

"It was a mistake," you said. But the cruel thing was, it felt like the mistake was mine, for trusting you."

--- David Levithan

The Shillong Times

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Meeting caste grievances

THE Union Cabinet has set up a commission to create sub-categories in the Central list of the OBCs. It is a step forward and is in sync with the proposals submitted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The purpose is to address grievances of various fragments of OBCs. Such grievances among OBCs are in regard to reservations in Central Government jobs and educational institutions in the country. It may be noted that some state OBC lists already divide into subcategories. It has been laid down by a Supreme Court judgement that there is no constitutional bar to the OBC list being divided into subcategories. The system in the states where there are such subcategories has been found workable. Law does not create an obstacle.

The OBC list is a comprehensive umbrella and it includes about 5000 castes and different stages of social, political and economic development. It is assumed that the more empowered castes in the OBC list have garnered greater benefit. Subcategories can eradicate grievances on these grounds. Sub-categorisation however has to be done systematically and after scrutinising carefully all data covering income, education, empowerment, etc. under the law. Pressure groups should not be allowed to stand in the way of implementing the exercise. The Central OBC list was a compromise made under Prime Minister V.P Singh pursuant to the Mandal Committee recommendations. The list has expanded over the years under political pressure. The creamy layer concept has not worked out. The income bar of the OBC has been raised by governments in contradiction to the SC's intervention. What is important is to ensure equality among OBC subcategories and that should not be vitiated by electoral politics.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Fresh violence in Kokrajhar

A CRPF jawan and a Bodo extremist were killed and four policemen injured as violence flared up during the 48-hour Assam bandh which began at five am yesterday, official reports said today. The extremists exploded a powerful bomb at the sub-way to a bridegroom Amguri forest gate in Kokrajhar district, last evening killing a CRPF jawan on the spot. Soon after the explosion, the militants fired at the police party, which was returning from an escort duty. The police party fired back but no casualty was reported. This was the second CRPF jawan killed by the extremists in Kokrajhar district in the past few days. The extremist Argen Gayari, wanted in connection with several cases, was electrocuted while he came in contact with a live wire, he was tampering with the electric line at Taktara under Sidli police station. The injured policemen, including a Sub Inspector and the driver of the vehicle, were admitted to Kokrajhar hospital. The Sub-Inspector could not be brought to the

Medical College here as his condition was very critical.

CPI(M) opposes 'Bodo Land'

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has opposed the Bodo's demand for a separate homeland in Assam. The politburo of the party, which concluded a two-day meeting here on March 19, reviewed the agitation launched by Bodo Student Union for a separate state leading to "widespread violence of life and property". Although the politburo was not satisfied with the handling of the agitation by the state government, it has expressed the view that a political solution to the demands of the tribal community could be found through negotiation and protection of their identity and by giving them regional autonomy. The politburo endorsed the stand of its Assam unit in this regard. This was disclosed here today by CPI(M) general secretary Mr E M S Nambodiripad who briefed the press on the deliberations of the meeting.

Vindicating Princess Diana: Western Modernity and the Carnal Gaze - II

By Deepa Majumdar

Into this foray of somatic narcissism entered shy young Diana – utterly innocent of the role she was to play, both historically and politically. She seemed to fulfill all the Caucasian dreams and demands made of female body – that it can be desirable only if it is slim, beautiful, fashionable, flawless – but also virginal and maternal. Young Diana therefore managed to do the impossible – by combining the carnal with the maternal. Sometimes I wonder if the west really understood why she was beautiful. I do not think it was her carnal dimensions or natural grace or skin tone, but rather her inner beauty and the touching pathos of her facial expression – always tinged with sadness. She had, what we Bengalis call "lavanya" – a quality of grace and inner beauty that can never be severed from goodness. What was touchingly beautiful was also her innocent maternalism – in a strange age that upholds the professional woman above the mother – or the woman who emulates male professions, to women like Diana who expressed the deepest beauty of feminine nature. We profane this beauty when we coerce motherhood, but we consecrate it – when women like Diana express maternalism naturally and sincerely from the depth of their being – revealing motherhood as the radiant cosmic principle it actually is. Indeed the picture of the fun-loving young mother, Diana, with her two boys, are among the most touching ever.

The rape of the female body can happen in degrees, the most egregious being gang rape. Without diminishing the pain of survivors of horrific gang rapes, we might nevertheless assert that there are milder shades of rape – "soft rape" – that can also cause enormous suffering and milder expressions of the same damage. At the subtlest level, we might define rape as any carnal use of the body of one person by another – a rape more sinister when the victim is many years younger. Like the more egregious forms of rape, these insidious forms of rape too take their toll. All forms, shades, and degrees of rape kill the soul of the victim. Raised in a culture that prizes romantic love as the end all and be all for young women – a culture that has given us the whole saga of Mills & Boon novels – and recommended strongly by Queen Elizabeth for her son Charles, perhaps on account of her innocence (and implied virginity), Diana walked into a trap, as it were. That she bore two sons with an adulterous husband implies a degree of soft rape. Her eating disorders therefore strike me as characteristic of victims of sexual abuse. Like many survivors, Diana battled self-destructive bouts of bulimia – all the more after Charles called her "chubby."

It troubles me that during her days of pain no senior member of her family (on either side) sheltered young Diana or healed her – with mature affection, wisdom, validation and understanding. I am horrified that no family elder saw through her self-destructive relations with

Self-destructiveness. I suspect, stalked her all the way to her death, expressing itself in dangerous escapades and ruinous relationships with men. Let us not forget that she did not wear a seat belt during that last fatal ride in Paris. Diana's interest in astrology too strikes me as an expression of the despair of a rape survivor. Above all, I suspect her relationships with men, subsequent to Charles were characteristic of rape survivors – a seeming promiscuity usually misunderstood as lust. The rape survivor repeats the destructive experience by going from one man to another – expressing graphically the loss of self, self-esteem, and self-respect – aiming almost at relieving the primary traumatic experience. This is how I understand Diana's "falling in love" with her bodyguard. The men who take advantage of such women are the ones to blame and chastise. If in harsh Islamist societies young female rape survivors are flogged publicly – sometimes to death – as punishment for what lustful imams mistake as female lust, then here in the west they are flogged emotionally, carnally, and spiritually. In Diana's case, one might suggest that such flogging was orchestrated perhaps not only by an unsympathetic palace, but also by a voyeuristic media that hounded her all the way to the end – a media she teased with all the deftness of a destroyed, insecure child. The hysteria of the media and the western crowds that followed her every move, prove the emptiness of carnal beauty – as much as they prove the emptiness of fame, to which Diana sold herself – seeking the love she missed, through the phantom of fame. But Diana was also lucrative merchandise in the hands of beauty industry and the media, which sold her image again and again, evoking her protest of "face rape." Like many white western women, Diana turned to non-western men like Dodi Fayed and Hasnat Khan. Naïve and needy, receiving wholesome affection perhaps at least from Khan – Diana seemed not to suspect the horrific realities of puritanical patriarchal attitudes towards white women in Islamist cultures. In the end, all she longed for perhaps was something not in the least glamorous – a loving home.

It troubles me that during her days of pain no senior member of her family (on either side) sheltered young Diana or healed her – with mature affection, wisdom, validation and understanding. I am horrified that no family elder saw through her self-destructive relations with

men to cherish, protect, and heal her. To think that Charles' adultery was tolerated by Buckingham Palace and British society, with his own father saying he could return to his mistress Camilla, if marriage with Diana did not work out – is shocking. That Charles and Diana turned out incompatible proves that physical appearance, power, and privilege, being only skin-deep, can never be the foundation of marriage understood as a lifelong friendship. That the British public forgave all when Charles married Camilla, showed how desperate modern man is for love – but also how much the public still neglects feminist causes. It reminds me of Trump voters who chose to overlook his utter crudeness and violence towards women. In the light of his subtle rape and usage of Diana's body, Charles is not fit to be king – if the monarchy is to have a shred of even symbolic historical meaning.

When she asserted her desire to be a Queen of Hearts – displaying her innate wisdom, which always elevated her far above political ideologies – it was perhaps Diana, more than Elizabeth II, who turned out to be the secular essence of the British people. For Diana was more a humanitarian than an angry revolutionary. She did not use her legitimate anger to fight political causes, but to soothe, comfort and bring succor to the dying, the destitute, and those in pain. She was thereby a subtle revolutionary. Without any conscious intentions to espouse feminism, Diana served feminism in the most radical way possible – not only by upholding motherhood, but by debunking the most pernicious of all sexist myths of white culture – that marrying a prince and becoming a queen confer upon a young girl, earthly felicity, meaning, and existential fulfillment. Often used subliminally to denigrate non-white women through colonial feminism, this myth is drilled into the souls of white girls. It has no place in the Indian psyche. Young Indian girls are raised to be wives and mothers – not princesses with fairy-tale weddings. That these noble ideals are often desecrated through coerced, greedy, dowry-laden marriages is another matter altogether.

I admire Princess Diana for the courage she displayed when she turned her life around – by transcending petty romantic love, to ascend to the higher universal love – offered with humility to those human beings usually rejected by society – people who did not look or smell nice. I admire her wholeheartedly because she taught her two sons humility – to reach out and touch suffering humanity. It is indeed a didactic irony of history that Princess Diana and Mother

Teresa sometimes worked together – the first a secular essence of British people (especially women) and the second, a religious saint. I can understand why Diana evoked jealousy in members of the British royal family. She succeeded far more in expressing the main purpose of their mummified existence – which is to be a secular essence for the British people. Indeed it was touching to see pictures of Diana, dressed in all her finery, bending low to touch and care for those in pain. It was touching to see her hold dark children on her lap, with no hint of the showmanship so endemic to this Age of Advertisement.

In the end I admire Princess Diana because in the most innocent way possible – by overcoming her own sorrows by serving others in greater sorrow – and without directly intending to – she brought about a great political revolution. She overcame western pity and colonial snobbery and hatred through her simple gestures of affection and love. She was, in the end, a philosopher of love. Although regarded as beautiful in the somatic sense, Princess Diana proved by her life's work of charity and humanitarianism, that the body is, in the end, no more than what Shankaracharya called a "khosha" or outer-most covering (or peel) of the sheathed, universal Self. Above all, I love Princess Diana because she felt "creeped out" when Donald Trump stalked her with bouquets of flowers, seeing her as the ultimate trophy wife. This goes to show that although hurt in marriage Diana was indomitable in the inmost fire of her being.

When I saw millions mourn Diana after she died tragically, I could not help but contrast her end with those of great savants who choose to die alone, celebrating death, thwarting all mourning – finding freedom in the release from the body. That millions mourned Diana showed that God answered her prayer and made her a Queen of Hearts – but retained her in the cycle of reincarnation, so she can return to earth to progress further towards the Divine. Regardless of the length of a life span, perhaps the same milestones are distributed within every life. In Diana's case, these milestones had to be crammed – because her life span was a brief flare in the universe.

(The author teaches at Purdue University, US)

Christianity not a threat to any culture or tradition

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

As a Christian, I am proud to be a Khasi even though I do not prefer to be classed as a schedule tribe but I am also extremely happy to be part and parcel of this great motherland India, and to be called Indian to the outside world. The development within our motherland that has attempted to divide this nation into various fragments and in particular the recent one within our homeland (Hima Mylliem) has prompted me to share a few thoughts. Toki Blah had shared his concerns through social network and I feel I should do my part as well.

The resentment against Christianity by non-Christian friends and those from the indigenous faith reflect their feelings of insecurity and the fear of being marginalized. The fear is that one day their rituals and traditions will disappear because of Christianity. This is true of other religions around the world as well, to the extent that Christians are persecuted especially in Muslim and Hindu dominated regions and elsewhere. This happens because of the misconception that Christians and Christianity will uproot their culture and identity as a community and tribe. This has made them resort to various kinds of violence and oppression including seeking political patronage and assistance to thwart and retaliate against the peaceful crusade of unarmed and harmless people. It sad and ironic to see these things happening when civilization is progressing rapidly and humans are now becoming more sophisticated, so much so, that the development of artificial intelligence is soon becoming a possible dream. Interestingly in the other aspects of humanity, we tend to depict a behaviour which is savage and beastlike thereby breeding intolerance and hatred against fellow human beings. Even animals in the jungle have some sense of tolerance among themselves once their belly is full.

In the context of tolerance, if those who profess to be Christians or followers of Christ had at any point of time exhibited some form of intolerance, then they have offended their own master and Lord Jesus Christ. If there is any intolerance that the Bible as the Word of God has strictly emphasized and the Church too as the body of Christ on earth should also strictly follow, it is only against sin and sinful activities which is an abomination to God. On the contrary, things are getting complicated because people are hiding their misdeeds and trespasses by taking shelter under their religious garbs and association. They are taking advantage of the greatness of the grace of God that surpasses any intolerable situation. Further, it is also a fact when the Bible speaks about different nations, tribes and tongues worshipping God in their own style and tradition (Revelation 7:9). So where is the question of 'Deculturalization' and acculturation of people's practice and tradition? Because of this reason God the Son Jesus Christ said 'I have come that you might have peace and therefore you should love one another for this is the Will of God'. At the simplest stroke of His mighty hand, He could have destroyed the entire humanity that He has created and formed but His grace and tolerance is immeasurable. Therefore, by His death on the cross He elevated humanity to a level at par with His own deity and His own life and blood for the purpose of

redemption and not by animal blood. And this is the greatest tolerance ever.

Today the realm of religion is dominated by emotional mediocrity where valuable philosophical thoughts and expressions are disappearing and the path of religious discourse is dominated by disillusioned fanatics who are driven by greed and power having no substantial truth except blind adherence to illogical ideologies. Those who think that Christianity will dilute their traditions and culture should carefully understand the mindset of Jesus Christ Himself and not react to the actions and behaviour of the devotees. Jesus Christ did not create or invent any religion but offered reconciliation with God Almighty. But yes in the course of time and history people have tried to institutionalize their rituals, practices and systems that have made the situation today very complicated. In my opinion, worshipping God and Jesus Christ in the temple or mosque or anywhere is not an offence or transgression to my God because the Bible tells us that true worshippers shall worship the Father not on this mountain or in Jerusalem (or a particular place) but in spirit and in truth for God seeks such people to worship Him (John 4:21-23). Further, Jesus Christ said "I have come not to destroy any law" or practice but in one law i.e. 'Love' hangs every type of law.

It is here that Christianity is different from religion. It is a kind of relationship with no strings attached. It is a dual type of relationship, first as a personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ and the second part in relation to fellow human beings. To Him (God) the eternal soul of human being is more important part than the mortal body. He is not bothered by what process we dispose of this mortal body because any process finally turns to dust. But He is more concerned that the eternal soul should not be embodied by sinful nature of greed and hunger for power. I pity those who resort to the path of defaming and tarnishing one another's credibility be they from any community - Christian or non-Christian. Let us not forget that a healthy society and civilization can flourish only when there is a healthy discourse of various religious philosophies and values.

Societies and the world at large need a transformation - in social and political aspects. A transformation that upgrade its values and principles where there is a shift in collective consciousness irrespective of different faiths and beliefs. The essence of a progressive civilization is to sustain itself throughout the ages. Leonard Joy, a veteran of international economics and social development work, in his book "How does societal transformation happen" acknowledges that there is a repeated collapse in every aspect of the society which includes economic, financial, governance, political, social, etc. His study aims directly at the kind of societal transformation required to stop this slide into catastrophe and begin to advance the growth of security and well-being for human communities and the whole commonwealth of life. To rebuild the whole system require collective effort and collective wisdom.

TO THE EDITOR

On the issue of LGBT

Editor,
I read with great interest the article by Benjamin Lyngdoh titled "A Spectacle called LGBT" (August 29, 2017). It was indeed a matter of great pleasure to perceive the kind of sensitivity that the author had on the need for our society to start recognising and appreciating the existence of the LGBT community. It has become imperative that we as individuals are made aware of the essential acknowledgement of the

existence of this community. The author has put forth a number of questions before us to start finding answers to in order to bring about a change that would be overwhelming for all in the society. Thank you for igniting a spark that must not be doused.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

A new cult following

Editor,
This refers to your thought-provoking editorial

activities. Singh is one of the several self-styled godmen and cult leaders to be embroiled in scandals in recent years. Today's gurus have built hundreds of ashrams across the globe and run flourishing businesses in everything from herbal medicine to meditation and yoga workshops. They travel in luxury cars, glide past airport security and are guarded by gun-toting police officers and bouncers.

As India becomes wealthier and increasing numbers of people feel left behind, they turn to gurus for spiritual and material

sustenance. The new generation of guru is, however, less the wandering ascetic, and more a powerful, flamboyant personality, often rich, and with the means to summon supporters on to the streets. Though health, well-being and spirituality are what they all profess, some like Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh have made it to the headlines for the controversy they create, like financial irregularities, sexual abuse and, sometimes, even murder. These modern-day mega-gurus are nothing like the wandering saints of ancient Hindu religious texts, who meditated and lived on

alms, renouncing all worldly possessions. Don't we think in the past two decades, spiritual life in the country has undergone a transformation as Indians embrace hectic urban lifestyles and move away from their cultural roots of village-based worship?

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad – 15

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.

"Illegal immigration is crisis for our country. It is an open door for drugs, criminals, and potential terrorists to enter our country. It is straining our economy, adding costs to our judicial, healthcare, and education systems."

--- Timothy Murphy

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 23 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2017

Climate Vows

INDIA has reminded rich nations of the pre-2020 climate goals. Business leaders and ministers from different countries are meeting in New Delhi to discuss how private business can work hand-in-hand with governments to achieve the goals set in the Paris Climate Pact. The goal is to extend beyond 2020. India's consistent stand on the issue was reaffirmed by Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan. He said that though India was fully committed to its climate actions under the Paris Agreement, it was critical and necessary that equal focus is given to pre-2020 actions by developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol. Speaking to a Global business and climate summit, Vardhan reminded rich nations of their commitment of providing effective finance, technology, transfer and capacity-building to support developing countries. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 and laid down binding targets for emissions reduction only for 38 developed countries.

The second commitment period extends from 2013 to 2020. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement is more comprehensive because of its universal application to all countries. The Paris commitments will be effective from January, 2021. Vardhan also made it abundantly clear that an agreement should be made on a timeline for early ratification of the second commitment period (2013-2020) of the Kyoto Protocol. Vardhan has also said that the private sector played an integral part in India's actions on climate change. He was happy that Indian industry had participated in voluntary carbon disclosure programs. However, success of the climate deal depended on developed countries. President Trump's attitude that the US had been conned was a speed-breaker.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Intl meet on Global Cooperation

An International Conference on Global Co-operation for a Better World will be held from Feb 11 to 13 at the Mount Abu (Rajasthan) headquarters of the organization the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. The Conference, to be attended by

about 2500 eminent persons from about 60 countries will have workshops for various professions and segments of society. The Conference is being preceded by an International Summit where about 80 eminent personalities from all over the world.

What about the Informal Workers?

By Sumarbin Umdor

The State government is all set to implement the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission bringing cheers to over 92 thousand regular government employees and pensioners but which will also raise salary burden by Rs. 1000 crore annually over current amount, that too just in the first year of its implementation. The pay hike is justified as employees of Central government and even state owned company like the Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited are already enjoying enhanced salary packages for some months now. So, while the welfare of workers in the organised sector (government and corporates) is well taken care of, what about those employed in the unorganised/informal sector?

Workers in the unorganised/informal sector comprise of those working in the unorganised enterprises or households (unincorporated private enterprises engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten workers), including casual/contract workers employed in the formal sector without access to employment and social security.

In our country, the percentage of those informally employed stands at 92 percent. A worrying trend is that over the years the share of informal workers in the organized sector has increased significantly because of a greater use of contract and other forms of casual labour as highlighted in the ILO India Labour Market Update (2016).

As per 2011 census in Meghalaya close to about 6.9 lakhs workers were engaged in agriculture with almost all of that employment being informal in nature, which is about 10 times the current number of serving state government employees. Those engaged in this sector face multitude of problems ranging from lack of access to inputs (fertilizer, etc) at affordable price, absence of storage and regulated markets, weak extension support, limited access to

finance, volatility of output prices- all of which causes hardship and distress to cultivators and farm labourers. While many of the above issues need long term policy measures, there are two areas where the state government can provide immediate relief to the farmers.

Although major agricultural products of the state are not covered under the minimum support prices (MSP) of the central government, there is an alternative mechanism called the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) implemented on the request of State Governments to provide price support to farmers for perishable and horticultural commodities in the event of a fall in market prices. The regular implementation of this scheme will save farmers in the state from incurring huge losses at times of price volatility of commodities. However, what dither state government in implementing this scheme is the condition that it has to contribute 25 per cent of the losses during procurement.

Recently, farmers in the state have demanded waiving of farms loans of Rs. 50000 borrowed under Kisan Credit Card Scheme (KCC) which many are unable to pay off due to low returns on agricultural produce. The total outstanding loans under KCC in Meghalaya at the end of March 2016 was about Rs. 308 crore which at present may have increased to about Rs. 400 crore. While loan waiver does not make sound economics and will only bring temporary relief to farmers, I wonder why the state should not occasionally indulge this hard working segment of the population, particularly when it does so to the government employees at regular intervals. Surely, the state government which is considering an expenditure of Rs. 4000 crore per year on salaries of its employees can mobilise

another 10 percent for the benefit of farmers of the state.

Let us turn now to informal employment in non-agricultural sectors where 78 percent of employment is informal in nature. In Meghalaya, the services sector accounts for a large percentage of the informal workers in the non-agricultural sector. An important legislation to protect the interest of the workers in the informal sector is the Minimum Wage Act of 1948.

Since labour is included in the concurrent list, the Act requires the appropriate government to fix minimum rates of wages in respect of employment specified in the schedule, and review and revise the minimum wages at intervals not exceeding five years.

When we review the minimum wages in Meghalaya which was revised in 2015, we find that the wages are probably among the lowest of the recently revised state minimum wages in the country. For example, the minimum wages for unskilled and skilled workers in Assam are Rs. 250 and Rs. 350 respectively, while in Mizoram they stand at Rs. 270 and 370. The corresponding wages for Meghalaya is Rs. 170 and Rs. 191. Many states have also introduced different rates for clerical and supervisory workers and are having more number of schedule employments than the 27 listed in Meghalaya.

The argument for increasing the minimum wages in Meghalaya is even more pressing as the State Fifth Pay Commission has recommended the minimum pay for its lowest category of government employees at Rs. 17400 per month (as on 1.01.2006) based on the norms suggested by the Indian Labour Conference in 1957 for fixing of minimum wage. Accordingly to the Commission, the above amount is required by a family of four members including the employee to meet basic needs of calories, clothing, housing, water, electricity, medical and entertainment to ensure a healthy and dignified

standard of living.

The proposed monthly minimum pay for Meghalaya government employees is almost four times the amount being paid to unskilled workers in the state at current wage rate. Even if we were to consider only essential need based items as per their cost and unit requirements tabulated and calculated by the State Fifth Pay Commission and also factor in the subsidised items provided under public distribution system, the minimum wage for unskilled worker in the state would still require to be raised by 50 percent just to enable a worker and his family to maintain half of the expected standard of the lowest rank state government employee.

While the benefit of the hike in minimum wages may not be enjoyed by informal workers in the unorganised sector due to enforcement and other issues, significant number of casual and contract workers employed by the government will be benefited if the minimum wages are raised by a substantial amount.

Besides wages, the state government should also consider other measures to protect the interest and welfare of the informal workers. Rajasthan has recently introduced labour reforms for domestic workers by setting working hours and other conditions to protect the interests of these workers. Similarly, other states have introduced accidental insurance policy covering private and commercial drivers who are constantly facing accident hazards.

So, at a time when the government of Meghalaya is considering spending Rs. 4000 crore on the nearly 69 thousand government employees, it should also spare some thoughts for the lakhs of informal workers in the state.

(The author teaches Economics at NEHU, Shillong)

Confusion on the educational qualification of Primary/Upper Primary School Teachers

By Torist Mark

This week we saw hundred of primary school teachers running helter-skelter from one office of the Education Department to another in the city, anxious to get clarification on the educational qualification of the teachers vide the latest amendment of the RTE Act, 2009. The teachers are naturally worried as they are made to understand that their job is at stake if they do not possess the required qualification by 2019.

Briefly the history of teachers' qualification as indicated in the RTE Act 2009 section 23 read is as follows: "23(1) Any person possessing such minimum qualifications as laid down by the academic authority, authorized by the central govt. by notification shall be eligible for appointment as teacher (2) Where the state does not have adequate institutions offering courses or training in teacher education, or teachers possessing minimum qualification as laid down under sub-section (1) are not available in sufficient numbers, the central govt. may, if it deems necessary, by notification, relax the minimum qualifications required for appointment as a teacher, for such period, not exceeding five years, as may be specified in that notification: provided that a teacher who at the commencement of this Act, does not possess minimum qualifications as laid down under sub-section (1) shall acquire such minimum qualifications within a period of five years

The academic authority authorized by the central govt. to prescribe qualification for teachers is the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE). Since 2001 the NCTE had issued four notifications in 2001, 2010, 2011 and 2014. In the 2001 Notification dated 4.9.2001 the qualifications were - For Primary (HSSLC and Diploma/certificate in teacher training of not less than two years OR Bachelor of Elementary Education). For Upper Primary (same qualifications as those of Primary above OR Graduate with Bachelor of Education). Since the state have no sufficient candidates with such qualifications, it appointed teachers with SSLC/HSSLC and provided in-service training to them. This continued till the implementation of the RTE Act 2009.

The NCTE vide their 2010 Notification dated 23rd August 2010 have revised the qualifications as follows: Para (1)-For classes I-V (HSSLC with 50% marks and 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education and pass the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET). For classes VI-VIII (Graduate with 2 year Diploma in EE OR Graduate with B.Ed and pass the TET). At para (4) of the notification, the relaxation of qualification of para(1) above are for the following categories of teachers - (a) teachers appointed on or after 3rd September 2001 under notification 2001 provided those with B.Ed or D.Ed shall undergo NCTE 6 month special programme in Elementary Education (b) teachers with B.Ed who has completed 6 month special BTC course approved by NCTE (c) teacher appointed before the 3rd September 2001 in accordance with the prevalent Recruitment Rules..

Again the NCTE vide their 2011 Notification dated 29th July 2011 have laid down similar qualifications as the 2010 Notification except a relaxation of 45 % marks for SC/ST. The latest NCTE notification on qualifications of teachers is notification dated 16th

December 2014. This we saw the 2014 Notification. It read "In the First Schedule, level 3. Primary and Upper Primary (classes I to VIII)- Minimum qualifications as laid down by NCTE vide Notification dated 23.8.2010 as amended from time to time, that is, Notification 2011.

In pursuance of the above notifications and ever since the RTE Act 2009 came into force, the state govt. have to prescribe the teachers qualification as indicated in the NCTE 2010 Notification. Teachers who are appointed after 1st April 2010 who do not possess the minimum qualification are given five years to acquire the minimum qualifications. This is as per sub-section (2) of section 23 of the RTE Act 2009.

Technically the deadline according to the Act ended in 31st March 2015 for all teachers appointed under the different NCTE Notifications. The state govt. have not been able to continue the training process for in-service untrained teachers hence have requested the Centre for extension of the period for training untrained teachers and the Centre have agreed to extend four years which will end in 31st March 2019.

The amendment 2017 to the RTE Act 2009 reads "Para 2. In the RTE Act, 2009 in section 23 in sub-section (2) after the proviso, the following proviso shall be inserted namely, 'provided further that every teacher appointed or in position as on the 31st March 2015 who does not possess minimum qualifications as laid down under sub-section (1) shall acquire such minimum qualifications within a period of four years from the date of commencement of the RTE Act, 2009.'

The present confusion arose out of the interpretation of the various NCTE Notifications and teachers recruited in different periods of time. Firstly, it is clear no teacher be appointed after April 2010 without conforming to the minimum qualification as prescribed by the NCTE notification 2011. If there are teachers without the prescribed qualification after that date they are given five years to acquire the minimum qualification prescribed and now they are given four more years which will end in 2019. Secondly, teachers appointed before April 2010 are governed by the various notifications of the NCTE and the relevant relaxation. Thirdly, neither the Act nor the Meghalaya Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011 mention anything about the fate of those teachers who fail to acquire the minimum qualification after the extended period. It is expedient to take a cautious approach in interpreting the various notifications without attracting legal implications.

It will be appreciated that the RTE Act attaches immense significance to the role of teachers in improving elementary education by making available professional trained teachers for the school system. The Govt. of India have assured that the expenditure relating to training of untrained teachers will be borne out of the approved allocation under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. The amount will be shared between the Central Govt. and the State Govt. in the ratio of 60:40 for normal states and 90:10 for North Eastern States.

The author is a former Director of Education, Govt. of Meghalaya

TO THE EDITOR

No railways for the state!

Editor,

This refers to the news report of August 31, 2017 where Union Minister for Railways, Rajen Gohain has blamed the state government for the railway deadlock in the state. It would be wrong to disagree with the statement, since the crisis was adamantly due to lackadaisical attitude of the government. This was further inflamed by the reaction and action of various NGO's. 21st century is an era of globalization and connectivity and accessibility are at the core of this momentous era. Political boundaries have lost their primacy since economic importance has taken over. In this regard we cannot blame railways as the sole culprit for bringing outsiders inside the state. Railways are just a means not an end in itself. In fact the real agenda is to question why these people are coming to our state and what is the attraction? Moreover, when we look deeper we might realize that we have issues only with poor migrants. The so called rich merchants have been flourishing in our state since ages and in fact we are dependent on them to fulfil the needs of our elite and style-conscious citizens in terms of apparels, footwear,

and more importantly, the food items. Some might argue with the example of Tripura where the tribal identity has been lost, but here also railways are not to blame. As we all know when partition happen during independence of India, Tripura was at a vulnerable location easily allowing Bangladesh migrants to cross over and the state capacity was limited at that time to manage such crisis and that's how it stands today.

Coming back to the question of why migrants are attracted towards our state, the answer is quite clear, E C O N O M I C OPPORTUNITIES and Ease of Doing Business with limited competition. Simple observation. We do witness in our everyday lives, shops managed by non-tribals flourish and expand as years go by, whereas the ones managed by local tribals keep diminishing in size. In the construction sector, our own tribal contractor often prefer non-tribal labourers due to devotion and hard work with limited wastage of time which proves beneficial for the house owner as well as contractor in term of cost and time. The same goes to privately own coal mining sector where non-tribals dominate the whole mining work. So what conclusions do we draw from this whole scenario? Should we say the reasons are that we are backward, less educated,

poor? I would rather say none of these. The main ingredients we are lacking I suppose is HARD WORK, and the best example we could assimilate is from the state of Mizoram - a small state but the tribal population of the state are dominating many business sectors.

In this globalized world it's not possible anymore to create barriers. The best solution is to arm ourselves and take up the challenge. Obstructing railway lines in the state is a wrong prescription for the wrong disease. As such without railways also we witness how migrants easily enter through other modes of transportation and the same will continue. Connectivity is the lifeline of development and highways are one of the cheapest modes of transferring freight and passengers. In recent times the announcement made by the Government to extend railway lines up to Shillong and Sohra can be considered as a positive move if it is realized. Such a move should be taken positively. We can explore opportunities in the form of various tourist circuits, hospitality sector, and travel and tours service, giving enough scope for employment and investment venture for entrepreneurs.

The migrant issue should be dealt with seriously vis-a-vis the international boundary, but intra-state

migration cannot be handled with the same parameters. Intra state migration can be a boon or bane depending on state functioning and vision, which also includes the citizen's perception. South Indian states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh have maintained their local identity and kept a stronghold in all sectors in the midst of large numbers of people coming from outside. This is a boon for the state and its people. Another scenario where it can become a bane is what is happening in our state, a perfect combo of government's languorous attitude and limited cognitive powers while blaming transport infrastructure to hide the slothful and work-shy attitude of our own people.

Yours etc.,
Sonic Kharduit
Shillong

Problem of E-Waste disposal

Editor,
This refers to your report "Pollution Board plans to check e-waste" (ST August 29, 2017). It clearly shows that technological revolution has brought a new threat to environment in the form of e-waste. The biggest challenge is to regularise the collection of

e-waste from consumers which requires a high level of awareness. E-waste must be recycled in order to conserve precious natural resources and avoid contamination. The opportunity of exchange and reselling must be provided by the companies to reduce the e-waste. The mounting waste that lie abandoned in our government offices reminds us of yet another problem snowballing into a grave environmental disaster. The government must come up with provisions to collect environmental tax from manufacturers who generate non-biodegradable waste like plastic.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad -15

Fallout of demonetisation

Editor,
RBI said it is all but 1.4 percent of the specified bank notes have come back into the banking sector post demonetisation. But the question remains unanswered whether black money is filtered out from the system. The opposition started commenting that demonetisation is a colossal failure. FM Arun Jaitley claims that it has had a positive impact. Depositing currency into banks does not mean they are legal tender.

The impact of demonetisation is yet to be established. The windfall gain by RBI was never an objective. While it has not yielded immediate gains but it led to increase of CASA (current account savings account) deposit. That enhanced liquidity position of the banks was utilised to bring down lending rates. A million pieces of counterfeit currency notes have been eliminated in one stroke. The financial inclusion of government flagship programme, Jan Dhan Accounts is now fulfilled. Lakhs of shell companies have been unearthed. A half crore of new tax payers have submitted their returns this financial year thereby netting in higher tax. Real estate prices have gone down. The objective was to formalise the economy, attack on terrorism, money laundering, a speed breaker for corruption and expanding digitisation. The trade and business with Pakistan has come under scanner of NIA. The biggest ever tax reform GST comes into effect. More is yet to come. Hope this will make India a stepping stone to becoming a world economic superpower in the long run.

Yours etc.
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Kashmir: Is it a paradox?

Media blow-up of incidents hits tourism in the country's paradise

By CK Navak

In Kashmir, it is generally said it is a 'mini-India', and indeed it is, whether you go by the past, present or future of the border state. Kashmir was said to be set up by Kashyap Rishi and hence the name. Earlier, it was ruled by Hindus, Muslims and even for a brief period by the Sikhs. So it is its demography in addition to the Buddhists in Ladakh.

Even when Jammu and Kashmir merged with India, the ruler was Hindu and the subjects were Muslim majority. Unlike any other state, Jammu and Kashmir has its own constitution and flag besides the Indian Constitution and the National Flag.

But this place, described as "the paradise on earth", is also a pot boiler with three nuclear powers sharing its territory and each claiming its own. Most parts of J&K belong to India after the merger of the former princely state. Some parts are occupied by Pakistan and the latter has ceded some territory to China, which is known as Aksai Chin.

The state is nearly normal today than what it was decades ago barring the exodus of Kashmiri Pundits. This has happened even though late Sheikh Abdullah's forefathers were Pundits who were converted during the Muslim rule.

But there was no sign of tension, either communal or insurgency, anywhere this correspondent went for a week last month.

Aam Aadmi, including sadhus, commute by buses which went to the pilgrimage side, Amarnath Yatra. Maszids give out blaring calls for daily prayers. Tourists are visiting the spots as usual. Shops and business establishments are open despite presence of heavy security all over.

But there is a difference. The number of tourists is less, especially who have come from outside the state even in this peak season. And the business establishment related to this industry is not doing good business because of that.

Tourism industry is taking a back seat creating concern among tour operators. Hotels are running with minimum reservation and boathouses dotting across the Dal lake are almost empty. The sikaras that ferry tourists are idle and the roadside vendors who sell goods and services to the flocking visiting tourists are having an empty look. Even the ponies that carry tourists and pilgrims are in poor health as their owners. There is not much income and so fodder is less.

Unfortunately, this is happening to a state whose bulk economy is dependent on tourism and virtually nothing else. The landlocked state has not much industry because of its landholding system. Outsiders cannot buy land and without land, no industry is coming to the state.

Being mostly hills, the state's agriculture output is also less. But the state used to earn huge money from tourism, both domestic and international, which has dried up now.



Surprisingly, the reason most say is a bad press. No news sometimes is called good news. But bad news is definitely worse. That is what is precisely happening to Jammu and Kashmir as a whole and its tourist spots in particular.

Huge publicity even to sporadic violent incidents is blown up by the media, mostly electronic, out of proportion. What follows worse is the evening TV debate with so-called experts who claim the situation in the sensitive border state as most volatile.

Surprisingly, this bad publicity is not given by the local media. "We send facts and in the evening they give dramatically opposite picture quoting so-called experts on the state some of them never even served here," said the local journalists. They are victims from all sides.

Back home the common tourists get frightened and change is his or her destination. And net loss is to the common man in Kashmir and its fragile economy depending heavily on sole source of income — tourism.

A visit to Pahalgam, one of the best tourist places in J&K, tells the whole story. Nestled in the terrorist affected Anantnag district gives no impression of disturbances at all. Tourists mostly from outside are few but move freely with no sign of tension anywhere.

