cleaner energy. New emission norms for cleaner cars. Scrubbers in factories chimneys to reduce noxious fumes. So, also at some point we must say this much inequality and no more. Otherwise, we have to contend with social instability, increasing law and order problems, investor nervousness, and eventually slowing or stagnant growth. It will be a nightmare for all of us. A large number of unemployed adolescents will contribute to social tension. Hence the reduction of inequality requires the same attention and focus as the reduction of pollution. Because it affects all of us, and not only the poor.

As we celebrate the seventy fourth Republic Day, let's remember the foundational values of fraternity, liberty and equality. That equality is in the economic, social and political sphere. As prophetic words were said by Dr. Ambedkar in a historic speech on November 25, 1949, if we ignore the peril of increasing inequality in Indian society, then "the seeds of social inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which... (we have)... so laboriously built up". His prophetic words were borne out in the form of the first instance of Naxalbari violence. It is a warning we must heed today with greater urgency. (Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist & writer. He writes for The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Uniform Civil Code

Editor, The much-awaited move of the Union Government to introduce the Uniform Civil Code in the country should have been implemented decades back but, unfortunately legislation could not be enacted till date due to strong opposition from different corners of the society as well as from political parties terming that UCC is against the Constitution as it will affect the secular fabric of the nation and will also disturb law-and-order situation. It is not understood how a law like UCC can create outrage. In fact, there should not be any separate law based on religion in a secular country. Perhaps the essence of secularism is far from our understanding. India is a secular country and it must have a single law for its citizens across the country for public and personal matters like marriage, divorce,

transfer of property, succession, population control, eligibility to avail government jobs, schemes etc. There cannot be community status (in minority) based on religion. There are several Supreme Court rulings that have recognised the need for UCC. Section 36, 37 and 44 of Chapter IV of the Constitution clearly mandate that among other arrangements, the state shall provide a uniform civil code for its citizen.

Yours etc, Krishnendu Deb, Shillong

Netaji – the true freedom fighter

Editor, Subhash Chandra Bose is a source of inspiration for the youth. The struggle-filled journey of his life and his efforts to make the country independent are an immortal saga. Today it is

necessary to remember his historic speech given in Ranagun on his birthday. He had said, "My comrades in the freedom struggle! Freedom costs sacrifice. You have sacrificed a lot for freedom, but your life is yet to be sacrificed. I ask you one thing and that is blood. The blood that the enemy has shed for us, can only be repaid with blood. So you give me blood, I will give you freedom".

Subhash Chandra Bose was put under house arrest in his own house during World War II that one night he left his own house by showing dash in the eyes of the watchman. He left India in disguise and then to Singapore where he organised the "Azad Hind Fauj" with the help of Rash Behari Bose. In this regard he earned the title "NETAJI" in Germany by the Indian soldiers of Azad Hind Fauj. Netaji started his gallant and victorious journey till Imphal but after that he had to retreat due to lack of food and weapons. With his brain

throbbed with pain, Netaji boarded a plane for Tokyo, but regretted to return to Netaji's death. Although it is rumoured that Netaji died in a plane crash, many Indians still believe that Netaji is still alive. Dead or alive, our beloved Netaji will live on in our minds forever.

Yours etc, Pinaki Nandy, Shillong

Truth as casualty

Editor, The colonial mind set of a section of Indian intelligentsia contrary to the judgement passed by the Supreme Court of India came to the fore, with the release of a documentary by the British Broadcasting Company on the 2002 Gujarat riot which depicted after the horrific Godhra train burning incident. Intense judicial, media and administrative scrutiny of 2002 Gujarat riot

particularly the role of the then Chief Minister of Gujarat had been done during the tenure of UPA-I & II Government. Supreme Court and free media (assuming that the media were free and unbiased till May, 2014). However, last year, the Apex Court had exonerated Sri Narendra Modi from all charges relating to the incident.

The so-called left liberals who constantly vouch for the Constitution of our country have now conveniently ignored the Supreme Court verdict and rallying behind the documentary film which pronounced Narendra Modi 'guilty' of the 2002 incident. The adversaries of Narendra Modi give credence to any narrative-propaganda promulgated by western media as the gospel truth irrespective of the actual fact. According to them Western people are civilized and liberal and are epitome of virtues compared to Indian people and Indian institutions. History however, paints a completely different picture of the so-called

'civilized' western people. They had colonized many countries of the world, plundered and looted those countries, killed innocent people and exterminated original inhabitants as in USA and Canada. They ate the people who had indulged in slave trade, practiced apartheid (till 1990s) and killed millions of Jews barely seventy years ago. Are these symbols of freedom? By the end of the 19th century, the activities of civilized countries of the west. However, truth is always a victim amongst the left-liberals. Yours etc, Debajyoti Bhattacharya, Shillong-1

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

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."
—Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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India's 74th Republic Day

REPUBLIC DAY and Independence Day are both marked by stereotyped, predictable observations that are intended to make citizens feel good about themselves because of where the country is today. The founding fathers of the Constitution had idealistic dreams which now lie in tatters even as the idea of social justice is trampled day in and day out in a society that is characterized by massive disparities of wealth and opportunities. In Jammu and Kashmir and some states of the North East, the idea of the nation state is a contested one and some groups continue to nurse hearburns against the Indian state. A day before Republic Day the NSCN-IM of Nagaland, the ULFA (Independent) and at least three outfits from Manipur have called for boycott of Republic Day. Left-wing extremism too persists in parts of India with no solution in sight. Why is the Indian state unable to resolve the differences with these disgruntled sections of society, some of whom continue to operate from foreign soil. It is time to call their bluff if all they do is to stifle economic activities by large scale extortion from established businesses and young entrepreneurs. But if they have genuine grievances those too should be addressed.

India's 73rd Republic Day is also marked by a war of words between the Judiciary and the Executive on almost a daily basis. The verbal sparring does not augur well for both sides especially when the Law Minister is addressing those sitting in the highest seat of justice through the media, instead of both sides sitting across the table to resolve their differences. The number of pending cases in different courts of the country have turned the legal system one of the most sluggish, which in turn hampers the justice delivery system. Justice delayed is justice denied but this does not seem to trouble those charged with delivering justice. India is today governed by a political party that does not believe in diversity but is intent on forging cultural and religious homogeneity by attacking minority faiths. While on the one hand this country claims to be a leader in IT, science, and technology, large sections of the poor still have no access to primary education due to acute poverty. Malnutrition among children cuts across large swathes of this country rendering them unable to use their cognitive abilities. No education means no jobs and therefore, abject poverty. Consequently, the divide between rich and poor and the urban and rural is growing alarmingly. This insurmountable divide is a real threat to law and order in the country.

The ideal of equality of status and opportunity has been shattered by the emergence of what appears like two nations within the Indian landmass. On one hand we have a prosperous, resurgent urban India and on the other, a dirt-poor rural Bharat wallowing in mass illiteracy, hunger, and disease as well as the pernicious class, caste and gender discrimination. Rhetoric must end in favour of rapid action to address the above issues.

Education is drowning: Who will rescue the sector?

By Barkshem Myroba

Shillong once prided itself as the educational hub of North East India. Many prominent personalities from different walks of life not only in the region but even in other parts of India had their education in Meghalaya. Thousands of youth from all over the region migrated to the City to acquire knowledge and learning and indirectly contributed towards the growth of the local economy. But decades of visionless, directionless, and business-dominated policies produced successive generations of economic and human resources that are unable to place a strong educational machinery in the state. The criminal neglect and apathy towards education has cost the state immensely in terms of economic and human development. The current educational scenario portrays a system of education that is drowning, and that requires serious attention to address this malaise. Rescue Mission is the need of the hour and hence, the government has to have in place a strong educational machinery manned by the Education Department with an Education Minister who takes rescue work as a mission. What is frightening is if we make mistakes in this education, we will soon reach the stage where it will be near impossible to reverse the condition. One may wonder why I make this value-loaded statement which I will try to address.

Meghalaya has fewer government schools and far too less government colleges. What is more worrying is the quality of these institutions. Barring a few, government institutions are infrastructurally fragile and academically unstimulated and neglected. While the rich do not feel the pinch of this disheartening condition of the government institutions, the poor are badly hit due to the high cost of education in the private sector. The deplorable condition of the government institutions especially at the primary level in far-flung villages partly explains the high rate of school dropouts which Meghalaya is infamous for and this is particularly true in the case of Garo Hills. Garo Hills, which was highly dependent on government primary schools. While baby steps are made in infrastructure development, there is no effort to improve the teaching-learning process which should have been the main focus. It appears that successive governments were happy to let these institutions die a natural death paving the way for the privatization and commercialization of education.

The government-aided institutions are the backbone of the education system in the state at all levels. But successive governments have meted out a step-motherly treatment to this category of institutions. Moreover, the government introduced too many kinds of grants in aid systems. One wonders how burdensome it is for the government administration to administer these institutions. Being forced by the apathy of the government, different teachers' associations launched countless agitations which have spoiled the educational environment in the state by disrupting the regular flow of educational activities in educational institutions. Instead of being warring parties, the government and the teachers' associations should put their heads together to uplift the educational scenario in the state. But none of the education ministers showed any interest to work together with the teachers towards the common goal.

Private educational institutions grow like wild mushrooms without any proper planning. This problem is compounded by the unplanned extension of financial aid to the management of private educational institutions. But the question is how the aid is extended. Instances are clear indicators that financial aid is never based on logic and reason but on politics and nepotism. This has created a condition where educational institutions are established where not needed thereby leading to the wastage of valuable resources. But who cares? Politics is served.

The state government allows the private unaided educational institutions to run more or less on a laissez-faire principle. There are no rules/laws to regulate the functioning of these institutions including the teachers' salaries and fees. While some manage to thrive based on exorbitant fees charged from students, others especially in the rural areas survive merely because teachers receive service with unviable salaries. What kind of education can we expect when teachers even at the college level are paid a monthly salary of less than ten thousand? Successful state governments with different education ministers belonging to different political parties have failed to implement subsection 2 of section 11 of the Meghalaya School Education Act, 1981 which states, "The scale of pay and allowances and other prescribed benefits of the employees of a recognised private school shall be determined by the State Government by general or special order issued from time to time in this behalf."

Teachers' qualifications and training are a grave concern for Meghalaya. It was on September 3, 2001, that the National Council for Teacher Education notified the NCTE (Examination of the minimum qualifications for recruitment of teachers in schools) Regulations, 2001. But it seems the Government of Meghalaya paid no attention to these regulations.

How did this happen? You might think that it was an act of madness, but that does not explain this tragedy. It could only occur because the seed for it was sown in the poison of hatred and enmity that spread throughout the country and affected so many of our people. One of that seed grew this poisonous plant. It is the duty of all of us to fight this poison of hatred and enmity.

How did this happen? You might think that it was an act of madness, but that does not explain this tragedy. It could only occur because the seed for it was sown in the poison of hatred and enmity that spread throughout the country and affected so many of our people. One of that seed grew this poisonous plant. It is the duty of all of us to fight this poison of hatred and enmity.