"But the news mainly TV debates are killing us more than the terrorists," said one hotel owner to this visiting correspondent recently. But for fear of possible reprisal he does not give his name.

Pahalgam is a popular tourist destination and hill station located 45 km from Anantnag on the banks of the Lidder river at an altitude of 7,200 feet. It is associated with the annual Amarnath



(Top) Betab Valley in Anantanag and the Pahalgam market

Yatra.

Chandanwari, located 16 km away is the starting point of the yatra that takes place every year in the months of July-August.

Tourists are coming but in trickle, the hotelier said. They were coming in thousands, now they are few hundred. As a contrast, the Amarnath yatra

is on with common people and sadhus moving in groups.

But their number is also less since out of just fear not many are going on the once dream journey. "If this is the case of pilgrims what will happen to tourists," he asks.

Helicopters ferrying high-heeled Amarnath

tourists fly almost nonstop. But they are few and carrying capacity is also less.

The picturesque Pahalgam with its famous Betab Valley (named after Betab film) has everything to offer to a tourist. Apart from the sheer scenic beauty, the valley offers trekking, fishing, tenting, rafting, horse riding and everything else a tourist wants. It has some ancient temples and Jamia Masjid with river flowing at the back-ground.

But bad TV, locals insist, has turned tourists away from Kashmir to other destinations. "Historically Kashmir, known as the heaven of India, is the prime destination but now it has been reduced to stopover destination for tourists visiting Ladakh," the hotel owner said.

Bollywood film crews have cancelled shooting or have to shift the location to Ladakh or nearby states due to the situation in Kashmir. The number of tourist arrivals here has come down to around 200 to 250 per day from around 1,200 to 1,500 earlier.

Naturally, hotel occupancy is at an all-time low, and it ultimately has an impact on the overall economy. Ironically, even this year's bookings were there until September and good rush of domestic tourists in October were expected. But almost 90 per cent of online bookings were cancelled. This has happened despite all time low air fares and massive room discounts!

This has a cascading effect. Many hotel owners are not paying their staff and some even have asked them to leave. The tourist guides are sitting idle and the small shopkeepers and vendors have a grim look all they have. Since there are no tourists nobody is buying anything. Taxi drivers who used to earn at least RS 1,000 a day are now content with hundred.

Tourists return happily after visit and Kashmir continues to be the safest place for women visitors but turmoil is turmoil and isolated violent incitements are blown out of proportion which scares them. Even simple law and order problem are given insurgency or at times communal colour which gives a negative image.

Even the pilgrim footfall has gone down. So far not more than 2.5 lakh pilgrims have kept their date with the cave. The arrivals fell to a trickle after an attack one of the buses in July. Kashmir is a place that does not require publicity but despite best of efforts the visitors are much less. Hotels have slashed tariffs but still there are no takers.

Luckily one of the main sources of survival these days is the local visitors. Schools come for picnics and these parks are filled and some money goes to the market, especially to the small business. But even earlier we used a continuous flow of the local tourist but now it is only on weekends.

Unlike other tourist's areas Pahalgam and other spots give a variety of entertainment besides the lovely snow capped hills and ever flowing rivers. While the hills offer sports like trekking, hiking, hot air balloons and paragliding the rivers offer rafting, fishing and camping facilities. There are historic temples as well as mosques for spiritual visitors.

But despite the plethora of natural beauties available in plenty in the state, many complained about the bad publicity which has ruined tourism, the main source of the state's economy, and indirectly, this has added fuel to insurgency since unemployed youths are resorting to arms. Again this is having a cascading effect on the picturesque state and its beautiful people.

Choose the life of an officer

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the best career options for any individual is none other than joining the defence forces. When we talk about defence forces, they include Army, Navy and Air Force.

Indian Army offers different things to aspirants, like professional advancement, job satisfaction, job security, economic stability, social status, quality of life, variety and adventure.

The Army offers both permanent and short service commissions (SSC). Permanent Commission (PC) is granted through the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehra Dun and Short Service Commission (SSC) is granted through Officers Training Academy (OTA) in Chennai.

Recruitment of commissioned officers in the armed forces is mainly through the Union Public Service Commission under permanent commission. For technical branches, women special entry scheme and NCC special entry scheme and service, recruitment is made directly through respective recruiting directorates for the army under SSC.

Selection for permanent commission through 10 + 2 NDA/Indian Naval Academy cadet entry and CDSE (Graduate) entry is through a written examination conducted by UPSC, followed by an interview by the Service Selection Board (SSB).

For all other Permanent Commission and SSC entries there is no written examination. These applications are shortlisted as per the criteria laid down by the Naval Headquarters, Directorate of Manpower Planning and Recruitment.

Women are granted SSC in Naval Architect, Law, Logistics, ATC, Aviation (Observer) and Education Branches.

The government has also given approval for permanent commission in Education, Law and Naval Architect on completion of SSC tenure depending upon merit and vacancy.

The best way is to join Indian Air Force as an officer because one can inherit a glorious heritage and timeless tradition of IAF, blended perfectly with the



latest technology.

As an officer in the Air Force one will strategise, lead and manage. Depending on one's qualifications, one could join one of the various branches in IAF. Broadly the Air Force has three branches with further sub-streams and the branches are flying (fighters, transports, helicopters), technical branch/aeronautical engineering (mechanical, electronic), ground duty branch (administration, accounts, logistics, education, meteorology).

There are two types of commission in IAF, which are Permanent Commission and SSC. Aspirants may opt for permanent commission or short service commission in Air Force.

Students or job aspirants may browse the official website of Army, Navy and Air Force for all job updates and other opportunities. Do not listen to any person who promises to give jobs as most are frauds and they take money and run away. For updates and

jobs, aspirants must look at the newspaper advertisements and official websites of defence forces. There is also entry for soldiers, airmen and sailor, apart from above mentioned officers' entry.

Updates

Greece Scholarships: The State Scholarships Foundation of Greece (IKY) is offering 50 scholarships to foreign nationals, including Indians, for attending courses and seminars in Greece in the Modern Greek language and culture. Last date for sending application is September 6.

The CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology, Jorhat, has instituted a scholarship scheme for the students of the North East for bachelor degree programme in natural/basic sciences at B.Sc, B.Sc (Hons), integrated M.Sc/MS programs in any one of the recognised institutions in India. Last date for applying is September 15.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 for any career related queries)

Architects of the Nation

By Uma Purkayastha

Teachers are the main architects of the nation. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of Independent India, and one of the most eminent philosophers and teachers of the world, said, "No subject is dull or hard if the teacher is not dull or hard". He also said, "Our educational institutions are devoid of all cheers and joy; and therefore, whatever a teacher does must be with a song in his heart to rejoice in the noble mission of teaching".

As a great educational reformer, his theory was that, a teacher should try to equalize his mind and soul with that standard of the children, whom he teaches; and read their mind, their likings and dislikes etc to make teaching effective.

Rabindranath Tagore, who was also a great educational reformer, said, "So long the teachers cannot create a joyful eagerness in the students' mind, teaching will be unsuccessful; and it will be only imposition of some subjects on the children's brain which will never help them in their mental development."

He always preached for liberty in education, as he felt from his own experience during his childhood. He became a school dropout at the age of 13 due to heavy pressure of rude rules and bindings of schools which had kept him imprisoned within the stone walls of lessons and punishment.

He said, "Due to excessive; pressure of learning multipurpose subjects, and fear of punishment, the children always feel tensed; and become victim of mental imbalance.

They become abnormally rude and peevish, and revolt in trifling matters. Though they learn something, and become educated; but at the cost of their

spontaneous gayness and simplicity of childhood."

So it is a necessary quality of the teachers to make the teaching atmosphere joyous to attract the students to be eager to know something new. But practically we find, loud scolding, and merciless beatings etc are the handy tools of most of the teachers, which could help some students' reach the top but could have blunting effect on many; and increase the number of school dropouts.

The educational reformers, time to time, raised their voice against such punishment, and explained how do the children suffer from fear psychosis, to go to school, because of such terrible punishment. Not only physical punishment, sometimes mental harassment by the teachers creates more phobia among the students which results school dropouts.

A teacher's responsibility is not only to teach the lessons of the school curriculum, but to lead the children towards advancement and development of their mind through innovative processes. A good teacher can mesmerize even the delinquent children, like a magician, with his wonderful wand of skilled teaching. Where the parents fail, the teacher succeeds, if he can deal the child psychologically and sympathetically.

Many dedicated teachers are there in the private schools, rendering sincerest service to the students, but in the old age when they retire from service, they leave with empty hands.

The Teachers' Day celebration by the government will be more significant if the teachers' community as a whole gets benefits like monthly pension and medical allowances after retirement. And that will be the best tribute to the Great Teacher, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, whose birthday is celebrated as Teachers' Day.

'Corruption in NE needs to be tackled'

The genesis of the Mizo National Front was a crisis that went unheeded in the mainland as well as in the North East. And it ended in a peace accord that became exemplary in solving insurgency in the North East.

But the scar that the two decades of strife left on the Mizos, a homogenous ethnic group, lasted for years that followed.

The documentary, *Rambuai: Mizoram's 'Trouble' Years*, looks back at the blood-stained past of the state and inquires about the impact of the upheavals on the future generation.

Directed by Maullee Senapati and produced by **SANJOY HAZARIKA** and Preeti Gill, the documentary is an initiative by the Centre for North East Studies (C-NES), New Delhi.

"The documentary is a step towards starting a conversation on the issue. Not much has been said about the 20 years of conflict and torture in the state," said Hazarika after the screening of the film in a city hotel recently.

In the documentary, Hazarika, the interviewer, asks the youth what effect the MNF movement had on them during their formative years. While some said there was an unsaid silence on the issue that restricted them from forming their views at a younger age, others wanted to forget the past and invest in a brighter future.

However, the armed struggle that prompted the Indian Government to retaliate with equal force traumatised the older generation. The case of massacre, in which the Indian Air Force was sent to butcher a bunch of hungry and desperate villagers, still haunts the elderly in Mizoram.

Villages vanished, youths were tortured and people, who hitherto lived as a close-knit community depending on jhum cultivation, were forced to migrate to other northeastern states.

As the former MNF leaders introspected on the movement, two senior army officers, now retired, admitted to the mistake of the army strategy used during the crisis. One of the officers even went to the extent of supporting an MNF member's wish for an apology from the Indian Government for the sake of long-term peace.

Hazarika also interviews the family of Laldenga, who led MNF and later became the chief minister of Mizoram after the peace accord was signed. As a former MNF member hints at the banality of the movement that had to end without "true freedom", Diki Laldenga, the leader's wife, argues that there were resentments among the Mizos but in the long run, the peace accord proved



A scene from *Rambuai* and Hazarika after the screening

TALKING POINT

to be the right direction.

Many in the audience, like documentary filmmaker Tarun Bhartiya, felt that the film should have gone into the depth of the subject. "We had travelled extensively during the shoot of the film. We had also visited the places where once there were villages. However, we had just 44 minutes to deliver our message," explained Hazarika.

A word of encouragement came from another city-based filmmaker and professor at IIM Shillong, Sanjeeb Kakoty, who lauded Hazarika's efforts to open up discussion on the issue. He also hoped that more works would be done on the topic. The film will be screened next at the Literary Festival in Bangalore in October.

The Shillong Times caught up with Hazarika, who grew up in the hill city, after the screening of Rambuai and spoke on various issues in the North East, including protests for Inner Line Permit in Shillong and the ensuing ballot battle in Meghalaya. Excerpts from the interview:

Has NE become more a stranger to India now than before?

No people are aware of the culture, music and tradition of various ethnic groups in the North East. Many youngsters are moving to the mainland for work, studies etc. Well, how deep the

knowledge is about the region is questionable. But we have to also see how people in the North East behave with those living in the mainland.

About Shillong, the demand for ILP is again getting louder. Will these groups go too far to create the spectacle again?

The issue crops up before every election. There is nothing new about it. The movement for ILP is not sustainable. Everybody has equal rights and there are special clauses which protect the rights of the indigenous people. It is basically how you treat people.

Do you think like Mizoram, peace accords in other states should also work?

Peace accords can work if they have a buy in from three significant groups: the principal stakeholder, which is the government at the Centre and state levels; the opposing group (especially if they are united and not divided, otherwise divisions will spawn charges of sellout and further splits when agreements are reached) and CSOs or those seeking to build long-term peace and stability without self-interest. The last point is very important. The role of women in this entire process is critical and often missing. That is what we need to ensure — that peace processes

I'd like to travel down the river again, stopping in place after place to understand how things are changing in the lives of the people who dwell on its flood plains, how are their lives changing, their cultures of music and economic sustenance, the songs they sing, the clothes they weave; also the ecosystems the Brahmaputra nourishes and how government planners and politicians are getting it completely wrong in turns of controlling and managing our water resources. Maybe a film, or several films or essays or photos and a photo essay. It can be many things.

You have written extensively about time zone. With the Centre rejecting as unfeasible what is your opinion?

There has been extensive research by many people on the necessity of a different time zone and based on this the suggestion was made. A person travelling from Delhi or anywhere in the mainland to the North East would gain business hours if the time zone is changed. Also, a separate time zone will also help push forward the present government's Act East Policy because the North East is closer to those neighbouring countries than the mainland.

What are the aspects/areas in the NE which need to be more in focus?

Those which are in focus such as failing or fractured infrastructure need to remain in focus, especially in terms of delivery of projects and time lines. Corruption needs to be tackled firmly but I don't see that happening and a process of accommodating different ethnic and political viewpoints by turning first to dialogue not to the gun as a first resort.

I would really seek to impress upon people that the issue of illegal migration and Bangladeshis should not be mixed up with that of migrants and settlers from other parts of India. It should not be mixed up also on the basis of religious composition. These are completely different issues.

There's been so much emotion and rhetoric on this issue that it's difficult to think rationally on it — Bangladeshis are those who came after Bangladesh became independent in 1971. Not before. Secondly, we need to understand that a lot of the political pressures that are building up in the NE not just Assam are over land disputation and the perception of land as not just a resource but the foundation of ethnic and identity mobilization and formation.

In every significant challenging situation in the region, you will find that pressure on land as a finite resource

sought after by many different groups. Those with money power and political clout — as well as weapons (the region is awash in illegal small arms and no one seems to be doing anything about controlling this vast, lethal trade) — call the shots. But it would help to note also that many of the accusations about illegal migrants and land pressure flow from the fact that settlers (many of whom have been around for generations, not just decades) use the land as part of a market economy: for growing surplus food/crops/products and connecting field to markets for purposes of profit; many local communities on the other hand still grow for their own needs and there's little that's changed in the cycle of self-sustenance and enduring poverty. This is another key reason for internal confrontations over land.

Are you watching the events in the run-up to the polls in NE states? What are your views on Meghalaya? Let's see how the next months go.

Which project(s) is close to your heart? What is your dream project?

The project on the boat clinics (www.cnes.org) on the Brahmaputra which reach nearly half a million people with healthcare on the islands of the Brahmaputra. I conceived, designed, developed and implemented it and led it for years arranging a tie-up with NHM and the Assam government so the stakeholders have a buy-in. I am deeply grateful for the way our teams work so hard with such dedication and courage through the year, in fair weather and foul. This is the way to cover the last miles for a million people if not a billion. Then there's the Brahmaputra community radio station (BCRS) in Dibrugarh which has won national and international awards — run by a dedicated team with little training in journalism but one of the best in the business, broadcasting in three languages.

I am planning to write a book on the Brahmaputra and have completed one on the North East which essentially looks at the region and its neighbourhood 20 years after I wrote *Strangers of the Mist*. And I'd like to write a book on Mizoram.

Do you think tribals in the NE are better off than those in the mainland?

They are. People in the North East are more educated and conscious about their rights. They are in control of things. The tribals in other parts of the country like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are worse off.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 3, 2017

Neptune parallel Sun on your solar return chart indicates mixed developments. While you may get an opportunity to start new work, you are also likely to face some problems. You may have to depart with some friends. Your extended family members may cause you some problems too. If you are not patient, you may develop some bad habits this year. It will become harder for you to control your anger and ego, which can cause some harm to your reputation as well as your finances. At the same time, you will get the blessings of your guru and learned people.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This phase brings glory, gains and success in professional and personal relations. You will express yourself with charm and grace as you are exceptionally articulate and your writing takes on a poetic quality about it. You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. Looking within at your values and beliefs gives you insight and direction. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining a balance in all areas of life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted successfully. You are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you come across as especially cooperative. There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved one. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would improve your professional and personal relations, as you express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner. There could be alterations in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. You can be lead away by enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. You are just, fair and generous in family and professional situations. Your sense of humor helps you out of difficult situations. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with overseas contacts. You are likely to get business and work opportunities from overseas and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you. At this time your heart is where the home is. You may be tempted to spend lavishly on things that make your life more comfortable and pleasant. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining balance in all areas of life.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are frank, outspoken and can be undiplomatic on occasions. Political correctness and diplomacy are the call of the hour. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations this week. You put in a lot of efforts and then find that this has established a strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve goals. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Romantic notions start to take on a realistic shape.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It's a great time to exert your personal influence where it can prove to be beneficial with the larger picture in view. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. This helps you build your self-confidence and

strengthen your financial position. You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you during the week. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. You extend your hospitality to family and expenses rise this week on purchase of luxurious household items. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at work.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You wield power and authority most effectively as you bring perspective and order in chaotic situations at work and home. You gain money and influence through business ventures. Success brings rank and respect as you dominate the professional scene. You win appreciation of people in senior position and this opens the doors of new opportunities. You carry yourself with confidence and style that attracts much attention and draw attention of interesting people around you. You would express yourself with charm and grace in professional life and this brings financial gains and new contracts. You feel full of energy and indulge in sports, physical activities and a structured exercise routine.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This brings success, glory and cordial relations with family and loved ones. Cooperation and focus on harmony and understanding benefits you professionally and enhances your reputation and public relations. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity this week. You are more rational when it comes to financial matters. You need to drop comparisons and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling of inadequacy and stress. You would regroup your energy and thoughts and focus on the basics.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You extend hospitality to family and friends as you entertain and organize meetings and get-togethers. You would perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation and favor from seniors. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. You would have a positive feel towards spiritualism. You are passionate in what you do, although you display self-discipline with people around you. It's also a good time to break bad habits.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Confidence, pleasure, and a deeper involvement in personal and professional relations comes to the fore. This enhances work opportunities for people in the creative line, marketing, arts, show business and related fields. A romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. This is a time where you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships in family and loved ones. Socializing and making new contacts could help to boost your career. A healthy lifestyle and fitness remain on your agenda.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would face new circumstances, changes and unfamiliar situations. A positive approach and well chosen words would benefit. You may take up new assignments and projects that would incorporate and utilize your ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. You incorporate and utilize your ideas. You would be loving and appreciative of the love you receive especially from children. Romance heightens your personal magnetism.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You feel the fragile bond of friendship, romance and love in personal relations. You curb your natural reaction to situation and focus and gather information and take care not to hurt any relationship. You will be needed to provide inputs and your presence may also be required at home and work and you will have to divide your attention according to priorities. It is time to heal friendships with tender, love and care. You may also display more responsibility towards your family and take them for outings. Your thoughts turn to philosophy and worship during this time. The fine arts are inviting and involving as you channel your creative energy into it. This is a good time to organize yourself and your thoughts and attend your health and well-being.



and narratives are not driven by a patriarchal hierarchy but include the voices of those who often suffer the most in times of conflict — women and children.

What are the C-NES projects on the anvil?

Right now our hands are full but one proposal is a research-led study on the trade and economic policies that are driving the Act East Policy and what difference it is making on the ground, if any, as well as connectivity to the neighbourhood.

We are also doing a project on the Brahmaputra water basin with Sasi Waters that looks at how local communities view key issues of water management. The Brahmaputra is a space, if one can call it that, that has enchanted, challenged and been very much a part of me for all my life.

CFSI's journey to NE

The Children's Film Society India (CFSI) recently held a film bonanza in Meghalaya that started from Tura in West Garo Hills and travelled to Ampati in South West Garo Hills and Williamnagar in East Garo Hills. CFSI CEO **Shravan Kumar** says about the journey to the North East, paucity in children's films in the region and other issues. Excerpts



What made you decide to build a version of the International Children Film Festival for North East India?

We have in the past organised many films festivals and events for children and undertook extensive exhibition activity. Over the period we have learnt that such an initiative binds them closer to the country and its people, when we showcase various CFSI films, which essentially cover the entire gamut of the culturally rich country. To extend our initiatives so far, we decided to bring this as a precursor to our upcoming 20th Golden Elephant, ICFI, we came to Nagaland.

There has been a paucity in children's films and stories in the North East throughout the festival here. How this issue can be addressed?

The North East has a huge talent pool, both in terms of production and acting. We have in the recent past seen many professionals coming up and focusing upon film-making and especially around the subjects and issues related to North-East. For example, a recent CFSI film ISHU, made around the social evil of witch-hunting is a classic example. We at our end plan to encourage the filmmakers from the North East working towards this cause.

We read about the overwhelming success and outreach of the Children Film Bonanza being held every year in all states of northeast India what is your vision behind doing such screenings and festivals in these states?

Our CFSI Film Bonanza has been a

great success with lakhs of children having been covered through this initiative. We will continue and escalate this in the NE states in India apart from covering the rest of the country.

Mostly film making is not highly considered as a career choice for children, what do you think we can do to help them understand that this can be a full-fledged career option?

Films were a taboo in yesteryears, but gone are those days. Today's media and outlets of expressions have grown multi-fold along with a change in the mindset and perceptions of the parents. You have more devices like mobile phones that allow children to experiment with their expressions and produce creativity.

Today, you have an internet that allows children to build their knowledge base and learning, which can then be applied to film-making.

And there are many opportunities to learn and upgrade their skills apart from the institutions like CFSI, which has been tirelessly and in committed fashion working towards this cause and especially in the last 5 years. With more and more experts from the current film fraternity moving towards this cause will result into a higher impact.

Khasi film on top 15 list at Assam fest

Khasi short film *Ki Lum Ki Kyang* (The Hills Cry), co-directed by Nongstoin-based Rinaldi Kharbani and Dominic Marwein, has found a place among the top 15 films in the competitive category of the Brahmaputra Valley Film Festival 2017.

Ki Lum Ki Kyang is the only film from Meghalaya that has been chosen.

The film is a fiction based on the issues arising in Meghalaya post Independence. It portrays the turmoil arising out of the changing mode of administration, corruption, illiteracy, fear of losing indigenous tribal identity and other issues that were a result of pre-western colonialism.

The film also shows how the same issues can fuel the future generation and lead to further disorientation and confusion.

Ki Lum Ki Kyang will be screened at the Brahmaputra Valley Film Festival in Guwahati, to be held on September 15-17. The result for the top three films from among the chosen 15 will be declared on the last day of the festival.

The directors have further added and shared their intentions of making a full feature film version of *Ki Lum Ki Kyang*. The project is likely to be taken up by end of the year.

The film is produced by Phyrnailin Myrthong and the cast members include Spainlang Sunn, Spatsingh Marngar, Phines Nongshillong and the residents of Mawkhiat village, Rambrai.

“Try to understand men. If you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and almost always leads to love.”

--- John Steinbeck

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 25 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2017

Modi's cabinet rejig

THERE was much speculation about Assam BJP's strongman Himanta Biswa Sarma joining the reconstituted Modi cabinet but Sarma himself clarified that his services are needed in the state. Biswa Sarma is heading the North East Development Agency (NEDA) a forum aimed at pushing the BJP mandate into the seven states of the North East. Manipur and Assam are already BJP-ruled states. Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura are going to the polls next year and Biswa Sarma has a huge task at hand. Should he be able to deliver these states to the BJP, his future in the Party is well scripted. Meanwhile speculations were also doing the rounds that Conrad Sangma of the National Peoples' Party (NPP), and Neiphiu Rio of the Naga Peoples' Front (NPF) both affiliates of the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre might be inducted but Modi has other plans.

The Modi Government is looking at delivery and will become heavily reliant on ministers who can deliver. That Rajiv Pratap Rudy the minister in charge of Skills Development was dropped suggests that the Department which was meant to create a buzz had failed to do so in the last three years. This is a critical ministry dealing with skilling youth for entrepreneurship but gauging from the outcomes something is missing. The fact that former bureaucrats and former police officers are now inducted into the Ministry means that Modi is looking at experienced hands as opposed to those with no administrative experience. Hardeep Singh Puri a former Ambassador at the United Nations – a man with vast experience as a diplomat has been brought in, possibly for a better understanding of international affairs, in the light of India's growing clout in the comity of nations.

Amongst the much speculated portfolios was Defence held by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. This has now gone to former Commerce Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman even while Suresh Prabhu will now head the Commerce Ministry. One minister in the NDA who is known for his hard work and dedication is Piyush Goyal who held the Power Ministry. He will now look after the Railways ministry which has been under the scanner for the many rail accidents that have come in quick succession. The Power Ministry has now gone to Raj Kumar Singh. Modi's signal to his team is “Perform or Perish. He is taking no chances for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Regional Alliances: Agenda 2018 or Goal 2023?

By H H Mohrmen

The two major regional parties' alliance is now a reality and after the seat sharing and selection of candidates is completed, the next important task that the alliance needs to come up with is a document which will include agreed list of agenda that the alliance would take to the people in the next election. Whatever it is called - common minimum program, agenda or Goals for 2023, it is mandatory for the regional party alliance to agree on a workable document that will serve as a blue print or a road map for the alliance to take on a priority basis if and when they come to power.

To begin with, let us try to understand the phrase 'regional aspiration' which is often quoted by the leaders and supporters of different regional parties and perhaps, the only reason that the regional parties are still around is also because of the aspirations that need to be realized or fulfilled. But the question is, what exactly is that regional aspiration. Do the people of Meghalaya still have a dream for the state and its people which is unique to the state alone?

The dream of having our own state is one common aspiration of the people and now that we have achieved our dream of having our own separate hills state, what next? Or have we stopped dreaming as a people? Don't we have any other dreams for our state which are unique? Or is the goal of having our own hill state the only objective we have and now our new goal is bifurcation of the same state for the creation of a separate Garo and Khasi Jaintia hills state. Are we destined to rotate on this same vicious cycle? Is that all that we can think of? The regional parties exist because there are still goals which are unique to the state and its people that need to be accomplished and also because people also evolve and their dreams and aspiration also change. It can be concluded that regional aspiration is a common dream(s) of the people for their state.

To be able to identify those shared dreams the first think that we need to do is to identify where our strength as a community lies? What is so unique about this state? Maybe the two strengths that are unique to the state are (a) the culture of the people and (b) the land that we call home. Without these two we are no different from others. The other main aspect that is unique is our

environment including the climate of the region which helps shape our culture, tradition and our way of life. These and few other features help define who we are and they are also aspects which make us distinct and unique from the others.

Since the idea of a separate Garo and Khasi Jaintia state is still a distant dream, at least for the next five years we need to come up with a plan for the state of Meghalaya as a whole. One of the major factors which defines us is the fact that agriculture is still the main livelihood activity of

“ The document should also give direction on the alliance policy towards promotion of sustainable tourism which will help create employment for the youths. We need to protect the pristine environment (which is our only USP) and also emphasise on preserving the myriad cultures of the area. ”

the majority of people in the state. Therefore the document should provide a direction on the alliance's agriculture policy which should be region specific. It should also take into consideration the traditional wisdom of farming and our own seasonal calendar which is again unique to the land and its people. A policy should be created on the strength of the Khasi-Pnars' indigenous knowledge system which is also mountain agriculture specific.

Therefore sustainable agriculture is another option in the offing for the alliance to explore. Sustainable agriculture also means giving due emphasis to Agro-ecology which means strengthening our traditional agriculture which is originally organic in the first place. Relearning the best practices that our ancestors used in agriculture and other activities and preserving our traditional seeds to maintain crop diversity is also part of sustainable agriculture. Value addition to the agriculture products to create more employment in the villages and ensuring market linkage of the products is another thrust area that alliance needs to focus.

sinks, water retainers, and all it is that trees are supposed to do, generally being good for environment to becoming threats to human life and property, should they not be removed? Is an entire forest of trees worth the life of a loved one? These are the questions that linger in my mind and through this medium I hope to raise similar concerns in the minds of like-minded people.

Yours etc.,
Michael Syiemiong
Shillong -3

Pre-emptive action needed

Editor,
We have not yet recovered from the shock of the tragic event on August 13 where three innocent lives were lost due to the collapse of a tree from the Governor's compound. Since then there have been cases of other trees falling onto the road endangering the lives of people. Months ago I had written about the need to cut down such dangerously leaning trees

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie,
Via email

Apart from agriculture, livestock rearing is one our strength and even if the activity is being practiced only for sustenance, we can conclude that rearing animals is part of our livelihood activity. In the past a rich family in the village is being identified by the number of cattle they have, which means that people already have some knowledge in the trade. Meat processing is another major thrust area that the government should concentrate and rather than fighting illegal export of cattle to Bangladesh we should think of exporting

processes meat to our neighbours in the south. The environment which ironically also abounds in minerals also raises a question whether 'to mine or not to mine?' And the pertinent question that we need to ask is even if we mine our minerals; how do we go about it knowing that it will destroy the environment - the very place we call home. And if we destroy the environment we also destroy the beauty of this land for which we are all proud of. The nature and the environment around us is intrinsic part of our lives. When our poets sing about our land, they praise the beauty of the rolling hills, the crystal clear waters and the clean and fresh air that blows along across. They do not sing about the big houses, the big and expensive cars that we have and branded clothes that we wear, because that is not what defines us.

And when we are away, we always long to come back to hills because we are part of the hills and the hills are part of us and they always stay within us, therefore the question is can we allow mining at the cost of nature and the environment that defines us? Who are the Khasi-Pnars without the nature and environment which they call mother and their home? Mining should

be with due care and concern for the environment. The state should therefore come up with a policy which would see that minimum damage is done to the environment. Our claim to be educational hub of the north east is gone, the sheen has been taken away by Guwahati. We will never be able to beat Guwahati anymore on this. If at all we still want to promote Meghalaya as a hub for Education, we need to introspect and come up with new ideas. We need to encourage institutions which provide new courses or programs, there is no need of starting engineering colleges because we already have plenty of engineers now who are not employed or semi employed. There is also no need of starting institutes which teach nursing and other paramedical courses because we already have nurses, lab technicians and even physiotherapist in plenty and it is the same scenario all over the country. Perhaps medical institutes are viable because this is one profession that is lacking in the country.

The document should also give direction on the alliance policy towards promotion of sustainable tourism which will help create employment for the youths. We need to protect the pristine environment (which is our only USP) and also emphasise on preserving the myriad cultures of the area. Ecotourism should also include cave tourism, adventure tourism and culture tourism. Meghalaya should not only target to be another hill station in the country. It should also try to attract tourists from Bangladesh and better still (as the former DC of Jaintia Hills, FR Kharkongor suggested) if we can sell Meghalaya as the nearest hill station for the diplomats who are working in Bangladesh.

Obviously, the people who live in the state and the land where we live is our strength and as long as we know how to take care of the two we will be fine. In a random manner these are some of the pointers to the proposed document. Hopefully it will help provide the state with a direction where the alliance plans to take Meghalaya in the next five years.

government wants the services of the deceased only while he/she is alive. Hence the proposal of the 3rd Meghalaya Pay Commission for appointment on compassionate grounds is much awaited. The issues pertaining to the grievances of Meghalaya State Government Employees are relevant. What we are getting now is obsolete, considering the rise in prices of essential commodities, high cost of renting accommodation and so on. We are therefore compelled to urge the government to look into our demands leniently. So, whatever the 5th Meghalaya Pay Commission has recommended is to be implemented for greater interest of the employees. We shall continue to strive for our demands.

Yours etc.,
Waillingstone N.Marak
Organising Secretary,
AMDMOA
Garo Hills Region
Tura

Modi should push for intensive collaboration of brics Ninth summit must draw a roadmap for broader partnerships

By Nitya Chakraborty

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is participating at the Ninth Summit of the BRICS nations-Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - at Xiamen city in China on September 3 to 5 this year. Mr. Modi is leaving for China following the easing of tensions at the Doklam area of India-Bhutan-China border and this gives the Indian Prime Minister a good opportunity to have effective bilateral discussions with his host Chinese President Xi Jinping. During the recent G-20 summit, the atmosphere at the border at Doklam was surcharged and there was no initiative on the part of anyone to have a bilateral meeting to discuss the border issue. But on the eve of the BRICS summit, the standoff is over and Chinese officials have indicated how important it is for them to widen economic relations with China.

It is to be acknowledged that the sudden softening of the Chinese position had to do with the coming BRICS meeting to be hosted by China and the growing business opportunities for the Chinese companies in India. China could not afford to keep the logjam for long in the interests of further expansion of their investments and trade in India. That is a positive development for India also since despite demands from some quarters, the Modi government did not put any restrictions on Chinese business activities during the period of Doklam standoff. Indian policy makers knew that the tensions will be contained by China and despite provocative statements in their media, Chinese government will not opt for the path of confrontation.

Indian Prime Minister is therefore in an advantageous position politically at the BRICS summit. India has shown restraint and China has retraced its steps. The ground is fertile to take this understanding forward by expanding areas of cooperation in the interests of both the countries as also other members of the BRICS. Among the member nations, Indian PM is better placed to play a pro active role at the summit to impart a big push to the cooperation. Brazil President Temer is under cloud and he is facing corruption charges in his country's Parliament. South African President Zuma has just scraped through a non confidence vote in the SA parliament but his credibility is low. Both Brazil and South Africa are faced with serious economic crisis. Chinese president Xi Jinping is facing his Communist Party Congress later this year and he has to make a success of the BRICS summit to vindicate his leadership capabilities before the delegates at the Congress. Russian President Putin is still isolated in Europe on Ukraine issue and his equation with the US president Donald Trump, has not yet clicked.

That way, most of the BRICS nations are not in the best of times. Indian PM can therefore play a vital role in leading BRICS summit to evolve some strategy which will give a big push to the economies of the member countries. China, as a host has set the theme of the Ninth Summit as BRICS: Stronger Partnership for Bigger Future". China expects that the Xiamen summit will promote members strengthening solidarity and collaboration

as also improving global governance. Chinese President wants that the BRICS cooperation will progress to a new level after this summit and BRICS will emerge as a very influential platform for South- South cooperation. Cooperation among the emerging market bloc will push forward the establishment of a more fair and rational international order.

India fully subscribes to this view and at the last Goa summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned that the process of institution building in BRICS must continue to remain a focus area and the institutions must support the development of the BRICS members. Modi also mentioned of emphasis on digital technology, smart cities, urbanization and collaboration between BRICS cities. He said that the next billion internet users will come from the emerging markets. The Goa declaration at the Eighth BRICS summit called for a number of actions by the BRICS members in 2017 and India has been consistently urging the members to follow up those as a part of their joint efforts to foster cooperation among the members. The most important is the proposal to set up a BRICS credit rating agency. Presently the US rating agencies Moody's Investor Services and Standard & Poor dominate the rating market and they have in many cases, taken a partisan view in rating the economies of the developing countries. Like the setting up of New Development Bank under BRICS, an independent rating agency will be of big use to the BRICS members and the agency can be of help to the other developing countries outside the BRICS.

India wants that work on the setting up of the BRICS Credit Rating Agency be speeded up and like New Development Bank, it should start playing a crucial role in helping the economies of the developing countries. Further, India also emphasizes the need for building BRICS Agriculture Research centre, BRICS Railway Research centre and BRICS Sports Council. Apart, Indian position is that there is a clear need to build norms, create structure and pool capacities to stop tax evasion and fight against black money and corruption. India favours the doubling of intra BRICS trade from US \$ 250 billion in 2015 to US\$ 500 billion in 2020. This requires businesses of five member nations to step up their engagement in a big way. The geo political reality is that the US foreign policy is unpredictable and what ever sweet words, the US President Donald Trump says about India and Modi, in reality what exactly, Trump will do nobody knows. India should maintain its strategic relations with Russia and try to improve further its relations with China. Indian PM should try to remove misgivings among the Chinese about India's closeness to USA. An understanding between India, Russia and China on key political and economic issues, will act as a game changer. India can do it keeping its national interests intact. PM Modi can make use of Xiamen summit to achieve both economic and political objectives. (IPA Service).

TO THE EDITOR

Is this PIL really in public interest?

Editor,
The recent PIL filed in the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya makes one wonder if the petitioner has really acted in public interest. The city has witnessed in the last two months several incidents of trees being uprooted by winds and heavy rains, which caused a lot of damage and public inconvenience, like traffic jams and damaged cars and buildings. The tragic incident of August 12, 2017 where a tree was uprooted and killed two unfortunate passers-by and injuring others, coupled with the inclement weather prompted several citizens to rush to the authorities in the government to cut down trees which were precariously hanging over their residences or thoroughfares. The response of the authorities was to have the offending trees removed, much to the relief of the petitioners.

No sooner had the forest department begun removing these trees when the Hon'ble High Court stepped in on the basis of a PIL filed by one Kaustav Paul and stopped the much needed removal of dangerous trees. My questions to Paul is whether it was really in public interest that the PIL was filed? Who stands to gain from the damages and deaths caused by falling trees? Having brought about the stoppage of removal of dangerous trees, will he hold himself personally responsible for any untoward incident that may (God Forbid) occur subsequently? Can he guarantee that his actions will stop trees from falling?

The environment is a factor that he may take refuge behind, but he should also be aware that interventions by humans in changing the environment to suit humanity are also important. When a tiger turns man eater, it is eliminated. Similarly, other actions are taken in a host of different situations that warrant the deviation from normal practices. When trees turn from being carbon

"The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind"

--- Khalil Gibran

The Shillong Times

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New Education Policy

IT is heartening that the Union Government is reforming its education policy. Currently the policy encourages a dead level of mediocrity on the academic scene. Politicians and bureaucrats dictate policy. The official think tank, Niti Aayog is now set to go for reforms. It has approached Finance and HRD ministries asking for amendment to laws in order to promote foreign university entry and private investment. The emphasis on indigenisation of education shutting out Anglo-American influence seeks to be gone. Education should be in the hands of 'not for profit' bodies. Underhand practices like capitation fees should be abolished. Such practices allow entry of teachers without commitment to quality. Curbs on tuition fee and student intake have on the other hand prevented the growth of colleges into Universities. There is a veritable licence raj with the result that Indian Universities rank low in the global order. There is a brain drain. The number of Indian students studying abroad has doubled from 84,000 in 2005 to 1.66 lakhs in 2015. It is a sad reflection on the state of education in India.

It is reported that the Union Government is reviving norms for 20 public and private universities which can measure up to world class and can be regarded as centres of eminence. It is of course generally admitted that official legislation will not serve the purpose. Nor will conferring labels. Hard work and autonomy alone can foster creativity. The reservation policy should not allow de-recognition of merit. Instead of twenty institutes following a similar curriculum there should be many breathing the air of maximum autonomy. Education needs a complete overhaul to include skills building as part of the general curriculum if the country is to get its act together and make its youth a potential human resource that is employable.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

The end of a controversy

The centre has decided to set up a Central University in Cachar district of Assam, Mr L P Shahi, Minister of State for Education and Culture told the Rajya Sabha last week in reply to a question by Mrs. Bijoya Chakraverty. That a Central University for Assam, which had none so far, was well on the card was known for several years now and if it did not see the light of day yet it was because of the fierce controversy raging from

the very start over its location, the rival valleys claiming it with equal gusto. The Rajya Sabha announcement settles the issue at last by allotting the University to Cachar in the Barak valley, a clear victory for Mr Santosh Mohan Deb, the Union Minister from this valley, who has been promising this institution for Cachar through successive Lok Sabha elections he has successfully fought on this issue.

The Hackathon Proposal

By Toki Blah

The Shillong Times of August 26, 2017 carried a news item regarding the launching of a Hackathon in the state of Meghalaya. I, for one was thoroughly stumped as this was the first instance one had ever come across such a word. The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary was of no help. Ultimately some friends who apparently kept abreast with the latest development in the world of digitised English informed me that the word stood for an event where computer programmers, graphic designers and project managers collaborate intensively on any given software project. The Shillong Hackathon will apparently focus and collaborate on solutions to problems such as waste management, traffic management, unsatisfactory electricity supply, poor water supply, housing etc., issues that have plagued and tormented us all for so long. Problems perhaps where hardware and financing are not so difficult to get but where the soft skills of cooperation and collaboration within the various agencies of the state are sorely missing. It is of course a state Govt proposal for the benefit of the citizens of this state, and that is simply one part of the problem. Out of previous experience we therefore expect the KHADC and the Synjuk ki Rangbah Shnong ka Bri U Hynniewtrep or whatever they call themselves, to immediately maintain their distance from this devilish attempt to usurp their 6th Schedule jurisdiction and status. Confrontation is the key word in Meghalaya. Cooperation, collaboration and understanding is strictly for the birds!

One of the key issues for the Hackathon to address is cleanliness and waste management. Shillong's inability to manage waste (how to collect it, how to transport it and its friendly environmental disposal) is rapidly becoming the biggest environmental problem and hazard we are facing today. Everyone blames the Government for this looming disaster, forgetting in the process, that there are other equally responsible institutions for management of the city's waste; institutions that have prevented a specific civic institution called the Municipality from

addressing the city's civic needs: and that in the final analysis, the Govt is of our own making and that each one of us make up what is called Government. So no one is to blame but ourselves! But there are people out there who fiercely insist (why, how and on what grounds is a mystery) that the state Government is a hostile entity out to destroy our indigenous make up and identity. Mystery is why should these very same people then contest the next MLA elections so that they can form the next Government, which immediately will be dubbed anti-people? It's stupid; it's outrageous; its sheer hypocrisy; there is no other word for it. Tragedy is that, as an electorate, we simply relish such double political talk!

The Sunday supplement of the ST, Aug 27, 2017 has highlighted the plight of the Umiam lake. We, that is all of us, are turning a picturesque water body into the biggest septic tank in the world. The Wah Umkrah is the sewer that empties into it. The river has turned into a sewer but any community initiative to clean up both lake and river will immediately run up against a stone wall. The Secretariat babus, especially in the Urban affairs, will simply produce a snort of contempt. The KHADC will claim ownership and jurisdiction. "Keep away, don't touch that river. It is ours and only we can do anything about it!" The traditional institutions led specifically by their Synjuks, which more or less have shamelessly shed off all political neutrality, will back up such claims of ownership and 6th Schedule status. But the whole issue is not about ownership. The poor river needs cleaning up and if you are the owner then clean it up! What's your problem?

The problem of development or should one say underdevelopment in Meghalaya is the refusal of its social / political institutions to work together. Take the current MUDA imbroglio for instance. What difference does it make as to who imposes building regulations. The objective is to ensure strong resilient structures to safeguard

residents against disasters? Will a 7.5 richter scale quake respect KHADC jurisdiction and spare the miserably and technically unsupervised structures within 6th Schedule areas? True that MUDA permission fees are excessively high. So tell the Govt to bring it down. What prevents us from doing so? It's a sin to play politics with the safety of the innocent public. They don't deserve it even if it means winning elections for a few. It's absurd to suspect your own elected Govt of encroachment into 6th Schedule areas. This is just a political gimmick and we fall for it. Surprisingly there is total absence of protest when Government spends money for rural development. Let us be very clear about one thing. The people who created this whole idea of encroachment into 6th Schedule areas are current sitting MDCs. If by chance they all do become MLAs and (Isha Allah) ministers of the Government after 2018, will they still continue to oppose MUDA? It's a very safe bet they will not. It will also be very clear then that once again we have been fooled. Once again we have been led up the garden path. When will we ever learn?

One of the questions before the Hackathon is how to manage our solid waste. It's a complicated problem but let this write-up attempt a solution at one aspect of the problem. Our shnongs/localities are very familiar with the concept of 'Ka Pynkhuid shnong'. Once or twice a year we all come out of our respective houses to clean up the locality we live in. We claim it's a traditional practice. Now why can't this traditional practice be taken to its logical modern conclusion and each household encouraged to do it daily? "Impossible. Simply impossible!" will be the reaction to such a proposal, but hang on a minute and allow me to explain. It is the routine and daily chore of every household in Shillong, rich or poor, tribal or non tribal, to sweep the house and compound everyday. Now why can't this chore be extended to the footpath and the patch of road in front of every house, irrespective from where and who litters that patch. You do it for your house, the neighbour to the left and the neighbour to the

right as well as the neighbour opposite the road, do for their own houses, and voila, the whole street is kept clean every day.

A question arises, how does the household then dispose of what it has cleaned? Here is where the dorbar steps in to ensure sustainable waste disposal based on economic practicalities. Through paid local workers (unemployed youth of the locality), segregation of waste at every household is ensured. These paid workers collect the segregated waste as well as report to the shnong violations and non cooperation if any. Thus segregation is enforced by the shnong. Each household pays a monthly fee for this waste management concept. This is no proposal for a new tax. Actually every shnong outside SMB is doing it. The workers then ensure that the segregated waste is collected and transported by specifically designated degradable waste and non degradable waste trucks. The practice is enforced by the shnong unlike the present unrealistic and unfounded faith of the SMB on its inspectors which doesn't work!

Both degradable and non degradable waste have a ready market. Degradable waste simply needs space and time before it turns into organic manure to be sold off to compost hungry gardeners within the city itself. Non degradable waste, like plastic bags, water bottles, glass and scrap metal etc are sold off by the kilo for recycling. Tons of non degradable waste is collected and sold off at Marten everyday and provides livelihoods to hundreds of people. The market needs to be identified and the proceeds for sale of both degradable and non degradable waste will contribute to the funds of the shnong and the sustainability of the concept. The trick is not to see waste (niut) as waste per se, but as an economic resource that can bring in revenue (kaba lah ban wanrah pisa). Give it this economic perspective and see the enthusiasm of those who can make a livelihood out of it. Its bound to spread like wild fire!

Of Demagogues and their Chimera

By Yona Nonglang

Whether Charisma is defined as grace and divine bestowal, or personal magnetism and charm that causes people to feel attracted and excited by someone, or a qualifier for personas with a penchant for authoritarianism, it is that conspicuous human trait that has the capacity to either build or destroy.

As a result, this gift that can inspire enthusiasm and popular loyalty comes along with extraordinary contradictions and vulnerabilities. Exceedingly covetable an attribute, it is susceptible to a great deal of mismanaging and misreading. Those who can't

backwardness and exploitation are often the ones who pay the price. Like the little ones of Hamelin who were beguiled by the hypnotic tunes of the avenging pied piper, as he led them to their scene of execution, the deluded disenchanting, usually, are the most vulnerable targets of these manipulators' most cruel deceptions.

People who can be misled by big lies can be pushed to do irrational things. Their blind loyalty renders them willing to even die or kill for the ones they've sold their allegiance to. No longer capable of thinking

Personally suffering from the delusion that he was the übermench who could spearhead the mythical Aryan race domination, he went on to dupe a majority of his fellow Germans to fall for his, to rephrase Roger Cohen, 'big lie that produced big fears that produced their big yearning for a strongman like him.'

handle their self-generated compelling charm with grace and accountability end up making unpleasant spectacles of themselves as they cling on to positions of responsibilities, the demands of which are, clearly, beyond their level of competency. Is it any wonder that some public figures are subjected to frequent lampooning because they just can't live up to the hype?

Is it also because high office aspirants in the form of abrasive, barefaced power-hungry demagogues have been unduly ascribed with charisma because they can stir up people's emotions with their bluster? It's not an uncommon thing to witness such harangues pushing their way into platforms where they can unleash their vulgar display of ignorance as they spew their chauvinistic garbage. And, since it's in the nature of the existing social and mass media businesses to favor sensationalism, some outlets seem to have gotten into the habit of unconsciously lionizing benighted Machiavellians with excessive aspirations.

In order to sustain their charmed circle and to keep their deluded supporters' continuing blind loyalty intact, these connivers are forever on a mission to create, as Roger Cohen observes in one of his essays, "big lies (that) produce big fears that produce big yearnings for big strongmen."

We've all been subjected to the hubristic exhibitionism of such characters. Agenda loaded grandstanders that they are, they're never shy of sputtering their sanctimonious platitudes from just about every accessible public platform in their bid to confuse the naïve and to win over to their side the gullible. The way things are, if the self-proclaimed messiahs do not do the dirty work themselves, there are always the misguided, the sycophants and the vested interests who don't mind propping up their 'chosen ones' for their own selfish reasons. In such cases, hardly anyone bothers to consider the whys and wherefores of anything said or done because everybody's too busy pushing forward their respective agenda.

It's a real tragedy, this whole travesty. Under such circumstances, the frustrated masses, ever hopeful for the arrival of a new knight in shining armour who will rescue them from the sad state of im p o v e r i s h m e n t ,

independently, they end up taking their Svengalis' words as gospel truth and elevate such kinds of people to the status of saviours. Why would they bother to question their heroes' credibility? Even if they've suffered the consequences of their mendacity, fanatical loyalists would still rise to the defense of their supermen to the needless bitter end.

We all know how Hitler influenced the mind and imagination of his fellow countrymen into embracing his racially prejudiced ideology. Personally suffering from the delusion that he was the übermench who could spearhead the mythical Aryan race domination, he went on to dupe a majority of his fellow Germans to fall for his, to rephrase Roger Cohen, 'big lie that produced big fears that produced their big yearning for a strongman like him.'

Clearly, many of the Germans of Hitler's time didn't have it in them to critically and appropriately respond to their Führer's disturbing notion of racial superiority. The rest of the world could have spared the pain and loss it had to go through if only they hadn't propped him the way they did. As for the courageous minority that dared organise the resistance against that brutal regime, it was either the concentration camps or the bullets of the Nazi firing squad for punishment.

Bigotry, indeed, had the upper hand, and the consequences were catastrophic and demoralising for both Germany and the rest of humanity. It took World War II, the deadliest and most devastating conflict in history, to finally make the Germans of that time acknowledge their complicity in that bloodthirsty quest of their unhinged mass murderer and his ruthless underlings.

Similarly, in our generation, those who choose to ignore the siren call of racial superiority are not only accused of being turncoats, but also of being jealous of their power lust madmen who are "blessed" with the gift of oratory and charm. That, however, shouldn't take anybody by surprise. History tends to repeat itself when people are incapable of appreciating its object lessons.

(The author writes on Religion, Social Issues and Current Affairs. Two of her novels, TEILANG and THE WAY AS THEY SEE IT, are available online as e-books).

TO THE EDITOR

Diana, Princess of the masses

Editor, Watching the respect shown to late princess Diana on the occasion of her 20th death anniversary demonstrates how much she is loved by the hoi polloi. I cannot understand why Prince Charles betrayed this beautiful princess and went for a hag. Will he one day be the King? Hope not as he is not worthy to sit on the throne.

Yours etc.
A. Pyrtuh
Shillong-14

Teacher's Day!

Editor, On this Teachers' Day, let us remember those millions of children and child labourers who do not know the meaning of Right to Education and will only watch children going to school with colourful dresses. Generally, we go to a place of worship to offer money/ sweets to the gods in order to get more material things and to ensure a ticket to heaven. Will God be happy with those things

when we fail His children? May our Divine Teacher teach us that it is a folly to give children the cold shoulder and engage instead in meaningless costly religious rituals.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Evils of corruption

Editor, This refers to your story "Corruption in NE needs to be tackled" (ST- September 3, 2017). Rampant corruption in the country of course has exacerbated the backwardness of the country. It is a fact that corruption, like other social evils such as bribery, nepotism and favouritism, has found acceptance in the social psyche and behaviour. Though all politicians are not corrupt, even a very few can deteriorate this entire democracy and eat away public money. So there has to be some independent law enforcing agency that can punish any top guns in the government machinery if the allegations against them are proved. Corruption in every

walk of our lives has been destroying every democratic institution that our forefathers have cherished. A corruption free system is not a favour granted to us by politicians. It is our constitutional right. We must remember that the fruits of progress can reach the masses only if we control corruption. Corruption is spreading like an uncontrolled virus and eating into our very existence. If every citizen comes forward to punish the corrupt, the cancer of corruption can be stemmed.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

GSU elections

Editor, The Students' Union of Williannagar Government College recently held its election. I congratulate all the elected members but I specially congratulate and thank the electors who have come out in large numbers to give strength to the elected Students' Union and the Election Commission of the College which has kept the spirit of democracy alive by holding elections on

time. This is how the democracy is sustained in every institution so that those leaders who are elected do not get used to power and become anarchic. The drama exhibited by the pressure groups during the recent meeting on the LLP issue at Shillong with cabinet ministers is a blot on the reputation of all NGOs in general and Garo NGOs in particular. The Tengsak-led-GSU yelling at the Balgra-led-GSU to get out of the meeting was an authoritarian move and a foolish act.

In democracy, a leader of an NGO/pressure group derives power from their supporters or electors. but in the case of the Tengsak-led-GSU, no one has elected him as leader nor has he been given any powers. In fact election to GSU is a closed chapter. So for Tengsak to proclaim himself as GSU leader is illusionary. Let's delve into the issue to understand how Tengsak-led-GSU is non-existent. After a long gap, in 2015, when the GSU (CEC) election was about to happen it was called off at the last minute by the Election commission citing

mass manipulation by Tengsak, the then president GSU (CEC). Subsequently, GSU CEC was dissolved and interim body was formed to continue its function. Thus, there cannot be two GSUs but only an interim body. Hence for Tengsak's claim of ebing GSU leader does not hold water. Now, he is being used by some tainted babus to douse any genuine societal issue. This is dangerous to the health of democracy, and we are disturbed and unhappy with these goings-on.

The Tengsak-led-GSU cannot deny the truth. If he is a true leader, he would not have seized the GSU illegally and immorally. If Tengsak is a leader he would have called for elections. People of his age are now in the higher echelons of the Government. By now he should have contested the MLA or MDC election. This proves that he is not a leader and does not have any leadership qualities. After LLP meeting, during tea, one cabinet minister remarked, "Is such an elderly person allowed in GSU?"

To prevent further embarrassment to the Garo community the GSU's (CEC) election must be held in a free

and fair manner at the earliest. An independent election commission should be formed which would include women. The Presidential election system of India (with modification) should be adopted with an electoral college to include GSU leaders of all the districts. Otherwise every leader has a following only in a particular area. The President (all GSU leaders) should be qualified to be re-elected only for 2 complete terms or within a certain age criterion. This is important because when they have families their interests are diverted only towards money making and business. These proposals are not exhaustive but they can address the sorry state of affairs of Garo organisations.

Yours etc.,
Dogrik Marak,
Via email

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

"You were merely wishing for the end of pain, the monster said. Your own pain. An end to how it isolated you. It is the most human wish of all."

--- Patrick Ness

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 27 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017

Governance failure on all fronts

GOVERNANCE in Meghalaya is given short shrift. The High Court has had to step in on areas that should have been the remit of the Executive. From trees that pose a threat to passers-by in the city to zebra crossings at busy traffic junctions, to garbage collection, the Court has literally pushed the Government to perform. Traffic jams are the latest challenge. Reaching one point to another within the city taxes the patience of commuters and it is inevitable that their blood pressure would rise on account of the tension of reaching their destinations within the designated time. The road condition in Shillong and its suburbs has deteriorated beyond recognition. Should people approach the court of law to address this problem too? Clearly there is governance failure on all fronts and this is acutely felt by citizens. One of the reasons for the traffic jam which beggars all description is the non-cooperation of the elite schools of the city to use school buses for ferrying their students. Meghalaya is the only state where private vehicles by the thousands converge on the already crowded roads in the morning and afternoon to drop and pick up students. Attempts to make the schools use school buses have met with a stiff resistance from the principals. Deputy Commissioners past and present have appealed to the better judgment of school principals but failed miserably. The Government meanwhile, seems incapable of coming down heavily on these few schools. At some point the court will have to step in here too on behalf of a desperate citizenry.

On a daily basis the Meghalaya Electricity Corporation Limited (MeECL) decides to go on power shut down mode in large parts of the state without prior notice. The Corporation is accountable to no one. No amount of public complaints has pushed the MeECL to perform. This is one Corporation that needs to be told, "Perform or Perish." But the Government has failed to use the stick here too. Can the Mukul Sangma government then claim to have delivered governance? On what basis is the Chief Minister seeking votes from citizens for 2018?

An urgent plea against a proposal of the Government of India to deport Rohingya Muslim refugees in India back to their native country Myanmar is before the Supreme Court. The plea has been made by two refugees facing imminent threat in their country and seeking protection of life and liberty in India. A challenge to our generosity, but proverbial last straw!

It is estimated that there are around 40,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees in India. The estimates do vary as most of them are unregistered and hence officially not recognised as refugees by the government. They are spread across the country in Muslim and non-Muslim localities, but bulk of them are staying in Jammu. The apex court has asked the Centre to respond to the petition.

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand besides India are affected by influx of this population driven from their homeland. According to latest estimates based on calculations of UN sources, 174,000 Rohingyas have sought refuge in Bangladesh since last October. They include a number of Hindus.

The issue basically is between Rohingya Muslims who claim to be descendants of indigenous inhabitants of Rakhine region in north-west Myanmar and the Government of Myanmar which considers them as refugees from Bangladesh. They are denied Myanmar citizenship under the Citizenship Law of 1982 and consequently deprived of fundamental rights.

Added to that, they have become targets of military and police atrocities. It is said that violence against them by Buddhist nationals led to large-scale exodus of these people to neighbouring countries by land and water. They are dubbed as "boat people" in international media as they travelled by crude boats. Thus, it is purely an internal problem of Myanmar in which neighbouring countries are drawn due to proximity.

UN Convention of 1951 defines Refugee as "a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political

Rohingya Refugees

Is it the last straw?

By Dr S Saraswathi

opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country".

This definition has been gradually expanded in international law to include persons who have fled their countries due to armed conflicts, internal turmoil, and gross violation of human rights who are referred to in international politics as humanitarian refugees.

The UNHRC considers that Rohingya Muslims is one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world. The Burmese army is accused of perpetrating various kinds of human rights violations against them -- murder, gang rape, arson, infanticide and so on. In the last one week, it is reported that 2,600 homes of this community were burnt down by security forces and extremists. Over 1,000 are reported killed in the conflict in Rakhine State.

The 21st century is witnessing a spate of refugee problems reminding us of the years between the two World Wars. Mass exodus from Syria to European countries has not subsided yet. East Asia is erupting with smaller but serious human rights violations. Refugee influx and illegal migrations are faced in India as in many countries spoiling prospects of cordial bilateral relations with adjacent States and sometimes creating local conflicts. India is not a signatory to 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and has not enacted any legislation in the matter. But, it scrupulously follows the international principle known as "Non-refoulement" which forbids States from forcibly returning people to a country where they would be at real risk of human rights violations. The Convention was adopted soon after World War II. Today, it is very much a relevant part of our progress in humanitarian ideals, but care is required to ward against exploitative regimes generating refugees.

The Indian subcontinent is historically renowned for its generosity in accepting people of different races, religions, languages and nationalities and living in peace with them. Apart from the controversial Aryan migration and the demographic fall out of the politics of the Partition of India in 1947, India has been home to many migrant populations. From Zoroastrians (Parsis) who found refuge in India to protect their religion in the 12th century and have taken India as their permanent and only homeland to present day Rohingya Muslims who seek protection for their life, there have been several population movements. Tibetan refugees have come in three waves - first in 1959 during Tibetan uprising when 14th Dalai Lama fled to India from Chinese onslaught, second in 1980s to escape political repression, and the continuing third wave in the form of steady stream of Tibetans to Dharamsala. The Chakma tribals from East Pakistan numbering over 40,000 entered India and were granted resettlement in Arunachal Pradesh and Indian citizenship. The North-Eastern region is home to illegal infiltration problem and has gone through anti-immigrant movements in Assam. Afghan refugees numbering over 60,000 came to India in 1979-80 during the Soviet-Afghan War. Again about 15,000 Afghans, mostly Hindus and Sikhs, fleeing from Taliban regime arrived and settled around Delhi. Nomadic Pashtuns from Pakistan settled themselves in the Kashmir Valley.

Sri Lankan Tamils numbering in lakhs, fleeing from Sri Lankan military operations, have arrived in southern India and are living in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. Having strong linguistic and social ties with Tamils in India, this group, a creation of Sri Lanka's internal politics, is affecting Union-State relations in India.

The biggest protection to refugees comes from the judiciary and advisories from the Government of India. A model law was drafted in 2002, but did not pass through the legislative process. The Foreigner's Act, 1946 amended in 2004 penalises entry into the country without valid documents thus permitting

deportation of refugees. Moral and humanitarian restraint seems to be than formal legislations.

However, a law to govern refugees will also create problems as situations differ and humanitarian considerations vary making application of uniform legal prescriptions irrational and impracticable. Law cannot solve all humanitarian issues. A judicious combination of human rights issue, national interests, international relations, and universal outlook is required in dealing with refugee problem.

Refugee crisis in European nations in recent times has led to some drastic legislations which are inconsistent with UN principles. Denmark, for instance, passed a law allowing the authorities to confiscate valuables from the refugees to cover the cost of their rehabilitation.

Fear of infiltration of terrorists as refugees cannot be ruled out. France tightened its emergency laws. Indiscriminate policing was unleashed in many countries. Several countries including Germany have been constantly monitoring refugee status in their national interests. Refugee status, like natural disaster, may fall on anybody. It cannot be prevented by individual intelligence or tact. In the prevailing international context, refugees of internal conflict number more than war-time refugees. They also steadily grow in number and infiltrate silently.

The problem of Bangladesh today may be more serious than that of India. But, it will take no time to spread further into our country. India has to guard against countries trying to grab our territory and send us refugees. Refugee influx coupled with foreign illegal occupation of our territory is a double edged sword that cannot be allowed. Such a situation will automatically nullify any law protecting refugees, for territorial integrity comes first for any nation.

---INFA
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

Brics summit, doklam resolution raise Modi's stature

China's backing of anti-terrorism stand major victory

By Subrata Majumder

In spite of China sending a signal to Modi before the BRICS summit that any reference to Pakistan sheltering terrorism would jeopardize the summit, Narendra Modi managed to bring the issue to the centre stage. The Joint Declaration of the five-nations BRICS Forum at its 9th Summit in Xiamen city in China named Pakistan based outfits Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashdhar-e-Toiba (LeT) as scary terrorist groups and called for the extermination of terrorism from their soils. China was the chairperson of the summit.

This reflects a big boost to Modi's stature in the global leadership, enabling him to walk taller at the summit especially after the resolution of the Doklam stand-off. "Modi goes to China with enhanced stature and stronger leadership credential than Xi Jinping", according to Professor Mohan Malik of Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies.

This was the first time that an Asian leader has taken on the might of China. Supporting the move, China's powerful media Global Times was assertive of the success of BRICS in burying the hatchet of political differences. "BRICS are expected to go beyond the differences in political systems and ideologies," it pronounced.

After failing to perk up the globalization mood at the Davos World Economic Forum last January, China reignited the tone of globalization at the 9th BRICS summit. In both the summits China was the chairperson. Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an uptick in globalization at the BRICS summit and rejected protectionism for the better health of global economy. "Only openness delivers progress and inclusiveness sustain such progress," he declared.

In Davos, American President Trump's pulling out of the WEF summit and notifying the exit from TPP gave shivers to pro-globalization interests. Eventually, the Davos summit-the world's biggest economic forum - ended in a limbo, shredding hopes on the Chinese model of globalization through OBOR (One Belt One Road).

BRICS - the acronym of five countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) - is the forum for independent international action to encourage commercial, political and cultural cooperation between the member countries. Even though the aim of BRICS is to push forward economic engagement among the member countries by financial sustainability and infrastructural development, the 8th Summit in Goa saw heightened political engagement.

At the same time, India is unlikely to discard protectionism at the behest of China's call for globalization. Protectionism continues to be one of the main pillars for the success of Make in India drive. High Custom tariff and import substitution will be the roller coaster to China-style globalization.

China is the biggest beneficiary of globalization. This is the prime reason that China has been advocating for it. Protectionism will restrict Chinese growth. According to Beijing custom official Huang Songpin, "The trend of anti-globalization is becoming increasingly evident, and China is the biggest victim of the trend." Given that protectionism is intensifying in the Trump era, fears looms large over Chinese growth.

China is an export-

oriented economy and the US has been the engine for China's economic growth. It is the biggest destination for China's exports, sharing 18 percent of China's exports. Trump's import substitution plus approach through tariff barriers and encouraging domestic production will possibly bring American investors back to the US. Similarly, Modi's Make in India will reduce dependence on imports from China. Currently, China accounts for the biggest share of India's imports, fueling a wide trade deficit. Protectionist policies by the US and India will pose a double whammy for China's export-led growth.

Modi's visit to China to attend the 9th BRICS Summit comes after India refused to join OBOR. The Chinese OBOR initiative is to address its domestic problems. China is engulfed by unbalanced regional development and sagging economy. Its economy dipped to 6.9 percent in 2016, lower than India while the capital flight intensified. A large financial package by Chinese government failed to gear up the economic activity. Geopolitical connectivity is the core of Chinese OBOR led globalization rather than economic spread.

India considers that the Chinese OBOR infrastructure link globalization violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India by virtue of the CPEC project (China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor). CPEC passes through Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan occupied Indian territory in Kashmir.

China needs India more than India needs it. China's eagerness for investment in India comes after its loss of cost competitiveness and India's neutrality in the South China sea dispute in the wake of the ruling of UN international court of arbitration. These factors warrant China's ardent need for India's support.

China and India are the main drivers of BRICS economy. The external health of three other economies of BRICS - Brazil, Russia and South Africa - is closely inter-linked with China. With China slipping into lower growth trajectory, concerns are looming large over the economic health of three member economies.

China is the biggest export destination for two BRICS countries - Brazil and South Africa-and the second biggest destination for Russia. China accounted for 18 percent of Brazil's global exports. The most important export earning of Brazil is iron ore and China accounts for 47 percent of Brazil's export of iron ore. The fall in Chinese steel output will lead to further drop in imports of iron ore by China and this will have a major impact on the Brazilian economy.

Similarly, China is the second biggest stakeholder of Russia's oil export, which accounts for Russia's biggest export earning, sharing about 70 of its global exports. Similarly, China accounts for 15 percent of Russia's oil export. Thus China is the pivot to Russia's export. Given China's predominance in Russia's oil export, a drop in oil import by China will likely cast a shadow on the Russian economy, which is already reeling under recession.

China is the biggest trade partner of South Africa and the biggest importer of its iron ore - the second biggest item of South Africa exports. The slump in steel manufacturing in China will unleash a major impact on South Africa's iron ore export (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Compassionate posting

Editor,
Apropos to the letters to editor by Messrs Jerome K. Diengdoh Lyngdoh and N Marak which appeared recently where they had quoted my letter appearing sometimes ago my response is as follows.

Whether the writers agree or not most of the untimely deaths of Government servants is due to bad habits especially excessive drinking. If someone disagrees I request the Government to set up an enquiry committee to look into the cause of untimely deaths of grade 4 and 3 employees for the last 10 years and find out the cause of death.

How many of these Government servants are sincere? Let us have a simple check. Go to the Government offices at 10 am and you will discover the pathetic attendance. In rural areas and far flung districts people don't even attend office regularly including many PHCS which are created for healthcare and dealing with medical emergencies. If anyone has doubts let the enquiry committee requested conduct surprise checks and find out the facts. Most

Government servants don't have a moral right to talk about sincerity.

Almost 50% population of the state lives below poverty line. I reiterate that the families which require real compassion are these and not those families of the deceased Government servants who will be receiving family pension and other benefits whereas these people have nothing.

Unlike many other states Government jobs are the most sought after jobs in Meghalaya as there are not many better private sector jobs available. Every job is therefore important in the state as unemployment is on the rise.

Government is not only for Government servants but for all. In the name of welfare of Government servants one cannot compromise the interests of vast majority who are more deserving in all aspects.

Government servants in the state therefore do not deserve any special consideration in the form of appointments. Let their family members also compete with the rest to secure jobs like the rest in all fairness and justice to all.

Yours etc.,
Desmond Lyngdoh
Shillong -4

Cabinet rejig

Editor,
This refers to your editorial "Modi's cabinet rejig" (ST- Sept 4, 2017). It is the PM's prerogative to decide who he wants in his Council of Ministers. Modi's cognisance of performance has also been a significant factor. The 3rd reshuffle of Council of Ministers appears an attempt to showcase 'performance' and 'delivery' over considerations of caste and politics as the country battles an economic downturn and agrarian crisis. There is no doubt that the inability to remove non-performing heavyweights is stark and has only reinforced the public perception of incompetence.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

Traffic jams in Shillong

Editor,
Traffic jams in Shillong has reached an alarming stage. People from all walks of life are facing this acute problem day in and day out. It is a cause of great worry for everyone. No one knows at what time one will reach one's given destination. It is

uncertainty, anxiety and frustration that one has to undergo while being stuck in traffic. With each passing day the problem has only aggravated. I feel we have overlooked one simple aspect. It is our changing life style. Because of easy availability/ accessibility to the transport system, we have become lazy. Just look, how people are waiting to go to Police Bazar any time of the day, from Laitumkharah, Laban, Jhalupara and adjoining areas. I am not exaggerating but during rush hours, one has to wait at least forty - five minutes to be able to board / share a bus or cab. Once inside a vehicle one is unsure about reaching one's destination.

Truly we are turning ourselves into invalids. To commute even a short distance by walking has become impossible. I feel we have borrowed this habit from other cities. Whereas the topography and weather conditions of Shillong are ideal for walking. There are many shortcuts available. People of my age (69 years) or even younger, will vouch for the fact that during our time we walked to our schools, colleges and our place of our work. These days we are all health conscious; we talk of Yoga

or other forms of exercises. Why not perform this simple exercise of walking daily? If we seriously want to reduce the rush in our traffic then the initiative of walking should come from high ranking officials, public representatives, school teachers and big businessmen. Let's make walking a fashion. It is possible only in Shillong and perhaps in all other hill stations. The government may also declare CHAKKA JAM once a month, at least within Shillong city and in its suburb once every few months. I suggest that Government should continue to construct footpaths with railings at the present pace and to depute more traffic police at road crossings particularly during school timings. I think, we need not mimic the New Delhi type 'Even and Odd numbers vehicles plying every alternate day' to regulate the traffic.

Yoursetc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong- 2

LPG problems

Editor,
There was an advertisement on Sep 2, 2017 calling for LPG distributors in various parts of Meghalaya, except Resubelpara, despite it being the headquarters of North

Garo Hills. Earlier there was advertisement calling for LPG distributors for Resubelpara too, however, probably due to some issues of non-transparency in the selection process by the Company, the project could not take off. My humble request is that the lottery for the selection of the distributor should be genuine (not pretend to be transparent by picking up one lucky candidate, when, probably all the other papers contain the name of that same lucky candidate), or it should not be used when there is a clear-cut eligible person who fulfills the required criteria. What ever happened has happened for Resubelpara, but it is high time that, we, the residents get LPG supply at our place too. In these few years, the cost of LPG has doubled. Over and above that the people of Resubelpara are paying more for the cylinder as it comes from the neighbouring town.

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen

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.

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

--- Theodore Roosevelt

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Assault on Freedom of Speech

SENIOR journalist, editor and activist Gauri Lankesh who was only 55 was shot dead by unidentified assailants at her home in Bengaluru. Four bullets were pumped into her body. The assailants were presumably following her on her way back from her place of work. She had been living alone in recent times. The police are hoping that CCTV footage from cameras which Lankesh had put up at her home may lead to some clues about the killers. She had of course faced a number of threats recently from rightist forces. She was known for her strident opposition to Hindutva advocates. Her murder is reminiscent of the killing of rationalist writer M M Kalburgi in 2015. Kalburgi's murder still remains unsolved. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that police teams have been set up to investigate Lankesh's murder. Union Minister of state for information and broadcasting, Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, has condemned the heinous killing.

Gauri Lankesh had carried at least 8 stories critical of the Union government and its leaders in the last 3 months. She had damned the Rohingya crisis and slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's demonetisation policy. In her last weekly column, she wrote on the death of children at the Baba Raghu Das Medical College and Hospital in Gorakhpur. She also criticised the removal of its doctor, Kafeel Khan. On social media she shared posts criticising the BJP government. Her Facebook page carried a picture of the Dalit student, Rohit Vermulla who had committed suicide. Lankesh's killing was hardly the first of its kind in India. So much for freedom of the press in this country!

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

No Trust motion against Tripura Min-istry admitted

A no confidence motion against the eleven month old Congress (I) Tripura Upajati Juba Samity coalition Ministry was admitted in the state assembly today. The motion was moved by opposition CPI (M) leader and former Chief Minister Mr. Nripen Chakraborty, Speaker Mr. Joytirmoy would be discussed tomorrow. Mr.

Chakraborty, in his motion said the people had lost confidence in the Council of Ministers headed by Mr. Sudhir Ranjan Majumdar. This is the first time the opposition raised a no confidence motion. In the sixty member assembly the Congress (I) has a strength of TUIS in seven and the Left Front 27 and one seat vacant.

TO THE EDITOR

Nepotism in allotment of MBBS seats!

Editor,
Perhaps we are the only State in India that is so habituated to taking things very casually. What a mess we see in the health sector, yet our casual approach continues. I understand old habits die hard, but don't we have a heart for the deserving and hard working students, at least?