Schools continued to recruit teachers without having the requisite qualifications. As a measure to fulfill the required norm (HSSLC with 45 per cent along with Diploma of Elementary Education) and to overcome the problem of unqualified teachers in primary schools, the government conducted a special Higher Secondary School Examination in 2015. The examination was conducted as a formality to enable them to pursue the D.El.Ed. The teachers acquiring the HSSLC certificate with a second division in the manner the Jews received 'manna' from heaven as narrated in the Bible.

Further, the question of under-qualified principals and teachers serving in colleges, especially government colleges remain unattended on today. Many principals and teachers are appointed through the National Council for Teacher Education in Meghalaya to the extent that none of the colleges are graded in the category of A based on the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) since 2018.

The functioning of the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) leaves many people baffled. While the question paper leakage that plagued the Board earlier had been addressed, the concern regarding the quality of textbooks prescribed received little attention. Whether there is any properly constituted expert committee that decides on the prescription of textbooks, and whether those textbooks prescribed have been subjected to scrutiny review by the experts. Further, the standard of the textbooks conducted by the MBOSE leaves much to be desired. Examination to a large extent determines the quality of teaching and unless there are examination reforms, the quality of teaching-learning cannot be improved.

Recruitment is a major issue that bequeaths education. Corruption and nepotism are a present reality in every sphere of our life. The MBOSE leaves much to be desired. Examination to a large extent determines the quality of teaching and unless there are examination reforms, the quality of teaching-learning cannot be improved.

on politics rather than merit. From such an institution what can one expect? Recruitment in government-aided institutions also is not free from nepotism. There is an urgent need to eliminate nepotism in the recruitment of teachers. A wrong recruitment spoils the future of not a few but hundreds, or even thousands of students and the damage continues for decades. No amount of effort to improve education will bear fruit once the quality of teachers is compromised. Nepotistic selection and appointment result in inefficient, poor, irresponsible, and unaccountable work culture.

Due to the lack of proper planning, higher education in the state has an unbalanced growth. Mushrooming of schools require more teachers. But the state severely lacks adequate growth of B.Ed. Colleges. Presently, many students from Meghalaya have to depend on courses from universities outside the state for their B.Ed. degree. It is a sad state of affairs that even today, Meghalaya fails to set up professional, technical and adequate vocational institutions. The state has ignored the quality of education has impacted the quality of students. This is revealed by the unsatisfactory performance of Meghalaya's students in the national level examinations and competitions. A recent example is the student's performance in the Central University Entrance Test for post-graduation admission in the central universities. If North Eastern Hill University decides to discontinue the extra weightage given to local students during admission, I fear that they may be deprived of admission and the campus will be flooded by students from outside the state. Further, I fear that the highest establishments of the state university without proper planning aimed at bypassing the CUET will not serve any purpose. Rather, the step taken by the Council government may lead to a spiralling decline of higher education.

Who will save education from completely drowning? Experiences have shown that money, influence, connectivity and MLA schemes-orientation by elect bases-nepotism, constituency work, etc. are not the answer. Representatives are incapable and unwilling to offer any solution. This category of voters and representatives is without a vision and mission for the general welfare except for themselves. Time will tell whether voters in the 2023 election will become wiser to change our future for the better or remain the same or become worse where the problems will be pushed further up to a point of no return the education system that we pride ourselves on.

The author is Assistant Professor, Political Science, Synod College and former General Secretary, Meghalaya Teachers' Association.

Doctors against health The curious case of doctors opposing the Right to Health bill

By Pavitra Mohan and Jagdish Rattanani

A landmark bill that promises to make healthcare a fundamental right has run into an ugly, unseemly and odd opposition from private hospitals and doctors, a group that should have been delighted that the people at last have a right that is often denied even 75 years after independence. The opposition from doctors is at its peak in the State of Rajasthan, where the Assembly has led the nation in bringing the bill and in making the efforts to pass it even though it ran into some rough weather earlier. The bill, which was meant to be passed in a previous session, was referred to a select committee and will come up for a vote in the current session of the Assembly.

The feisty and perplexing opposition by private hospitals and doctors stands in the face of a strong civil society movement to support the bill, which seeks to provide free, full range of health services at public health facilities to all persons in the State of Rajasthan, as a matter of right. The bill builds on wisdom that has led to models like the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK and other developed societies in Europe. Mr. N.Y.E. Havan, Health Minister of

ment scheme called Chief Minister Durgabai Chema Yojana, coupled with the Chiranjeevi Yojana, the State version of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). This scheme provides for free emergency care of all accident victims, irrespective of their insurance status. Government can and should consider enlarging it to include all emergency care. Finally, some costs need to be absorbed by the hospitals which have received benefits from the government in the form of subsidies, and an in-flow of patients through the Chiranjeevi Scheme etc.

The second demand is around representation of the doctors' association in district and State health authorities. While it is a fair demand, it is needed to enlarge the representation of healthcare providers to include not only doctors, but also nurses, ANMs and ASHAs who provide a large proportion of primary healthcare to rural populations. Also, as civil society groups have demanded, the representation should most importantly include civil societies, groups, patients' groups and citizens' groups.



England from 1945 to 1951.

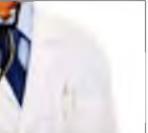
England from 1945 to 1951. The architect of the NHS had proclaimed way back then that "illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay nor an affliction for which they should be penalised, but a misfortune the cost for which should be shared by all citizens."

In India, as many as 50 to 60 million people sink into poverty on account of health bills, according to data cited at the Asia Health Conference 2020 organised by the ICI. The latest National Health Accounts released last year noted that out-of-pocket expenditure all over India was Rs. 2.38 lakh crore in 2018-19, comprising 53.23% of current health expenditure so that households spent more than the government.

Rajasthan will be the first State to give a firm push to the movement to end all this, creating the right demand momentum for a similar adoption across the nation. However, the State, especially the representatives of private doctors and private hospitals have opposed the bill tooth and nail. They have even threatened to go on strike if the bill is not rolled back.

They have three significant demands, none of which are about improving the bill for the patients. The bill makes a significant provision: any emergency care will be provided free and free of cost to all residents, at a public or a private facility. This is significant as it has the potential to save thousands of lives by ensuring that a sick patient is provided timely care in such a situation at the closest facility, irrespective of their ability to pay. So, it is even more baffling as to why doctors are opposed to a provision that would save lives.

There is a fear among private providers that the cost of giving emergency care is unpredictable and may be very high, in many ways the fear is exaggerated as even that only a fraction of all emergencies are going to land up at a private facility. Secondly, many emergencies will not entail high costs in stabilising the patient before sending him or her to a public facility. For example, most patients with heart ailments will require inexpensive care at the emergency phase. Thirdly, there already exists a State govern-



ment is already remaining the provision that restricts appeals to the civil courts any matters that are pending before the grievance redressal mechanism set up under the Act. Legal experts have commented that such a restriction in any case is not in law the citizen's right to justice. Government should have no difficulty in removing such a provision.

The Rajasthan right to health act is an act in the right direction, and will provide a legal framework for progressive improvement in strengthening public health systems, and ensuring equitable healthcare. Columbia is a small country in Latin America. In 1993, the country's health system was built on the foundation of a strong right to health act. Over the next twenty years, the act provided the custodial support for a public health system that has become one of the most progressive, people health reforms, some of them through the intervention of the court, including the Act. We can hope for a similar trajectory for Rajasthan, followed by other States. It is time for doctors' associations to keep people's interest foremost, and constructively engage with the government to allow for the passage of an Act with suitable improvements. Any win for the people will be a win for the doctors as well.

India cannot remain unmindful of the huge inequalities in access to healthcare. While on one hand, those with means can access state-of-the-art healthcare by paying huge sums in private hospitals, the poor continue to avoid seeking treatment, or are mistreated in overburdened and under-resourced public hospitals. The Right-to-Health Act, backed by adequate budgetary allocations and legal commitments to ensure access to quality healthcare without incurring a financial burden on families, can make healthcare equitable, humane and responsive.

(Dr. Pavitra Mohan is a co-founder of Basic Healthcare Services, a Rajasthan-based non-profit providing primary healthcare services. Jagdish Rattanani is a journalist and faculty member at SPHR, IISW, and personal syndicator, The Billion Press. E-mail: toba@billionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor: Politics & corruption

Editor, Reading GF Shilla's letter, "Joining politics in order to corrupt" (ST Jan 5, 2023) reminds me of Psalm 73. Here the Psalmist was jealous of those people who enriched themselves with ill-gotten wealth. He complained to God how they could enjoy themselves while the just and honest people suffer. This is what he said, "they are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their neckpiece, violence covers them like a garment, their eyes bulge with abundance. They have more than the heart could wish for. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression." Is this what we see in most of our politicians today? Listen to what God showed the Psalmist. He took him to the sanctuary (House of God) and showed him their end. He saw them end and confessed, "Then I understood what will happen to the wicked. You will put them in slippery places and make them fall to destruction. They are instantly

destroyed and go down to a horrible end. They are like a dream that goes away in the morning. When you awake, O Lord they disappear. I was stupefied as an angel. I did not understand you. Yet you hold me by the hand and guide me with your instruction and at the end you will receive me with honour. What else have I in heaven but you? Since I have you, what else could I want on earth?"

It is a fact that no one fights the election to become corrupt but to win. It is after winning that acquiring wealth seems to be the only objective as it is most enticing and easy to achieve. Hence they use all kinds of unorthodox methods to enrich themselves. Historically the curse of ill-gotten wealth has visited many families to one, two or three generations. Now we notice this even in one generation. The predictions recorded in the Bible are 100% reliable. Unless they repent, the fire of the corrupt is inevitable. I wish we all see the writing on the wall and flee from corrupt practices. There is no joy compared to a sincere and honest life.

Editor, The Preamble of our Constitution specifically states that India is a Secular, Socialist State. The Supreme Court of India has held that "Secularism" is the basic feature of our Constitution and any State Government which fails to uphold this basic feature has no right to continue. Secularism, as per the Constitution is not anti-religion. Secularism is the religion of all religions and respect to all religions. Of course, it goes without saying that the Indian state has a religion of its own, but for that matter can any religion claim superiority over another religion.

Secularism: A Heritage to Preserve

Editor, Yours etc. Devt Mark, Via email. There can be no doubt a most dangerous combination that is harmful to the country as a whole. Independent India has miserably failed to put an end to the most dangerous combination of politics and religion - the most abhorrent kind of illegitimate bond - continues to wreak havoc in the nation. We have never stopped killings and raping people in the name of caste and religion; we have not conquered the evil of social and economic inequalities even after 75 years of independence. Anyway, within months of independence, bullets pierced the very heart of our secularism and tolerance - the Mahatma.

On February 12, 1948, in a speech delivered to a crowd of over a million people gathered on the banks of the Ganges to witness the immersion of the Mahatma's ashes, Nehru said, "Our country gave birth to a mighty soul and he shone like a beacon not only for India but for the whole world. And he was to die to death by one of our own brothers and compatri-

ots. How did this happen? You might think that it was an act of madness, but that does not explain this tragedy. It could only occur because the seed for it was sown in the poison of hatred and enmity that spread throughout the country and affected so many of our people. One of that seed grew this poisonous plant. It is the duty of all of us to fight this poison of hatred and enmity.

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Constitution. And that would be the best way to observe the Republic Day this year.

Yours etc, Dr Omkarin Kyndiah, Via email

NPP versus UDP

Editor, Reference to your news item captioned "NPP calls UDP bird of fair weather" (ST January 21, 2023). It was amusing to note that NPP mouthfully accused their coalition partner UDP to be a bird of fair weather. But the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya, the late Mr. N.Y.E. Havan, said, "In politics, friends are no permanent friends and permanent foes. This phrase is universally practical and I really appreciate it and learnt from it. I hope the NPP too may learn and agree with their Chief advisor's ethical view."

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Chief advisor's ethical view. Yours etc, Shivalina Wankhar, Shillong-1

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"Set your goals high, and don't stop till you get there." — Bo Jackson

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 157 No. 100 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2023

Day of symbolism

SYMBOLISM matters, but this need not necessarily be a reflection of real life. The Republic Day on Thursday occasioned the spectacular presence of labourers and street vendors in the VIP gallery, which was so far filled exclusively by the movers and shakers of capital Delhi. This time, a select group of those who "move" bricks on their head for construction works or "shake" the footpaths with their vending kits were given the pride of place alongside the usual pack of VVIPs. This was a sight to behold, but alas, this feel-good image contrasted starkly with the real life struggles of India's large army of poor, a contrast as striking and intense as between black and white. Clearly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi who leads the nation from the front for a second consecutive term in office has often demonstrated his penchant for such fancy gestures or flights of fancy.

The two Presidents that Modi and the BJP installed in office were from the socially and economically most-deprived segments, namely a Dalit in the form of Ramnath Kovind and a tribal as in Droupadi Murmu. Nothing goes to show that beyond the symbolism, the cause of these sections of the society was taken forward in any significant manner by such gestures. For the prime minister and the ruling party wielding all the powers, the ways and means are many to uplift the poor and deprived sections. Unfortunately, despite the change of several governments in Independent India in its past 75 years, these segments remain mostly where they were generations ago. The Global Hunger Index 2022 has ranked India so low at 107 on a scale of 121 nations. Overall too, less than 10 percent of the population keeps with them 90 per cent of the nation's wealth through generations. The ground realities -- and not the Indian government's claims of the nation's rise to being the fifth largest economic power -- vouch for this. Wealth for India is certainly not the problem, but its concentration in a few hands is.

The government's resort to such symbolisms might be viewed as a clever ploy to keep social tempers under control by giving the poor a feeling that they too have a stake in India's growth and prosperity. The poor caught in their daily struggle for survival have neither the time nor the inclination to see through such games. They live on hope through generations, some have risen above the poverty line by dint of sheer hard work or by luck, but the rest are condemned to a life of slavery to the affluent sections of society.

Letters to the Editor

Constitution diluted

Editor, What happened in Telangana in connection with celebration of Republic Day can be termed as dilution of the Constitution and that by the Chief Minister of a state which is holding on to the past after swearing in the name of the Constitution. Such an act by the Chief Minister is highly objectionable and the High Court had to intervene in the matter. A few days ago, a rally was organised where about five lakh people participated and four chief ministers attended without following Covid protocols. To fulfill any political aspiration, constitutional norms should not be violated such as the Telangana Chief Minister not attending the function at the Raj Bhavan. Assembly elections are due this year and such type of politics being played is not in good taste.

As far as dilution of the Constitution is concerned the present war of words between the Supreme Court and the Union Government is an example. The statement of Law minister, Kiren Rijju is not in good taste when he stated that government is answerable to the public whereas supreme court judges are free from any accountability. Recently similar incidents also happened in Tamil Nadu where the Constitution was miserably diluted in Tamil

Nadu reports are emanating about the differences between the Chief Minister and Governor, where the latter unilaterally proposed that the name Tamil Nadu should be changed to 'Tamilagam', because he thinks it's a more appropriate name. The Governor has also started using it in official communications. Needless to say, such impetuosity has angered the MLAs of Tamil Nadu, a state in which regional feelings are very strong and which witnessed anti-Hindi and anti-north India agitations not very long ago. It is gross misconduct on the part of the Governor to change the name of the state where he is expected to "observe, protect and defend the Constitution." His decision was not only unilateral but also against the express wishes of a democratically elected Government. A press communique released by the Governor's House said, "There has been a regressive politics with the wrong habit of refusing anything that benefits all sections of people including academicians, hindly for their own interests, claiming that the state is not an integral part of India." That may be correct, but it is the job of the Governor to reform the politics in the state? And even if a Governor wants to do something that may be deemed as political, should he or she do that without taking the Government of the state into confidence?

A Governor should not convey the wrong message that he is working at the instructions of the BJP. The country had already witnessed such conflicts in West Bengal and also see such news emanating from Kerala where there was tussle between the Governor and Vice Chancellors of universities. Such actions tarnish the image of the country. This year we have to be more vigilant as the G-20 conference will be held in India and various programmes in this regard will be held across the country. Such undemocratic steps will be highlighted by the foreign media. Hence governors and chief ministers should come to the negotiating table and solve matters amicably. The DMK's reaction is on expected lines. Senior leader TR Ravi Kumar, "He [Ravi] makes statements that are factually incorrect and potentially dangerous." The consequences are also not unexpected - a Constitutional logjam in the state. On the basis of the above instances we can say that all the concerned should refrain from diluting the Constitution. Yours etc., Yash Pal Raihan, Via email

Capable people do not need freebies

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

In understanding development, there is something called 'capability approach.' The basic premise is that it is the complete opposite of 'welfare approach.' In welfare, the emphasis is on giving money commodities for uplifting of people without knowledge of the ground situation. For example, giving computers and bicycles to all people without assessing who needs a computer and who needs a bicycle is a blind intervention for development. In capability, the emphasis is on interventions for the well-being of people by leveraging on their capabilities and competencies. It is about improvements in well-being by factoring and tapping into the capability of a person. For example, do not give computers or bicycles to everyone; rather, create an enabling environment and do assessment so that those who know computers will open say a desk top publishing house and those who know how to ride a bicycle will start a home delivery business. Although the capability approach to development can be traced to contributions by Adam Smith and Karl Marx; its contemporary application is credited to Amartya Sen. The central idea of the approach is to build on capabilities through an enabling and nurturing environment so that everyone can work on their well-being. The world at large has shifted from welfare towards capability. But, when it comes to Meghalaya, it is a matter of concern that the political parties themselves are still making people 'slaves to welfare.'

To start with, the NPP's FOCUS has totally lost its link with capability. This scheme is meant for farmers to produce competitive agricultural products and increase income. The inherent nature and goal of the scheme is good. But producing competitive products also requires proper infrastructure for farming and combined with a very effective marketing network maybe in a public-private partnership mode. If the farmers are not assured of a profitable market then they would be de-motivated to

produce. Also, production would be impossible in the absence of irrigation facilities, approach roads, quality checks and packaging help. The outcome is that instead of improving the capabilities of the farmer, FOCUS has turned into a mere freebie due to bad judgement by the government. It has been turned into a welfare gimmick. The ground reality is that the money is being used for all other purposes apart from farming. It is a vicious cycle with no end. The farmers who went to the FOCUS public meetings recently did



so with only one objective in mind -- to gain access to free and unaccountable cash. The spirit of the farmer is killed and the essence of capability for well-being is silently laid to rest. The main culprit here is the MDA government.

The case of TMC Meghalaya is equally intriguing. The WE (women empowerment) and MYE (Meghalaya youth empowerment) cards promises a monthly financial return to women and unemployed youth if it comes to power. It is true that such schemes are also practiced in other countries. In fact, literature shows that this concept is mostly prevalent in developed countries. But, here lies the difference. In those countries it is known as social security scheme or unemployment allowance. Had it not a chemical methyl been used here in Meghalaya then, it would not have been too much of a problem. Openly claiming that it would provide employment and create opportunities is misleading. This is because money is not the only factor for well-being. A dynamic

ecosystem is required for employment. In fact, many youth are unemployed not because of lack of money; rather, the lack of a robust investment environment, marketing problems, poor drive and motivation. In most likelihood, the TMC cards will only result in localised inflation if it is not matched with an increase in production of goods and services. The economics is simple. When you give free money to many but the supply of goods in the market remains the same, the result is inflation.

It is of grave concern that the people at large are not looking at capability and well-being and pushing the governments to act as such. On the other hand, the political parties, the very of this fact and take full advantage of it come every election.

In Meghalaya, the solutions for well-being through capabilities development are not difficult to fathom. This is because much has not been done on these grounds. Government jobs are still there. However, there is a need to look beyond MPSC. For example, the UPSC and SSC recruitments are continuous. If we look towards these opportunities, many of the youth would find employment. What is needed is a systematic intervention of coaching centres so that they are empowered to break through these competitive examinations. If this intervention is too much for the government, then a scheme of public-private partnership can help. There are many good teachers in Shillong who can help build competitive capabilities. In one discussion, a state government officer stated that if the villagers of Meghalaya were given water and roads then they would have more agricultural produce which can be marketed for their better livelihoods. He is absolutely right! If only the MDA government who can give money is good and vice versa. This chronic cancer is eating into the psyche of the society. Wellfare mind-set rules the roost. As a result, the people have become less competitive, more lethargic, poor future outlook and with uncertain career planning. In the rural areas of Meghalaya, many parents are questioning as to why they should be sending their children to school? They see no child. The real reason for this is that we are not looking to build on the capabilities of the students. Till today, the thinking is "I go to school so that I can find a good job", when in truth school and education as a whole is meant for building the capabilities, confidence and personality of the youth. They will make them capable of doing things on their own.

Under Explosive Acts. By law LPG cylinders should be home delivered but in most cases this is violated and people are expected to pick them up from a certain point where the truck loaded with LPG hals. The gas has no smell but scientists who put safety before everything had put a chemical methyl mercaptan or methanethiol which is a colorless flammable gas with a distinct odour like rotten eggs. When there is leakage, the smell prompts intelligent users to switch off the regulator, take the cylinder into the open and call the agency to have it replaced. The agency cannot repair the regulator as it is unlawful and deals with the valve. It is heard from some that the rubber seal as well is attempted to be replaced. The duty of LPG users is to have the cylinder replaced and agencies are equipped with a manometer to check leakage.