Firstly, deserving students are "robbed" of the best colleges just because they don't have any connections in the government. There is a visible and blatant irregularity in the allotment of medical seats in different colleges to students. I'm very sure we are the only state in India in where those with lower marks are allotted seats in some of the best medical colleges (higher preference colleges) while many top rankers have been given admission to third rate medical colleges. In other states of India the preference system makes sure that top rankers get the best colleges. What's the point of having a merit list if top rankers are deprived of top colleges? Of course the authority in Meghalaya, as usual, would claim that

allotment of seats is based on lottery system. But year after year what I see is a distribution of seats that is simply mathematically stupid! I am well versed in Mathematics and I understand what I see. So should I believe that allotment of seat is on the basis of a lottery system? It maybe a lottery system, but not after many seats are pre-booked! I wonder what the heck is that "medical counseling" for? And did I mention that "nepotism" is the worse form of "corruption"?

Secondly, a month before the medical seats were allocated it was heard that Assam would no longer allot seats to the neighboring states. Then why could our Government not resolve this issue in time? I can only imagine the psychological torture that the unfortunate students are enduring right now.

I'm afraid that if the government keeps playing with the future of hard working and meritorious students, karma will make sure that our State stays at the bottom of the graph! If we love our own State and our fellow citizens, we must speak up!

Yours etc.,
T Fightingstar L
Mawlong,
Viaemail

Whither medical colleges in Meghalaya?

Editor,
It is very disheartening to learn that ten students from Meghalaya were denied admission for MBBS seats at three Medical Colleges of Assam, viz., GMC, Guwahati; AMC, Dibrugarh; SMC, Silchar. It is in the interest of the readers and our political leaders, to know that our big brother Assam, has a total of 11 medical colleges in the State. Three to four new medical college projects came up under the NDA government under the able leadership of Prime Minister Modi. What is interesting is that five years ago, our Government made a public announcement that two medical colleges will come up in Shillong and Tura respectively, but in reality it was only a foundation stone laying ceremony.

Since election 2018 is round the corner, perhaps it's high time for students, NGOs and all stakeholders to demand from the central government and claim 60% (around 30 MBBS Seats) for the local indigenous people of Meghalaya at NEIGRIHMS. At present there are only 8 to 9 MBBS Seats for students from Meghalaya in NEIGRIHMS, which is too little compared

BRICS: India Steals Show

Keep China engaged

By Dr DK Giri

Beijing's behest to create an alternative power centre in political and economic terms. Both China and Russia were wary of countering America's growing power in the world. Beijing and Moscow sought to create a multi-polar world to promote multi-lateralism.

BRICS was meant to be a hedge against American domination of world politics. Brazil and South Africa joined with their respective calculations. India was wary of American calling the shots in Asia without a countervailing force. Consequently, India in search of markets found in China a big economy. As an immediate neighbour it was in New Delhi's interest to stay as a friend and partner in BRICS with China.

Undeniably, BRICS has progressed since its launch. A new Development Bank to support development in BRICS countries has been set up at Shanghai and US\$ 1.5 billion has been invested in seven infrastructure projects.

The second package is of US\$ 2.5-3 billion. A financial mechanism Contingent Reserve Arrangement which protects members against fluctuations in their currencies is also in place, similar to 'stabex' stabilisation of foreign exchange set up by the European Commission in its Lome Convention. Recall, an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was set up early last year.

The other objective of BRICS is to help improve global governance and reform of the global financial architecture. BRICS countries represent 40 percent of the world population. International political experts suggest that BRICS is better than G-20 which is too unwieldy.

So far so good. But, as SAARC is stalled by India-Pakistan rivalry BRICS viability is being threatened by New Delhi-Beijing tension. Stated London's Kings College Prof of Chinese Studies Kerry Brown, BRICS is promising but it requires

stronger partnership for a brighter future. Perhaps the Chinese negotiators heard him at Xiamen and put their stamp on a stronger partnership with India.

Undoubtedly, there are a few discernible drivers for Chinese diplomacy to accommodate India's biggest concern over Pakistan sponsored terrorism. New Delhi made Beijing realize that they have a role in global governance as the space has been vacated by US as it is retreating into protectionism under Donald Trump. Hence, China has the opportunity to lead the globalisation process.

Two, Beijing's new ally Moscow seems to have prevailed on China to take a stand on terrorism and not over-protect Pakistan which is on the international radar for hosting terrorist groups and could do so at the risk of heavy loss of credibility. Beijing is under a cloud as China is the only country supporting North Korea which continues to conduct nuclear tests.

Three, Beijing began to reckon India's growing clout in international politics, its diplomatic ability to garner support and make friends. It realized that their military push and shrill media rhetoric would not work anymore: Sun Tzu's Art of War --- tiring out the opponent, subdue the enemy without fighting.

Four, China's strength in the world lies in its US\$ 12-trillion economy built by international trade, not its diplomacy or military. Wherein, it did not want to jeopardize its economy through bad diplomacy. China is in business with India in almost every sector, solar energy to smart cities, construction to turbines, toys to technology. Huawei has alone 22000 employees in Bangalore. The Chinese mobile phone is advertised by the world popular Indian cricket team. Beijing could not risk all of these huge business opportunities.

Five, the Communist Party of China Congress which meets once in five years is to meet in October and Xi Jinping who has been bestowed the 'Core Leader' status by the Party, an honour given to towering

leaders like Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, is most likely to be re-elected. That would secure his position till 2022. Thus, the Party would not like its leader to fumble at BRICS in their own country. Xi Jinping was conscious of the loss of image if BRICS was stalled at Xiamen.

Six, Beijing is concerned about the new axis built around its territory comprising Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and India fully backed by America and Israel. It would not like to alienate New Delhi completely. On India's part it knows it's competing with China and by 2032 might overtake the Chinese population. If not anything else, it could try to reap the demographic dividend as the biggest population of the world. Therefore, it has no cause to foster antagonism with China, instead trying to catch up with Chinese economy while tackling issues which its vibrant often chaotic democracy throws up.

Many other issues too were discussed by BRIC leaders like voting share in IMF and WB, BRICS energy research platform, SMES, joint information network etc. But, what overshadowed the summit was the build-up of tensions between Beijing and New Delhi. However, for now, the air is clear and clouds of enmity have passed. Post-Xiamen, the two countries need to maintain peace and stability in the border areas and work together in mutual benefit and progress.

South Block mandarins can claim credit for back-to-back wins in Doklam and Xiamen. But, their wins do not defeat China. The onus is on New Delhi to continue to engage Beijing in a win-win approach. In international politics, there are no permanent friends or foes what counts is one's national interest. New Delhi must learn this dictum by heart. --- INFA

(The writer is Prof International Politics, Jamia Milia Islamia University)

being burnt alive.

Religious beliefs and practices need to be in tune with the changing times. So, we got a Raja Rammohan Roy to stop women from "voluntarily and respectfully" committing Sati, an Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to stop "honouring" widows by allowing their remarriage and a Kamal Ataturk to deny Muslim women their "right" to wear the burqa. They dedicated their lives to weed out such regressive practices.

Indeed, the burqa has become a liability for Muslim women in this hot and humid country as girls are increasingly coming out to get higher education and jobs. Yet religious pressure makes many women in Muslim communities accept this liability. On the other hand, the religious practice of wearing a sacred thread by non-sudra Hindu community especially by Brahmins gives Dalits a non-sacred identity. We must admit that it is almost impossible to find a man who will voluntarily agree to wear a burqa and Hindu religion has not given Dalits the right to wear a sacred thread. So, it is time to do away with polygamy, triple talaq, burqa and sacred thread.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Investment famine plaguing Indian economy

Job generation should be the priority

By G. Srinivasan

The Modi Government unveiled its third Cabinet reshuffle giving primacy to gender factor by elevating a woman to the defense portfolio and dropping, inter-changing and adding a few familiar and new faces and the spotlight naturally shifts to governance now. But in the run-up to the reshuffle, a lot of ill-tidings gripped the government with the RBI announcing its final count of how much old currencies returned to the system to apprise the country rather obliquely of how the entire demonetization bid was a mountain labored to spawn a mouse! As if there is a distinct disconnect between official claims of demonetization and the stark ground reality, the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) came out with its first quarter gross domestic product (GDP) figures.

The CSO number on growth was a damp squib as real GDP growth slipped to 5.7 per cent in the first quarter (April-June) of 2017-18 from 6.01 per cent in the previous quarter, reflecting the resurgence of growth concerns. This is by far a 13-quarter low, even as the governing class has not refrained from chest-thumping that India continues to be one of the few fastest growing economies in the globe. Government functionaries including ministers had the unenviable task of defending demonetization as demonizing it would cost them dearly.

But a reality check reveals that there is not a scintilla of doubt that the demonetization exercise of declaring high denominational currencies of 500 and 1000 rupees from the mid-night of November 8, 2016 has had a deleterious impact on the economy, besides pushing the informal sectors into a state of disrepair as it was widely relied on cash for conduct of its affairs. Even before demonetization, the factors swaying the slide of five straight quarters beginning from 9.1 per cent in March 2016 are many and varied as the Central government was hamstrung by leadership attention to State Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh and a few other States. Still there is scarcely any doubt that the demonetization bid coupled with the uncertainty shrouding the July 1 adoption of a new indirect regime, viz., the goods and services tax (GST) remain the real culprits for slowing down activities in the real sectors of the economy under the fear of the unknown.

Though the initial teething troubles concerning the GST might be partly overcome in the second quarter as firms get entrenched to the new milieu of indirect tax regime, the crucial question of demand for industrial output getting any impetus remains shrouded in mist. The central bank last month said that its industrial outlook survey had signaled "a waning optimism in the second quarter about demand conditions across parameters and especially on capacity utilization and profit margins and employment". A cursory glance at the sector-sector trends reveals that manufacturing expansion in gross value added (GVA) terms had slowed down to a near stagnancy at 1.2 per cent. This, from 5.3 per cent in the last quarter (Jan-Mar) of 2016-17 and 10.7 per cent a year earlier, is an unmistakable signal that things are not honky-dory on the industrial front. The

persistent balance sheet problem of highly-leveraged industries on the one hand and lack of affordable credit from the banking system on the other which also suffers from identical balance sheet woes meant that there is virtually an investment famine gripping the crucial industrial sector. With private investment not picking up, the requisite pace and mojo, the issue of meaningful job creation through the real sector activities is in the backburner.

It is in this context that a beleaguered finance minister acknowledged that the challenge before the government now is to work out both policy and investment measures. This is absolutely necessary now to impart the needed thrust and momentum to keep the growth engine in at least half-throttle. But the issue of keeping fiscal deficit at the ceiling prevents the government from loosening the fiscal tap lest any laxity should result in high inflation, high borrowing cost and crowding out private investment from the scene outright. This being the penultimate year to the next electoral gambit in 2019, the Modi Sarkar can ill-afford to keep its powder dry now as people promised of Acche Din precisely three years ago would turn restive.

Be that as it may, economists, policy analysts and critics of the government now contend whether the demonetization disruption was worth the effort especially after the RBI conceded in its latest annual report that well-nigh 99 per cent of banned high-value currencies were back. In the aftermath of the demonetization, there was widespread belief that it would bring a windfall to the Centre. To the extent that the demonetized high value notes were not deposited or exchanged at banks particularly by those who hoarded their booty markedly in cash-the resultant reduction in the apex bank's currency liabilities would produce a 'profit', which it could then distribute as dividend to the government. But this did not supervene.

As the annual report has corroborated Rs 15.28 lakh crore or 99 per cent of the Rs 15.44 lakh crore worth of the notes rescinded overnight on last November 8 was turned in. Instead of fostering revenue boost-the original estimates put it at Rs 4-5 lakh crore-the RBI's surplus payable to the Centre out of its earnings for 2016-17 fell to Rs 30,659 crore from Rs 65,876 crore the year before. With the central bank having had to incur extra costs on printing new notes of high denomination, disbursing interest on the excess cash it was compelled to absorb from banks and making an unexplained additional provision of Rs 13,140 crore towards a contingency fund, there was simply less surplus to distribute. The Centre's expectations on this score had sorely been belied.

In retrospect, the long queue to exchange old notes, the overstretched bank staffs behavior to their own customers of all hues, the manipulative capability of some egregious and errant elements within the banking system to help people wriggle out of their ill-gotten wealth and the money laundering it helped people of dubious proclivities are really worth the troubles they caused to the economy?

(IPA Service)

“ We were all born with a certain degree of power. The key to success is discovering this innate power and using it daily to deal with whatever challenges come our way.”

--- Les Brown

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 29 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

India-China

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at the BRICS Summit in Xiamen. Bilateral relations were assessed sensibly. The Doklam Crisis has been defused. Modi and Xi agreed that such incidents should not recur. Disputes should melt away in an atmosphere of trust. The militaries of both countries should be in close contact. Peace in the border areas is of the utmost importance. All this is good news. The question remains as to why irritants along the line of actual control raise their prickly head so often. Why has the boundary issue not been settled as yet? Relations between the two giant neighbours oscillate as a result. China professes to believe in the banding spirit of Panchsheel. But it seems to show no interest in India's interests and reciprocity. China is constantly trying to threaten the US in a power game. India is also dragged into the trilateral relationship. The Henderson Brookes-Bhagat report should also be borne in mind. The US may not wish to argue with its Banker. India should also keep an eye on economic interests.

What is more significant about the BRICS Xiamen declaration is the condemnation of Pakistan-Based anti-India terror groups. It should impact China's relations with India. China's business interests in India are considerable. Chinese imports face stiff competition in countries other than India. China should promote ties with India at all costs. It should not unduly protect Azhar the terrorist. And India should not make much of the Dalai Lama's stand on Tibet.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Meghalaya improves 20-Point implementation

According to a review of performance on the implementation of the 20-Point Programme for the fiscal year 85-86 conducted by the Union Ministry of Programme Implementation Meghalaya ranked 2nd in the North Eastern Region after Manipur, an official press Note said. Compared to the performance in the previous three years, the performance of the State Govt under the 20-Point

Pro-programme last year has been very encouraging. This is more so considering the fact that the State Govt has had to face the chronic problem of non availability of various physical inputs from outside the State for execution of plans schemes it added. The ranking of the State has been assessed on the basis of performance in regard to the 12-points of the 20 point Programme.

Social media has changed our lives forever!

By Patricia Mukhim

In this era being a journalist is no big deal. This space has been flattened by social media. Every person with a Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp account is a journalist today. Never mind if the content is fake, raw, unmediated, and liable to incite communal and religious tension or to defame a person or institution. By the time the content is taken off the internet after a complaint is filed by the defamed or intimidated victim to the local police and the Facebook/Twitter/WhatsApp administration, the damage to his/her reputation is complete. Recently after the famed journalist from Karnataka, Gauri Lankesh was shot dead a Facebook post originating from Shillong in the name Vikram Aditya Jung Bahadur Rana who claims to be working in a Government establishment here, went on a rampage. He not only lauded the killers but made a list of other journalists who he felt should be killed in a similar manner. His page has now disappeared from Facebook but screenshots of those posts can still be viewed on pages of other Facebookers. This guy obviously has his loyalties to the ruling establishment in Delhi and is one among the army of trolls employed by the BJP to tame those who are critical of the Party and the Modi Government.

These are dangerous times for India because we are a country where flare-ups along religious lines are common fare. They have happened in the past and they are likely to recur in the near future if crackpots and maniacs begin to dominate the social media. In Meghalaya there is at this moment a subdued tension between the Seng Khasi adherents and Christians after the Mylliem incident when the dead body of a Seng Khasi elder was not allowed to be cremated for reasons best known to the village dorbar and the residents there. This incident led to protests in the media and an article by Mankular Gashnga, "No place to live and no place to die," virtually unveiled the sense of insecurity that followers of the Seng Khasi faith perceive. Of course the

rejoinders from a few Christian leaders flew thick and fast and it was made to appear as though the matter was blown out of proportion. As usual, instead of a dialogue which is the essence of Khasi conflict resolution, the matter is sought to be laid to rest but I doubt if the scars have healed.

And then some crazy Christian extremists invaded social media and spewed venom on the Seng Khasi religion. The posts were obnoxious and unreadable. They were sacrilegious and foul-mouthed in the extreme and one begins to wonder how such poison can spew out of the minds of young, obviously half-educated men (from the names given, albeit fake, all of them were men). One must appreciate the Seng Khasi elders for not reacting to such gross violation of their right to their beliefs. But who knows if there isn't someone out there who harbours a grudge and let's out his grievance on some unsuspecting victim! This world we are living in today hangs by a very fine thread and if we are not careful social media will tear us apart.

This era has been called the post-truth era where fake news is circulated, consumed and ingested and opinions are not only instantly formed but reactions too are posted without much thought. We just saw the US election which threw up a Donald Trump. Much of that campaign was based on lies peddled as truth until it was later found out to be pack of lies. This is what sociologists call the post-truth politics. In this post truth era debates are framed not by facts, reason or logic but by a crude appeal to emotions and people tend to discount facts. In other cases they cherry pick data and believe what they want to believe. Recently we saw the White supremacist neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, USA which turned violent. The march obviously had the tacit support of President Trump. The problem with

post-truth is also that those who stand to gain by peddling fake news have an army of social media warriors while those who wish to counter fake news have very few takers. So when Donald Trump points at CNN and calls it fake news, I feel they should tell him they are not fake; it's he who is fake in every sense of the term.

This battle of fact versus fiction in the post truth era is spilling into the social media platforms. It conveys information and opinions in what is called a "bubble" phenomenon. Since most social media users don't have the intellectual bandwidth to check facts before they react, what they read or see reinforces their convictions, even if based on false information. So what happens in this atmosphere of dissonance where noise is valued over reason? Meghalaya is heading for the elections soon. Already one sees several platforms of different political parties peddling their respective ideologies. This is fine so long as they don't indulge in bitching over social media. But the problem is that things quickly degenerate into cat-fights and you have profanities flowing like wine.

Recently a Guwahati based correspondent of a national daily asked me how active the politicians in Meghalaya are on social media and whether they have Twitter handles. My response is that thankfully politicians in Meghalaya don't peddle fan pages and ask people to 'like' them. Even those that do have Facebook pages are not managing them themselves but are outsourcing them to some tech-savvy firm or individual who does it for a price. I use the word, "thankfully" because I have noticed that those politicians in Meghalaya who do have a Facebook page don't use them to push their politics. Their page is a family platform of sorts. In my interaction with some of them I have found that they shy away from taking on people on social media. Perhaps they are busy with real work or they are not adept at punching words on their smart phones.

The only politician who

is quite active on social media and is publicising all the foundation stone laying ceremonies or sporting events across Garo Hills is Zenith Sangma, the Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs. He has a following of over a thousand people at any given time. But one wonders if those thousand Facebook likes actually constitute his voters. Quite likely they don't! You need more than social media warriors to win elections. But the sore point is that the social media wars will be fought between supporters of politicians and political parties rather than the main actors themselves. And as we approach the election season these fights are going to get very ugly.

So where do people turn to for news as it is meant to be delivered? And how do people form opinions about their candidates and the political parties they belong to? Hopefully mainstream media (newspapers, television news channels) will do an impartial analysis of as many contenders and their parties as is possible. Television discussions moderated by anchors that can draw out each of the candidates will be a good beginning. The problem is that many candidates will avoid such platforms either because they are not articulate enough or because they are afraid of being pilloried by an incisive anchor. But whether we like it or not, it is the good old mainstream media on which lies the onus of defending the truth and giving out factually correct information and balanced opinions. There is no substitute to a free and fair media in a democracy. The threat to democracy today is from social media and its fake news content. If you ask me, social media cannot deepen democracy. On the contrary it has the propensity to polarise and radicalise positions and lead to fragmentation of societies that have hitherto lived fairly peacefully.

Responding to disaster a big challenge

Stark contrast in Houston and Mumbai

By Kalyani Shankar

With a reported 50 inches of rainfall and flash-flooding last week, Hurricane Harvey in Texas has gripped world's attention. The fury is said to have returned after 500 years. The storm has displaced more than 1 million people, with 50 feared dead from flooding that paralyzed the state. But halfway around the world, another flood has wreaked havoc in India at the same time. What a contrast between the way India and the US react to the natural calamities?

I had a glimpse of the promptness with which the administration moved in to deal with the situation during my current visit to Texas. The official response to Harvey appears to be very competent. For instance, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was on the ground two days before Harvey reached land. Texas governor Greg Abbott deployed the entire Texas National Guard. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner quickly activated police and firefighters, and provided clear instructions to

was the first major disaster and a significant test for his leadership response. Visiting Texas twice in the last week, he made no secret of his desire to be seen as leading a successful disaster response effort. Texas Governor Greg Abbott has sought more than \$125 billion for relief work. The Trump administration has sought \$7.85 billion appropriation for response and initial recovery efforts.

Compared to that the response to the last week's Mumbai rain fury showed that very little has changed since the 2005 deluge when the city was marooned. The city administration was not equipped to meet the natural disaster despite the warning from the Met department predicting heavy rains. There was no advance planning to deal with the situation. There were no efforts to provide additional transportation or warning to the public.

Friends from Mumbai claimed that the demand for essential commodities like bread, milk and eggs were not met. The point is that the

“ The administration promptly pressed in helicopters that rescued stranded people. About 30,000 National Guard and active duty troops were on standby to assist Texas authorities. ”

residents.

The administration promptly pressed in helicopters that rescued stranded people. About 30,000 National Guard and active duty troops were on standby to assist Texas authorities. Immediately before the Harvey hit the state, the governor of Texas requested aid for long-term recovery projects. The citizen-soldiers of the Texas National Guard also have been called upon to assist.

Two days after the havoc the city Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner told CNN: "We need immediately, right now, just for debris removal alone, anywhere between \$75 million to \$100 million."

As capable as the local, state and federal disaster response has been, more impressive was the great effort made by thousands of Texans, volunteering to help their fellow citizens. Old timers point out that this was much better than the response to the Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana in 2005.

There is a huge Indian population in Texas of about 3,50,000, of which Houston alone housed 1,50,000. Though the office was shut the Indian consulate worked day and night to reach out to the affected. Despite all roads being inundated with water and closed for traffic, Consul General Anupam Ray personally went to the university complex where more than 250 Indian students were stranded. Ray was all praise and told me, "The same rescued Indian students were out within a day volunteering at city shelters," and that the Indian American community also came in to help in a large way.

The US administration is currently getting ready to face the aftermath. There is likely to be a long-term threat to public health like water contamination, pollution, power outages, and economic disruption. Some of the hardest hit communities are the low-income groups. Texas is also home to the second largest Latino population of the US (9.8 million). Most undocumented immigrants fear deportation.

For President Trump, this

administration has no plans in place to meet this kind of situation. Mumbai remains highly vulnerable to the heavy rains despite well-identified solutions to reduce the risks. The city's drainage system is over 100 years old and incapable of handling annual monsoon rains.

Following the 2005 deluge that killed over 400 people and caused huge damage to infrastructure and buildings, a committee recommended overhauling the drainage system, but not much has been done. The politician-builder nexus continues merrily.

According to the statistics, 68 per cent of India is prone to drought, 60 per cent to earthquakes, 12 per cent to floods and 8 per cent to cyclones, making it one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. There is every need to bolster our defenses against the natural calamities.

Preparedness is the key to the success of Disaster Management Plan. There is a need to enhance the role of Civil Defense and formulate an effective National Plan for Disaster Management. The Disaster Management Authority needs to make efforts to educate and effectively institutionalize the disaster management plan and process.

The integration and coordination of various crucial departments like Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Geological Survey of India (GSI) etc is a must. Instead of having disaster management task force as a part of the Police Department or Home Guards we need to have a separate command centre should be set up. Even a ministry for disaster management could be thought of.

A United Nations report says that India spends about \$10 billion every year on crisis management. Why should not part of it be spent on disaster management?

While the government can no way prevent natural calamities from occurring, it can certainly provide the resources and the leadership. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Oh the pampered Govt employees!

Editor,

I have been following the letters for and against compassionate posting in the government. In our state government jobs are the most sought after as there are not many other avenues available especially for the educated class. Government jobs are also preferred due to built-in security and the perks and privileges associated with these jobs. But frankly speaking I have hardly seen a sincere government employee. Once appointed they take their jobs as a birthright. The vast majority are easy going. A visit to some government offices at 10 am will prove my point. People attend church and other religious functions on time but not to their work in the government which puts food on the table and much more. Further, corruption is on the rise in the government. It is difficult for a common man to get the work done without paying. I have also seen some of the religious types also making money left and right. Yet they never miss an opportunity to deliver sermons on virtues without any shame.

I am reminded of a retired IAS officer who held many important offices in the government and was corrupt

to the core but was giving sermons in the church like a holy cow with a wrong belief that no one knows about his character. A good number of politicians are no exception. Well, nothing remains a secret in the state and everyone knows who is what.

I wonder why such hypocrisy and degeneration of values especially by the people in authority. Are these people not highly pampered at the cost of the public exchequer? Are these people exploiting others one way or the other for their selfish gains?

I think nothing will change without a revolution

Yours etc.,
David Kharkongor
Shillong 14

An honest college dropout

Editor,

What "tomorrow" will unfold for us can't be predicted. But we should carry on the journey of life. We face many challenges but have to move on with a smile. Sometimes, apart from the determination and effort, one should have courage to break down the high walls of social stigma and jump into the venture. One who cares about what society thinks may not be able to take the first bold step. And consequently, he ends up feeling discouraged and pulled back by detractors

around.

On September 2, my attention was drawn to a very humble looking teenaged boy who has broken that stigma and begun to peddle 'kwai and cigarettes' at Mawkhar Point, near Palace Hotel. This Class XII drop-out from Shillong College, Romario Lyngdoh has set up a shop which he confidently wears round his neck. This he does to support his mother - a single parent who is not so healthy, and on medicines. I call his venture a very bold step.

Romario's gentle and humble disposition drove me to ask him a number of personal questions. His father had deserted his mother and four children. This fact deeply touched me. It's tough for a mother of four children, who herself is not-so-healthy, to raise and send all of them to school with what she receives as a domestic help. Her total earning is just under Rs 4000 per month out of which she has to pay Rs. 1500 as house rent. So, for the past four months, Romario, the eldest among the three has started selling kwai and cigarettes.

Romario answered all my questions very respectfully. I was deeply moved when he gently refused my offer to keep the remaining amount of Rs 40 after I had bought kwai for Rs 10 by giving him a Rs 50 note. He said to me, "Sir this is your money, so please take back,

thank you so much". I felt overwhelmed with a surge of affection and said, "Romario, you are a very honest and humble boy and continue to be like that, God will surely bless you. Even if not materially, spiritually you will be very rich".

In the evening I felt touched by this episode and shared my encounter with Romario on Facebook. There I crisply highlighted his honesty and humility in spite of being weighed down by family responsibilities due to abject poverty. I felt that other youths should take inspiration from this hard-working lad.

To my amazement, an incredible number of people praised and wished Romario well. He became a source of inspiration for countless youths. The story from my FB wall has been picked up and heavily shared - over 9000 likes and shared by 1042 kind-hearted people. One scholar Paul Tracy from Dublin (Ireland) was so bowled over that he writes: "This boy is not poor... he is, in fact, one of the richest humans I've read about He radiates the light of love and humility of the Divine within." Similarly, Ms. Balasuk Warji remarks - "A little helping hand from each one of us who've read this post will do some good to this lad and his family. Can anyone share his contact no if possible?"

Sadly, Romario has not enough money yet to have a mobile phone.

Please note, this boy and his family's woe is just the tip of the iceberg. Every vendor, every daily wage earner has his/her own sad tales to tell. I think we shed tears profusely only on social media and by reading fiction novels. I believe, our kindness becomes meaningful when we can practically soothe the agony of the underprivileged with our physical support and love. We shall never be the loser, the karmic force of Mother Nature will certainly pay us back with interest at the appropriate time.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwal, Via email

Nongpoh's Treasury Officer vis-a-vis SC order on Privacy

Editor,

The recent public notice circulated by the Treasury Officer, Ri Bhoi District, Nongpoh has directed all pensioners and family pensioners falling under this district's jurisdiction to come to the office of the said officer for a special Aadhar enrollment drive to be conducted w.e.f. 23rd August to 31st August, 2017. Literally, however, in the Aadhar enlistment one

has to prima facie compromise his/her sacrosanct privacy which may incidentally be leaked out as in the case of Mahendra Dhoni, the Indian cricketer.

Notwithstanding the fact that the question of Aadhar would be decided on November next by a smaller bench of the Supreme Court, but given the said Treasury Officer's circulation on the immediacy of Aadhar, some confusion has crept in public domain pursuant to the latest declaration of a nine judge bench of SC passed on 24 August 24 where the latter has in no uncertain terms declared that: "Privacy is a fundamental right" as enshrined under Article 21 guaranteed by part III of the Constitution. Hence, the said direction of the Treasury Officer, Nongpoh is markedly an infringement upon the parameter of one's privacy by way of finger-print and finger impressions on mechanical devices. In a word, shall I not be surprised if some discerning persons file a PIL against such directions of an officer in question as the same is explicitly in contravention of the SC's verdict on privacy? I shall be indebted if someone enlightens me on this critical issue!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh, Via email

“When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.”

--- Paulo Coelho

The Shillong Times

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Where is India headed?

THE killing of journalist Gauri Lankesh has led to a war of words between political parties. It is unfortunate that this murder most foul has degenerated to Left versus Right versus Centre (if the Congress Party can be termed that) slugfest. It is hard to believe that a senior Congress leader, Digvijay Singh should stoop to using expletives to express his venom not so much against the killers of Lankesh but against the Prime Minister. Matters were brought to a head when the Press Club of India, Delhi held a meeting on Friday to protest the assault on free speech and the meeting was populated by politicians and university activists with leanings towards a particular ideology. A reporter of a channel perceived to be close to the ruling dispensation was given a dressing down by the student activist and told to leave the venue. Has the Press Club now become the hub of a political battle? Clearly the media seems to have lost its moorings. That a meeting convened by the Press Club should provide space for a political fracas is unacceptable.

Media trials have now become par for the course. This is made worse by right wing trolls that condoned the death of the activist journalist from Karnataka on social media. Naturally the suspicion has fallen on the BJP-RSS even before the police have been able to nab a single suspect and even before anything has been established beyond a reasonable doubt. This is troubling for the country as the death of other rationalists like Kalburgi and Pansare lie unsolved and the cases are pushed to the backburner. Karnataka police have even said that whereas the killings follow a pattern where the victims are killed at close range in what is termed as a pre-meditated murder, they have not been able to get any conclusive evidence. Hence the case might just be closed for want of such incontrovertible evidence. This casts a pall of gloom on India's criminal justice system. Murderers are able to get away with impunity leaving us to wonder if the system has failed us completely. With conviction rates so low, people tend to resort to instant justice and to take the law into their hands. This is a dangerous portent for the country. Things are made murkier by the political opportunism displayed by politicians of all hues who want to cash in even from tragedies. Clearly India is sinking into an abyss made worse by social media.

India needs some quick solutions. It needs more jobs, a free and low-cost banking, a growing industry and a thriving farm sector. To say that India cannot do it won't be right. This is the world's highest growing economy, even if we take the slide to 5.7 per cent growth. It hides, however, some of the disturbing trends.

Many are now blaming demonetisation for the slowdown. But we find that the pace had slowed down over the years or at best it had been lopsided. Since 1970s GDP has been growing exponentially but so has been the distress -- fewer jobs and increasing rural displacement. It can be attributed to decelerating agricultural growth since 1980s.

Policy makers in their enthusiasm to entice people away from agriculture started laying less attention to the sector, if not ignoring it. While the rest of the economy was growing, agriculture was winding down with the green revolution losing the push it required. The then Planning Commission and high-ups in the government had viewed that investment in the farm sector was a waste as in their opinion people needed to be weaned away from it and jobs in industry and other sectors had to be created.

The policy increased penalty in the farm sector. Farmers themselves were reduced to marginal labourers and productivity started falling. The annual rate of farm growth at constant prices in the 1980s was 4.24 per cent. It reduced to 3.17 per cent in the 1990s and to 2.37 per cent in the first decade of 21st century.

The Economic Survey 2016-17 Volume 2 states that agriculture is characterised by instability on incomes owing to various types of risks related to production, markets and prices. It says growth rates of agriculture have been fluctuating at 1.5 per cent in 2012-13, 5.6 per cent in 2013-14, (-) 0.2 per cent in 2014-15, 0.7 per cent in 2015-16 and 4.9 per cent

Farming, Jobs, Pvt Sector...

Create integral economy

By Shivaji Sarkar

in 2016-17. The major fact stated is the dependence on rainfall and the survey attributes this for fall in 2014 to 2016. This speaks volumes. The occasional growth is due to the efforts of the farmers, when they can. The society had done little to add to it.

This becomes more pronounced if we look at the 54 per cent GDP growth between 2005 and 2012. The period created only 3 per cent -- or net 1.5 crore jobs while every year over one crore jobseekers were added to the list. The maximum distress was in the rural and farm sectors, with severe under-employment, the survey notes.

The country will add over 8 crore net new job seekers

agriculture will remain the largest employer and reorient the policies. It raises brouhaha over approximately Rs 75,000 crore farm loan waivers in UP, Maharashtra and Punjab though it does not mind about almost Rs 12 lakh crore bank NPAs to about less than 100 large corporate. Loan waiver is bad economy but the banks do not lose, it is paid by the government. The NPA is simple loot of the money put in by poor depositors. Both stress the economy and add to banking and administrative costs.

This exactly happened post demonetisation. The banks have excess liquidity of Rs 2500 billion (Rs 2.5

The policy increased penalty in the farm sector. Farmers themselves were reduced to marginal labourers and productivity started falling. The annual rate of farm growth at constant prices in the 1980s was 4.24 per cent. It reduced to 3.17 per cent in the 1990s and to 2.37 per cent in the first decade of 21st century.

by 2025. Even if the growth increases to 7 to 8 per cent not more than 3 crore jobs would be created. Mere growth does not create jobs. It requires investment and capacity to pay by the industry or the manufacturers, where most jobs are to be created. This lopsided stress again leaves the largest private sector, agriculture, into a perennial situation of neglect.

Agriculture, official data say, employs 54 per cent of the population, or approximately 70 crore people at 14 per cent contribution to GDP. It means the largest number of people subsist on the minimum GDP. It has to change in an area when we rightly or wrongly are in a spree to promote private investment.

Let the nation accept that

lakh crore) as on June 2017, according to the Survey 2. Other estimates put it at Rs 4 to 5 lakh crore. Managing and paying interest on it is draining the banks. It is said to cost the banking system and RBI about Rs 16,000 to Rs 24,000 crore a year.

It does not estimate that a large part in the farm sector, kept in households or small businesses that transacted in cash, that was away from the banks but legally transacted is stressing the formal banking. It also affected farm and rural and informal sector. Lack of cash has hit its operations. So if the people associated with farming and informal sector do not thrive, the hope that the rest of the economy would boom is

wild expectation. With almost 70 crore people having sub-standard living, the nation cannot expect to achieve the proverbial moksha.

India has to plan for adding 8 crore jobs by 2025. No investment in any formal, government, large corporate projects can create that many jobs. The stress of the government is fine through a number of schemes from start up to make in India, but it has to include the farm, informal and the large small sector. The government has to give up the idea that it could manage everything everywhere.

It has to be the facilitator for an economy that would be different from what the world pursues. The IMF-World Bank model would not do it nor a modified version of the Mamohanomics. India needs an out of the box model. It has to reverse the economic process. Instead of revolving around large industries, large projects, highways, fast trains, fast cars, it has to make a fresh start with the village of Mahatma Gandhi and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya to the fore. So far the planning has been urban centric and it has neither helped the cities nor the villages nor the industry.

The Survey 2 says NITI Ayog has set up a task force to address deficiencies in the existing data on unemployment and create a road map. It is a good admission. The solution has to be different and the Ayog must change tack.

In this 70th year of Independence, the nation has to look for a new economic paradigm. It has to begin from the informal sector, farms and the villages. The focus on shifting villagers must change. The nation through an intense discussion must create an integral economy that would be a precursor to integral humanism and all-round job growth. ---INFA

Gau Rakshaks, Netas

SC cracks the whip

By Insaf

Stop pussyfooting around. A terse message from the Supreme Court to State governments on doing precious little against cow vigilantes. On Wednesday last, it directed all States to appoint a senior police officer in every district to check violence in the name of cow protection, following a petition by Tushar Gandhi, great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi seeking curbing of cow vigilantism. Undeniably, the incidents of violence and mob lynching continue and have grown on this front since the BJP-led government came to power three years ago. With several of its States having made laws to punish cow slaughter, gau rakshaks have been targeting cattle and meat traders, transporters etc. Worse, they have been using cows as a pretext to target Muslims and Dalits. A clear no-go with the Court and 'it must stop'. Vigilantes cannot become a law unto themselves and the cops must prosecute such people with promptitude, it directed. The States have a week to comply with order.

Likewise, in another matter raised by an NGO regarding the whopping increase in legislators' assets during their tenure, and they be asked to disclose their source of income in their nomination papers, the Supreme Court was peeved with the Centre simply sitting pretty. It demanded that it spell out the action initiated against 289 MLAs and MPs, some of whose assets are said to have jumped by over '500 per cent' between elections.