One suggestion while picking up a cylinder is to choose the newly red painted ones over those old decolourised ones. We can't depend on the heating plants that bottle lakhs of cylinders per day to be cent percent investigative and 'serif. While collecting the cylinder, be ready with a little drop of water. The distributor will be too happy to give the cork to let the consumer put some drops of water on the body of the cylinder. If there are bubbles in the water the distributor would replace it with a safe one. But it is not known if the defective

fire incident. Fortunately, there were no loss of lives. In November last in Mookyndar, two little children perished in a fire involving gas explosion and very recently at Mahab, two precious lives were lost. These tragedies keep repeating but the government of the day never cares to do a post-mortem to find out the cause of fire and to raise awareness and organise workshops to save lives. It would appear that human life today is of no worth at all.

Until 2019 we heard of the sales managers of Indane organising a 2-month long workshop on safety of gas usage but few attended. Educating the users is the prerogative of the government. In big cities piped supply of gas has made life comfortable and safer for consumers. All that the consumer needs to do is use the mobile phone to call the gas company saying he/she needs LPG refilling. A few minutes later there is a response from the company. Of course, we cannot expect this to happen in our state even in the next century. Hence we should adopt safer measures while handling LPG cylinders. Yours etc., W. Pasah, Nongkrem

Articles and Letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times. In the beginning of 2023, we heard of the Lumawabz

'Mood of the nation' survey forecasts third term of Narendra Modi. Projections are far from the ground political reality in 2023

By Sushil Kutty

The results of yet another 'Mood of the Nation' survey is out and the summary is, if elections were held today, the Bharatiya Janata Party will rule again. That is standard gaff for those on the BJP gravy-train. Doesn't matter that the hostage media no matter what the truth will jump to the BJP's bidding and predict to keep Prime Minister Narendra Modi happy. So, the day after Modi told BJP leaders to fan out and become friends with Muslims, also to not speak "ill" of him before the so-called 'Gadi Media' were falling over praising the Prime Minister's Muslim outreach, and Pathaan's blockbuster opening.

The question is who is the hypocrite, the Prime Minister or the mainstream media? Contrast Modi's diktat to the likes of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narayan Mishra on Bollywood films, with his response to the BBC documentary India: The Modi Question.

It is okay for Modi if the Shaikhrukh Khan film 'Pathaan' denounces the Indian Army and humanizes the notorious Pakistani spy agency ISI. In the movie, Pathaan, played by SRK, collaborates with an ISI agent, played by Deepika Padukone, to save India from the machinations of a rogue RAW agent, an ex-Indian Army officer Param Vir Chakra, played by John Abraham, who wants to drop a "smallpox bomb" on Delhi.

Question is, how did the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) allow such a negative portrayal of the Indian Army to go unchallenged? And to think, the entire pre-release bonanza was over the 'Bhisham Rang of Deepika's bikini!'

The Indian Army can be besmirched, its honour guillotined at the altar of Bollywood success, and BJP's outreach to Pasmanda Muslims, but when a Congress leader asks for proof of the 2016 surgical strike, the Congress is stranded as anti-Indian Army!

The electronic media does not see the double standards of the Modi government, and that of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the party steeped in hypocrisy, its nationalistic bombast to get both glib and fundamentalist Hindus to vote for the BJP with the promise to resurrect Hindu temples from the rubble world and enact UCC and NRC, and the CAA.

A different genre of promises will be held forth to the Pasmanda, and then forgotten at the altar of expediency. BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra, who would say anything to help improve the Prime Minister's image, wowed the accomplishments of the Modi government and demanded that Modi be given another term, not acknowledging that the Hindi hordes who voted Modi in 2014 did it for purely Hindu objectives. If Modi jettisons Hindu demands for Pasmanda appeasement, it won't help

the BJP. Modi is in for a surprise in 2024. The 'Mood of the Nation' survey of the Modi-friendly media house that carried out the 'Mood of the Nation' survey, jumped the gun. Chances are Modi would face a Hindutva backlash if he gets too over the top with his Pasmanda outreach. The Pasmanda themselves wouldn't reciprocate with the same Modi zeal and fervour. And the pollster conducted the polling before the 'Modi' 'The Question' documentary pole-axed Modi's 'Vishwaguni'.

With the impressions of Gujarat 2002 resurfaced in the India of 2023, the poll calculations need to be looked afresh. And the ramifications of 'India: The Modi Question' are only beginning to unfold. More questions would be asked and the answers could be on Bollywood films, with his response to the BBC documentary India: The Modi Question.

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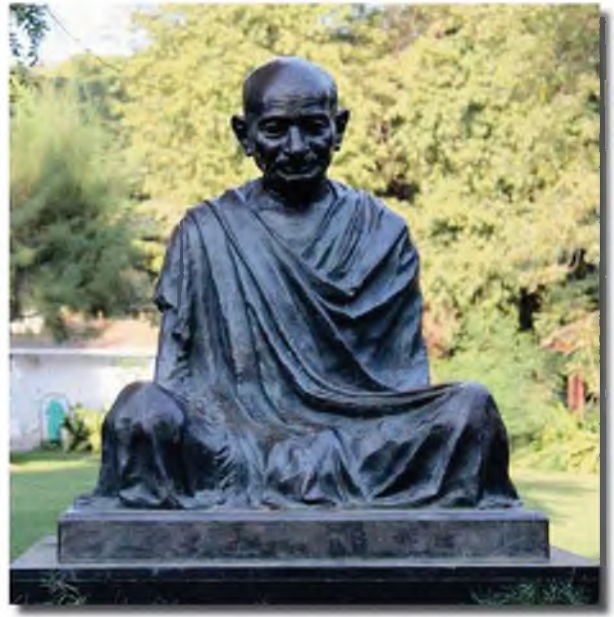
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Gandhi's image under scrutiny



Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi remains, even 75 years after his assassination, a useful symbol for many in India. For secularists, the leader of the country's independence movement represents an imagined India of the past. For the current government, he is a means by which it can soften its international image.

In his 2002 essay, academic Ashis Nandy, mentioned four versions of Gandhi, who led India's move from British colony to independent nation.

The first is the Gandhi of the Indian state and of official Indian nationalism. The second is a puritanical and sombre figure, apolitical and dependent on state funding, the subject of university seminars debating: "What would Gandhi do?"

The third is the "Gandhi of the ragamuffins", opposing mechanisation, large-scale development and a high-consumption economy. The fourth is Gandhi the non-violent revolutionary, a worldwide phenomenon, influential in movements but no longer feared by tyrants, nor taken seriously by the left.

Over the past two decades, however, Gandhi and his legacy have taken a thorough beating. Reappraisals of Gandhi are, admittedly, long overdue. Titles such as "Mahatma" ("high souled" or "venerable" in Sanskrit) and "Father of the Nation" have worn thin since his death, as new events in India and worldwide that brought new scrutiny to his life, work and politics.

Some of these seem far-fetched, for example equating Gandhi with Osama bin Laden and global jihadists on the grounds that they were similarly based on a "sacrificial humanitarianism". Speculations about his sexuality provoked a debate about his supposed "celibacy". In the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, his strange practice of sleeping next to naked young women was openly discussed.

The rise of much-persecuted Dalit people (previously known as untouchables) in political and intel-

lectual spaces over the past two decades has given rise to trenchant criticisms of Gandhi's complicity in the preservation of caste dominance, and the hypocrisy in his stands repeatedly that favoured the preservation of caste over justice and emancipation. Economist and politician Bhimrao Ramji "Bhabasabeh" Ambedkar's evisceration of Gandhi's politics is now more widely known and accepted than ever before.

Of those images of Gandhi named in the essay, some are now seen as enemies of the vision of progress of India's current prime minister, Narendra Modi. Others have been refined to sit comfortably within the cultural nationalism of Hindutva, the project of creating a constitutional Hindu state and institutionalising its version of Hindu culture and social order in contradiction to Gandhi's vision of a multi-faith nation.

Those using Gandhi's methods of protest are now likely to be labelled "urban Naxal", a Hindutva shorthand for intellectuals and activists involved in struggles of the rural poor, and have draconian legal charges slapped on them.

Malawi's government stopped construction of a Gandhi statue after these accusations, though pressure from Modi's government resulted in the completion of the statue later.

In Ghana, Gandhi's statue was pulled down. Black Lives Matter movements in the US and in the UK also branded him a racist, and called for removal of his statues.

HOW MODI USES GANDHI

The most far-reaching bid to move India away from the nation that Gandhi imagined has come from India's ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) and its

parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS was briefly banned after Gandhi's killing for its involvement in the crime. It espouses a violent communal polarisation with an anti-minority politics, and several episodes of mob lynching with impunity, have been the fertile ground for its rise.

While Gandhi emphasised truth, fake news has been used to mobilise mass support for Hindutva. The RSS also tries to quote Gandhi in support of their political approach.

However, Hindutva organisations organise tableaux annually to re-enact the assassination on January 30 1948. Those elements of the RSS who supported "Gandhian socialism" are in political hibernation.

Modi, the Hindutva state and the new official nationalism, though, still need Gandhi. Under Modi's modernisation fetish, major Gandhian ashrams, like Sabarmati, have been given such a tourist-friendly facelift, seemingly stripped of all historical gravitas.

Modi launched his Swachh Bharat [or Clean India] campaign using Gandhi as the logo. Home minister Amit Shah claims that Modi is Gandhi's

true modern manifestation.

Modi supports the construction of Gandhi statues worldwide. At the UN, Modi said he represented the face of Gandhi, claiming that erecting a bust at the UN headquarters was a matter of pride for all Indians.

Modi's Gandhian paradox is that the only Gandhi he wants to assimilate into his project is a Gandhi shorn of his core beliefs, principles and modes of political action.

Is the influence of Gandhi's ideals finished then? Not quite. Activists from the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act movement (an attempt by Modi to end Muslims' constitutional equality with Hindus) claimed to be following Gandhian principles of popular protest. The farmers' movement against Modi's plans to give corporations power over Indian agriculture also tried to mobilise Gandhi's legacy to their cause.

Perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight, there is a clearer picture now of the man, stripped of much of the myth and mystique. A resource for many social movements forging alternative ways to meet contemporary challenges.

(The Conversation)

Jacinda Ardern's resignation: Gender & the toll of strong, compassionate leadership

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown", wrote Shakespeare, way back in the 1500s. It's not a new idea that top-level leadership jobs are intensely stressful and pose a heavy toll. Extended periods of stress are known to put people at risk of burnout.

Yet probably few of us can ever grasp just how unrelentingly demanding and difficult leading a country actually is. Especially in times of crisis and with our modern media and online environment, every statement and every move a leader makes is subject to excessive scrutiny and commentary.

Increasingly a troubling feature of the commentary about New Zealand Prime Jacinda Ardern has been its abusive, violent, sexist and misogynistic tenor.

While she has not focused on this as a reason for her decision to resign yesterday, being targeted in this way, and knowing her partner and even her child were also targeted, must surely have made an already difficult job so much more challenging.

Crises, kindness and courageous decisions

Crises have long been understood as the most intensive tests of a leader's skill and character. They involve making weighty decisions, at times about matters that quite literally have life and death implications. Decisions have to be made at speed, but often with insufficient information to confidently predict the consequences of the choices made.