The big question being what steps the Government had taken so far and whether property amassed by these legislators was through legal means. The two-member bench trashed the Central Board of Direct Taxes affidavit filed in the case as it was incomplete and asked: "Is this the attitude of the Government of India? What have you done till now?" For, the affidavit filed "is nothing but typed papers." It cautioned the Centre against making 'vague statements' and directed that a fresh detailed affidavit be filed by September 12. Hard enough rap to shake up the Centre from its chalta hai attitude.

Karnataka's Horrific Murder

Karnataka and political parties are sadly missing the woods for the tress. The brutal murder of journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh in Bengaluru, which has generated a nationwide outrage, has unfortunately got embroiled in a tu-tu-mein-mein between the so-called 'secular' and 'communal'. We have the Congress leaders hitting out at its foe saying "anybody who speaks against the RSS/BJP is attacked and even killed...they want to impose only one ideology..."

The BJP hits back

The BJP hits back questioning 'poor law and order' in the Congress-ruled State, alleging 18-19 political killings in the past two-and-a-half years with no logical conclusion to the investigations. The Left chips in with 'the killing fitted into familiar pattern of eliminating voices (Kalburgi, Dabholkar, Pansare) that dare to speak against climate of intolerance...' Worse, even the media is clearly divided with pro or anti-establishment slant in its coverage. In the midst of headlines and attempts to score brownie points the critical issue has got lost. The stark fact is another member of the fourth pillar has done to death and

freedom of expression, vital to a democratic society, has been dealt another deadly blow. Remember, journalists are crucial to the very functioning of our societies and their safety must be top priority of all governments. Time the Centre and States' leadership shift focus. India ranks 137 in world press freedom index!

No Space For BJP In Bengal

TMC-BJP face-off gets petty. Trust the West Bengal government to ensure that the RSS or BJP have no auditoriums in Kolkata to hold their seminars. Not only did Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's administration deny permission to the State BJP leadership to organise a seminar at the Netaji Indoor Stadium where party President Shah was to speak, but also had another auditorium, Mahajati Sadan cancel permission to a Trust's seminar where RSS chief Bhagwat was to deliver the keynote address! This, after the organisers had given requisite formal letters for bookings and even got confirmation. Excuses such as maintenance work, annual renovation before Durga puja, police clearance denied etc were cited. Clearly, there is more than meets the eye. The BJP is not going to let go either. It has decided to move court against the government's refusal to party events. Let's see who has the last laugh.

BJP Eyes All N-E

Five to all eight is the BJP's goal in the North East. At the second conclave of the North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), a coalition of BJP and five regional parties, on Monday last, party President Shah made his intentions clear of expanding base. While it rules in three States—Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and its allies in another two, Sikkim and Nagaland, all-out efforts are underway to get the remaining three—Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura into the NEDA fold. It would tom-tom its claim that development in the 'alienated region' in the last three years under Modi is 'several times more than Congress-led governments in past 65 years.' No harm in wishful thinking, as there is no denying that from zero, the BJP has notched up three States in past one year. With the three States going to polls later this year and early 2018, all ministers have been on call, to visit the north-east regularly, one State every 15 days! Will voters oblige? A Congress-mukt North East?

MP Taps GenNext

BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh looks ahead to next generation. It has embarked on an ambitious scheme to help farmer's children. With only a handful of takers for its mega food park projects to minimise post-harvest losses of horticulture and non-horticulture produce, it now eyes custom processing and servicing centres for agriculture commodities and promote entrepreneurship amongst kids above 18 years who have cleared 10th exams. Beneficiaries could get bank loans up to Rs 25 lakhs for setting up these plants to make puree, paste and tofu from garlic, onions, tomato and soyabean, besides setting up vegetable and fruit dehydration plants and modern jaggery plants in villages. It will give SC & ST additional 10% subsidy than the general category's 40%. The big question is whether the government will meet its target of 1,000 centres in three years or be dumped as pulp? ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Allocation of Medical seats

Editor,

Apropos the letter to the editor, "Nepotism in the allotment of medical seats" (STAUG 7, 2017), I agree with Mr T Fightingstar L Mawlong that there's no point of a merit list if the allotment of seats is vitiated by manipulative tactics. I was shocked to see that none of the top scorers in Khasi Jaintia category - 402, 390, 383,377, 371 and 370 - were allotted seats in the most preferred top colleges in Delhi - Lady Hardinge Medical College, Maulana Azad Medical College and VMMC & Safdarjung Hospital - despite the fact that all of these top scorers expressed their desire to get into one of these top colleges. It is to be noted that the seats in these top medical colleges in New Delhi in this academic year went to the much lower scorers of 360, 341, 323 and 318. Under the Garo category it is much worse with the Lady Hardinge seat going to a score as low as 151.

I am 100 % certain of nepotism in the allotment of seats to these top colleges. Now just a thought: if a student begins his career in a corrupt manner, what kind of a public servant would he/she become in the future!

To set things right, I strongly suggest that the government adopt a real counselling procedure in allotment of seats in the future, in the same way that the central government does.

Yours etc.,
Amaze Glory Nongtdu
4th year Computer science student,
NIT Kurushetra.

Goralane Road - An appeal

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to highlight the pathetic condition of Gora lane road connecting Laitumkhrah and the MES. The condition of the road has worsened so much that, it has become unworthy for vehicles to ply on it. This a punishment for daily commuters who have no choice but to face the impact of indifferent attitude of Government Departments. I am indeed more perturbed to see the plight of the residents staying adjacent to the road. The road has not seen any maintenance and the rainy season has made it worse. Commuting through this road is like participating in adventure sports right in the heart of the city. Despite the area being under the jurisdiction of the local MLA who is a minister in the Government it is surprising to see that there is no effort

being initiated by her or the authorities under her to rectify the road. I would therefore appeal to the concerned authorities to kindly take immediate steps to repair this important road for safety of life and property of people otherwise we may witness a major mishap resulting in loss of innocent lives for not acting on time.

Yours etc.,
B. Nandi
Shillong - 6

Alphons for Meghalaya polls

Editor,

The political scene in Meghalaya is going to get intense with the appointment of a former bureaucrat representing the BJP but with a Christian tint in a Christian majority state. Surely the 2018 poll is going to be a hot affair, with the Congress party losing out steam rapidly than expected and diluting its national party image whereas BJP is gaining advantage in the state and winning the confidence and trust of the citizens. Then we have the regional parties which are still trying to find common grounds on how to serve their people.

We might ponder what will be the political agenda this time and who we should elect. In fact multiple issues

could be raised, ranging from poor governance, development deficit, traffic congestion, healthcare, state of education, teachers struggle, and more recently the hardship of our medical students and so on. But I'm sorry to say that none of these will be recalled when the poll arrives. Often our choice drifts towards the one who bears the same religious trademark, shares the same bench in our churches, no matter how stupid the person is. The saying that "Religion gives people hope when the world is torn apart by religion," is a perfect situation in our case. As the polling date comes closer the community work starts picking up pace. There is sudden sensitivity towards the poor and schemes emerge miraculously after remaining dormant for the last four years. One simple truth is that in politics, a person who has done his job in his five year tenure need not worry about campaigning in a one month period. The love, compassion and his/her integrity with the job while serving those who have bestowed faith in him/her will be enough to secure the seat.

As we all know, politics by itself is neither bad nor good. It all depends on individuals we elect. As Gandhi has pointed out, politics without principles is one among the seven sins, and it becomes worse when the principle is

faulty in itself. To say the least, for the sorry state of any government failure especially in a democratic setup the blame should be on its people. The power of our vote has been misdirected due to narrow mindedness. Our choice in electing representatives is often driven by a religious cult. Self-interest overrides the overall goodness of the society. Bad politics often takes advantage of this weakness in which religion itself serves as the prime political weapon in the whole process.

I believe it's high time to wake up. If we want change then we can be the change at the individual level by removing the veil of egocentricity and move beyond our religious boundaries and elect the right person for the right job so as to benefit the society and not the church per se. The party name or symbol won't matter as long as the person who represents us has the right ingredients to perform. For example, the emergence of our regional party four decades back, claiming to be the sole torch bearer and protector of tribal identity has reached nowhere. Even today they are struggling to establish their foundation. In fact they are still busy fighting among themselves to gain political power which serves none other than themselves. One must

understand that in politics just because the person shares the shame blood, faith or culture is no guarantee that he/she will fulfil the community hopes and aspirations.

The same goes with our autonomous councils, established by those who didn't even share any tribal blood but still understood its importance in preserving the tribal culture and identity. Ironically our own people who run it are busy in the cock fight for power forgetting the soul and spirit of such an institution.

So the appointment of KJ Alphons by BJP is no rocket science. In a state where Christian consciousness is inexorably strong, they are bound to appoint such a person. But what we are witnessing here is that religion has again become the compelling factor to resolve our state of despair and future developmental aspects, as if all problems pointed above can be resolved by divine, religious intervention.

Yours etc.,
Sonic Kharduit,
Via email

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

Tough stand to revive ties



With trade in mind, India sends a strong message on Rohingya crisis

From C.K Nayak

India has suddenly taken a tough stand on the problem of Rohingya refugees though it has a history of giving shelter to lakhs of such immigrants as recently as those from Afghanistan. And this happened in spite of an appeal from none less than Secretary General of the United Nations and intervention from its own Supreme Court.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for the Muslims of Rakhine state (Rohingyas) to be given either nationality or legal status. He has voiced concern about the violence that has since late August forced nearly 125,000 people to flee and risk destabilising the region bordering Myanmar.

The Supreme Court too has sought to know the government's stand on a plea challenging its plan to deport Rohingya refugees. India has for decades sheltered people fleeing conflict and disaster, though it is not signatory to any pacts obligating it to offer refuge.

The 'principle of non-refoulement' is binding on all states whether they have signed UN's refugee convention or not.

In the first state visit here Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday that India shared Myanmar's concern about "extremist violence in its Rakhine state", where a security force operation against Rohingya Muslims has sent about 125,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh. This comes after Modi successfully shamed and named Pakistan during the just concluded BRIC summit held in China, the latter's oldest and closest ally in the whole world.

Modi said India and Myanmar had similar security interests in the region. "We share your concerns about extremist violence in Rakhine state and especially the violence against security forces and how innocent lives have been affected," he said. "We hope that all the stakeholders together can find a way out in which the unity and territorial integrity of Myanmar is respected and at the same time we can have peace, justice dignity and democratic values for all."

Modi spoke after talks with Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a visit aimed at expanding commercial ties as part of its Act East Policy and pushing back against Chinese influence.

Reciprocating Suu Kyi told a joint news conference with Modi at the pres-

idential palace in the capital, Nay Pyi Daw, that Myanmar was grateful to India for its stance on the attack on her country and they could work together to face the challenge.

"We would like to thank India particularly for its strong stand that it has taken with regard to terrorist threat that came to our country a couple of weeks ago," she said in brief remarks. "We believe that together we can work to make sure that terrorism is not allowed to take root on our soil," Suu Kyi said.

The meeting between Modi and Suu Kyi came on the day she was quoted as telling Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that global outrage over Myanmar's treatment of its Rohingya Muslims was being fuelled by "a huge iceberg of misinformation".

Sympathy for the Rohingya was being generated by "a huge iceberg of misinformation calculated to create a lot of problems between different communities and with the aim of promoting the interest of the terrorists", Suu Kyi was quoted by an official statement as telling

Erdogan in a call.

Suu Kyi has come under fire in recent days for failing to speak out against violence targeting Rohingyas, particularly given her previous image as a champion of human rights. Hundreds have died since Rohingya militants raided police posts in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Home turf

Back home, Union Minister Kiren Rijju is looking for a round of applause for not driving the Rohingya refugees in India into the sea or shooting them; all that he wants is their deportation.

It is, however, doubtful whether the process of exiling them will be uncomplicated since it is bound to raise humanitarian concerns in India and elsewhere.

It is not easy to harshly deny shelter to a group which has had to leave their own country, viz, Myanmar, in dire circumstances.

Rijju probably believes that branding them as potential terrorists since they are Muslims will be persuasive enough. But

it is not an argument which will be readily accepted.

Moreover, the issue of deportation has been complicated by, first, Myanmar's reluctance to accept them and, secondly, by the unwillingness of the emigrants themselves to return to a "home" which they no longer consider safe in view of the recent army actions against them.

Even if the Myanmar army was targeting the insurgents among the Rohingyas, the fact remains that the victims were innocent men, women and children as is usually the case. Because of the conflict between the army and the rebels, the ordinary civilians had no option but to flee.

Reviving ties

It seems after losing the country earlier India is now trying to boost economic ties with resource-rich Myanmar, with which it shares a 1,600-km border, to counter Chinese influence and step up links with a country it considers its gateway to Southeast Asia.

As many as four states of the North

East, including insurgency-hit Nagaland and Manipur, share the major part. Two-way trade has grown to about \$2.2 billion as India courts Myanmar following the gradual end of military rule, but Indian-funded projects have moved slowly.

Modi certainly would not want the projects to be delayed in view of China's ambitious 'One Belt One Road' initiative touching most of its neighbours. In India, there are about 40,000 Rohingyas in Jammu, Hyderabad, Delhi-NCR, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. With ISI raising its head through new recruits India will not allow a fertile ground for the rebels.

Influx of migrants also leads to social, political and cultural problems and the idea to "ensure the demographic pattern of India is not disturbed, the Government fears. But this has also a bearing on the anti-Muslim policy of the BJP government which has become clearer day by day.

The problem has started since Myanmar has not recognised the Rohingyas among its 135 ethnic groups under a 1982 citizenship Act. The Myanmar government terms them 'Bengali' to paint the Muslim minority in Rakhine state as recent migrants from Bangladesh and in Myanmar, the word Rohingya is a taboo. There are about 10 lakh Rohingyas in Myanmar and over 1.23 lakh have fled to Bangladesh since August 25 following violence.

India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN refugee convention, or its 1967 Protocol and the government decides asylum pleas on ad hoc and case-to-case basis. Asylum-seekers whose plea is okayed are given long-term visa (LTV) to be renewed annually. Long-term visa gives them the right to work in private sector and access to education and banking.

The major part of refugee population in India is Tibetans (about 1 lakh) and

they have many rights as that of a citizen. They can buy even land on lease and seek jobs in the private sectors. There is no hope of their going back and they have been rehabilitated in different parts of the country and even run a parallel Government of their own with famous Dalai Lama as its head and headquartered at Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh.

There are the Chakmas of Bangladesh, Afghans and ethnic Tamils from Sri Lanka are among those given refuge in India. Chakmas in the past used to come and go back as refugees depending on the change in the Government in Dhaka. Only last year the Modi government allowed Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to buy property for self-living, obtain driving licences, receive PAN and Aadhaar identity cards.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International expressed serious concerns over the attacks by Rohingya militants in Myanmar which left at least 32 people, including 11 security personnel, dead.

"These attacks are a dangerous escalation in violence and could put ordinary people in Rakhine State at risk, in particular as tensions have been reaching a boiling point in the region recently. We urge all sides to show the utmost restraint and ensure that ordinary people are protected from human rights violations and abuses," Josef Benedict, Amnesty International's Deputy Campaigns Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, said. Following fatal attacks on police outposts by Rohingya militants in northern Rakhine State in October 2016, Myanmar authorities launched major security operations in the area.

Amnesty International alleged wide-ranging human rights violations against the Rohingyas during these operations, including unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, rape and other sexual violence, as well as destruction of homes and property. The organisation concluded that the Myanmar security forces may have committed crimes against humanity.

But in this politics of violence the Rohingyas have become no country's citizen.

(The author was in Na Pyi Taw on invitation)

(With inputs from IANS)



(Top) Muslim women hold posters of Aung San Suu Kyi during a rally against the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Medan, North Sumatra; (left) An injured Rohingya, 60-year-old Mohammad Salim, receives treatment after crossing over from Myanmar into Bangladesh, at Chittagong Medical College Hospital. (PTI)

Opt for central forces

By Ranjan K Baruah

In our last edition, we published about defence as career. Similarly we can also choose Para Military Forces or Central Armed Police Forces as career. Para Military Forces (PMF) in India includes Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Sashastra Seema Bal, Assam Rifles, Indo Tibetan Border Police, etc.

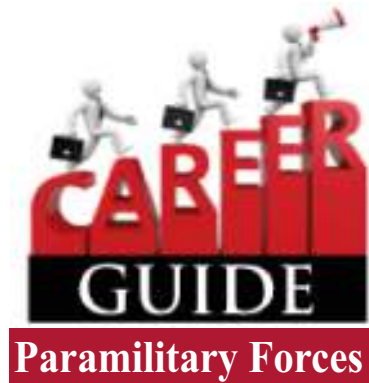
The Paramilitary Forces of India are these agencies that help the law enforcement agencies and Indian Armed Forces in their operations. It has over a million personnel active in its service.

One can enter any service of the Paramilitary Forces of India after completing Classes X, XII or Graduation. Women are also allowed to enter paramilitary forces services. Graduates in any stream, who are 20-25 years of age may apply for recruitment to posts of sub-inspectors in BSF, CISF, CRPF, ITBP and SSB. Female candidates are eligible for recruitment to CISF and CRPF only.

Some of the Central Police Organisations are Railway Protection Force (RPF), Indian Home Guard, Rapid Action Force, Central Reserve Police Force, etc. Central Para Military Forces includes Border Security Forces, Central Industrial Security Forces, etc. There are different recruitments to all

these services.

There are scopes for graduates and above. Promotions are structured in these forces and through it one can reach to high level posts with years of service and experience. The promotions in CRPF are structured. Generally an Assistant Commandant may reach the rank of DIG or IG in a 20



year service. Newly selected candidates begin their careers as AC (Assistant Commandant) and within 20 years the career graph ascends to the rank of DIG or IG in case of BSF.

ITBP recruits young men at the four levels of Assistant Commandant - Sub-Inspector - Head Constable - Constable. Vacancies are advertised from time to time in all leading newspapers and also

Employment News.

Physical fitness is necessary for all these services and there are different norms for the same. Information related to vacancies is published in news paper and their websites. Aspirants must be careful of frauds as there are many people who might charge money for giving jobs. Aspirants must look for authentic information and should not believe anyone from genuine people related to the services.

As the vacancies are advertised in the website of these forces, here below are the web addresses of some of the forces. Aspirants may visit these sites for vacancies. Some of the websites are:

BSF— <http://bsf.nic.in>
CRPF— <http://crpf.nic.in>
ITBP— <http://itbp.nic.in>
SSB— <http://www.ssb.nic.in>
CISF— <http://www.cisf.gov.in/>.

There are opportunities for doctors/engineers in these forces too as they employ people of different professions. Like serving in defence forces there is also pride and honour for those who join these forces and serve the nation. Aspirants may visit official websites of these PMF for job vacancies and opportunities.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a social activist and can be reached at bkranjank@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)

Literacy in digital world

By Ranjan K Baruah

In today's world 'digital' is a common and popular word amongst young or old. This term is most popular amongst young people as they use gadgets and devices. No society can progress without literacy and it is important how best we make use of our resources to achieve complete literacy in our society.

At record speed, digital technologies are fundamentally changing the way people live, work, learn and socialise everywhere.

They are giving new possibilities to people to improve all areas of their lives, including access to information; knowledge management; networking; social services; industrial production and mode of work.

However, those who lack access to digital technologies and the knowledge,



skills and competencies required to navigate them, can end up marginalised in increasingly digitally driven societies. Literacy is one such essential skill.

Just as knowledge, skills and competencies evolve in the digital world, so does what it means to be literate. In order to close the literacy skills gap and reduce inequalities,

this year's International Literacy Day will highlight the challenges and opportunities in promoting literacy in the digital world, a world where, despite progress, at least 750 million adults and 264 million out-of-school children still lack basic literacy skills.

International Literacy Day, celebrated annually on September 8, is an opportunity for Governments, civil society and stakeholders to highlight improvements in world literacy rates, and

reflect on the world's remaining literacy challenges. The issue of literacy is a key component of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The theme of this year's International Literacy Day was 'Literacy in a Digital World'. As the theme suggests technology can be used to promote literacy in the easiest way.

The forms of education have changed from the past and it is up to how best we can utilise gadgets and technology to promote literacy.

We can't achieve SDGs without literacy from different perspectives. Literacy may be formal or informal but it is important that all the citizens of the world must be literate if we really want to achieve SDGs.

(With direct inputs from UN publication and feedback may be sent to bkranjank@gmail.com)

Death not an option

By Sonali Shinde Tesia

World Suicide Prevention Day is observed on September 10 every year across the world to promote action and awareness towards prevention of suicides. WSPD is organised by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). The World Health Organisation (WHO) is the co-sponsor of the day. The purpose is to raise awareness around the globe that majority of deaths due to suicide can be prevented. This year marks the 15th World Suicide Prevention Day.

World Suicide Prevention Day gives organisations, government agencies and individuals a chance to promote awareness about suicide, mental illnesses associated with suicide, as well as suicide prevention. Various activities are observed in countries across the world in local, regional and national levels.

Every year, more than 800,000 people die by suicide globally and of these 135,000 (17 per cent) are residents of India. More than 1 lakh persons (1,34,599) in the country lost their lives by committing suicide during the year 2010 according to the National Records of Crime Bureau. Suicide is the second major cause of death among young people 15-29 years of age. According to WHO data, the age standardised suicide rate in India is 16.4 per 100,000 for women (6th highest in the world) and 25.8 for men (ranking 22nd).

Meghalaya has a suicide rate of 4.1 per 100,000 person. However, systematic profiling of suicide attempts in North east India is still lacking. Suicide remains a major public health concern.

For every completed suicide around 20 times as many persons have suicide ideation and attempt suicide. Behind these statistics are the individual stories of those who have, for many different reasons, questioned the value of their own lives. Each one of these individuals is part of a community. Some may be well linked in to their community, and have a network of family, friends and work colleagues or school mates. Others may be less well connected, and some may be quite isolated. Regardless of the circumstances, communities have an important role to play in supporting those who are vulnerable.

This sentiment is reflected in the theme of the 2017 World Suicide Prevention Day: "Take a minute, change a life." As members of communities, it is our responsibility to look out for those who may be struggling, check in with them, and encourage them to tell their story in their own way and at their own pace. Offering a gentle word of support and listening in a non-judgmental way can make all the difference.

People who have survived a suicide attempt have much to teach us about how the words and actions of others are important. They often talk movingly about reaching the point where they could see no alternative but to take their own life, and about the days, hours and minutes leading up to this. They often describe realising that they did not want to die but instead wanted someone to intervene and stop them.

Many say that they actively sought someone who would sense their despair and ask them whether they were okay. Sadly, often no one had asked them. They often say that if someone had taken a minute, the trajectory that they were on could have been interrupted.

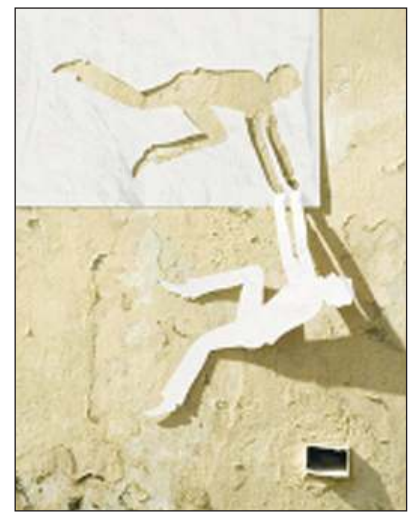
Life is precious and sometimes precarious. Taking a minute to reach out to someone – a complete stranger or close family member or friend – can change the course of their life.

People are often reluctant to intervene, even if they are quite concerned about someone. There are many reasons for this, also with a fear they will not know what to say. It is important to remember, however, that there is no formula. Individuals who have come through an episode of severe suicidal thinking often say that they were not looking for specific advice, but that compassion and empathy from others helped to turn things around for them and point them towards recovery. Another factor that deters people from starting the conversation is that they worry that they may make the situation worse.

Again, this hesitation is understandable; talking about suicide is difficult and there is a myth that talking about suicide with someone can put the idea into their head or trigger the act. The research evidence suggests that quite the opposite. Being caring and listening with a non-judgmental ear is far more likely to reduce distress than exacerbate it.

Contemporary issues

The use of the internet among teenagers and young adults is widespread. Along with this come the risks of internet addiction, cyber bullying and compulsive gaming. A recent phenomenon is the Blue Whale suicide challenge, an online game which allegedly consists



of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators during a 50-day period, with the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide. The term "Blue Whale" comes from the phenomenon of beached whales, which is linked to suicide. Suicide cases attributed to this fatal game have been identified in many countries and recently in India. Case reports have been reported from Maharashtra, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Assam.

Resources are available

There are various well-established resources that are designed to equip people to communicate effectively with those who might be vulnerable to suicide. Mental Health First Aid is based on the premise that many people know what to do if they encounter someone who has had a physical health emergency, like a heart attack (dial an ambulance, administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation), but feel out of their depth if they are faced with someone experiencing a mental or emotional crisis. Mental Health First Aid teaches a range of skills, including how to provide initial support to someone in these circumstances. Relevant resources can be found on the websites of IASP and WHO.

Risk factors for suicide attempt

- Person with a prior suicide attempt
- Mental illness patient suffering from depression, alcohol or drug abuse, Schizophrenia

pression, alcohol or drug abuse, Schizophrenia

- Person with severe emotional distress (loss of loved one or relationship problems)
- Young adults with excessive internet use and social isolation
- Person with chronic physical or mental illness
- Person with history of abuse or violence

How to offer support

Ask and be there — talk about suicide with the person you are worried about. Listen carefully with open mind what the individual is thinking and feeling.

Help them connect — encourage the person to connect with trusted individual like a family member, friend and offer to accompany them to seek help from a professional doctor or counselor. If you think the person is in immediate danger, do not leave him or her alone. Take him to the hospital and inform the family members.

Keep them safe — Ensure that person does not have access to means of self harm e.g. pesticides, firearms or medicines. Reducing, restricting or eliminating access to lethal methods can be a highly effective component of preventing suicide.

Stay connected — Keep in touch to know how the person is doing.

How to ask for help

What you can do to take help, if you feel like life is not worth living.

If you feel like life is not worth living, worthlessness, hopelessness or negative and disturbing thoughts or feeling very lonely even when you have friends and family. You do not understand why you are feeling or thinking this way. Reach out for help.

Talk to a trusted family member, friend or colleague about how you feel. It is okay to talk about suicide. It can help you feel better

Consult a psychiatrist doctor or a mental health counselor

Social, psychological, cultural and other factors can interact to lead a person to suicidal behaviors but the stigma attached to mental disorders and suicide means that many people feel unable to seek help.

Communities can play a critical role in suicide prevention. They can provide social support to vulnerable individuals and engage in follow-up care, fight stigma and support those bereaved by suicide.

Community measures

- Early treatment of mental illness and regular medications
- Reducing social isolation
- Preventing social disintegration
- Regulation of sale of medicines and pesticides

It is also the time to take notice of what's going on with your family members, friends, colleagues and yourself. It is about taking time to have those conversations when you notice that something has changed and equipping yourself to help yourself and others. A caring, compassionate person at a difficult time can help turn things around. The small acts can be life changing. If you are concerned about someone, reach out and ask them if they want to talk. Take a minute to make a difference. It is okay to talk about suicide as it does not provoke the act of suicide; however can reduce anxiety and helps people feel understood.

(The author is Consultant Psychiatrist based in Shillong)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 10, 2017

Moon trine Mars on your solar return chart indicates a good year ahead. You'll grow closer to the spiritual, emotional and physical balance you've been seeking when you commit to daily meditation rituals. You'll spend more time in nature this year, to improve your physical health and honor your drive for connection with Mother Earth. Strive for balance between work and play, as your tendency toward one or the other could be the very thing that is undermining your progress. Your financial restrictions will clear when you adopt the confident and determined stance.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

People and friends look to you with more respect, tolerance, and acceptance. You don't feel the need to prove yourself. You have the chance to shine because you project yourself with self efforts and modesty. Some of your most natural talents and hobbies would meet with reward and acceptance. Work done behind the scenes may be revealed or incorporated into your career or public life. Past efforts pay off now. New friendships are likely to emerge as they are supportive and easygoing ones. You need a certain amount of self-confidence during this period.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You would move towards a more positive and objective approach to your professional and personal life. You would have a great desire to expand your work and knowledge. You might further your education and it's a fabulous time to do so, or you could broaden your knowledge in a more informal manner. Confidence is the key of success and faith in the universe and your ability to do the right thing will get you everywhere now. This is the best time for realizing the positive potential that you have. You could have a feeling of unrest or dissatisfaction with your environment.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to be more spiritual. You are sober and serious in professional and personal relationships. You are getting serious about loved ones, family relationships and children. You are likely to take your hobbies more seriously. In fact, this is an excellent time for monetizing any personal hobby and turning it into a profession. You would be more practical in romantic relations with a loved one. For many, a romantic relationship stabilizes and becomes more serious. Opportunities-both personal and professional-are likely to present themselves. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness in professional aspects. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You may travel or make contact with people of different cultural backgrounds than your own. You are more determined to achieve your personal goals, and are more strategic in the manner that you go about doing so. Pouring your heart and soul into your efforts comes naturally now. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you is indicated. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Health needs care and old habits of excesses need to be discarded.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are frank, outspoken and can be undiplomatic on occasions. Political correctness and diplomacy are the call of the hour. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations this week. It is good time to you would be involved in lectures, debates, and discussions. You would have a tendency to work on many projects. You are more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires. This is an excellent period in your life in which to get organized and to stick with projects through to the end. A new project or goal begun at this time has a good chance of being successful and long-lasting. It's an excellent time in which you make a lifestyle change, as your ability to concentrate on what really matters to you is enhanced. A short vacation allows you to enjoy natural surroundings with a loved one.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There is perfection and beauty in emotional and personal relationships. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. This is altogether a happy and relaxed period for you. Remember to be thankful. Mental pursuits, new learning, and all forms of intellectual activity are favored.

Your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. You should maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way otherwise you will become frustrated and dull. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

A business partnership is lucrative and supportive. Good planning and management leads to be more progressive and productive professional ventures. Good luck in financial opportunities is encouraging. You are restless and move into varied activities and pay visits to friends. You are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility. Your personal charm and attractiveness has a positive effect on your personal and professional relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person and they would help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. Responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual, so set a target and make a proper schedule to meet the desired goal. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender, love and care. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender, love and care. Children look up to you for love and affection. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Family is supportive, children are loving and friends share hospitality and love at this time. It would be in your favor to make new beginnings and forget all old wounds and past patterns. It is best to let go negative feelings about relationships and situations gone by. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It is time to come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Issues of sharing of power and authority with others in personal and professional relationships come to the fore. You are likely to experience events that highlight the necessity to share and trust. Events and circumstances are such that you learn about your own personal strength. You may have to deal with willfulness and issues of power and competition. You would have a tendency to control your life through some form of manipulation. You may discover a new direction in your career. Things will not go in your favor if you resort to tactics to get what you want. You could have problems staying calm, cool, and collected at times.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 19)

You are in touch with dynamic, forceful and assertive energy to make new beginnings. Professional power and authority is vested in you to organize and achieve important targets and goals. You bring stability and order in business and professional projects with a dynamic and assertive approach. You come up with original and creative ideas that surprise others in the professional area. Your warrior like qualities of energy, action, swiftness, strength and pride come to the fore. You need to value and respect established relationships and business partnerships as they stand by you in times of stress and trouble.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It is time to break through restrictions, additions and emotional patterns as you are ripe and ready for major professional changes. Do not forget about long term commitments while you are dealing with short term contracts. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event is celebrated. You are appreciative and caring as you give total support to loved ones through a difficult time. It is time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills as a promotion or lucrative business opportunity is likely to present itself. You are physically fit and it is important to keep a handle on and maintain balance in relationships, finances and new business ventures.

Sick of imaginary ailments

I don't always Google my cold symptoms but when I do I have the Black Death, pregnancy and a disease only horses get.

This is not actually that surprising. I've had every disease known to man, except hypochondria, and I'll probably get that from a toilet seat later today.

But I will admit that some diseases are definitely all in the mind. There's a sign hanging from the ceiling at a hospital near where this columnist lives: "Beware of your head." Wise advice.

Consider a letter I received from a reader in Thailand about a murder earlier this year. A man was found dead in Chiang Mai with 15 bullets carefully fired into his bottom. Investigators, puzzled by the mode of execution, eventually uncovered one of those bizarre-but-true stories that you only get in Asia.

A woman, 39, had been seeking a cure for the constipation suffered by her husband, 40. As one would, they consulted a witchdoctor, who confirmed that a "Death by Constipation" curse existed, but a spell to remove it could be had for the equivalent of \$2,900.

So far, so relatively normal (for Asia). But later, the couple remembered that a family member had died of constipation 10 years earlier. OMG!

Clearly, the doctor was a serial killer whose modus operandi was to remotely shut down people's digestive systems!

So the couple did what they felt they had to do, according to police they got a gunman to kill the witchdoctor by gunshots to the buttocks because — if you think about it scientifically — that would surely break the spell, right?

seriously, rubbing his abdomen and making an appointment with his doctor.

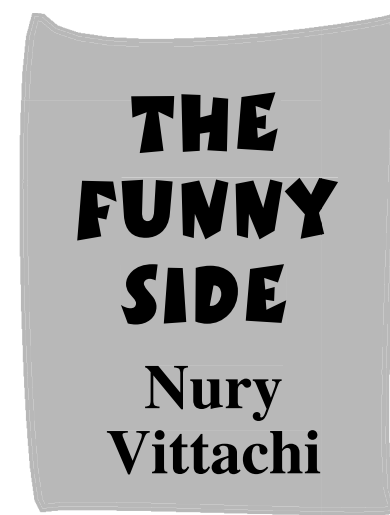
Which reminds me: we are overdue for an outbreak of koro.

This is a disease that appears in epidemic form every decade or so. It goes like this. 1) A guy imagines his genitals are smaller than he thought and privately tells a friend that they've shrunk. 2) The friend starts to worry which causes his genitals to shrink too. 3) Repeat x 1,000.

There've been many koro epidemics (Singapore in 1967, Thailand in the 1970s, Northeast India in the 1980s, West Africa in the 1990s and 2000s) but except for a small 2010 outbreak in south India, nothing recently. I may start an outbreak myself. Male readers: Do you feel your boxer shorts are more roomy than they used to be? Uh-oh.

The official modern medical treatment for koro is "education and reassurance", but I suspect the traditional Chinese remedy works better: Healers bang a giant gong very loudly near the sufferer and tell him he's fine now. In fact, the big gong thing could pretty much cure anyone of anything, including constipation. I may wheel one into my local hospital and try it out for the sake of medical science. Stand well back!

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)



Last I heard the couple were facing the terrifying prospect of many years in Thai jail, a thought I know will dramatically cure the husband's constipation. Stand well back!

Constipation is just one of many ailments with a mental element. I once told a colleague that his bloodshot eyes were "a sign of a twisted uterus" and he took it

“Smiles from the threshold of the year to come, Whispering ‘it will be happier’...”

--- Alfred Tennyson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 32 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2017

Double standards

UNION Minister of State for tourism K J Alphons has come up with contradictory ideas to promote the tourism sector in the country. He has made a singularly mystifying statement when asked about the lynching of beef eaters by cow vigilantes and the restriction in large parts of the country on the sale and consumption of beef. His ideas are very nebulous about the impact on tourism of these developments. It is in total contradiction of his anger about the view which is common about his government imposing a dietary regime in the country. He said that tourists can eat beef in their own country and come here. It is not merely offensive to tourists but also contradicts the slogan, “atithi devo bhava.” Tourists should be welcomed with a smile as they bring in foreign exchange. Alphonso had said earlier that Goa was a beef eating state and would continue to be so. His logic is his own. And the lynching by cow vigilantes has been strongly condemned by the Supreme Court and by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Double standards apply to non-Indian tourists in other ways. India charges different rates of admission for foreign and national tourists for admission to heritage monuments. How can that be justified? The special position of Goa and Kerala is also hard to explain. These states attract the largest number of tourists visiting India. But they do not come to these states to eat beef and standards cannot be different from other states of India. Alphons has spoken eloquently about the history and culture of India. That is what attracts tourists to this country. It may be noticed that even in hill stations foreign tourists do not make a beeline for liquor shops. The point to emphasise is that restrictions are odious and do not promote a national culture.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Meghalaya has over 17,000 Unemployed Youth

There were 17,129 unemployed youths in Meghalaya on December 31 last year. The number includes under-matriculates and is based on statistics available with Employment agencies in the State, according to Minister of Labour Mr S P Swer's reply to a question raised in the State Assembly.

About thirty students are being sponsored by the State Government for the MBBS course every year in order to solve the problem of the State. There are nearly 150 students from Meghalaya studying for the

MBBS. Minister for Health Mrs Maysalin War said in reply to a question in the State Assembly recently. The State Government is not in a position to appoint at least two doctors in State Dispensaries and Primary Health Centres. The norms for setting up of health centres are: One PHC for 30,000 population in Hill areas. A Community Health Centre is set up for every one lakh population. Since State dispensaries have been in existence for a very long time to cater to local needs of a particular area, no norms were fixed during those days, Mrs War said.