Ardern's premiership has thrown crises after crisis her way. And time and time again, she has displayed a strength of character and considerable leadership skills in responding to them.

Her handling of the Christchurch terror attacks won global admiration for her composure, compassion and decisive resolve to ensure such heinous acts could not be repeated here.

Her response to the Whakaari White Island eruption garnered similar praise, showing yet again her intuitive grasp that a leader offering support to those caught up in such a distressing event actually makes a difference. That Ardern has sought to combine compassion and kindness with the courage to make tough decisions is a key feature of her style.

Unrealistic expectations of a leader

Throughout the pandemic, Ardern has repeatedly proved her willingness to make courageous decisions. Combined with her prowess at mobilising the public's understanding and support for the government's COVID response, this was critical



Jacinda Kate Laurell Ardern was sworn in as the 40th Prime Minister of New Zealand on October 26, 2017. She became the world's youngest female head of government at age 37. Ardern gave birth to her daughter on June 21, 2018, making her the world's second elected head of government to give birth while in office after former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Following the unopposed election of Chris Hipkins as her successor, she submitted her resignation as Prime Minister on January 25, 2023.

to the success of the elimination strategy. Many lives and livelihoods have been saved due to her leadership.

When Delta and then Omicron emerged, Ardern sought to continually adapt the government's policies to a changing context. While tenacity and resilience may number among her many strengths, dogmatism is not one of her weaknesses.

Of course not all decisions proved to be optimal — expecting them to be so would be wildly unrealistic. Some of her decisions have sparked a strong negative response. But it's foolish to expect perfection from leaders, and the job unavoidably means making tough calls not everyone will agree with.

Rise in sexist and misogynistic abuse

No leader is omnipotent, especially in a democracy and in a globally interconnected world. The latest crisis Ardern has been grappling with

— the cost of living — is in large measure driven by global forces beyond the control of any New Zealand prime minister. New Zealand's situation is better than many other countries, but unfortunately for Ardern this holds little sway for some people.

The reality, then, is that her growing unpopularity has in part been rooted in people having unrealistic expectations of what leaders can and can't actually do, and needing someone to blame. But there's also no getting away from the fact that far too much of the criticism directed at her has been coloured by sexist and misogynistic attitudes.

There's a continuum in how this is expressed. It starts with one C word — Cindy — which is a sexist attempt to belittle her authority and status as an adult woman who is the elected leader of our country.

It ends with the other C word. Research by the Disinformation Project shows its usage is enmeshed

within a wider discourse that denigrates other aspects of her identity as a woman and extends to fantasising about her rape and death.

This kind of behaviour is simply inexcusable. It should be to New Zealand's eternal shame that Ardern has been subjected to this. It cannot be justified by arguing her policies have been controversial and she "deserves" this abuse; that line of reasoning simply replicates the defence long used by rapists and domestic abusers.

Ardern is New Zealand's third woman prime minister. The glass ceiling for that role is well and truly broken. We now also have equal representation of women within parliament. But the sexist and misogynistic nature of so much of the criticism and abuse directed at Ardern also shows we are a very long way from having equal treatment of women in leadership.

(The Conversation)

Teaching the Holocaust through literature

A survey commissioned in 2019 revealed the shocking result that over half of Britons did not know that at least six millions Jews had been murdered during the Holocaust.

This result was all the more surprising given the fact that the Holocaust, as a topic, has been part of the national curriculum in England and Wales since its creation in 1991.

The 2014 iteration of the national curriculum has the Holocaust as a firm part of key stage 3 history—compulsory for all 11 to 14-year-olds in state schools. Additionally, many secondary school pupils may encounter the Holocaust as a topic in English or religious education lessons.

However, research into what school pupils in England know about the Holocaust shows that they lack knowledge about its context. They may know bare facts—ghettos, deportations, concentration camps—but are less clear on the ideology that led to the rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust in the first place. Pupils may not be clear what exactly it is they need to take away from these lessons and how they can be relevant to their contemporary lives.

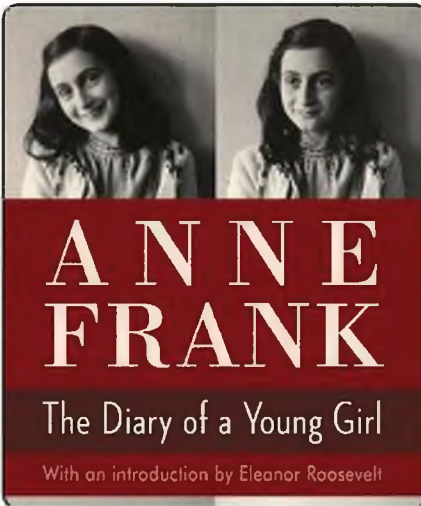
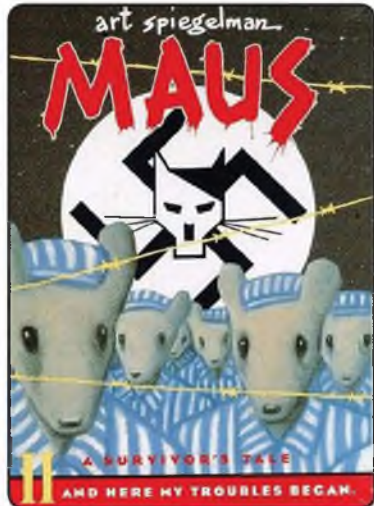
For instance, it is important to understand how politicians sought to gain popular support by blaming minorities such as Jewish people for all the ills Germany experienced after the first world war. Relentless anti-Jewish propaganda was used to incite the general population.

It is for this reason that literature can be a meaningful additional teaching tool, not only in schools but also for everybody interested in the events leading up to the Holocaust.

Literature can broaden horizons and deepen knowledge. It can offer different perspectives, often in the same narrative; it teaches us empathy, but it can also help us to acquire facts and additional knowledge.

However, the sheer number of books on the Holocaust—survivor accounts, biographies,

Four books to help young people gain deeper understanding of the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million European Jews by the Nazi German regime and its allies



novels, factual books—can be overwhelming.

Sometimes, bestselling books on the Holocaust, such as John Boyne's 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' (2006) or Heather Morris's 'The Tattooist of Auschwitz' (2018), lack the factual correctness and depth that is necessary to make them a good way to learn about the history.

It is consequently vital to find books that meaningfully introduce their readers to the topic and that provide carefully researched historical context.

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit is an excellent—though hard-hitting—way to introduce a younger readership to the prejudices and reprisals Jews were increasingly subjected to in Nazi Germany.

The Diary of a Young Girl: Anne Frank's The Diary of a Young Girl (1947) is probably the one Holocaust book most people have heard of. It charts the two years Anne and her family spent in hiding in Amsterdam.

The book is often praised for its positive and hopeful message. It is, however, vital that even young readers are made aware of the fact that the Franks were eventually discovered by the Nazis, deported to Auschwitz and from there to Bergen-Belsen, where Anne tragically died in early 1945.

Survivor accounts are generally the best way to learn about the Holocaust.

Older teenagers could read Elie Wiesel's outstanding Night (1958). It describes, in a dispassionate voice, Wiesel's experi-

ences of being deported from his home town of Sighet in what is now Romania, first to Auschwitz and from there to Buchenwald.

Wiesel lost his father, mother and youngest sister in the Holocaust and dedicated his life to Holocaust education.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1986. If anybody plans to read just one book on the Holocaust, it should probably be this one.

While this is potentially a distancing device to soften the impact of his illustrations, it also helps Spiegelman to pass critical comments on the Nazis' notorious attempts to classify people into strictly segregated groups.

Maus made it back into the bestseller lists in January 2022 when a County School Board in Tennessee controversially banned it from its classrooms and libraries. Censorship is not yet a thing of the past—and it is, maybe, especially the people making decisions about education who ought to read these texts.

Using literature as a tool to augment Holocaust teaching in secondary schools might be a good way to further pupils' learning and understanding not just of the Holocaust, but of the ideologies, populism and propaganda that lay behind it—and how to identify similar narratives that are, worryingly, on the rise again in the world around them.

(The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 29, 2023

'Birthday Forecast'

Mean time Mercury in your star return chart. You will be in a good mood and full of self-confidence. You will feel more secure and confident. You will think of doing everything with your mind. But have a few things to your heart. You will get a good love affair. You will also plan to get married. You will get support from family. Your boss will also have a nice opinion about you. Whatever work you have in your hand you will complete it with ease. You will take special care of your health. Students will get success in exam/ interview. You will be busy with official work. Your income will also double up with in no time. There will be happiness at home. Students will perform well in exams/interview. There are no health issues. There will be a gathering at your house or some other place, which friends will meet each other.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a great week for you. You will be having financial gain. You will also take up new tasks and face challenges with confidence. You will also get the expected help and assistance from friends and colleagues. You will face some challenges to begin with but eventually victory will be yours. You will also spend a lot of your time with your family members. You will also take out some time for fun, entertainment and relaxation. You will also have plans to buy and sell property. You will complete your work with utmost dedication and sincerity. Your business plans will also be successful. You will take some work to complete with a planned approach.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will be having new plans. You will also make a lot of money. Your family crisis will be resolved. You will take some concrete decisions in business/work. Whatever work you will think of to get done. Planetary situation in your favor. You will discharge your responsibilities well and your financial well-being will be strong. Your family problems will get resolved. In your office the atmosphere will remain congenial. Do not take any decision by hasty emotion. You love life, a game is yours to enjoy and you will share amazing bonding with your mate. Your superior will appreciate you for some great achievement. You will move ahead with a positive attitude. Visitors/guests will drop in and you will remain busy welcoming them.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) It is time to ponder about your future. Instead of taking a big risk, you will wait for a favorable time to come. You will also plan to travel abroad due to your work. You will face no problem in your official matters. There are some of no problem in your official matters. You will also take up your opportunities in ease. Your time will be spent on various occasions. However, something good will come out of it. All troubles regarding marriage will end. You will also meet a lot of people. Your interactions with others will turn out to be useful. You will take right decisions at right time. You will also look after your parents and children. You will provide care and comfort to elders.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You will work hard and willing to take challenges. You will also carry your duties dutifully. As a result, you will be busy with your work. You will be looking forward with a lot of self-confidence. You will not bow before anyone and will also pay attention to the spouse. You will also run smoothly on the track. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. Creative thoughts will fill up your mind. And those in media, fashion and film industry etc. will get a lot of attention. People close to you will give lot of respect. You will give advice and suggestions to the people close to you. You will also take part in some wedding or work. You will also spend some time with your children. You will work responsibly.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) You will come close to your partner emotionally and will share strong bonding. Your official duties will pass without a hitch. You will also give importance to your job with your heart. You will move forward despite any obstacles. There will be increase in your earnings. The health of a family member may become a cause of stress and worry for you. You will perform all your tasks in a new way. Your personality will be fearless and inspiring. Your financial matters will get over. You will also make a business deal. Your brothers will listen to you and follow your suggestions.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) You will have financial gains and will suddenly earn lot of money. You will also return to work with vigor. You will work with utmost dedication and your business takes will emerge. Your property related issues may bother you. You will get best results in love matters. You will plan to get married. Whatever work in hand you would get completed in

time. The stars will be in your favor. You will take special care of your parents' needs. Time is promising. You will have monetary gains. Your name and fame will rise. You will do noble deeds and will be generous towards others. You will also win people's heart easily. They will work for your progress. You will enjoy lot of good luck.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) Time is fully favorable. Whatever work that you want to do, will be done now. It is time to realize your dreams. Those looking for job for a long time will get success. For those who have an interest in politics and media, the time is right to establish your influence and impression. You will be able to make people see your point of view. You will also get some fame due to your noble deeds. You will help people a lot and will harbor generous feelings towards poor and weak people. You will show them the right path. Travelling will be comfortable. You will get some good news from somewhere. An understanding between husband and wife will get renewed.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) You will through yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. Money and wealth will come your way. You will also make best use of money. And will buy valuable items. The time will be extremely good and happy. You will also get success in some interview or competitive exams. Your right advice will change the life of a person. You will get appreciation for your work. You will also get rid of diseases. You will be knowledgeable in many ways. A long standing worry will come to an end. If family happiness will increase. Your influence and impression in the wrong of your environment. You will also meet lot of new people.

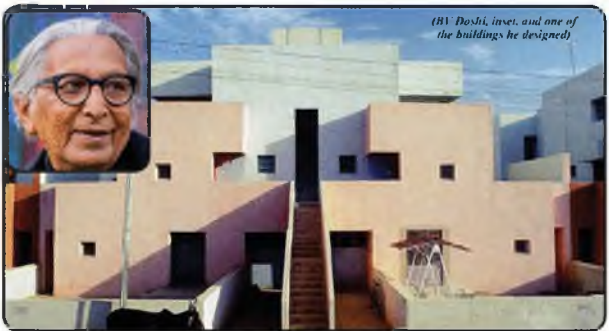
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) The time is favorable. You will get promoted in your job. You will also have financial gains. You will get support of your bosses. You will find a change in your relative's behavior and get good news from their side. You need not be worried about the health of your elders. The situation at work will be under your control. You will also be stable in your job. You will be busy but will be happy that your dream work is completed. In the field of politics you will establish a contact with new people. The time is good from all perspective. You will be successful, in whatever you do. You will be asked to depart from the normal life of working and the will work in your favor.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You may come across many good professional opportunities. May receive your money that will be held for long. You will enhance your income. You will find a long to take education. Your close ones will be giving support. Some upward mobility may happen to your hand or relative. An agreement related matter will get resolved. You will get the messages of your senior family members to have your moral boost. Your investments will give you good returns. Property disputes will also be resolved by some final family member's intervention. Your health will remain perfect. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. You will get an unexpected success in your professional life.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 19) You will be full of self-confidence and will take some strong decisions in your business which shall cast a powerful impact upon your life. Your profits will increase. And you will use your talent and abilities to your best advantage. Your hopes and expectations will be met. You will receive money that will give to someone. You will have mental peace. Your long standing worries will come to an end. You will take some vital decisions which may prove to be fruitful for your life. You may be late on.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) The spirit of the new year will inspire you. You will get money, fame and will be surrounded with wonderful people. You will be happy with your performance. You will achieve the heights of success. You will also spend the time happily in the company of your family. You will be just someone and some peace you. You will also have a hard work and will be in the right frame to get the results of your hard work. Your fame will spread at all corners. Marriages will be finalized. Brother and sister will assist and cooperate each other. Some close relative may deceive you. You will be a big order.

BV Doshi leaves behind irreplaceable void in architecture industry



(BV) Doshi, inset, and one of the buildings he designed

Balakrishna Vithaldas Doshi, who was the first Indian to bag the Pritzker Prize, considered architecture's highest honour, has passed away leaving behind irreplaceable void in architecture industry.

Born on August 26, 1927 in Pune, Doshi, who right from childhood was interested in arts, got admission in the Sir J J School of Arts in Mumbai. Later, he came in contact with France's leading architect Le Corbusier, who played a very important role in carving, channelising and exploring Doshi's skill right in India.

Le Corbusier assigned him to direct the planning and architecture work of Sarabhai Villa, Sodhan Villa, Ahmedabad Textile Industries Research Association building.

Doshi's architecture is seen in some of the most iconic buildings in India, including the Indian Institutes of Management in Bengaluru and Udaipur, the National Institute of Fashion Technology in Delhi, along with the Amavadni Gufa underground gallery, the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, the Tagore Memorial Hall, Institute of Indology and Premabhai Hall, and the private residence Kamala House - all in Ahmedabad.

The Padma Bhushan awardee had also received the RIBA Gold Medal.

Apart from his international fame as an architect, Doshi is equally known for having been

an educator and institution builder. He was the founding director of the School of Architecture, Ahmedabad (1962-72), founding director of the School of Planning (1972-79), founding dean of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (1972-81). Founding member of the Visual Arts Centre, Ahmedabad, and founding director of the Kanoria Centre for Arts, Ahmedabad.

Doshi was instrumental in establishing the nationally - and internationally - known research institute Vastu-Shilpa Foundation for Studies and Research in Environmental Design. The institute has performed pioneering work in low-cost housing and city planning. He is noteworthy for his pioneering work on low-income housing, and for his designs that incorporate concepts of sustainability in innovative ways.

Remembering Doshi's service in conceptualising institutes, Utpal Sharma, director Nirma University, Ahmedabad said, "Doshi had supported the Lalbhai family in setting School of Architecture (Formerly Centre for Environment Planning and Technology) 1962, he had also headed School Planning."

Sharma shared his rich experience with Doshi and said: "He guided me to set up the Faculty of Architecture and Planning at Nirma University."

Doshi breathed his last on Tuesday morning and was cremated in Ahmedabad later in the day. (IANS)

"Nothing recedes like success."
—Walter Winchell

The Shillong Times
Vol No. 148 No. 101 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2023

Yatri's hour of triumph

RAHUL Gandhi and the Congress Party have achieved what they attempted at in a spectacular manner. He has raised the National Flag at Lal Chowk in Srinagar, Kashmir, after braving several odds and a punishing schedule through his Bharat Jodo Padayatra lasting nearly five months at a stretch. At age 52, Rahul Gandhi has demonstrated that he's not only young enough to take up the challenging task but also resolute in making it a grand success. At the start of the yatra in September from Kanyakumari, many had wondered whether he was cut out for this task. The huge public response to the yatra through 12 states showed the ground-level might of the Congress even in its post-2014 slumber. A new life has been injected into the rank and file of the Congress.

Those who aspired to write off this tricolour behemoth in terms of its reach across the nation are sadly mistaken. Clearly, the fight at the hustings next year would not be a cakewalk for the BJP though Modi might still have the last laugh. Across states, the Bharat Jodo Yatra received a euphoric welcome, dismissing initial assessments that this could be limited to the South where the BJP was not a major force. But, even the rally's culmination in Kashmir showed a surge that was a revelation in itself. The idea of 'knitting India' at a time when divisive and communal forces were majorly at play has obviously impressed the people. This must send out the right signals to the BJP and the hard-core communalists that the way to exist in India is to co-exist, live in harmony and spread the message of brotherhood.

Rahul Gandhi, on his part, seemed to enjoy every moment in this long schedule. Such was the warmth with which the people urged him on. He mixed with the hot polloi, sat at roadside tea-stalls, communicated with the people around and had a feel of the people's pulse, their struggles in life. This for him was a discovery of the real India, though far less from the manner that Mahatma Gandhi perfected himself as a leader. When India celebrated its Independence at the midnight hour, the Mahatma was walking in the slums of Noakhali, Bengal, extinguishing the fires of communal fury. By contrast, most politicians drunk with power today revel only at 'exhorting' the people from public platforms or at engaging in cat-fights with rival shades. Dressed in spotless white, these borses are a class apart and have no real 'connect' with the people, whom they simply "lead" up the garden path. The nation deserves a better class of politicians.

Letters to the Editor

Stop noise, drinks and vulgarity during Pujas

Editor,
Appos the letters by Sarali Giewali, "Criticism against vulgar entertainment during pujas" (ST January 12, 2023) and rejoinders such as "No More Wild parties on Christmas" by Robert Lyngdoh, "Religious leaders and CPC should take initiative" by Rakesh Nath, I also want to express through this daily my disappointment with Durga puja organizers and facilitators. In this regard, I wish to recall my ordeal while going around some pandals in the year 2019. My close friend and I were on fast on the 7th day of Navaratri which we keep every year. We had decided to visit a few early puja pandals in the evening. Full of excitement we set out on the journey for Goddess Durga's darshan at around 8.30 pm. People were all in a festive mood and we were happy. Initially, we were not aware that three boys, who I believe were party drunk, were chasing us from one pandal. They were also teasing us. Because aware of what they were up to, they followed us from pandal to pandal. Realizing the spooky situation, I sought the help of a gentleman on the road who was with his wife and children. Thank God, that person scolded those boys and chased them away. We

At least one political party the TMC has already announced its manifesto for the upcoming elections and in a few days from now many more political parties will make their agendas for the development of the state public. The question that begs the answer is what are the issues in the state that require the immediate attention of the new government?

Youth and unemployment
In the state of Meghalaya, the number one issue that requires immediate attention is unemployment, particularly unemployment among educated youths. In the few months that this writer spent visiting homes in both the urban and rural areas of Jowai town, it was found there is a huge number of unemployed youths in the rural areas. This calculation is gathered from visiting the different localities in the town and also the villages in the suburbs of Jowai. I admit that this calculation is not accurate and a proper survey is needed to arrive at the correct number of unemployed youth in the state but it will not be wide off the mark. The findings have no doubt shocked me. The first thing that the new government needs to do when it assumes office is to survey and get the accurate number of educated unemployed youths in the state. Until and unless the government has the correct numbers, it will be very difficult if not impossible to come up with a solution to the problem.

Education as a Factor
If one only takes the number of students who passed the annual secondary school leaving certificate (SSLC) examination, the numbers are startling. Every year between thirty to forty thousand young people pass their SSLC examination and the same number of young people are added to the job market in the state. It is therefore not wrong to say that people's ability to access education is the factor that contributes to the increasing numbers of educated unemployed youths in the state. Today almost all secondary schools are upgraded to higher secondary schools which also helps young people complete higher secondary school which would not have been possible if the schools are

located in distant places. At the college level too, young people are able to graduate from college because colleges that were started by religious organizations, trusts or communities helped bring higher education to the doorstep of the people.