TO THE EDITOR

Students' plight turns into political game

Editor,

As a concerned citizen of Meghalaya, I cannot understand why the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) is demanding the resignation of the Chief Minister of Meghalaya Dr Mukul Sangma and his Council of Ministers over the issue of denial of admissions to MBBS students from Meghalaya in medical colleges of Assam. The statement issued by the BJYM is merely a publicity stunt to earn cheap publicity without really going into the root of the matter. As has been reported, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya was very prompt in responding to this issue as soon as news of the denial of seats broke out. He even spoke to the CM of Assam on this. Therefore this not only exposes the BJYM's political agenda before the elections but also its desire to create confusion.

It is ironic that they are condemning the Congress Government of Meghalaya

when in fact they should be condemning the BJP led Assam Government for not doing enough to ease the plight of the students from Meghalaya who want to pursue their studies. Students had to suffer because of the political enmity between the two states and BJYM has turned it into a political issue. This is not acceptable. In fact the BJYM should offer solutions to the problem instead of making it as their agenda to score political points at the cost of the students.

Yours etc.,
Joannes JTL Lamare,
Nongkrem

Plight of Rohingya Muslims and Buddhist extremism

Editor,

The Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Rakhine state of Buddhist majority Myanmar is the most persecuted people in the world. Lakhs of people fled across the Bangladesh border and thirty thousand are trapped

A Relook at the Government's Employment Policy

By H H Mohrmen

The state has witnessed a mad rush of educated youths applying for any available government job and the reason is because it pays well and comes with many allowances. But more importantly, unlike private or contractual work, a government job is secure. The trend now is that for every advertisement of a few government jobs that the MPSC or the different DSCs advertise there are thousands of applicants vying for the few jobs. This is one pertinent issue that the next government that comes power after the 2018 election needs to take as top priority.

The youth wing of KHNAM has flagged one very important issue which is related to the upper age limit of the youths who are applying for certain posts. But this is only related to the state civil service vacancies which were recently advertised by Meghalaya Public Service Commission. No doubt this is an important issue but we need to take this trivial age-limit subject a little bit further.

The government should re-examine the prescribed age limit for job applicants legible for applying for the various post. In some cases the age bar should be done away with because it is irrelevant. To begin with, it is wrong or rather comical to prescribe 18 as the minimum age for an applicant to apply for a post in which the required minimum educational qualification is a degree. Even if an applicant passes high school at the age of 14 years (which means that the student was in class 1 at the age of 4), she will only be able to graduate at the age of 19 because it will take her another 2 years to complete the higher secondary course and another 3 years to finish a degree course. The point is even if the candidate graduates from high school at the age of 14 she will take another five years to get a University degree.

This is even funnier when the required minimum qualification for the post is technical degrees like BE, B Tech, BSC Agriculture, B Pharm which are four year degree courses, because it is next to impossible for a person to complete a technical degree at the age of 18. The point is prescribing a minimum age for the post in which the required minimum qualification is a degree is irrelevant. The government should do away with

minimum age when advertising for a post in which the required minimum qualification is a degree. The same goes for jobs where minimum legible qualification is master's degree, for the simple reason that it takes 17 years to complete the course.

Then the advertisement becomes more amusing when apart from the fact that the minimum qualification prescribed for the job aspirant is a degree, then it also mentions that preference would be given to candidates with two, three or even five years experience. Can a youth complete a degree and also have two or three years experience at the age of 18? If the government increases or does away with minimum age limit then it can increase the upper age limit to a more practical one.

The upper age limit also needs to be raised because many public services commission including UPSC has increased the upper age limit of job aspirants. If experience is what the employers need then the upper age limit needs to be relaxed or done away with because experience also comes with age. Perhaps the upper age limit is only relevant for the armed forces recruitment because the job requires some kind of training and physical fitness, but for other posts or clerical jobs there should not be an upper age limit. Office and clerical jobs require only mental and physical competency, hence anybody before retirement age should be legible for the job.

The other issue is contractual employment, and since the introduction of programs and missions like NRHM, MNREGS, NULM, NRLM, IBDLP and SSA which only engage employees on contractual basis, the services rendered by the young staff should also be taken into consideration. The service of these staffs is not only insecure but they are also paid a paltry sum of money. The emoluments paid for staffs with the same qualifications and experiences also varies from one mission or program to another. Pay for Program Associates, F&A officer, field staffs and DEO in one program or mission is different from the other. Therefore it is only fair that the government provide the same pay or remuneration for the same post.

Employees working on

contractual basis are all on mission mode and unlike other office staffs, their work is result oriented and they have goals to achieve, yet they are paid very less. The government should give equal pay to its employees and their salaries should be commensurate with the amount of work that they do. Then the case of teachers being paid based on different schemes or missions is another pertinent issue. There are various schemes under which the teachers are paid like SSA, grant in aid and regular government posts. Here too the salary paid varies. Teachers are paid base on the schemes and missions and not on the number of hours they put in.

It is only fair that the yardstick for deciding the salary of all the employees is equal pay for similar or equal work. For example the government is engaging Home Guards personnel as traffic wardens to help the police control traffic, but in spite of putting in the same efforts and working the same numbers of hours, the salaries of policemen is two or three time more than that of the Home Guard. There should be no discrimination based on the schemes or missions or the process of appointment. Staff should be paid based on their work outcomes and efficiency.

If the government treats regular government employees and those under contractual basis equally, there would not be so much competition for government jobs because the pay will be the same irrespective of the post. In his article which was published in the Shillong Times as well as the vernacular paper, Dr Sumarbin Umdor suggested that the government should come up with a minimum wage for all those who are engaged in any form of labour. This is not only a good suggestion but it is also a way forward because if the objective is to have productive employees, it is only fair that there should be equal pay for people engaged in similar work and payment should be based on numbers of hours the employee works and her efficiency.

Payment based on the

effort put in by the employee is especially relevant in a society like ours which lacks the industrial culture. We have so many social obligations to attend to like birthdays, weddings, visiting the bereaved families, funerals, domestic and social commitments and even cheering for local football clubs and we are getting paid for attending all these events, because payment is not based on the efforts that we put in. Government should also make all jobs result oriented to ensure that all its staff perform. This can be achieved if we determine wages on an hourly basis.

Recently there was a debate in this paper about c o m p a s s i o n a t e appointment in case of a government employees' unfortunate demise and in this regard government of Assam has come up with a good idea. The government has decided to continue paying the family the salary (including increment) and all the benefits that deceased employee is entitled to (had she/she been alive) and also continue to pay the family pension when the employee is supposed to retire. This is not only practical but it is also fair and humane because it continues to take care of the employee's family as well as being fair in giving equal opportunity to all job aspirants to apply for the vacant post.

Therefore the way forward is for the next pay commission to think radically and come up with out of the box ideas. Payment based on efforts and efficiency should be encouraged because it will also make it easy for employees to switch jobs. Employees will not have to stick with the job they have no interest in just because it is lucrative, it pays well and it is secure. Government employees will not leave a government job because the available alternatives are not lucrative enough but if payment is based on hourly basis then it will make no difference which post one holds.

The government needs to do a rethink and reform its employment policy if it really wants to move forward.

China's "Strings of pearls" threat to India's strategic hold in Indian Ocean Region

By Rabin Prasad Kalita

It becomes obvious that, under the banner of One Belt One Region (OBOR) China is developing land and maritime trade routes but one must not be oblivious to the fact that they always carry a military ambition at the back of their minds. India has already been looted by Chinese military and commercial facilities and also as per the piecemeal reports, Pakistan's soil has been used for establishing Chinese military and naval base which would become a possible last slot in the chain of pearls encircling India. It would be worth mentioning here that similar military as well as commercial facilities also have been developed by China to encircle Japan and other American allies. Since our concern is India, our prime motto is to discuss Chinese presence in Indian Ocean Region only which might cost us heavily if any conflict should arise with China. Our concern is about the much talked Chinese doctrine of "String of Pearls" around India. China is also trying to foothold her presence

energy security. Moreover, it cannot be made null and void China's weaknesses in regards to the India's increased maritime surveillance in this area, which has shaken her. Hence, to by-pass these hostile and combative areas, the CPEC project will definitely add a new vein as an alternative route for them which would also decrease any possible confrontation. This alternative route would definitely reduce the shipping cost and transit time to half of the currently available circuitous sea route which is roughly 12,000 kilometers long. This new route from Gwadar to Kashgar (Xinjiang province, west part of China) would be approximately 3000 kilometres and another 3500 kilometers from Xining to the eastern part of China. Crude oil is expected to be refined at the Gawdar port and then sent to China via ongoing land pipeline (Gwadar- Kashgar project under CPEC). This route under CPEC will also enable them easy access for doing business with Middle East,

China is trying to outplay and exert its control over India in Indian Ocean Region with her significant string theory where India has ever dominated.

establishing maritime as well as military bases covering both land and maritime footprints of India in the region. 'String of Pearls' refers to a geopolitical network theory of Chinese crooked intentions in Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Rather, it precisely refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities developed around countries falling on the Indian Ocean.

Nearly 80 per cent of China's oil imports from the oil fields of the Middle East pass through the Straits of Malacca. Hence, Straits of Malacca is indispensable for China until it develops an alternative route. India has a good amount of strategic hold on Malacca straits because of Andaman and Nicobar Islands' easily accessible vicinity. Therefore, China is very keen to improve relations with countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia which surrounded the Malacca Straits. Moreover to check India's movement China is said to have developed a naval base on Cocos Keeling Archipelago, which is an Australian External Territory in the Indian Ocean.

Likewise in Kyaukpyu Port situated in the Bay of Bengal, Woody Island in the Paracel archipelago, Port in the Spratly Islands, Sihanoukville of Cambodia, Istmo de kra of Thailand, port of Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Marao port of Maldives and the Gawdar port in the south-west of Pakistan's Baluchistan province are the encircling ports developed by China as their commercial and strategic military deployment base in last few years.

Moreover, China is heavily dependent upon the sea routes that pass through the South China Sea near the disputed Spratly and Paracel islands where they have made their positions strong enough to thwart any untoward happenings. These islands are currently a source of tension amongst China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and the United States. Even the proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM) has also been susceptible to India's advances against China in the event of any scuffle, thereby, limiting the viability of BCIM corridor. China is putting more efforts and interest in CPEC for her

Africa and Europe with much shorter time and distance. No doubt, it is a well-managed gambit of China by making Pakistan a string-puppet for her sole interest.

China is trying to outplay and exert its control over India in Indian Ocean Region with her significant string theory where India has ever dominated. That is why China is trying to turn ports into naval bases in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives where she can house combat aircrafts and other hardware by hook or by crook. A well-orchestrated plan by China to block India's growing Maritime interests is the need of the hour. China is trying to help those poor countries with a number credit line scheme to have control over those poor island nations in Indian Ocean, so that, they change their mood and sing in favour of China.

After having made so much infrastructures in those countries encircling India, China hasn't limited herself, but it has also made its presence felt on the African coast and the Middle East. She is said to have a commanding presence with powerful military base on the African coast i.e., in Sudan and Kenya.

There are a lot of things that India can learn from China's foreign policy maneuvering strategies. So, better late than never, India's doctrine of 'Look East Policy' (LEP) now renamed by Prime Minister Modi as "Act East Policy" (AEP) will surely prove to be the answer to the Chinese 'String of Pearls'. The sluggish LEP got a boost in recent years after focusing on promoting connectivity with ASEAN states including security, strategic relations, counter-terrorism, trade and commercial relations, defense collaboration and also rejuvenating ties with the neighbouring countries to a greater extent.

India has a lot of scope for better trade and economic opportunities provided she seeks greater involvement in this region. The desire to fulfill her ambition to upgrade her age old relations with those countries is possible only through the dynamic and judicious implementation of the "Act East Policy".

Court of India has agreed to hear a petition challenging the government's decision to deport all the Rohingyas living in our country.

But the real danger has just begun. In the name of Jihad for the plight of Rohingyas, Myanmar may be a target for ISIS. The bottom line is that migrants are a potential pool of recruits for militants. The conflict may lighten the rod for Islamist networks that stretch from Philippines to Indonesia and Malaysia with links to Middle East. The battle between Buddhist extremism and Islamist extremists has just begun. Can India's North East escape from this global crisis?

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Digvijaya Singh - A loose cannon

Editor,

United we Stand, divided we fall is a common adage. The administrative failure of Digvijaya Singh as Chief Minister of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh state resulted in the state splitting

into two - Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh without considering the long-term economic viability, self-sufficiency and sustenance of the newly born state of Madhya Pradesh as the entire mineral resources lay in the womb of Chattisgarh. The partition of the MP State was completed during the Congress-led UPA regime which inherited the legacy and the philosophy of "divide-and-rule" from their British Masters. In doing so they have ignored the universally experienced and accepted adage of "Unity is Strength". Digvijaya Singh the master-mind of communal disharmony, coined in a sycophantic tone the term "Hinduterrorism" for appeasing and providing a vocabulary to Rahul Gandhi for election campaigning with an eye on the vote-bank for the Congress party. Making derogatory statements and denigrating the entire Hindu community is undesirable. Is it not necessary to review the definition of the terms "Secularism & pseudo-Secularism"?

During the proxy war launched by Pakistan in

Mumbai on Nov 28, 2008 where many innocents of different died different communities died and there was wide-spread carnage not even sparing hospitals and ailing patients, it is important to investigate as to who instructed the Congress Government to send three senior-most police officers huddled together in a jeep to combat and counter-the Pakistani terrorists led by Kasav.

In Srimad Bhagavad Gita it is scripted that the life-style and standards of ethics, manners and values as created and set by great men and souls are generally and normally followed by ordinary mortals. Of course, Congressmen like Digvijaya Singh and N D Tiwari are certainly not the epitomes of ethics and morality!

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

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

"It's amazing how a little tomorrow can make up for a whole lot of yesterday."

--- John Guare

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 33 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

How safe are our students

NOT a single day passes without some gruesome story about suicide, murder or young school boys being sodomised, school girls being raped within the school campus; the latter by teachers. We cringe to hear such news and our faith in basic human values take a knock each time we are confronted with such horror stories. Added to this is the new social media terror that teenagers seem to be addicted to – the Blue Whale Challenge – which has already taken a few lives. There is too much to cope in a single day yet we cannot simply black such out these events. The point is to reinforce security on all fronts in educational institutions. That the driver of a school bus in Ryan's International School, Gurugram should be able to enter the students' toilet and carry out his heinous act of slitting open a student's throat, just exposes how lax the whole system is. These days it is impossible to trust anyone not to commit obscenities. That is the premise on which schools should operate. In the past we are informed of bigger boys bullying smaller boys in toilets etc. These may sound absurd but they happen all the time, yet they are hushed up by most schools. Parents too don't report such incidents or even incidents of bullying by teachers for fear that their kids might lose the seat in that "prestigious" or "elite" school. This has only exacerbated the problems in educational institutions. It is only when children die or are brutally attacked that parents dare speak up. But this culture of silence helps no one.

Physical assaults by male teachers are tales we often hear being told by parents outside the school campuses. Students too narrate such stories to each other after they have passed out. Some suffer such scars forever. Others become violent as a consequence of having been victims of violence. The psychological damage inflicted by teachers or fellow students is incalculable. Yet parents stoically suffer such ignominy. Is this helping anyone? Is there a system of anonymous complaints by parents so that schools can take corrective steps? Granted that there will be several bogus whining from vested interests but there could also be genuine grievances that could lead to greater harm in the long run if left unaddressed. The question to ask here is what are the Parent-Teachers' Associations(PTA) doing if not to engage with the school authorities for the greater good of their children?

Need for a new vision for education in the North East

By Jyotirmoy Prodhani

The recent crisis on the medical seats in Assam medical colleges for the North East states has opened up a new concern pertaining to the higher education scenario in the region in general. It is unfortunate that the few seats of as important a discipline as medicine doled out to the students of the Northeastern states by the Assam medical colleges have now become uncertain. Under NEC quota there are only 13 seats for North Eastern states with 10 seats for Meghalaya and one each for Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. Arguably the students who crack tests to get these seats come through stiff competitions and are, undoubtedly, some of the most deserving students from their respective states. Out of the 726 medical seats available in Assam not even 2% of seats are meant for the students of these states where infrastructure for higher education is still at its nascent stage. In order to ensure a comprehensive growth of the region it is incumbent upon Assam, the largest state of the region, to provide certain facilities it has at its disposal, to the states which are smaller, relatively new with inadequate resources to build up enough institutions for themselves. Besides, Assam also has historical obligations to these states. In India the doctor to population ratio is 1:2000 that is, there is one doctor for every 2000 people which is considered quite low by the standards set by the WHO, which is 1:1000. If we go by the India Population statistics, doctor and population ratio stands at around 1:5000 in Meghalaya, 1:3000 in Nagaland 1:7000 in Mizoram and about 1:1700 in Arunachal Pradesh. The combined doctor population ratio in these four states is about 1:2500. These are rough estimations on the basis of available data; the actual reality must be far grimmer.

Evidently there is a huge deficit of doctors in these states where basic health services are yet to reach the last man living in the periphery. The present dilly dalling on the part of the Assam government in accommodating the NE students in the medical colleges of the state is extremely unfortunate and

enormously disappointing. One might argue that how come these states are yet to come up with their own medical colleges? But then to set up medical colleges and sustain them is not so easy for the resource strapped states, although the paucity of resources cannot be an excuse to ignore the necessity of establishing educational institutions. However, there should be special directives from the centre to increase NE quota in the educational institutions in Assam not only in Medicine but also in other institutes of professional and higher learning (including medical and engineering colleges) as well as in the universities.

When in academic circles we are so vocal and emphatic about North East as a composite geo-political identity, the situations on the ground is quite the opposite. There are hardly any combined efforts to formulate policies for greater coordination among the states to ensure the strengthening of the North East solidarity at a more comprehensive level. Massive disparity in learning opportunities among the states is a major factor leading to intraregional imbalances. In fact, it should be addressed as one of the key issues by the states to come up with a mutually agreeable policy to formulate an agenda for enhanced education opportunities all over the North East. To make North East a common hub of learning for the students from the region there should be uniform growth of education infrastructure in all the states in the region and at the same time the states with better infrastructure need to take the lead as an ethical imperative. At present there are huge gaps when it comes to education opportunities in the states. It is noteworthy that when the central government is spending millions in the region in terms of security expenditure, spending in education sector is evidently low. It is likely to further go down with the progressive decline in budget allocation by the centre in education sector which has gone down to as low as just 3.77% of the GDP that stands as the lowest so far. Even the highly

developed countries like the US, UK and many other countries from the first world, which have much higher GDP and lesser population than that of India, still spend much more on education than what India has been doing in terms of GDP ratio.

Substantial investment in education sector in the North East should be an urgent priority for the central government in order to ensure all round growth of the region so that it can subsequently be at par with any other developed parts of the country. Investment in education can be an alternative to the insensitive industrial push at the cost of its ecology and human habitats. A new vision and a well thought out plan for education in the North East is an urgent necessity.

Firstly there should be more investment in the region to develop education infrastructures in all the states. A lone central university in the respective states is not enough. There has been huge outflow of students from the region to the other parts of the country seeking higher education as well as various professional courses. The centre and the states should ensure developing high quality institutions of professional courses and higher education in the region which should be some of the best not only within the country but should be among the top institutions of higher education in the South and South East Asia. North East has a huge potential to emerge as an education destination for the South and South East Asian countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and the like following the close ethno cultural linkages North East shares with these countries.

Each state in the North East must have medical and engineering colleges with full central support for it might not be feasible for the tiny states to sustain such institutions. Some seats needs to be reserved for the respective states as a special provision. Professional courses like

medical, engineering, media studies, science education and the like should gain priority where a few seats should be earmarked across disciplines as North East quota which would not only help students get opportunities for higher education within the region, but also help bringing various communities and ethnic cultures of North East come closer to each other. That would, subsequently, enhance greater amount of mutual understanding.

Reputation of education institution is not achieved through the physical facilities alone, the eminence of an educational institution is primarily predicated upon the quality of teachers. Most of the great institutions evolved into prestigious centres of learning because of their teachers and facilities for research. In this respect it is a critical requirement to develop teaching and research in the region as an attractive proposition. It is a common practice in the major institutions of higher education world over to offer various incentives to attract best of the minds as its faculty and researchers. Quite sadly there is hardly any such policy in the North East, teachers in the universities and colleges here do not even get any research seed grants or substantive incentives resulting in the absence of a robust research environment which has direct bearing on the quality of teaching at any level. Besides, there should be a comprehensive policy to attract the best of the young minds and academicians to cultivate and permeate their knowledge in the region to turn North East as one of the major knowledge destinations.

If North East has to grow as a region with edge and strength, massive development in the education sector is the key for which the union government must come up with affirmative policy strategies which is also crucial to ensure stable economic and political climate in the region.

The author can be reached at rajaprodhani@gmail.com,

Privacy: Coincidence of convergence at the apex level RBI report stresses importance of protecting personal data

By K. Raveendran

In a strange coincidence, a report of the Reserve Bank of India published on August 24, the day the Supreme Court delivered its historic judgment upholding the right to privacy as fundamental, shares almost identical views on privacy and the use of personal data by financial institutions.

In its Report of Household Finance Committee, the RBI observed that technological solutions to household finance problems often rely on households sharing personal data with financial product providers and this raises obvious issues of privacy. "While this is not the principal focus of our recommendations, we do provide thinking about a sensible framework for data privacy in Indian household finance, and suggest the adoption of a rights-based privacy framework in contrast with the more common consent-based privacy framework," it said.

The same day a 9-member bench of the Supreme Court held that the right to privacy is fundamental. In a unanimous decision, the judges ruled that privacy is an inalienable right, and a crucial aspect of individual liberty and dignity.

The issue arose out of a batch of petitions assailing the constitutionality of the Aadhaar project, which involves the collection of biometrics and storage of extensive personal information within a centralised database. Issues have also been raised about the security of the information, both in terms of breaches and access by third parties. The privacy implications of Aadhaar are now to be further examined by the court separately.

The historic verdict, which overturned the position prevailing for over 50 years, recognises privacy as an important facet of individual autonomy, the right to live with dignity, and the right to personal liberty. The court has also acknowledged the importance of informational privacy and right to exercise control over one's personal information.

There is no way that the RBI's approach, known over time as typically orthodox, could have been influenced by the Supreme Court thinking. This means that the apex bank must be credited with some original out of the box approach. The RBI Committee has similarly followed an open-ended approach to some of the other issues as well in an uncharacteristic departure from bureaucratic apathy.

The report documents the high levels of unsecured debt of Indian households, and perhaps more importantly, debt taken from non-institutional sources such as moneylenders. Such debt generates high costs for the Indian households, which lead to households becoming trapped in a long cycle of interest repayments.

Despite the high holdings of real estate, mortgage penetration is low early in life, and subsequently rises as the households age. This is at variance with Indian households' counterparts in other countries, where debt has a characteristically hump-shaped pattern over the lifecycle. Indian households tend to borrow later in life and are more likely to reach retirement age with positive debt balances, which is a source of risk, given that they are no longer earning income during these years.

The report links this tendency to social arrangements in which households bequest housing wealth to future generations and in turn receive support during retirement. Such traditional approaches to household financial management have likely evolved over time as a rational response to prevailing economic conditions. However, it notes that these traditional structures are increasingly under pressure from shifting

demographic patterns, social norms, and changing economic conditions, introducing risks to economic well-being especially as households age.

The Indian household finance landscape is distinctive through the near total absence of pension wealth. Pension accounts and investment-linked life insurance products exist, but they are only used frequently by households located in a small group of states, while in most other states, the contribution of pensions wealth to household wealth is negligible.

The report refers to a strong negative correlation between participation in insurance and the incidence of non-institutional source debt, suggesting that households are dealing with risks through high-cost borrowing as opposed to insuring against such risks. This has been described as a costly approach, as high interest payments on informal debt impose substantially greater costs relative to insurance.

The report highlights the importance of strengthening the public provision of health and social welfare services to mitigate the problem and attributes it to the tight constraints on household budgets which do not permit them to take on insurance. Over the coming decade and a half, the elderly cohort is expected to grow by 75 percent. Only a small fraction of this cohort has saved in private pension plans. Moreover, a large segment of the population of households in all age cohorts has not actively taken steps to insure adequate financial coverage during retirement. The need to finance adequate consumption during retirement is, therefore, a looming issue, and when combined with the low penetration of insurance, households appear particularly vulnerable to adverse shocks later in life.

The report looks at the impediments for the households to approach formal banking channels for their needs. These include the high transactions costs and bureaucratic hurdles which create a high 'nuisance factor' for households hoping to engage in formal financial markets. Indian households strongly associate formal banking institutions with large administrative burdens and complicated paperwork.

There are also trust issues that households face in their participation in formal financial markets. These arise from their negative perceptions of the formal providers, which are exacerbated by occasional poor experiences with unscrupulous providers. These trust issues appear to correlate highly with the income level of the household, and low income households often report their belief that access to financial products is the prerogative of elite groups in society. This lack of trust in financial institutions helps explain the tendency of households to eschew financial products and to invest in instruments such as gold instead. It also helps to explain the continuing reliance of Indian households on traditional systems of provision of financial services, the report concludes. Behavioural factors such as a lack of self-confidence in engaging with formal financial systems also come as deterrents.

Cognitive issues like bias and the self-perceived financial management skills of the head of the household are also important factors. That the report acknowledges the role played by non-institutional debt, which unfortunately comes at high cost and associated imperfections, indicates a subtle change of approach in looking at the issues of household finances. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Freedom of expression – a double edged sword

Editor,

The recent article "Social Media Has Changed Our Lives Forever!" (ST, Sept 8, 2017), by our upright journalist, Patricia Mukhim made a very interesting read. She has aptly pointed out -- "fake news is circulated, consumed and ingested and opinions are not only instantly formed but reactions too are posted without much thought." Thanks to the mushrooming media shops that have the shocking audacity to serve out lies in various flavors – which could be relishing for some, but too unsavoury or too bitter for others. These very news agencies, which can be purchased by the highest bidder also have an amazing art of hiding the "truths" if they don't fit well with their agenda. No wonder, what we hear we hold as true and react in the same manner as it was presented – perfectly like

Newton's third law of motion.

Thus, sufficiently worked up by the media, the enraged folks of various classes and faiths go on a rampage on social media because there they find endless ready-made battlefields. Here they can demonstrate their raw and crude heroism. Besides the harsh vocabulary of hostility, the filthiest terms are used to attack the opponent, his religion and finally his blood relatives. All jargons of obscenity are what decorate these virtual battlegrounds. Phew, this is how the double-edged sword of the "freedom of expression" is mindlessly wielded in modern times leaving the society and the human values grievously wounded.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong-2

Whither freedom of speech

Editor,

On Gauri Lankesh's

murder, your editorial, "Where is India headed" (ST, Sep 9, 2017), rightly says, "This casts a pall of gloom on India's criminal justice system." Gauri Lankesh's murder is another attempt to kill Indian democracy, the spirit of our Constitution, the voice of the champions of the downtrodden and above all the evolutionary progress of humankind. After Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and Malleshappa Kalburgi, Gauri Lankesh had to give her life.

What would have happened to our great men had they lived today? Raja Rammohan Roy waged a war against dogmatic forces to stop killing widows in the name of Sati. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar did the same to give widows the right to remarrying. On the other hand, Sri Ramkrishna himself practiced Islam and Christianity to live his words - 'Many opinions, many paths'. Rabindranath Tagore condemned tyrannical social restrictions on intermarriage and described such prejudices as a gigantic obstacle to realizing our national unity. Swami

Vivekananda worshipped and touched the feet of a four-year-old, poor, Kashmiri, Muslim girl to worship her as Goddess Uma. Sri Aurobindo introduced a Christian French lady, Mirra Alfassa, as the Divine Mother.

It is a pity that we could not save the life of Mahatma Gandhi in independent India whereas those great men including Gandhi survived in British India in spite of their sweeping reforms and egalitarian ideology. Must not we make ourselves independent enough to live great ideas and improve our criminal justice system?

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Regular default by LPG supplier

Editor

I don't believe in writing against any organisation/institution in the media because it causes far reaching, adverse consequences for them. Therefore, unless I am

pushed to the edge I consider it proper to settle the scores bilaterally. In the instant case my grouse is against Trinity Bharat Gas Agency, Nongthymmai. This agency should explain to the public, as to why it puts its consumers in jeopardy. Unlike other agencies Bharat Gas supplier is usually very irregular in refilling LPG, and it can be ascertained from the following facts. This agency has not supplied the LPG refill to its customers at Barapathar since June 29, 2017. During the year (Calendar year) 2014 it supplied refilled cylinders only six times; in 2015 five times; in 2016 seven times and in 2017 so far, it has supplied only three times. These figures are counted from the gas card. If I am not mistaken a gas agency is mandated to supply nine LPG refills in a year. Thus, one can visualize just how much the consumers of Bharat Gas Consumers are pushed to limits of intolerance. Hence their grievance is ventilated through this newspaper for redressal.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri,
Shillong-2

When journalists unite

Editor,

The ghastly murder of renowned journalist Gauri Lankesh will go down as a black day in this democratic nation of ours. The Shillong Press Club along with the entire media fraternity came and paid tribute to her at Police Bazaar near the old State Assembly. It is truly a unifying moment for people involved directly and indirectly with the media. The media here has even had a share of its incidents of government harassment here in our state. Those in authority in the government should know that the media is the eyes and ears of the nation and no one can stop it from fulfilling its duty.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar

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.

“Sometimes we should express our gratitude for the small and simple things like the scent of the rain, the taste of your favorite food, or the sound of a loved one’s voice.”

--- Joseph B. Wirthlin

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 34 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

Singh on Kashmir

THE Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh during his visit to J&K took a cue from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that he would talk to all involved in the crisis in the sensitive state. He promised compensation and better equipment to the local police and security forces. He also allayed fears caused by the suspected challenge to Article 35A and made it clear that youth below 18 years of age will not be treated as criminals. Instead of being put in prison, they will be sent to juvenile homes. The Home Minister shared with the State government its concern for responding to the expectations of the local population. Positions have hardened since the killing of Hizbul commander Burhan Wani in July 2016. Voter turnout in bye-elections in April this year was a meagre 7%. The Army chief General Bipin Rawat defended the use of civilians as human shields. Raids on separatist leaders by the National Investigation Agency over allegations of providing terror funds and arrests of some of them queered the pitch for a dialogue in J&K. There was also apprehension about the state BJP questioning the validity of Article 35A.

Rajnath Singh has promised to break the ice. The BJP-PDP alliance in the state has to be reinvigorated and all internal contradictions must be removed. Singh’s assurance of talking to all stakeholders brings non-violent political elements of the state in the ensuing dialogue. The promise that youth in the state will not be criminalised also generates hope. Singh’s statement that he will visit the Valley 50 times in a year shows sense and sensibility.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Union Home Minister to visit Manipur

Dissidence in Congress(I) is endemic everywhere and it makes no difference whether the party is in power or in the opposition. In Manipur where the Congress(I) is in office, the dissidence threatens the life of its own Ministry handed by Mr Rishang Keishing; in Tripura where it is in opposition to the CPI(M), it threat-ens law and order in the State in its effort to find a political foothold strong enough for a fight with the ruling party. Mr Buta Singh, the Union Home Minister and also sup-posed to be in charge of the Congress(I) affairs in the state, must be a bold man indeed to have undertaken a two-day tour of the two states, in expectation of pro-viding a ready-made solu-tion for the Congress ills in both the

units. It requires no extra intelligence to suppose that ahigh dignitary that he is, he was surely empowered to dispose of the ministerial tangle in Manipur at Imphal itself. That the tide has turned accordingly in favour of Mr Keishing would be only too evident from the spate of withdrawals of earlier resignations for his Ministry, which started flowing after the close of Mr Buta Singh’s series of parleys with Congressman at Imphal. The bane in the dis-sident camp is that there were too many too willing to be projected as Mr Keishing’s substitute and successor-in-office and this only strengthened Mr Keishing’s case for continu-ance in office. The message do something themselves politically and not be expecting to get everything done.

An era when reason and hypersensitivity coexist

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Since the dawn of civilization about 4004 B.C., we had been constantly progressing into the modern age. The society is said to have evolved from primitive religion to more advanced philosophical idealism, then to modern scientific mentalities when science and scientific methods are employed in the management of human affairs. In the ancient societies, some forms of religious cult had always been part and parcel of the political and economic systems. No state in the past was thought to be complete without the incorporation of some form of religious cults because that was necessary to address human ignorance of scientific knowledge. But as scientific knowledge develops, the general wonder to mystery was dispelled and science replaced religion. It is then hoped that science by itself is able to provide mankind with a way of life which is self-consistent and harmonious as well as free for the exercise of that objective reason on which our material progress depends. The modern age is also viewed as the age when the importance of the moral guideline of the super-ego is restricted while the power and freedom of reason enhanced.

But it is also opined that the rapid increase in scientific knowledge and technology and the spread of scientific spirit are in large measure responsible for the strange and multiple chaos of thought in the modern society today. Reason is supposed to ensure successful adjustment of the individuals to habitual cognitive situations and to facilitate our minds to correct our own human errors, and also to develop abilities to cope with situations that cause anxiety. Hence, it is in the application of reason that civilized man is said to owe his evolution from the savages. But it seems that man has rapidly created changes in the natural and social environments to which he has so far not been able to adjust himself with.

The industrial and commercial system of economy again put the individuals in wonder of their statuses and worth in the entire political and economic systems. Individually and alone, each person is in a social gloom and thrown into helplessness in the whirlpool of a powerful system though the human race as a whole seems to be in control collectively. This produced a social pathology which science and technology cannot provide the answer. To deal with such general gloom which is

experienced individually, mysticism in the guise of psychological and spiritual healthcare systems revived and entered into the global markets and become superfluous antidote to an exaggerated scientific and rational structuring of the human minds and spirits. These days, anyone who can claim to be a yoga guru or god-man to offer instant peace and solace to the starving spirits can make multi-million dollar business anywhere in the world with little tangible capital investment, provided that he/she is courageous enough to claim that he/she holds the key to solve this social pathology.

Whether such systems really work or not is not our intention to discuss here. It has been said that today politics and business go together. But a new trend also emerged where business and religion go together. But business in the real sense demands hard work, diligent and fair dealings. So it is not business that go together with politics and religion, but it must be theft, robbery and fraud that are legalised in political and religious activities.

The modern period was also accompanied by the rise of humanism as a system of views which extolled man, stressed his essential worth and dignity, and with deep faith in his tremendous creative potential, proclaimed freedom and inalienable rights of the individual. Humanism sought the glorification of the human and the natural as opposed to the spiritual and divine, and advocates man’s right to pleasure and satisfaction of earthly desires and requirements and urges him to seek joy on this earth rather than in an afterlife. Indeed, this era seems to promise prosperity and glamorous success to everyone. This has induced unlimited aspirations in the minds of the youth, which when thwarted by stark reality sometimes proved catastrophic. If everyone shall be a master with numerous slaves and servants, then who shall be slaves and servants? It is an irony of truth, and a gross blasphemy for anyone to say that the merciful God had blessed him/her with numerous slaves and servants. But that is the paradox of the modern world. No wonder that suicide rate is on the rise even in the remote villages!

Modern information technology through the agency of the social media is supposed to create an inter-cultural global society based on general understanding and tolerance. But since a

common scientific language has not evolved, each person understands the elements of global communication in the context of his/her own cultural upbringing that on the contrary, a general culture of egoism, hypersensitivity and intolerance seems to have emerged. Selfie facilities have built up an egoistic and selfish mentality. Since fabulous self-worth, fashioned by virtual reality has given people with fragile hearts that are easily offended, the world could be shaken to the roots not by God or by the demons, but by a silly post in the social media. We have indeed become so hypersensitive, emotional and mentally shakened that not only would the youth commit suicide by stinging criticism, insults and ridicules, but a third world war might also be triggered by the provoking tweets of the leaders of some nuclear armed nations even though there is no serious international reason at all.

The Khasi society in the past had the means to deal with individuals’ dignity problem which plagues the modern world today. In the Ri Bhoi region of the Khasi Hills, children were purposely given derogatory names based on physiological defects, such as u/ka dkoh (the lame), tlhah (blind), kyllut (deaf), thlun (dumb), khuruh (ricket) etc. They were also given names based on character defects, such as u dih (drunkard), u/ka salia (lethargic), u sarei (clownish), u zlah (deceitful), u lubuit (naked), u dakaid (wicked), etc., to train them to bear with the insults and to thicken their skins with immunity to live a normal life in the face of insults and ridicules. Insults and ridicules are already contained in a person’s name, then what else can the society insult his/her spirit by further ridicules? There are many persons still living perfectly normal lives today in the Ri Bhoi region with such derogatory names, when the enlightened persons of the modern world would, by casual derogatory remarks be hastened to suicide.