Uneducated youth
There is also a large number of youth who are less educated or young people who are not able to complete their high school for many reasons. It cannot be denied that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic is also the cause of large numbers of students dropping out of school. Through preliminary interviews with school headmasters and teachers, it is learnt that there is an unusual increase in the number of school dropouts because of the lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic. Again it will be interesting if a survey is conducted to find out the percentage of students who dropped out of school due to the pandemic. The pandemic has no doubt created this peculiar situation leading to a high drop-out rate among school children. No doubt there are large numbers of uneducated or less educated youth who are unemployed and the government needs to survey to get the numbers of youths in this category.

Multi-pronged approach
The new government will be able to come up with a solution to this vital problem only after a proper survey is done. Only then the government will be able to get correct data on youths of the state who are unemployed. There cannot be just one solution to a problem as complex as the unemployment issue in the state, and the solution to the problem has to be multi-pronged. Now when people talk about job creation it is almost fashionable to talk about entrepreneurship, micro small, and medium enterprise (MSME) as if it is the only thing that can save the state. Some politicians have also started talking about incubation or start-up hubs where new entrepreneurs would be provided support and training to start their enterprises. This is one area that the MDA had tried its hand on.

MDA government's PRIME
Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government under the leadership of chief min-

ister Conrad K. Sangma in January 2020 launched a programme to help promote entrepreneurship known as PRIME. PRIME which is an acronym for Promotion and Incubation of Market Driven Enterprises was launched with the goal of providing training and mentoring, market access and to even avail credit. The main goal of PRIME is to encourage the youths of the state to look for other job avenues and not to depend on government jobs only and more importantly to become job creators.

Like many government schemes, the impact of this government flagship program is not forthcoming. There are many reasons why this project has not achieved the expected targets and the number one reason is that paucity of time, the program was launched only in 2020. The number two reason that the program falls short of its target is that not every youth can become an entrepreneur.

Skill Meghalaya through MSSDS
Another important approach that the MDA government initiated to help solve the unemployment crisis in the state is by skilling the youths of the state. Meghalaya State Skill Development Society which is under the department of labour initiated a project last year. Skill Meghalaya last year MSSDS is also unable to achieve the expected goal because the program was started very late in the day. MSSDS under the project Skill Meghalaya partnered NGOs for providing skill training to the youths at the beginning of last year only. NGOs were able to start the training only in the second half of last year. The truth is it is also too early to say if this government initiative has helped in providing the needed skill sets for the young people of the state to help them become gainfully employed.

MDA's FOCUSing on the farmers
FOCUS is one scheme that went off the target because Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma was in a hurry. FOCUS which is an abbreviation of Farmers' Collectivization for Upscaling Production and Marketing Systems is aimed at supporting the farmers to get them a good market

of parliament to maintain decorum so that they may be the example for other countries also. The collective wisdom of parliament is not being put to use in making the law. The last two sessions due to disruptions in parliament many important bills could not be passed. It is expected that the bills will be passed in this session. Let us hope that good wisdom will prevail on parliament members and party politics will be kept away by both the ruling party as well as opposition parties.

I quote the expressions expressed by late Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, "If a person wants to enter politics then he/she must have to maintain the habit of expressing sorry for any act and as well as to say 'thats'." Much of the ruckus in parliament is because members don't say sorry when they have broken the protocol of the House. During the tenure of Atal Bihari Vajpayee there were instructions to the Parliamentary Ministers that they should be visible to the opposition benches/leaders than in the treasury benches so that the House may run smoothly. To maintain the sanctity of parliament it is expected from the ruling party that it should refrain from passing the bills in the last one or two days in an intentional crude manner or whatever reasons. But the sanctity of parliament must be maintained. It is expected from political parties that they should not involve party politics but should uphold national interests above all.

Even during Saraswati puja, Krishna Janmashtami, and Viswakarma puja they celebrate puja with Bollywood songs. Why does the Central Puja Committee (CPC) still not realize that we are falling from grace in the eyes of other faiths. Being a Hindu, my head hangs in shame. Can anyone quote from the sacred books in which there is mention that God will bless us all when we celebrate the sacred days with noise, drinks, and vulgarity? All should raise a strong voice against such sacrilegious puja, which is an insult to God.

Yours etc,
Usha Kakoti,
Via email.

and also to help them get a good price for their produce. The FOCUS approach is to support funding, value chain development, machinery support, market linkages, promotion, and aggregation of the produce of the farmers. But the important question is whether FOCUS has achieved the goals of providing the above services to farmers? FOCUS is a good scheme, but it went for a toss when the Chief Minister who is in a hurry started using it as an election gimmick. The problem began when the government started to distribute dummy cheques to the farmers. The question is whether the farmers that are organized under the Producer's Group have been provided the necessary training to start to distribute dummy cheques to the farmers. The Chief Minister was quick to make a tall claim that they have distributed cores of money for the benefit of the farmers but the question is whether the farmers have been able to make the best use of the money?

In its earlier stage, FOCUS also included in its ambit the promotion of 'nano enterprises', and service providers. Nano enterprises are those in which the owner employs two or more assistants in her/his unit and the service provider is one who provides service for the different needs of the unemployed youth in the village. The service could be providing transportation or providing immediate and basic veterinary services in their respective villages. This is also a good idea that would have helped create more jobs, but the same was not continued in the program.

Rural Backyard Piggery Scheme and Piggery Mission
A few months back Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma also launched a flagship program called Rural Backyard Piggery scheme. The government's goal is to help improve the income of the farmers, but this scheme was destined to fail because the piglets were brought from outside the state and also the cost of a fattened pig in Meghalaya has fallen sharply because of the pigs that came to Meghalaya from outside the state. The other flagship program of the MDA - the Piggery mission will also suffer the same fate because of the import of pigs from outside Meghalaya. It is, therefore, safe to say that the schemes that the MDA government launched to create employment for the youths have not been able to achieve the expected goals.

It is worth noting that public opinion is not involved in the bills passed by parliament. In this context I quote the example of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru who called the joint Parliamentary Session to discuss the Hindu Code Bill and when one of members asked Nehru why he called a joint session when there is no opposition to this bill, he replied that in parliamentary democracy public opinion will be a most otherwise democracy will have no meaning.

Crude prices are rising and has gone beyond the reach of the common man. It is incumbent on the government to convince the opposition parties that it is due to hike in international crude prices or whatever reasons. But the sanctity of parliament must be maintained. It is expected from political parties that they should not involve party politics but should uphold national interests above all.

Yours etc,
Yash Pal Raihan,
Via email.

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Joshimath in the making in Meghalaya

By Dr Barnes Mawrie

The recent news report on Utiarakhand presents a horrifying scene almost like one of the scenes from the movie "2012" where cities just caved in. The opening of the ground and the cracks of buildings in Joshimath and other towns of Utiarakhand, came as an unforeseen natural calamity to the people of that state. It looks like Utiarakhand is no longer an inhabitable place which should be abandoned altogether. Where will the people of the state go? That is the big question for the government. Property worth hundreds of crores just goes down the drain in a matter of few days. We sympathize with the suffering people of that state and we hope and pray that quick solutions will be found to save the misery of those people.

It is an open secret that in spite of the ban on coal mining by the NGT, clandestine mining is still going



on in these places. Trucks of coal are still being exported to other places and even to Bangladesh. There are powerful people behind the whole racket and money power plays a very decisive role in the whole affair. All the coal barons need not fear about these aftermaths because they all have mansions in Shillong and elsewhere where they can escape to.

Who will be the poor victims? It is the poor people who have now here else to go but to continue living in those places. They are the ones who are bearing the brunt of these unscientific and illegal money-making activities. Today, when even the sources for drinking water in these areas have mostly been poisoned. It is the poor who will get sick and die and not the coal barons because they can afford to buy bottled water. The vicious cycle will go on and in the turn of events the rich and powerful will always survive while the poor and the have-nots will perish.

It is time for the Hindustani people to get rid of this selfish and greedy attitude which is destroying our community from within and start reviving our humane and ethical code of living as handed down to us by our wise ancestors. We need urgently to revise the sense of solidarity and collective well-being. Mahatma Gandhi has rightly pointed out that "nature has enough for everyone's need and not for everyone's greed." Let us not greed destroy the very land on which we have lived for thousands of years because our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren still need it.

(The writer has authored the book, "Climate Change: A Theological-Moral Response." He can be reached at barnesmawrie@gmail.com)

"Transparency increases credibility and accountability."
— Park Won-soon

The Shillong Times

Capricious public sentiments

POLITICS and politicians create noise during election campaigns mainly to divert people's attentions from their failure to deliver the public goods in the last five years. To fight anti-incumbency ruling party politicians use all kinds of diversionary tactics. Unfortunately people easily fall for such stratagem but that's also because during the election campaign period there are no platforms for raising questions from those who have held the reins of governance. Sitting MLAs make generic statements about what they have utilised the MLA schemes of Rs 2.5 crore annually. Recently an MLA confessed that the money he could not spend in the last five years was used to buy pressure cookers for his destitute constituents. It is had enough that the relationship between the voters and the MLA is reduced to that of a client and patron. The MLA schemes has been largely abused and the bulk of it is used in the fag end of the MLA's tenure which is in the fifth year when he/she seeks re-election. It is unfortunate that people are not educated enough to understand that what's being used to lure voters is public money and does not come from the MLAs personal coffers.

Another contentious issue about Meghalaya's politics is that people tend to have short memories. The pressure groups that make a strident noise for all of four years and will be doing that the moment a new government is in place by March 3 next are curiously silent now. Once a new government is formed they will start making the same old demands they have raised for the last 50 years. These would include the border disputes with Assam, the Inner Line Permit, blocking the railways from entering Meghalaya, deporting the ubiquitous alien (who is never identified). A pressure group that raised a hue and cry over unemployment a couple of months ago is now not even demanding that all political parties should make unemployment a priority in their manifesto.

If the politicians are holding public meetings, it is incumbent on the pressure groups to have parallel meetings where they will remind people of the unfulfilled promises of successive governments and of the many seams that have tainted the present MDA government. What has happened to the Smart Meter scam and the Rice scam? Where are the enquiry reports? Why are they not made public? Are other political parties like VPP and TMC that were not in the government reminding the public of these issues? What about the collapse of the Meghalaya Assembly dome? At whose doorstep does the blame lie? It's public money down the drain so why is the MDA government brushing all these misdemeanors under the carpet? And worse is that the engineer in charge of the construction of the Assembly building is contesting elections from the NPP ticket. This is literally a slap in the face of the voting public.

Letters to the Editor

Dynastic Politics: A Problem for Development

Editor,
In many developed countries, especially in Western Europe, people have eradicated the early widespread of dynastic politics for decades. In the Indian situation, the people in the recent past rejected political dynasties from the country's political arena. This kind of politics, played by many politicians, negatively impacted society.
Roland Mendonca revealed in a study that "dynasty-ruled constitutions" typically had more significant income disparity and poverty levels. Another survey by R. Tussan and others emphasises the predominance of "family-based politics," which justifies the exploitation of public funds. Consequently, there is a mismanagement of funds allocated for health, education, employment, infrastructure, and overall economic development.
If we agree, Meghalaya has created a few decades of what we refer to as "dynastic politics." In such cases, this plunges the electorate

and locks out potential leaders of the "non-dynasty" class from public office. In today's era of the West and India, the people experienced such destructive political interference, which led to its eradication. Although the West designs many harmful strategies for others, at the same time, we cannot ignore some of their best democratic values, which replaced the early political dynasties with people-centered politics. We anticipate that the state's people will follow their democratic procedure and our country's electoral reform as examples of hope for a better Meghalaya while casting their votes in the upcoming election. Yours etc.,
Banshen Mawlein
Via email

Gun violence in America

Editor,
In the USA, there is no guarantee that the person who left home will return safely in the evening. Thanks to the easy accessibility of guns any adult citizen above the age of 21 can purchase firearms. Therefore, a sense of doom prevails in this advanced country. It is the

Politicians must give accounts - Not a list of achievements

By Angela Raigad

Meghalaya has become a state with super diminished expectations. And during elections more so. From West to East, North to South, suddenly, media and/or PR accounts of parties are full of celebratory stories about MLAs giving accounts of their expenditure. And like love letters on these supposedly "heart-warming" stories of transparency grow exponentially.
So what are these accounts? Going by infographics released by an MLA or a daily (re)inauguration of works with photos that some long-term MLA in Shillong are taking as their accounts, one realises that these are no accounts at all. They are merely the list of works carried out from People's money. They all are like some many crores spent on roads, some many lakhs on pressure cooker, blanket, bad quality crockery, laptops and mementos distributed. They all read and sound like the slogans on big expensive hearings that the government put up all around the state. So many kilometres of road every day, so many women part of SHG programmes, so much money transferred to so many people etc.
But are these accounts or just expenditure counting? Let us use a cliched example. When we send our child with 100 rupees to shop for things, let us say a packet of sugar, tea and milk and she comes back with sugar, tea and milk, what kind of accounts do we ask of her? Did you get some change? What was the price of sugar, tea and milk? Did she get some change? Does she have a receipt? And if we see her teeth browned by chocolates we want to find out whether she is inflating the prices to get some extra money for her impulse purchase. We do this because we want our child to learn some life lessons in economics and be ethical in spending money. But why is it that this same principle we apply to our child, we forget to apply to our MLAs and government expenditure?
Now for instance, an MLA tells us that he has distributed 350 laptops to meritorious students in five years. A "account" can't just say 350 students benefited with laptops and so much money sanctioned and spent on it. For any respectable account we would need answers to the following five questions.
Who are these 350 students?
What is the brand and model names of these laptops?
How much money was spent in procuring these laptops and detailed breakdown

of that expenditure?
How much per laptop?
Who supplied these laptops, where were these laptops procured from and how was the supplier chosen?
These are the kinds of questions CAG audit asks anyway. Answer to the first two questions are important because they will allow us to check whether the beneficiaries received the laptops or they are merely ghost names. Like during COVID-19 pandemic cash support programme of the government.
"One of the most common misconceptions about corruption is about reducing the act of corruption to merely 'money' and 'corrupt' individual. And therefore the solution to corruption is reduced to getting the corrupt individual out and getting morally upright and educated (quality of degree doesn't matter) individuals in. But for far too long in spite of many sanctimonious pronouncements these individual-based anti-corruption solutions have failed."

the list that Government gave out to our RTI queries had more than a RTI queries had more than a list of names of beneficiaries who were supposed to have received their 2100/5000 rupees but when we checked on them, many had not received their money or had only received their money partially.
Answers to question 3 and 4, would let us know whether our money was corrupt individual out and getting morally upright and educated (quality of degree doesn't matter) individuals in. But for far too long in spite of many sanctimonious pronouncements these individual-based anti-corruption solutions have failed.
We need to remember that corruption is first of all stealing of people's democratic rights as citizens by

"We need to remember that corruption is first of all stealing of people's democratic rights as citizens by an individual or institution. It is about abuse of power. Money flowing up to the person holding power over us is merely a product of that abuse. Second, corruption is an issue only under a democracy. In the olden times where sovereign and oligarchs held divine or virtual power over masses, corruption was only when someone stole from the king or oligarchs."

an individual or institution. It is about abuse of power. Money flowing up to the person holding power over us is merely a product of that abuse. Second, corruption is an issue only under a democracy. In the olden times where sovereign and oligarchs held divine or virtual power over masses, corruption was only when someone stole from the king or oligarchs. It is only under democracy where

power is supposedly held by the common people who have rights and supposed to be equal before law that the question of corruption becomes pertinent. Because of democracy, our representatives or bureaucracy are public servants, they are merely spending our money or exercising power on our behalf because sovereignty/under democracy are the citizens. Any action by the public servants that steals that power from the citizens is therefore corruption.
So to stop that corruption what should be done. First, it is important that people know that the government money being spent on their welfare is their money. It is no grace from the politician. It is not for some MLA to recommend or implement or spend. And if it is our money then we need to be given accounts for the expenditure. Accounts have to be a very minimum about the money being spent on their welfare is their money. It is no grace from the politician. It is not for some MLA to recommend or implement or spend. And if it is our money then we need to be given accounts for the expenditure. Accounts have to be a very minimum about the money being spent on their welfare is their money. It is no grace from the politician. It is not for some MLA to recommend or implement or spend. And if it is our money then we need to be given accounts for the expenditure.

How was the decision for expenditure taken?
All the bills and vouchers for the expenditure?
Who is implementing the scheme? Is there any conflict of interest?
Has the scheme been implemented? How long did it take?
What was the quality of the works and who were the beneficiaries?
In Meghalaya these days MLAs and politicians rather than giving accounts are more interested in installing expensive (and probably illegal) stones carrying their name as implementers and recommender rather than giving out accounts of the expenditure. Sadly even the government is not implementing the section 4 of the RTI Act 2005, under which they have to be proactive disclosure in public domain for much of this expenditure. It is as if Transparency and Accountability is no longer an issue in Meghalaya.

But we know that for far too long governance and economy in Meghalaya is pockmarked with instances of one time to high ticket corruption and abuse of power leaching people's resources in a few criminal hands. The only way to stop this is to have mandatory legal framework of proactive disclosures and possibility of citizens to ensure that the criminal politico-bureaucratic class that gets exposed by this regime of Transparency and Accountability pay for their misdeeds.
And we can begin this by providing REAL ACCOUNTS not just a list of works done.
(Angela Raigad is a member of Kom Meghalaya & contesting for MLA in the upcoming elections.)

Star Cement, Meghalaya then was too naive and unaware of the possible environmental destruction awaiting the State wide cement production.
The Government of Meghalaya blundered in not consulting MCLL established in 1966 to at least calculate the energy consumption vis-a-vis the health of our power plants. At the time Leskha was not yet born. The then government granted license to one but ten cement plants, five clustered around Narphub Reserve Forest in an area of 25 square km. In 2007, 6 years after licenses were granted, the Lukha river turned blue. A team of professors of Chemistry and Zoology Departments of St Edmund College rushed to discover pH level of water at 3.5 and PPM 3, and 7 being the minimum for aquatic life. The report was submitted to the State Pollution Control Board but as the report was damning and the agency a non-governmental one naturally it was shelved.
The bludge did not become the writing on the wall, rather the government believed Star Cement when it attributed the cause of the blue waters to effluents from coal mines. As laboratories as these scientific agencies are always siding with the corporates, no surgical chemical analysis was ever done. Going through YouTube, the causal was said to be copper sulphate as its solution in water gives rise to blue siltial exactly like Lukha blue. Had it been so, Meghalaya would be very lucky as copper would be in huge demand for future e-vehicles to replace electric vehicles which would do away with petrol or diesel engines. It probably was the ploy of these corporates to deflect blame from themselves. The Lukha river

The Lukha River is dead: An obituary

By W. Passah

The river Lukha's source is at the foothills of two hills called Marangshih and Bakorsing west of Saipung. Overseeing the river is the Khaddom range that wedges apart East Jaintia Hills and North Cachar Hills. The river is rich in aquatic lives. In the alden days anglers camping on the banks could hear the slophans and their leaders trumpet to say "sorry" to the humans in great numbers begging the beasts to leave the paddy unharmed. At times an alarm call of the barking deer being stalked by the royal Bengal tiger could be heard. The river finally descends into the Surma river to meet with the Bay of Bengal where the sun scorches the waters to raise rain bearing clouds back to Lukha river all governed by cycle well timed unlike today in the world of climate change.
Fortunately or unfortunately East Jaintia Hills struck coal in the 1980s. With the exodus of cheap rat hole miners from as far as Bihar and Nepal, the mines soon reached the vicinity of Khaddom villages. The Geological Survey of India on Sitehead in age Star Cement wanted to enhance its production capacity. It needed more limestone and eyed the 8.2 km area around the ecologically sensitive zone of Narphub wildlife sanctuary. Public hearings attended by NGOs from Shillong and locally and the villagers to protest



against granting more forest land to Star Cement ended in smoke.
After a full of two years the Union Environment Ministry granted permission to Star Cement without consulting the State Government. In the spring of 2021, Environment Minister James PK Sangma landed at the banks of the Lukha bank amidst villagers who did not understand English. He promised there was going to bring American and German scientists to treat the Lukha. Now we are in February 2023 but there's no sign of the scientists.
But in Narphub, the Lukha is reeling under severe air pollution with flowers, garden vegetables and cloths turning gray. Children are having respiratory problems. Noise pollution as well comes from loud speakers calling truck drivers till 3 AM. My friends there are now nocturnal creatures. Today the rare caves brought to global limelight by Meghalaya Adventurers Association with Israeli and German caves are now filled with soil. The irony is that mineral-rich areas across India are inhabited by innocent tribals who are leaderless. Even if there are community leaders they are suppressed. Narphub has no leader to rescue the people even after the confirmed death of the Lukha.
I pray that this story of the death of the Lukha awakens all Meghalayans to the roles played by our ministers/politicians in this emerald-green murder of the river EVM bucket.
Good bye Lukha river. Though dead you will always remind us of the sins of the political class.

Women in politics

Editor,
Today India feels proud of the power and position enjoyed by its women. They have worked hard against heavy odds to achieve their present position and so richly deserve that they have achieved. Today Indian women hold high positions in every walk of life, from education to entrepreneur-ship; from business to bureaucracy and from administration to politics. However, women are still under-represented in Parliament and state assemblies. Indian women have come a long way in politics. But key reforms (viz 33 percent reservation for women in parliament and state assemblies) that could see them improve their position remain undone because of the male feudal mentality. The Women's Reservation Bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill has been in parliament for over two decades. Male politicians with feudal attitudes had and will do their worst to prevent the Bill from being enacted.
Hence according to Global Gender Gap Report, 2021, India has declined on the political empowerment index by 13.5 percentage points, and a decline in the number of women ministers, from 23.1% in 2019 to 9.1% in 2021.
Yours etc,
Dr. Omarlin Kamkhah
Via email

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