So, I would advise any young man or woman who reads this article to accept that the world is never perfect, and no one is perfectly normal. Society is not heaven but is basically, a chaos operating in order, and maintaining itself on the

force of cumulative individual interests. Human society cannot solely rely on democratic freedom which only imposes the responsibility upon others to allow a person to be free, not to restrict one’s thoughts and actions in exercise of his/her democratic rights and to protect him/her from any form of discrimination, oppression and aggression. However, such a freedom would not suffice to transform a person into a free and rational being. It is enlightened freedom that would empower a person to attain rational maturity and self-realisation. No authority on earth can guarantee a person freedom from insults and ridicules, and much less, from his/her own fear, shyness, feeling of inferiority and self-condemnation. Freedom from criticism, insults and ridicules does not imply their absence, but it essentially means the ability to cope with them, the ability to be immune to such human frailties and to transcend above them all. Freedom of the individual in the age of reason does not mean freedom from the condemnation of others but it is freedom from self-condemnation. A perfectly rational man is free from self-condemnation whatever the world may pass judgment on him.

This generation craves too much attention; and if attention is lacking, people become desperate and may resort to questionable behaviour for attention or may even resort to suicide. You have to find peace and refuge firmly in yourself so that you need not seek attention unnecessarily. Insult and ridicule carry no poison in themselves until you allow your own mind and heart to brew the poison into embarrassment, fear, inferiority feeling, self-condemnation, and in extreme cases, into suicide. All feelings of inferiority, shyness, embarrassment, anxiety and fear have no external existence other than in your own mind and heart and don’t ever condemn yourself; you have the full right to live and exist, and to exist honourably, as anyone else. Even if the whole world were engulfed in flame, you should consider yourself one among the few who would escape from destruction and emerge out of the ashes to continue the human race.

Myanmar Communal Strife

What could India do?

By Prof DK Giri

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Myanmar following a successful BRICS summit was not free from criticism. Why did he not raise the issue of Rohingya Muslims who are subjected to appealing repression, rape and murder by the Army and Buddhist mob? A human tragedy of such magnitude could not possibly escape the attention of the ever-alert Modi. It was, indeed a studied, silence owing to the geopolitics in the region. The argument being that maintaining a balance between democratic ideals, humanitarian issues and critical security interests has been a hard task for India vis-à-vis Myanmar.

Then, Modi’s visit begs the second criticism that he could have raised it with the de-facto head of Myanmar, noble laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Why didn’t he make her speak on Rohingyas? The entire world was amazed and worried by Suu Kyi’s silence on the pogrom in the State of Rakhine, inhabited by majority of Rohingya Muslims.

However, both the concerns have been addressed by Modi and Suu Kyi as both of them spoke up. The problem needs to be handled carefully, as the situation is complex. Aung San Suu Kyi said that protecting everyone, even those not citizens, in Myanmar is the government’s responsibility. Obviously, she was mainly referring to Rohingyas who are stateless without their citizenship entitlements; and others living in the country as diplomats, businessmen and like.

But, do Modi’s and Suu Kyi’s utterances help resolve the crisis? Are they not mere rhetoric as hundreds and thousands of Rohingyas flee the country to escape rape, murder and mayhem? By the latest estimate, about 300,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh in most punishing and inhuman conditions, and are literally starving of food, clothes and shelter. Some have left for Malaysia, Thailand and other neighbouring States. Over 400 Rohingyas have died in fighting the army, and attackers from Buddhist community. Their villages and houses have been torched and razed to the ground.

Although there have been sporadic violence in Rakhine, the latest reached the nadir of ethnic rivalry. The violence began on 25 August when the Rohingya insurgents led by Aarakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked police posts and an army base killing 12 security personnel. This spurred an unusual military counter offensive of rape and murder. There has been a mass exodus of Rohingyas.

Observers said the genocide that was perpetrated is a “text book example of ethnic cleansing.” Some compared it to ‘Srebrenica’, the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia when 8000 Muslims were killed by Slobodan Milosevic. Myanmar calls it ‘clearance operation’ of Muslim terrorists. The insurgent group called a ceasefire last Sunday. But, the government has rebuffed it, saying they would not negotiate with the terrorists.

The conflict is rooted in the origin of Rohingyas. One account traces their origin to Arab Traders centuries ago whose descendants decided to stay back. Another profiling of Rohingyas suggests that they are Bangladeshi immigrants, who should go back at some point. The problem was deepened by persisting poverty and manipulation

over decades by the army. They have no citizenship, which made things worse for them.

What could New Delhi do to repair Rakhine and restore peace, normalcy so that Rohingyas return home and are resettled? India is in a difficult diplomatic situation. The Prime Minister made his first visit to Myanmar capital, Naypyidaw “in order to cement ties,” and coincidentally, Rakhine was burning at that time. Obviously, India is playing a catch-up game with China on Myanmar. Modi’s visit was also a part of his ‘act east’ policy, like the famous ‘ostpolitik’ (look east) politics of Willy Brandt of Germany. Will he succeed like Brandt had done?

India shares 1600 km border with Myanmar. New Delhi seeks to prevent Naypyidaw from slipping into China’s sphere of influence. It depends on Myanmar military for presenting North-Eastern militants from using Myanmar as a safe haven. India will like to help Myanmar’s successful transit to a stable democracy after 50 years of military rule from 1962 to 2011 but is wary of ethnic Burmese sensitivity to any external pressure.

Against this backdrop, New Delhi has to raise it with Myanmar government and rally behind Rohingyas. Instead, it has asked for the expulsion of 40,000-odd Rohingyas residing illegally in the country. The matter is in the court. Worse, it has chosen to remain silent to UN Refugee Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein’s censure of India’s decision to expel Rohingyas. New Delhi maintains that, since India is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, it is not bound by international law. Be that as it may, it has persuaded Myanmar government to run a large-scale aid programme in Rakhine province.

During his visit, Modi chose to push for big infrastructure projects. By building roads, ports and other transport links relations would improve between the two countries and security interest be secure. In this connection, the Kaladan transport project delayed since 2013 for ‘this and that’ could be fast revived. It is among the “crucial pieces of infrastructure” and is strategic in furthering relations between the two. Modi also suggested trilateral highway projects connecting India’s North-East with Myanmar and Thailand.

Back to Rohingyas, Modi said, “India and Myanmar shared “similar security interests”, which included the extremist violence in Rakhine. This is being interpreted as a support to Myanmar government vis-à-vis Rohingyas. It may be some respite to Myanmar from international condemnation in the form of a Security Council censure looming large. Some commentators have started suggesting that Modi and Suu Kyi had an ‘alignment of word views’, State sovereignty and security over individual human rights etc.

This is ominous. Suu Kyi was the Poster-lady for human rights, democracy and non-violence for activists around the world. But in power, she seems to have become pragmatic over principles. Some would say she has to be ruthless in a ruthless environment. There is a demand for her noble peace prize to be withdrawn. Modi represents a majoritarian Hindutva politics. ---INFA (The author is Professor, International Politics, JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

Water woes in Kench’s Trace

Editor,
Through your esteemed paper, I wish to draw the attention of the authorities to the acute and chronic water shortage faced by the residents of Oxford Hill, Kench’s Trace. For nearly three months our water supply has steadily dwindled to the point that now there are days we don’t get any water at all. We have run from pillar to post in our efforts to find out the reason for the disappearance of our water but to no avail. We are at a loss as to what to do about our acute water shortage since the PHE seems to think that this is only a very recent and temporary phenomenon. However, we the residents know that our water troubles started nearly three months ago and the irony is this year we’ve had in a long time so this time the standard excuse of ‘the streams and

springs are all dry’ cannot be applied. No one knows where our water supply has gone. It seems to have disappeared into thin air. And the PHE too, sad to say, is not in the least bothered to find out the reason for this problem and to help us.

We cannot live without a regular and adequate supply of water anymore and we demand that the PHE look into our water woes and take up this matter seriously and immediately.

Yours etc,
Amanda Khyriem,
Viaemail

Driving rules should be enforced

Editor,
Through this letter I request the concerned authorities to make laws against using mobile phones while driving, to prohibit smoking inside cars if there are children inside and basically all those unwanted

activities pertaining to road ethics. Some of the above mentioned trespasses are so common in Tura and I’m assuming even in other parts of the State. As a student who travels in auto-rickshaws, what worries me is when a driver picks up his phone to answer while car driving. This is literally taking a passengers life for granted. Hope this reaches the concerned authorities.’

Yours etc.,
Chanangbil Marak,
Viaemail

Save the innocence of children

Editor,
This refers to your editorial “How safe are our students” (ST- Sept 12, 2017). The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 has guidelines to deal with each case. But a lot of cases are settled quietly and that is extremely dangerous.

Children either don’t report the cases, or the cases are hushed up even if they do report them. The police should not be the only agency that deals with children who have been abused. There should be a team of specialised child psychiatrists and other child care professionals who can ensure continued support to the child. When a case of child abuse is reported, hardly any support is offered to the child and the family to get their lives back on track. When children take the extremely difficult step of reporting abuse we need to ensure they are properly supported and get the help they need when they are brave enough to give evidence in court. The urgent need of the hour is enactment of laws providing for stringent punishment for the perpetrators of crime against children, and their implementation. Don’t we think all of us should break our silence to save the innocence of children?

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit

Ahmedabad- 15

Can we see change in 2018?

Editor,
As a concerned citizen I would like to ask one simple question to all the sixty MLAs what have they done for nearly five years since they were elected. The true test of a good Government is whether or not it is able to solve the major problems and issues that are blocking the progress of the State. The reason our state is facing a lot of hurdles is because of the lack of policies, regulations and laws which are supposed to be legislated by our elected representatives.

If our elected representatives in both the State Assembly and the District Council are not capable of making laws which would protect

the interest of the people and their customary practices and uplift the economy then the mandate bestowed on them by the people would be meaningless and they would be the laughing stock. So I request all residents of Meghalaya to choose people who are not only good in giving out schemes and claim to be good leaders but rather choose those people who would bring a change in the system. The reason I write this letter is because I have seen and experienced myself the plight and predicament of the people of our State. The poor and middleclass hardworking Khasi men and women of my locality of Nongstoin are eager for a better, speedier and transparent system and a better economic standard with a much wider and more inclusive job opportunities.

Yours etc.,
Jerry R. Marwein
Pyndengrei,
Nongstoin

“Tears shed for another person are not a sign of weakness. They are a sign of a pure heart.”

--- José N. Harris

The Shillong Times

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BJP and freedom of speech

THE IT cell chief of the BJP, Amit Malviya said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not ignore anyone or block anyone on social media because he is firmly committed to freedom of speech. It concerns the murder of Gauri Lankesh. But this week the BJP has slapped a legal notice on the historian, Ramachandra Guha for his views on the murder of Gauri Lankesh. The BJP should be aware that it is watched closely worldwide for its views on curbs on individual freedom. The current controversy over Guha diminishes the ruling government's stature. The charge made by the BJP is without merit and cannot stand in court. Guha drew attention to the climate of hate and suspicion which, according to him, the ruling government has fostered. Thousands of people, he said, share his concern. He however did not drop any hints about the suspected role of the RSS and the BJP in the killing of Gauri Lankesh. In fact, he emphasised that some freelancers who were not concerned about the limits of their freedom of expression exposed critics of the ruling government to the charge of being anti-national.

Those who drafted the legal notice were aware of the loopholes in it. They had complained merely about the hurt sentiments of thousands of members of the RSS and the BJP. The matter could drag on in court for a number of years and finally the result could be negative. But the allegation of silencing and wasting the time of a writer cannot be denied. It will have a depressing effect on all votaries of freedom of speech. The ruling party cannot anyway gain from the legal proceedings.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Not a convincing reply

The weakest part of the Union Minister of State's reply to the two-day discussion in the Lok Sabha on the Bodo movement is where he introduced the analogy of the GNLFF movement in Darjeeling to equate his Ministry's stand in the two apparently identical cases. The fact is that New Delhi was much more responsive to Mr Subhas Ghising's appeals and efforts to get the former involved in a settlement of the Gorkha demands. Mr Dev, on the other hand, says in his reply in question that the Centre would participate in discussions for solving the Bodo problem only if it was invited by the Assam government which the latter was unwilling to do. In the other case no such formal and specific invitation from the West Bengal leaders too had contacted the Centre at various levels on different occasions, but not with the same success as yet as had fallen to the lot of the Gorkha National Liberation Front leader almost from the very start. The CPM, West Bengal ruling party was not as weak in Darjeeling as is the AGP in the Bodo areas and hence is the suspicion in some quarters that the Congress(I) may have been interested in getting the AGP drowned in the Bodo waters rather than bailing it out as the Centre's intervention could bring about.

The finest part of Mr Dev's speech was when he said that the State government was itself to blame for its predicament as ABSU had learnt many "lessons" from the All-Assam Students Union-led agitation a few years ago. If the AASU leaders could establish contact with the Centre over the head of the then State government, so could the ABSU leaders now. But here this analogy also ends. If in the AASU case the Centre chose to be a participant in the talks for an accord irrespective of the

attitude of the State government, the Centre is insisting in the present instance on the State government inviting it to do so which Mr Dev of all people knows Dispur is too unwilling to do. In the other case the State government was virtually wholly eclipsed to see the Centre's writ run without any let or hindrance for the sake of peace and progress in the State and the region as a whole. The danger now is the same as it was then if not much more in the context of a multiplicity of divisive forces now at work all over the north-eastern region. The Union Home Ministry, therefore, should not feel shy of taking the initiative in resolving the most potent factor of ethnic discontent inherent in the Bodo movement.

Another agreeable statement in Mr Dev's speech is the Centre's reaffirmation in the Lok Sabha against any further division of Assam, which more or less tallies with a cross-section of opinion in the whole region at large, not to speak of that in the concerned State. It was however, unnecessary to add that the Centre was against further division any other part of the country either. This would tend to create an impression that this policy was a general one uniformly applicable to all and not the result of a detailed consideration of the pros and cons involved in the Bodo case which in many respects is different from many other demands for separation in other areas. In fact no two cases are exactly the same, depending on the respective circumstances and situations. Such a positive statement rejecting the demand for separation of the Bodo areas would have been more impressive if accompanied by even a vague thinking of the Centre about the possible alternative solution.

Steps too little, too late

Warming Signals

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Most countries, including India, have announced various measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but these are abysmally inadequate. A recent study has again rung warning bells citing serious implications it would have in various sectors, including food production, floods, droughts and other types of natural disasters.

A research by University of California, Berkeley has observed that a rise in temperature may have catalysed about 59,300 suicides in India over three-and-a-half decades. When temperatures are above 20 C, a one degree rise on a single day during the monsoon season can on an average be accompanied by over 70 suicides over the normal rate. The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, also found that an increase in the growing season rainfall by 1 cm is associated with a decrease of about 8 suicides per million.

Such prediction of rise in temperature is nothing new as was confirmed way back in 2015 by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune. Apparently, scientists along those from France and US, warned temperatures in the country are to rise by 20C by the middle of the century but this may become a reality much earlier, at least in some parts of India, and by 3.50 to 40 C by the end of the century. These were based on scientific and mathematical formulas used in tandem to predict the future climate pattern. One such model suggested temperatures could rise by as much as 60 C by end century.

Even a UN report stated: "The INDCs have the capacity of limiting the forecast temperature rise to around 2.7 degree Celsius by 2100, by no means enough but a lower than the estimated four, five or more degrees of warming projected by many prior to the INDCs". Additionally, the world would just have nearly 250 giga tonne (Gt) of carbon dioxide for development work beyond 2030. This is certain to hit poor and developing countries of Asia and Africa

the most as these would not be in a position to peak their emission by 2030.

Remember, the fourth IPCC report on climate change had much earlier pointed that a temperature rise above 2 degrees Celsius from 1990 levels might not be ecologically sustainable. The upper bound on temperature increase translates into upper bound on greenhouse gas emissions and the resultant effects that were outlined include: extreme weather conditions in most parts of the world; shifting wind and rainfall patterns making dry areas drier and wet areas wetter; acceleration of emission rates of CO2 due to industrialization, increased energy consumption, unsustainable agricultural practices and, course, population growth; more hurricanes and floods forming now than a century ago, threatening millions of people along the world's coastlines, specially in the Third World; ocean variability and glacier melting causing sea level rise resulting in inundation in areas nearer to the sea; killing of coral reefs faster, causing them to disappear twice as fast as rainforests on land; and deforestation and other forms of habitat destruction, pollution and poaching affecting animals, plants and of course human beings.

Most of these predictions have become a reality now. The floods and droughts in the country have been causes of deep concern. However, various measures are being taken at the national level, the most important being the government's resolve to expand solar power in a massive way and make it affordable. Over the past two years, coal use increased by just 2.2 per cent, a sharp fall from the previous ten years when average annual growth was over 6 per cent, as per recent findings of Greenpeace Energy desk.

Meanwhile, India has committed to produce 40 per cent of its electricity from non fossil sources of energy by 2030 under the Paris accord. It is, therefore,

planning to scale up targets for renewable energy capacity from 30 GW by 2016-17 to 175 GW by 2021-22. It is quite evident that renewable are booming in the country due to increasingly cost competitiveness of solar and wind installations.

Recently, a Supreme Court bench restrained manufacturers of firecrackers and similar other substances from using substances like lithium, antimony, mercury, arsenic and lead aimed at checking air and noise pollution that have been increasing over the years in big cities.

Lithium, as is well known, is a metal used to impart red colour to fireworks and antimony to create glitter effects. Similarly, lead oxide is used to provide a special crackling effect which, if inhaled in high concentration, could cause damage to the nervous system. This is one of the many measures being taken by the authorities in tackling pollution.

The problem of controlling pollution in a high density population country is indeed quite challenging more so because a major section are impoverished. Thus, health consciousness is very poor and while in the western world has full proof preventive medicine standards these are completely unknown in our country, even among the middle class.

Another significant order of the apex court has been imposition of 100 per cent penalty for illegal extraction of iron ore and manganese ore in Odisha since 2001 and pay compensation of Rs 17.576. It rejected the plea of the Centre and SC appointed Central Empowered Committee that only 30 per cent value of the mineral be recovered from the companies. This order would henceforth stop mining without environmental clearance. It is also significant that the court suggested setting

up an expert committee under a retired judge to identify the lapses and the spread of environmental pollution.

Such steps are no doubt laudable but, the measures adopted in most countries are far from adequate. As such, the prediction of increase in warming levels and attendant effects of floods and droughts is destined to have a severe effect on humans. Mention may also be made of a report of the Asian Development Bank released in July this year that found 13 of the top cities with the highest projected flood losses from 2005 to 2050 in the Asia Pacific region and include Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Surat.

In such a scenario, the future looks quite challenging. Managing climate change involves exhaustive exploration and discovery of organisational potential, business processes and options for greenhouse gas abatement through research and development. Though the Indian government pledged that it would never allow the country's per capita emissions to exceed the average per capita emissions of industrialised countries, this needs to be strictly adhered to by the country as also China and other emerging economies.

Special efforts have to be made to identify and check climate change impacts on human health, water resources, coastal areas and agriculture as this is vital for a large segment of the country's population. Innovative efforts are needed in areas such as dryland farming, soil conservation methodologies, watershed management as also other agricultural technologies so that farm production is not hampered. In fact, it is time for all governments in the Asia Pacific region, including India, to become more serious about the impending fall-out of the warming catastrophe and evolve strategies for effective promotion and implementation in specific areas that could counter the threat. ---INFA

The embarrassing picture of Meghalaya's education

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Despite immense support and efforts from the government to assist various schools and students in the state, the educational scenario is not at all encouraging. The drop-out rate and low literacy level seems unstoppable and the situation is alarming. This is a concern that our respected officials right from the Principal Secretary down to the District administrators are expressing their on the matter. But blaming poverty as the sole reason for this fiasco is insufficient because this is not a homogenous situation in the present generation where compulsion and influence are very strong. In fact it overshadows other social evils in the society which have distracted and disrupted the learning process and the lapses in the entire education system.

School drop-out is also a global problem but with varied reasons and causes depending on the local situation. In our case, the urgent need of the hour is to have clear data pertaining to causes of school or college dropouts. Then only a solution can be contemplated to tackle the problem. As a matter of fact, a thorough study should be conducted as to what leads school children to drop-out. I strongly believe that there are various factors that push the students out of the school system. And this is exclusively the environment within the school system. Some of these factors can be poor academic performance as a result of a confusion and inadequate foundation while in the primary level. Poor teaching methodology and lack of inspiring activity and creativity definitely dilutes the enthusiasm and interest of the learners.

In addition, there are other factors that pull the students out from the school. And these are external influences and pressures that undermine and burden the concentration of a child or student toward his/her education. Some of these factors can be family background and this is common in rural areas with huge numbers of siblings in one family. And in most cases, elder children are caretakers of their young siblings. Further, in a free society like ours, we cannot rule out teenage pregnancy and early marriage. Whereas in urban areas most of the kids are deeply influenced by other social evils such as alcohols, drugs, etc that has distracted their goal in education. These are some of the push and pull factors of dropouts. In this manner if we can categorize the causes accordingly, with some precision in terms of percentage, then perhaps we can channel the resources and address the problem categorically.

This issue has been discussed and debated over and over again but without any sign of improvement. Therefore, it is high time to go back to the standing document that has empowered and entitled children to free education. When the Right of children to free and compulsory education Act 2009 was notified and enforced on the 27th August 2009 in the whole country, it had clearly defined who the stakeholders and major stakeholders in this regard are. Chapter One of the Act has clearly named these stakeholders such as central and states governments, the National Commission for Protection of Child's Rights (NCPDR) & State Commission for Protection of Child's Rights (SPCPCR), the local authority (such as municipal bodies, panchayat etc. or whatever name and in our case Dorbar Shnong and Hima or Raid), the institution or school authority both aided or funded by government and unaided school or those not receiving any funds from the government and finally the parent. And with due

respect they are expected to perform their roles accordingly and not to wait for a situation to arise.

For instance, the purpose that NCPDR/SCPCR has been tagged into the Act is to ensure that any violation and suppression of child's rights are not compromised in any situation. Besides, protection of children from various types of abuses by ensuring safe learning environment for children, SCPCR has a major role to play in curbing child labour within their own family and society because of which elder siblings of the family are prevented from attending school. Since this is still a big problem in our state, the question is, what has the Commission done so far? Does any statistic of the Commission reflect this kind of situation and what are the actions taken and achievements in this regard?

Further, the Act has also clearly stipulated in Chapter 3 that the appropriate state government should ensure and prescribe a curriculum and courses of study. But in our case it is very sad that the state does not have a specific curriculum of its own for almost a decade now since the Act was enforced. This is perhaps one of the reasons that have shattered the concept of children on the scope of a holistic education. Comprehensive evaluation system is another aspect that the Act has injected into the education system in order to encourage the system of evaluation based on comprehension and understanding on the subject. But here is the grey area where most teachers are manipulating the system in awarding grades without properly assessing the understanding level of a child as this may reflect the teacher's competency towards teaching. It seems that there is a gross violation to the RTE Act in the State which ultimately amounts to contempt.

Recently we have seen through the print media of how the Board (MBOSE) claims that it encourages critical learning in the teaching system. In the absence of a meaningful curriculum, I wonder how this can be achieved and evaluated so that the goal of every student to score good marks in the Board exam in order to get admission to higher studies is not affected. There is no doubt that there are thousands of schools in the state that have produced huge numbers of students irrespective of the level of performance of the students which doesn't seem to matter at all to the school authorities and owners for as long as they reap some benefits. Therefore, the recent direction from the Chairman of the MBOSE to derecognize those institutions with low pass performance is a welcome step but should have been done right from the inception of the Board.

Every Student Succeeds Act' was a unique education policy enacted by the Obama administration but was replaced by a new one 'No Child Left behind Act' under the Trump administration both equally unique and child centered. The alarming situation is indeed critical but how long will the state live with this picture and how many more dropouts will we see in the years to come if those who have the keys to unlock every channel and deal with the problems do not take any action. Finally, it goes back to the people who are the creators of their own destiny in the form of electing representatives and the type of government to govern. But the problem is that the major chunk of voters in the state comprise of rural people who do not care much about the type of education we should have.

TO THE EDITOR

Political Parties and Citizens can learn from this

Editor,

I would like to share with your readers the following lines taken from an article written by Nanini Chatterjee titled, "A time to engage" published in the TELEGRAPH on 20th March 2017.

"For one.....Electoral mandates in the first-past-the-post system always exaggerate victories but no ruling party in India has ever got even 50 per cent of total votes polled. Rajiv Gandhi with his 400 plus seats in 1984 came closest with 49.10 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP managed its best ever performance, winning 312 seats with less than 40 per cent of the vote.....The Election Commission data shows that a total of 86,657,529 men and women voted in the seven-phase election this year. Of these, 34,403,039 voted for the BJP - which means 52,254,490 voters did not.....they are not a mere statistic, but flesh-and-blood human beings, over five crore of them, who chose not to be swayed by Modi's magic or moved by communal feelings.

Second.....When Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi won big mandates, Modi did not lose faith in his RSS ideology, he did not give up politics, he did not surrender to the Congress's (& Constitution's) ideals of secularism and plurality. Even when the BJP was down to two seats, Modi and his brethren soldiered on determined to rebuild their party in keeping with their own ideology, however

divisive others might find it to be. Today, it is the turn of the Congress and all other parties opposed to the BJP to show the same resilience, patience and energy to build a vibrant and creative alternative to the RSS's blueprint that Modi and Adityanath are out to execute.

Third, there is much more to democracy than elections and legislative majorities. Even outside the realm of politics, battles need to be fought every day in every space to safeguard small freedoms, ensure peace, secure justice. Despair is an indulgence engaged citizens cannot afford"

Yours etc.,
Michael N. Syiem
Via email

FB Post-'Thad Madan'

Editor,

Social media has gone viral in the past few days through the confession of a lady who is allegedly a commercial sex worker and her claims and the identity of her clients and agents. The cyber crime department has to bring to the light with a justifiable reward all those involved in this flesh trade that has shaken this city. We may be building castles in the air if we hope to unveil the proof in the humbug of truth or lies created by this unidentified person. Let us not judge the book by its cover but rather learn to read the reality deeper. Firstly, commercial sex is an informed choice made by both client and the one who solicits sex on payment. No one has been forced into the profession. The question is

how the lady is ready to expose her clients but keep her identity secret. Since the woman has claimed a certain person as the father of her child let a DNA test be conducted to prove the paternity of that child by following all the procedures and necessary information. Then the culprits would not get a chance to escape from due responsibility. However, there are a lot of grey areas yet to be revealed. If a victim of prostitution is a minor then the police have a case but what if the victim is an adult? Those running the sex racket of course have to be punished.

Our conscience may not be at peace if we remain silent when exploitation of women and children is not stopped right away to bring justice to the innocent and for the corrupt culprits responsible in this racket to be arrested. Let the law take its course without politicising it by being impartial to anyone. There should not be any misuse of power or money to cover the misdeeds of those running the sex racket. It is also a lesson to all that in the name of poverty we should not let easy money and illegal means degenerate the dignity of a human being. The FB site 'Thad Madan' posted few days and over which the son of Home Minister HDR Lyngdoh was accused of being the father of the woman's child who posted the Facebook Post as appeared in your paper on Tuesday is a political gimmicks. It is an attempt to tarnish the name of many people by hook or crook perhaps by some disguised

culprits. Let us not spoil the decorum and dignity of politics by taking advantage of fake posts on social media. It is high time for us as responsible citizens to save our jaithynriew by giving voice to the voiceless and eradicate all these evils that threaten to destroy our peaceful co-existence in the society.

Yours etc.,
Evarist Myrsing
Shillong-17

Attacks on journalists

Editor,

It is indeed worrying to see that the attacks on journalists have increased both in frequency and brutality. The high percentage of journalists losing their lives while covering politics and corruption, reflects poorly on the law and order situation. Women journalists, in particular, are frequently threatened with rape and acid attacks. The Gauri Lankesh murder has sent shock waves through the media, with many slamming an attempt to silence voices of dissent. Unless the nation wakes up together to reform and strengthen our institutions, like the police and judiciary, such attacks will continue and our basic fundamental right to state protection will remain unfulfilled. We need to address the problem of impunity in murder of journalist to ensure that the press can work freely.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

“Everything that's created comes out of silence. Your thoughts emerge from the nothingness of silence. Your words come out of this void. Your very essence emerged from emptiness. All creativity requires some stillness.”

--- Wayne Dyer

The Shillong Times

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Shinzo Abe's India visit

IT is unfortunate that the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India for the 12th Indo-Japan Summit has been woven around the issue of the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train. This multi-billion dollar super fast train project funded by soft loan from Japan has pushed aside other more important issues that the two countries will be discussing. Abe's visit to India is important for several reasons. Both nations are trying to cope with China's posturing in Asia. Both nations stand to benefit from bilateral ties and a better appreciation of each other's strengths. In 2015 Abe had termed Japan and India as natural partners. Since Modi's first visit to Japan after he came to power in May 2014, the ties between the two countries has further strengthened. To attribute the closeness between Japan and India only for countering Chinese attempts at gaining Asian superpower status is a misnomer.

The world is passing through a churning of sorts with North Korea testing its hydrogen bomb to demonstrate to America that it would not cow down before that superpower. For a long time the world looked up to America as the avant-garde of global security. But now there is uncertainty all around and countries are trying to find alliance partners with similar concerns.

Prime Minister Modi and Abe share some similarities in the problems they encounter within their respective countries. Most often what drive the foreign policy of any country are its domestic challenges. Both Japan and India have not developed their maritime strengths despite having huge coastlines. China's 'string of pearls' policy and its push to become the game changer along the Indian Ocean has now compelled both Japan and India to redesign their maritime objectives. Although China has beaten India to the game, the latter is now trying to counter China by aligning with other Asian countries that are threatened by China's overreach. Japan and India are working on greater military cooperation and infrastructural development. It is only natural for China to lose sleep over Abe's visit.

Debate necessary for a vibrant democracy

By Patricia Mukhim

One has written reams of articles on issues that are supposedly of public interest. Often writers tend to have delusions of grandeur that they can change the world, impress governments or influence public opinion. After nearly a quarter century of churning out articles of all kinds, one realizes that one has not written too many articles to build young minds and toss around ideas that could be of some import in their quest for life skills. Over many years of being a teacher one also realizes the power of articulation in trying to convince people to buy into your ideas. Communication skills are unfortunately a much neglected part of our education system. And yet communication skills coupled with logical arguments are what empower people not just to win a business deal by convincing their clients about a product they are selling but also to sell ideas and influence minds. Marketing skills primarily rest on good communication skills. This is an art that young management graduates are taught. But communication skills need to be taught early in life. They can then be honed in colleges and universities. This is where debating as an activity is so important. I am writing on the importance of debate after having attended two debate competitions as judge on a single day and my mind is still riddled with what constitutes a good debate.

It was Robert Sharpe who said "The skills a person learns through good debates is crucial for modern life." With social media, debates are reduced to cagey positioning and irritable repudiation that leave a bitter taste in the mouth. But public debates are important in the construction of logical arguments and rebuttals based on facts, figures and reason. Debates also necessarily imply that we listen attentively to what the other side has to say if we are to refute the points put forth by our opponents. Debating is about persuasive arguments, good oratorical skills and body language. A debate need not be dry and humourless. Good debaters find humour in the most boring of topics and connect with their audience and the jury not just through the route of reason but also through emotions.

Having participated in countless debates sometimes as judge and at other times as moderator one has learnt what to expect and what debates should not be about. In a debate you don't come with a prepared text and read out from it. You are not delivering a speech but arguing on an issue that you have educated yourself at length on and collected all relevant facts about. Hence a debater can write down points so that she/he does not slip up and go blank on account of stage fright. I have seen many debaters clamping up completely after the first two sentences and unable to get their wits together, until they have to be told to resume their seats. When this happens it's a lost opportunity for the debater and it can sometimes scar the person for life because it is like an admission that the person developed cold feet. To such debaters I must say, "Never give up and never say die." Not everyone is an accomplished public speaker but we can all learn the art of public speaking.

Debate is about communication. 'What' a person says is as important as 'how' she says. This is why I feel that a debating forum should always ensure that the microphone is good and that prospective debaters are taught to use the microphone effectively. This too is an art. The best of speeches can go flat if the audience has to strain their ears to get what a person is saying. And this has happened once too often. Some people speak too close to the microphone and their words jar. There is cacophony instead. Others even while holding the microphone speak away from it and are not audible.

On Thursday, September 14, two debates were organised at two different institutions. The first debate was at NEIGRIHMS on the topic, "Public-private partnership in health care is a boon for a developing country like India." Normally moderators/speakers for a debate are carefully chosen on the basis of their experience and stature. A Speaker moderates the debate and lays out the rules of the game at the very outset. After that the Speaker only calls out the debaters one by one. The Speaker does not comment in the middle of a debate or try to correct the debaters or to tell them what is right or wrong. There are judges to do that.

At the NEIGRIHMS debate the audience was never asked to vote for or against the motion. It was tailored to be like a mock parliament where the participants questioned each other after the formal debating was over. Therefore it should have been called a mock parliament instead of a debate since each has its own format. Besides, the topic itself is very technical and those not from the medical profession would have found it hard to argue why health care should be solely in the public sector or why public-private partnership in the health sector is desirable. In fact the first speaker from the treasury bench began by stating upfront that he has no experience of a private-partnership in the health sector.

At St Anthony's College, the theme of the debate was on a very current topic; hence the debate was fiery and much more participative. This could be gauged by the spirited response from the audience. The theme was, "Right to Freedom is Under Threat in India." This is a difficult topic to argue against considering the current climate of intolerance we are living in, but, those who opposed the motion did a commendable job. Of course there was repeated mention of Kanhaiya Kumar of JNU fame and his clamour for "Azaadi" and the shouts within India's leading university of, "India ko tukre tukre kareng." etc., being examples of how the line between freedom of speech and expression and the call to sedition needs to be drawn. The question is who draws these defining lines between freedom and license because there are clear distinctions between the two.

In a debate chosen for a topic every word needs to be expounded and played upon to get the best out of the topic. Not much is done on this important aspect of debating. Debaters need to internalize the topic so that they appear confident when they speak before an audience, no matter how daunting the audience or jury is. Body language

actually fetches a lot more marks than debaters know. You can easily make out someone who is tentative and lacks confidence. That sort of debater has already lost the first round. Initially every person will be diffident about public speaking but practice makes perfect. This is one reason why schools and colleges should provide space for their students to articulate their points of view. It is unfortunate that most students pass out of colleges and universities without having acquired the skills of articulation which serves them in good stead in the long run. It is a life skill since clear, concise and precise communication of an idea is what most employers look for in their employees. Few employers have patience for a person who bumbles and is unable to communicate what she/he wishes to say. Usually this is because the person lacks clarity of thought and was never taught how to communicate effectively right from her/his early childhood days.

In a debate we have often watched with dismay how debaters with the most stunning content lost the game because their delivery was poor. However, delivery alone does not help. A lot of research must go into a topic. A passionate argument based on strong factual content and a positive body language is what wins a debate. In fact, some amount of drama is welcome. Some incisive questions at opponents and intelligent rebuttals to their claims makes a debate interesting. It shows that the debaters are able to think on their feet! And that is what a debate is all about! It's about being quick-witted and well prepared after soaking oneself in the topic for several days.

You can make out a debater who is well prepared and one who comes into the debating arena trying to filibuster around with rhetoric and hoping to impress the judges with their flair for language. Judges are not easily impressed. Let's hope more debating societies come up in schools, colleges and universities for then we will have an informed citizenry.

Schools and Education

By Ananya S Guha

The death of a seven year old boy in a school at Gurgaon highlights how schools have become unsafe for children. Even now, the cause of the death is unclear, although initially the media, as it is usually wont to do, pronounced it on the school bus driver, much in the way they did for the Aarushi case.

Schools have become unsafe, so what about education? If we are apprehensive about sending our wards to school, then what purpose will an educational Institution serve? Parents spend fulsome amounts on educating their children, hoping that this is the best they can give. Then they invest in private coaching and tutorial classes. But even safety isn't ensured. The school authorities and the police are now clueless as to what was the cause of the murder. Nothing is more pitiable than this. A seven year old, a child who should be comforted and cared for is brutally murdered. What are our intellectuals and educators doing? Can't they go out to the streets and protest? Are political issues, the only matter, which they voice issues about? The death of children in Uttar Pradesh and now the brutalization of society, has assailed our human rights as never before. Education, especially for school children must be accorded greatest priority. It is not only the classroom situation, but perspectives must be wholesome. What happens outside the classroom and the safety of children are equally important.

The privatization of education has made it increasingly commercial. This commercialization, has brought in its wake disturbing factors of education as business. Once there is interplay of business with education, many of its finer points are neglected. What was the Principal of the school doing in Mumbai? A Principal must be vigilant at every point about the school, as there are children and young adults there; the latter susceptible to external influences. Quality is measurable in terms of the extra academic, and most of all safety of students. If children are not safe in the precincts of a second home, then, to hell with education, and all the glorification it stands for.

In a recent discussion in the media, many venerable

discussants pointed out about this safety. One argued vehemently for electronic intervention Can machines replace tender care and comfort? We are so enmeshed in certain comfort zones that the idea of the human touch becomes a sacrilege. Everything is seen in terms of technology. If technology can solve all problems, then why is this crime, becoming almost insoluble? In the school where I studied in Shillong, in the sixties and seventies, there were ayahs to look after five or six year old children, and they were like mothers to them. Harping on technology is deviating from the point. Children must get human protection, and the protection of teachers and elders. Schools can easily spend more money on this aspect. Classroom education. must be or can be, technology driven, but not safety. At best electronic devices can be a means to an end.

It is high time the government frames universal rules, for the safety of children and students in schools. It is high time a system of common and commonality schools emerge across the length and breadth of the country, so that private schools cannot administer systems, in the way they want.

Children committing suicides is, in a way the responsibility of schools. Children are now caught in two worlds: the impersonal world of technology and a very personal world of classroom friendship, intimacy and friendliness with teachers. Schools ought to be sensitive to this, and tailor all educational needs to an overall sensitiveness between teacher, taught and students. A child's problems could be many: from slow learning to a perceived hostile environment. The objectives of education, is to go beyond immediate classroom dynamics to a world of friendship, creativity and fun learning. Here, technology can be an added component, intelligently and creatively used, but it can never be an end in itself. What the environment has impressed upon children is that it is an end, and that is spelling disaster, especially in the shape of 'games' such as the Blue Whale Challenge. We are living in the world of technology, but also on its edge, nervously.

TO THE EDITOR

Democracy is larger than elections

Editor,

Apropos the letter by Michael N. Syiem, no doubt the electoral system in India is very complex in nature and it's not free from drawbacks. The first past the post system (FPTP) is one of them. It allows a person to be declared elected even with a small pie in the total vote share by virtue of being the front runner among all competing candidates in terms of votes garnered. This system has been practiced since the birth of our Constitution and continues till date. In the early days it might be justified somehow, considering the limited number of political parties competing, resulting in minor division of votes, but with the passage of time and with the entry of large number of political parties at the national, state and regional level as well as independent candidates, fragmentation of votes has become a new reality and the winning candidates might garner less than a quarter of the votes polled. When we examine this fact we might

realize that democracy has taken a back seat and the election has taken the front seat, since winning election has become the sole target overriding the moral hazards of not representing the popular opinion of the masses. In fact the right path should be vice versa. Democratic principles should precede electoral principles, since fair and free election was designed to realize democratic values.

Free and fair election is the backbone of any democratic system. It strengthens democracy by giving enough scope and opportunity to assimilate both minority and majority's will to represent themselves. But it is also the least reformed system post-independence. Although the Election Commission has tried its best to bring certain positives changes, like the moral code of conduct (MCC), electoral funding regulations, preventing criminalization of politics etc., which signify its noble intention but the reality is something else. Today, money power rules the roast and criminals enjoy political power. Ironically any new changes in the electoral system requires the consolidated will of the political class itself!

The FPTP has become a dampening factor in the current system, where a minority stands to rule the majority's will. No doubt in India, where heterogeneity is the prime character, minorities will also need to be adequately represented and constitutionally several safeguards has been designed and guaranteed by reserving seats for such class. But is impossible to reserve seats for every sect and clan due to the diverse nature of our society. A middle path might be taken by making it mandatory to secure at least 50% vote share to claim victory as a symbolic representation of the popular will.

Electoral reforms are a highly contentious issue and as mentioned earlier any change requires the consensus of the political class itself in the parliament, thereby making it difficult. Some changes which have come by are via the convention route and not by law itself. Any scope for electoral reforms is futile since political power is what every candidate clings to at any cost. Their sacrificing the shortcut opportunity by modifying FPTP is highly improbable.

Electoral reforms are therefore a one-sided affair

with the elected and the electorate at two ends of the pole. In a representative form of democracy the electorate possess the ultimate power, thus electorate reforms also has its importance. An informed and enlightened electorate nourished with adequate information will serve better in establishing a clean politics. We need qualitative and quantitative electoral enrolment. Merely increasing numbers of fresh voters won't be sufficient if we are deficient in our political attitude, narrowed down by nepotism and political chauvinism and more importantly the one driven by extreme form of sub nationalism, resulting only in further dividing Indian society. Democratic values (e.g., secularism, tolerance, brotherhood etc.) is our guiding star for shaping our political views and judgment. Whether the elected class are ready to reform themselves or live with existing electoral system would become less futile if and only if the electorate are ready to reform themselves and transform our society into a mature democracy. The saying, "Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people" means that people are the foundation of democracy

itself. This is further complemented by Nelson Mandela who said, "An educated, enlightened and informed population is one of the surest ways of promoting the health of a democracy."

Yours etc.,
Sonie Kharduit
Viaemail

Congress's arbitrary actions

Editor,

The Congress came to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills much before Meghalaya attained statehood, yet till date and after 45 years of statehood, the Party still cannot get a majority on its own during the last elections. It needed the coalition of independents and other smaller partners to form the governments in the state. This reflects poorly on the performance of this Party and its past and present leadership. Of course, we cannot deny that this party, because of its antecedents has been able to enlist members in all villages, formed units in all polling booths and has its Blocks Committees in all

60 constituencies, District Committees in all 11 Districts and is controlled by the State Committee, namely the MPCC. But, in the final analysis, the real people who run the show in the Party are those who held the post of Chief Minister and the President of the State Committee. However, to be more precise, the state Congress here in Meghalaya in the past 45 years used to be controlled by whoever occupies the office of the Chief Minister. Today, this is even more pronounced.

During the last ten years or so the government of Meghalaya was run by one man. There was no dissenting voices; at least those voices are not heard in the corridors of power or by the public at large, except by one minuscule leader. You may disagree with me, but the Chief Minister today, is not only controlling the affairs of the Government of the state but also that of the Party. The state PCC Chief, who last year nearly managed to unseat the present Chief Minister, is today under the control of the Chief Minister. This will not be healthy for the present and future of the

Party. It was often claimed that this party is democratic. That is a misnomer. In practice it is not. The very fact that all the affairs of the party and of the government, if it is a Congress government, is left to be decided by the High Command proves that it is not democratic. The hard fact is that it is the people of Meghalaya who elect the Party and the Government; not the AICC or 10 Janpath.

The dissolution of a number of Congress Block Committees recently by the MPCC Chief is a clear proof of what I have stated above. You cannot dispense with people at your whims and fancies. Yet in the media the PCC has unashamedly stated, "No one in the party is indispensable". Remember that you dealing with people and people make up the party. Remember that in the BCCs there are MLAs, many important office bearers and party workers who are strong pillars of the party, and the MPCC Chief nullified all that with a stroke of his pen without following the laid down rules in the party's constitution ! If this is not arbitrary, undemocratic and dictatorship like then what

is ? Does the MPCC President think he is doing this because he has no more stakes in this election or in 2023? Does he think this will build up the party or weaken it? And does he still think that this will help the party to win handsomely in the 2018 elections? The MPCC President may be jealous, suspicious and may dislike some people within the party whom he considers as rivals or smart guys who can take him on and unseat him one day, but he cannot dispense with them at his whims and fancies!. There are rules and regulations in the constitution of the party which ought to be followed not only in letter but also in spirit. If not followed then it is nothing short of cut throat politics or just following somebody else's diktat? Too much of everything will surely bring downfall.

The Congress has lost power in Delhi and elsewhere because of such high-handedness and dictation from 10 Janpath and more importantly because of its omissions, particularly rampant corruption.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Viaemail

"Maybe everyone can live beyond what they're capable of."

--- Markus Zusak

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 37 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2017

Oil Hit

THE Finance ministry's current economic survey reveals that oil prices are falling. International crude oil prices may have halved since the Modi Government assumed office. But the consumers have not gained. This is due to a wrong taxation policy. The price of petrol and diesel always impact the Union Budget. The centre and state governments have been raising revenue in an extraordinary manner in the last three years. Centre revenue from petrol and diesel has doubled. The oil sector last year yielded Rs. 5.24 lakh crore or 3.5% of GDP. Of course, it is necessary for the Government to tax the oil sector. But linking domestic retail price to international crude price is done in such a mysterious way that consumers do not reap any benefit. It is because governments both at the centre and in the states pocket the gain. What is called reform is rubbished. Even Pakistan passes on more benefits to consumers in the oil sector. It puts Pakistan on a relatively competitive economic footing

Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan has argued that high taxes are justified to cope with massive government expenditure. Even when socialism was the mantra of the Union Government, oil tax rates could be as high as 97.5%. Successive governments rationalised the tax on petrol and diesel. Lowering of petroleum taxes is a must for the common people in the country. That will boost the economic growth of the country and reduce the daily hardship of people in urban and rural areas. It is ironic that in the early stages of the Modi Government and much before Jaitley could play around with the taxation regime oil and LPG prices had come down considerably and people had begun to sing praises of Narendra Modi. Now they regret having spoken too soon. Raising revenue for development does not mean punishing the citizens with sharp rise in oil prices and inflation.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Meghalaya bids adios to B.N. Singh

Meghalaya bid adios to Mr Bhisma Narain Singh who left Shillong on Monday relinquishing the office of Governor of Meghalaya and Assam. At a solemn function held at the State Central Library Hall, Chief Minister Mr P A Sangma eulogized the role played by Mr Singh in smooth administration of the two "sensitive" states. Reading out a formal address of farewell on behalf of the people of Meghalaya, Mr Sangma said that Mr Singh with his "vast and instinctive awareness of the tribal ethos", has accomplished the task with "distinction". He recalled that Mr Singh had assumed office five years back at a crucial time when both Assam and Meghalaya were beset with "seemingly insoluble problems". Mr Sangma attributed it to the outgoing Governor's personal contribution which ensured restoration of peace and tranquility in the entire region.

Former Chief Minister Mr B B Lyngdoh described Mr Singh as "a friend and counselor". The CEM Khasi Hills District Council Mr G S Massar termed him as a "non-controversial Governor" and said that "there was no controversy in Meghalaya during his tenure as Governor." Replying to the felicitations, Mr Singh said that he was leaving the place with a sense of "contentment". He paid rich tributes to the people of Meghalaya for their "genuine love for peace". Meghalaya, he felt, was making "commendable efforts" for developing the State. The tempo had gone up during Mr P A Sangma's tenure as Chief Minister.

Mr Singh described the office of the Governor as "linchpin" of the constitution apparatus of the State and added that "I

can say from my experience that the importance of the office of Governor is increasing day by day". He further said "after 1967, the ruling party at the Centre and the parties ruling the state are not always the same; hence the Governor becomes a bridge between the Union and the States. Even here in Assam and Meghalaya, two different political parties are ruling the states with a common Governor. The State Governments had to pass through stormy rapids and the Chief Ministers had to navigate as helmsmen and the Governor has to give steady support like a ballast," he added. Earlier Mr Sangma handed over an endi shawl and a Khasi headgear as a token of remembrances. Deputy Chief Minister Mr D D Lapang presided over the function. Mr Singh later in the afternoon left for Guwahati.

Bodo violence unabated

Five people, including three railway employees were injured in Bodo violence in different part of Kokrajhar and Darrang districts of Assam during the past 24 hours, official reports said. A Railway Protection Force constable, the driver and the diesel assistant of a goods train sustained injuries when Bodo extremists hurled bombs between Basbari and Tipkai stations of the Northeast Frontier Railway this morning.

The seriously injured RPF constable was admitted to hospital, the reports said. One Mr Shajan Pathak and his wife were injured yesterday when a group of extremist who raided their house shot at them and hurled two bombs. Both the injured were admitted to hospital.

Rise in oil prices hits economy hard

By K R Sudhaman

man.

Critical to any business is stability especially in prices to enable easy planning and execution. When there is volatility in Rupee exchange rate, exporters or importers usually demand stability in exchange rate rather than volatile rates even if there is sharp depreciation. It is no different when it came to oil prices in the country as volatile prices hurt not only industry but also agriculture as every activity is dependent on oil.

The daily revision of petrol and diesel prices, introduced in the country is certainly disruptive to the economy and the worst aspect is that the prices have crept upwards by over 8 per cent since it was introduced in June 16, despite the fact that the global oil prices have remained more or less stable. More problematic aspect is that the government is unwilling to respond to this issue particularly when the economy is on the downside. Also when there are more than 300 million poor people in a huge population of 1.3 billion, the surging oil prices on a daily basis throws the entire economic activity out of gear. One may be surprised to know that petrol and diesel prices in India are one of the highest in the world. That apart there is a big variation in prices from state to state and city to city. One expected the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to bring about uniformity in oil prices but that was not to be as it was kept out of the ambit of GST as not only the Centre but the states also wanted to exploit petrol and diesel for more revenue generation. This topsy-turvy policy is hitting the economy hard.

Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan recently ruled out any government intervention to disrupt the daily revision in petrol and diesel prices saying the reform will continue. In the past, UPA government used to cut taxes to soften the blow when there was spurt in oil prices to minimize the impact on consumers, particularly the common

Pradhan maintained that the criticism of the government for the spike is unfair and also the present spurt is a temporary phenomenon. In fact after introduction of daily changes in petrol and diesel prices, there was a period when the prices fell continuously for a fortnight or so and nobody at that time complained. The daily increase might have been incremental, cumulatively there has been Rs 5 per litre hike in prices of petrol, whereas crude oil prices have tumbled from \$54 a barrel a month ago to a \$52 week low of around \$45 per barrel on September 13. So it is difficult to understand why the retail petrol prices in India are still rising. This is mainly because of over-dependence by both states and centre on one major source of revenue. This also indicates the skewed tax structure in the country under the garb of raising revenue of developmental activities. Dismantling of administered prices is fine as part of reform measures and if that is the case then the government should clearly explain why market determined prices are rising when global crude prices are falling. Also how would government explain to the common man this unusual phenomenon when 80 per cent of India's crude oil requirement is imported?

Domestic fuel rates have been aligned to movement of equivalent product prices in the international market since April 2002. Accordingly prices used to be revised every fortnight till the daily revision started a few months back. Fortnightly revision did provide some stability in prices and also accounting was easier.

Though Pradhan claims that daily revision immediately passes on benefit of reduction in international oil prices to consumers, this seems to have somehow not happened. He may however be right in saying this has avoided sharp spikes by

spreading them in small doses. "The government has no business to interfere in day-to-day operations of oil companies. If at all, efficiency is the only area government will interfere," he told the heads of state-run oil firms ruling out a change in daily revision of prices. He also maintained there was some spurt in global oil prices recently due to factors like hurricane in the US and softening in the rates have already begun. 13 per cent of US refinery capacity was shut down due to the hurricane.

Opposition parties have latched on to this issue, putting pressure on the government to cut excise duty on oil to soften the blow. The Modi government had raised excise duty on petrol and diesel on nine occasions between November 2014 and January 2016 to withdraw the benefits arising from plummeting international oil prices. Duty on petrol and diesel was hiked in all by Rs 11.77 per litre and diesel by Rs 13.47 a litre during this period. The duty hike resulted in government's excise mop-up, more than doubling to Rs 242,000 crore in 2016-17 and Rs 99,000 crore in 2014-15. This had greatly contributed to containing fiscal deficit, which was otherwise slipping during the last two years due to reduced revenue collections in other taxes and duties in the face of slowing economy. Demonetisation has worsened the situation as the economy has slowed down further.

In contrast UPA government reduced duty on oil to mitigate the suffering of the common man as a result of spiraling global crude oil prices to the detriment of containing fiscal deficit. During the global financial crisis of 2008, oil prices shot up to \$140 a barrel. Yet government ensured there was no drastic spike

in domestic petrol and diesel prices by reducing excise duties. But Modi government has not been able to bring down oil prices even when global crude oil prices hovered around \$40-50 a barrel because they hiked excise duties substantially.

This approach of the government has pushed many economists to suggest bringing petroleum products under the ambit of the game-changing GST which was rolled out in July. This will not only bring about uniformity in rates but also some stability in the duty structure. In fact there are nearly 3000 items that attract excise duty; now GST. But only 25-30 odd items accounted for 90 per cent of the revenue garnered by the government. It is high time that government seriously take a relook to ensure that revenue mop up becomes more balanced for the good of the economy and people. Petrol and diesel dealers too are unhappy as it is disruptive and leads to lot of accounting problem. This also results in inventory losses to dealers whenever there is drop in prices. Also of the 56,000 petrol pumps, not many are still automated forcing them to manually update prices on a daily basis resulting in serious operational difficulties.

Lately states are looking at the possibility capping value added tax on natural gas at five per cent and lowering it on petrol and diesel for those manufacturing units using them as inputs in the face of growing agitation. The GST council may take up this issue in the near future. This is a welcome development as it may pave the way for uniform GST rates on petroleum products but that is not going to happen in the near future as it a major source of revenue.

(K R Sudhaman, has been Editor in Press Trust of India and Economics Editor in TickerNews and Financial Chronicle)

TO THE EDITOR

Abe Shinzo's visit

Editor,
This refers to your editorial "Shinzo Abe's India visit" (ST- Sept 15, 2017). The determined effort by India and Japan to inject life into their bilateral relationship is showing positive results. Japan PM Abe has rightly said, "Both India and Japan place importance on the universal values and strategic interests that we commonly share." India and Japan are working on a different philosophy, involving more local interests and participation. Japan is now possibly India's closest strategic partner in the world, as both sides converge in their strategic and economic outlook. Cooperation in areas like nuclear trade, bullet train technology and infrastructure reflect broad convergence of interests. Time has now come for India to tap the immense technology and the great know-how that Japan has long been wielding. With the nuclear deal between the two countries it will allow both sides to cooperate in building nuclear reactors. The India-Japan relationship has the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship in the world.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

Ban on coal mining a hoax

Editor,
Apropos the news item, "Coal mining ban: No NGT relief for miners" (ST Sep 14, 2017), it is known that the NGT has banned extraction and transportation of coal in Meghalaya on April 17, 2014 but later it allowed only transportation of extracted coal with strict observance of the guidelines laid down not to pollute the environment along the way from the loading points (depots) to the selling points (depots). The permission for transportation of the extracted coal dumped at depots was extended from time to time by the NGT. During the period of extension illegal extraction of coal from various mines in Meghalaya was taking place rampantly right under the eyes of the law enforcing authorities. Hence the coal stocks in the depots always remained filled up.

We should not forget that the NGT has completely stopped transportation of coal from May 31, 2017 but we should not be surprised that coal is still being illegally transported without any problem right before the very eyes of the law. Only few are seized just to show that something is being done, but thousands are plying freely and reaching the desired destinations. Again, we should not be surprised that

these heavy coal laden trucks belong to the powerful lobbies- the coal merchants, the powerful law enforcers and the powerful politicians. Now, what can the NGT do? Only the small time coal traders are really suffering.

I suggest that the NGT monitor this blatant violation of its order by itself, or else, if it cannot do so, it should lift the ban on coal mining altogether.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Of Godmen and their lifestyles

Editor,
The uproar over Gurmeet Singh Ram Rahim and his army of followers taking the law into their hands has once again revealed the clout that India's Godmen possess. They thought they were indomitable until the law caught up with them for financial irregularities (FERA), sexual abuse and even murder. From Asaram Babu to Sant Rampal and Nithyananda Swami, they all end up in the list of fake Babas. Gurmeet Ram Rahim is the prime and latest example. He was finally sent to prison after living a flashy life in a palatial ashram. India has a long

inventory of Godmen. They do politics and wield authority but show no signs of divinity. No wonder these invincible holy men enjoy preferential treatment from government even while they promote an unholy racket.

Recently Sri Sri Ravi Shankar visited Assam and Arunachal Pradesh for indigenous people's conference to kindle hopes for peace. The high profile Guru is welcomed by none other than the Chief Justice of Guwahati High court at the airport. The former rebel leaders of ULFA, NSCN(IM) and civil society groups were being shepherded to interact with him for finding a final solution to conflicts in the NE region. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is optimistic of brokering peace and claims to be in touch with ULFA(I) and NSCN(K). But Paresh Baruah has other ideas. He has refused outright any form of peace talk. It is not known whether the ULFA Chief has been consulted before such an offer was made. This is not the first time that The Art of Living Guru has made hollow promises. Why do India's spiritual heads want to be in the limelight?

Yours etc.
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

The Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar

By Thanggoulen Kipgen

On August 25, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) launched military attacks against 30 police posts and an army base in Rakhine state killing at least 12 security personnel including several hundred civilians. The ARSA is an ethnic militant group operating in the Muslim-dominated Rakhine state fighting against the Myanmar government who had denied them citizenship, regarding them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Since independence, successive governments in Myanmar have denied the Rohingya's historical claims and recognition as one of the country's 135 ethnic groups.

Myanmar military and border police responded to the attacks by launching "clearance operations" in the following days, leading to escalation of terror and violence in the troubled region till today. It is believed that thousands have lost their lives though the Myanmar authorities claim that 400 lives have been lost. What has captured international attention, both governmental and the media, is the large scale migration of the Rohingya Muslims out of the country. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees, over 370,000 Rohingya children, women and men have been forced to flee to Bangladesh escaping violence in Myanmar since August 2017.

Clashes between the ethnic Rohingya militants and the Myanmar police have erupted periodically since the late 1970s compelling hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingyas to flee their homes in the predominantly Buddhist country. However, since last October, violence has been witnessed frequently leading to several confrontations between the militants and the police and resulting in several deaths on both sides of the camp. This has led to large scale migration of the Rohingya Muslims to cross the border by land or by sea into Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Among these countries, Bangladesh has witnessed the highest numbers of Rohingya refugees moving into her territory. According to BBC, more than 300,000 undocumented Rohingyas were estimated to be in Bangladesh before this latest influx. Bangladesh says their presence strains local resources, increases crime and deters tourists in the Cox's Bazar area. This has led to Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to urge Myanmar to take back these Rohingya Muslims who have fled violence in Rakhine state. Malaysia has also already hosted over 100,000 Rohingya refugees from previous crises, but has agreed to take in even more on humanitarian grounds.

There has been mounting global criticism against Myanmar in handling the Rohingya crisis particularly among several Muslim-majority nations. UN human rights chief Zeid Raad al-Husseini responded to the crisis and described it as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing". In a statement, the White House urged Myanmar's troops to "respect the rule of law, stop the violence, and end the displacement of civilians from all communities". ASEAN itself has been silent on the issue largely because of its members' commitment to the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, though Malaysia and Indonesia have urged Myanmar to find amicable solution to the crisis without delay. The Myanmar government and the ASEAN has until now considered the issue as an internal matter. Foreign ministers from the ASEAN met in Yangon late last year to discuss Myanmar's Rohingya crisis amidst reports of brutal killings, rapes and the torching of Rohingya homes in the northern Rakhine state by Myanmar's army. The meeting failed to offer a pragmatic solution to the crisis.

The United Nations Security Council also held an emergency meeting on the Rohingya crisis on the 13th of September. The meeting condemned the violence in

Myanmar's Rakhine state and called for immediate steps to end the violence. Britain's U.N. Ambassador Matthew Rycroft said "the press statement Wednesday following closed-door consultations was the first statement the U.N.'s most powerful body has made in nine years on the situation in Myanmar." The UN condemnation is significant in the sense that China and Russia who have been backing Myanmar on the Rohingya issue and longtime Suu Kyi's friends United States and United Kingdom had unanimously voted for the resolution. This will give added pressure on Myanmar to act and take swift measures to end the violence.

There has been growing pressure on Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto civilian leader of the country, to act and stop these growing tensions. Her global image and reputation is rapidly disintegrating as she has so far remained silent or failed to take any meaningful steps on the military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslims. She has been so far defending her country's military attacks in Rakhine and denied that it is 'ethnic cleansing' as accused by several states and international organisations. She even said that her government had "already started defending all the people in Rakhine in the best way possible." Due to this global pressure on her to act fast and even a personal appeal from international figures such as Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, it is very likely that Suu Kyi will break her silence in the days to come. In fact Suu Kyi is in a very calculated state of mind on the Rohingya issue. As Nehingpao Kipgen, Assistant Professor and Executive Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, OP Jindal Global University, has argued "many

around the world tend to ignore or downplay the significance of the Myanmar political system. First, Suu Kyi is prevented from holding the office of the presidency, which is the highest office of the land. Second, her NLD government is in a power-sharing arrangement with the country's powerful military, which controls, among others, the three most important ministries related to security matters — home, defense and border affairs." He further argued that "the power-sharing nature of the hybrid system is such that the military can simply choose to ignore or not cooperate with the NLD-led civilian government. The possibility of another military takeover cannot be ruled out in the event there is a real threat to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, regardless of what the constitution says." The sensitive and complex nature of the political development on the issue has even led her to skip the UN General Assembly to deal with the Rohingya crisis.

What Myanmar should now ensure is to find immediate or short term solutions to end the crisis. State sponsored violence must end; atrocities towards the Rohingyas must be halted and external aid agencies should be allowed to get access to the affected areas on humanitarian grounds. It is likely that the United Nation's condemnation on the issue may not go down well with the Myanmar government. However, if the crisis continues it has the potential to destabilize the entire region, both South and South East Asia. There are reports that the Rohingya refugees have been recruited by Islamist militants in the neighbouring countries, taking advantage of their vulnerability and helplessness, in a bid to establish bigger foothold in the region. Malaysia's Defense Minister has even said that "We cannot leave them (the Rohingya) desperate and wanting, because if they are and they turn to these groups, countries in this region would have to pay the price." Therefore, the sooner the crisis is halted, the better for all concerns. (The author is a scholar at NEHU, Shillong)

Ferrandinis' 75 years

By John T Lyngdoh

My family was originally Calvinistic Presbyterians. It was through the wisdom of one of our aunts that we switched over to Catholicism. My two elder brothers received first holy communion on entering the Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. While Peter took up printing, Paul pursued tailoring respectively. After Christmas 1956 our rector Fr Virgilio Albera, Sdb led all the boarders, who didn't go home, for winter vacation to Mawkyndeng, Parish (Raliang), Jaintia Hills.

Those days, the road after Mawryngkeng check gate to Jowai and beyond was still muddy and unpebbled; with both sides covered by thick forests where wild animals including ferocious ones like bears, jackals, leopards and Bengal tigers roamed freely. The Jowai-Silchar Road was still nonexistent, except via Umrangshu (Garampani) to Haflong. The NEEPCO and coal mining sectors have not operated and the whole environmental surrounding was still in pristine beauty.

It was one week before the parish's annual procession, by the beginning of January 1957, that Bishop Ferrando, arrived with his assistants. To tour the different interiors he used his round bonnet green coloured American jeep, piloted by his faithful driver Samuel Sangma. The vehicle was gifted by the US Catholic community. A similar yellow coloured model belonged to Rev S D Perry, pastor Church of Christ, Mawlai Motsyiar, Shillong. The moment he arrived I joined with the village children to welcome our old Bishop (Bishop tymmen); since I was the youngest of boarders. For the whole week he would visit the outflank villages to meet his flocks and take stocks of their problems.

That same year Fr Dino Colussi, Sdb our counsellor prepared all those who were to receive baptism, first communion and confirmation during Easter, from Bishop Ferrando's own hands.

Bishop Ferrando was born on 23 September 1895 at Rossiglione to Augustine Ferrando and Josephine Salvi; they were two brothers and one sister. He was second among them and came from a pious Catholic



Archbishop Ferrando with his own MSMHC sisters and (below) travelling to Guwahati airport

family. His education in and frequent contacts with the Salesians of Don Bosco inspired him to enter in this congregation. By 23 December 1923 he arrived Shillong with a group of novices, to join the eleven pioneers who came on 23 January 1922 led by Fr Louis Mathias, Sdb. Fr Ferrando was immediately appointed Asst Novice Master to Fr John De Ponti, Sdb a pioneer of the first batch, at the Our Lady's noviciate and interim theologate.

He learnt Khasi very fast to facilitate missionary tours, in addition to his duty as professor. When Fr De Ponti left for Italy due to ailment, Fr Ferrando replaced him.

The outbreak of World War II (1939-45) adversely affected the missionary activities of the Church. This time Germany, Italy and Japan formed the Axis powers fighting against other allied nations. All Italian and German missionaries were arrested and interned at the temporary detention camp of Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai, Shillong. Even one adjacent locality of Mawlai Mawroh was made as makeshift

military cantonment for the Indian Sikhs and American Soldiers (GIs) regiments.

The war casualties overburdened the FMA sisters or Daughters Mary Help of Christians, running the St Mary's Convent, Gauhati. Some Adivasi convent girls involved in social works with their superiors of St Mary's Gauhati, were moved by the spirit of dedication and service rendered by the sisters on humanitarian grounds.

During a routine visit to the mission centres in the plains, Bishop Ferrando stopped over at St Mary's Convent Gauhati, in which he met the girls who offered themselves to become sisters. He acceded to their request and initially they were kept in the same convent. Fr Colussi was instructed to build additional two rooms adjacent to the convent for keeping the aspirants separately to pursue their studies in the convent. Within a short time the rooms were ready and all the ten novices shifted to their own house. Those lacking in educational standard were given special coaching, while intensive training on the Salesian pattern was also imparted in

other fields of religious life. During training two left the noviciate for personal reasons, including a lone Khasi girl Edwina Dohling, brought by Fr C Vendrame, Sdb. After completion of rigorous orientation course, eight novices who persevered were inducted into the newly founded congregation on October 24, 1942, taking the name of Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) or Ferrandinis—the Holy Rosary month and date when monthly Marian Novena ends in Salesian houses. Virgin Mary was mandated as the Patroness and intermily adopted the rules and habits of the FMAs.

By 1965 the Mother house was shifted to Peachland Laitumkhrach, Shillong which became the noviciate and later the first Provincial house. Fr N J Kenny, Sdb was their spiritual director and confessor till he died. More centres came up in the north-eastern region and outside, some on their own others belonging to the parishes concerned. The new Generalate at Hatigaon, Gauhati was blessed in 1993, side by side with the Little Flower Higher Secondary School. During these past 75 years the MSMHC now grew into seven Provinces at Shillong, Tinsukia, Tezpur, Gauhati, Siliguri, Bangalore and Turin (Italy) — a station preparing its sisters for posting in foreign missions. From the six pioneers the number rose to 1200, spread over mission centres in India and abroad; touching the shores of Africa and Hawaii an island of lepers where St Fr Damien of Molokai worked and died.

The sisters constantly receive requests from many dioceses to work in their areas. Pontifical recognition was granted to the congregation on March 21, 1977, and by July 8, 1986, assimilated into the Salesian family.

Bishop Ferrando whenever he administered the religious vows to his sisters would always insist that "you should observe the rules strictly because you'll be answerable in the end".

(The author is national councillor, DBPPA Shillong Province)

(To be continued)

Your attitude matters, limbs need not

By Alfonso Elenkial

W Clement Stone, one of the most popular motivational authors of our century, writes, "There is very little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. That little difference is whether one's attitude is positive or negative."

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States qualifies the above statement saying, "Nothing can stop the man/woman with the right mental attitude from achieving his/her goal; but nothing can help the man/woman with a wrong mental attitude."

John Paul Carinci speaks of a 35-year-old man, born without legs, in his book *The Power of Being Different*, whom he had seen featured in a television show. Carinci writes, "I saw him walking on the palms of his hands right to the edge of a pool; he then flipped himself in, and started swimming with his arms, as a normal person would do with his legs. A little later, he pulled himself out of the pool and, again using his hands, walked right over to a chaise lounge at the pool while I sat transfixed, wondering what this man would do next."

"The programme then showed him in the kitchen where he pulled himself on to a chair, and moving to the kitchen counter to have his meal. Finally, I saw this unusual man climbing onto the engine compartment of a car in a garage, where he worked as an automobile mechanic...."

Professional Baseball player Jim Abbott was born on September 19, 1967, in Flint, Michigan, with only left hand. However,

very early in life, he earned for himself name and fame, which players with both hands cannot easily achieve!

Abbott would catch the ball from the catcher with his glove on his left hand. He then would hold the ball against his right limb. Then with the limb resting against the glove, he would wind up and pitch the ball. Soon, he would slip his left hand

into the glove. He could actually pitch the ball with one hand, and also field the ball very well, if it was hit back to him. From 1985-88, he captained "Michigan" team leading them to win two Big Ten Championships. From 1989, he was in the Major Leagues.

In 1986, Abbott received the United States Sports Academy's Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias Award for his courage and will power to overcome adversity, and excel in sports. Next year, he won the James Sullivan Award as the top amateur athlete in the US. In 1992, he was presented the Tony Conigliaro Award, given annually to a major League Player who successfully overcomes obstacles and adversity with unflinching determination. As recent as 2007, Jim Abbott was elected to the College Baseball Hall of Fame for his successful career in Michigan. Abbott says, "All things are possible as long as you long for it enough. By changing your attitudes, you change your results!"

Here's another young man who was born without arms. Though he doesn't have arms, he brushes his teeth, drives his car to different locations, opens a jar, and does everything that we do, by using his feet in place of arms.

He does it all, amazingly, by raising his legs up the way we use our arms. He tells young people like him to win over hurdles and handicaps, by developing a positive attitude to life. If he could succeed in spite of serious limitations, he says, they too can be winners and successful in life!

Life without limbs or the normal use of our limbs is unthinkable for most of us. Under such circumstances, many even think of putting an end to their lives, God's most precious gift.

But the men above teach us beyond doubt that life is worth living, even in such or worse situations, and that we can still make of our lives a beautiful gift to God and to the people around us! What really matters most in life is our attitude to life, and all that it brings to us!

"All things are possible as long as you long for it enough. By changing your attitudes, you change your results!"



'Matt was always the first choice for Suburbicon'

George Clooney is not only a champion actor, a Hollywood sex symbol and a movie maker but a noted humanitarian too, advocating rights. IBNS Canada's Suman Das aided by Sudipto Maity catch up with the Hollywood megastar at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), where he was busy promoting his new directional venture Suburbicon.

Suburbicon is a crime comedy film directed by Clooney and written by Joel Coen, Ethan Coen, Clooney and Grant Heslov. The film stars Matt Damon, Julianne Moore and Oscar Isaac. Excerpts:

Two movies became one in Suburbicon. How did that happen?

Grant (Heslov, writer) and I were looking at a piece about Levittown, Pennsylvania, and an event that happened there. We had seen some things in the (US Presidential) campaign trail where they were talking about building fences and scapegoating Mexicans and Muslims and we are always reminded that these aren't new things and new moments in our history and we thought it would be interesting to talk about it. We wanted it to be entertaining, not a documentary, so we merged it with Suburbicon because we thought it would be a funny idea to put it in the suburbs in the 1950's, when we all thought everything was all so perfect... if you were a white straight male.

So there was this Coen Brothers' script and you thought you can put these two together?

The Coen Brothers had offered me to play the part that Oscar Issac plays and they offered it to me in 1999. The film never got made and when I called up Oscar to do the part, people asked me why didn't I play it... cause I got Oscar

Issac, which is not a bad move.

Your movie is set in the north of the US, but when you hear about racism in America, it's always the south that gets the blame. Your thoughts on that.

I grew up in Kentucky in the 60's and 70's and we sort of thought we were exercising this. Segregation had come to an end and we felt that the trajectory was going the right way, but it didn't. It stalled. And when you see in films this kind of bigotry, it's always Mississippi burning or always the southern guys saying terrible things and the north-east likes to say well we weren't like that and you want to go, well you actually were. I thought that was an important part of it. Even in casting we had to make sure that we really didn't have anybody with southern accents.

Let's talk about the tone of the movie. On one hand you had the signature Coen Brothers blood and gore and on the other hand it was an elegant story about the early civil rights. How did you draw a balance between the two so as not to spoil the film?

Well, it was tricky. We had to change certain things while editing. Times changed while we were shooting... Trump was elected...and it changed some of the temperature of the film in a weird way, because the country (US) got angrier, irrespective of whichever side you were on. It reminded us that we have to play with this tone a little differently. We had scenes with Josh Brolin that were some of the funniest scenes we have ever shot. I send them to Josh afterwards but we had to cut him out, because, it felt the wrong tone suddenly. We had to tone down some of the slapstick stuff and make them a little more dangerous. Tone



is what you win or lose on in films, in general and particularly when you are playing in this kind of genre. I have had it go both ways. We tested the film knowing what tone we wanted and core was a big piece of the tone.

You talk about so many burning issues in the film and there's so much going on in the US in terms of destruction, both natural and manmade. Tell us, how do plan to make this world a better place? I guess you are talking about Houston and Florida... we are all worried about that. You see, in Houston, it's going to take a long time and we are all going to have to be involved. You asked me how you're going to make this world a better place... we need involvement, because Houston is Syria, quite honestly. People in Houston

are now refugees based on something that had nothing to do with them. They did not do anything but they are now victims and they are out of their homes and they are going to be suffering for a long period of time and much like the people and children in Syria, we are going to have to find ways to be involved. That is our job as citizens of the world.

You made a little boy cry and got Matt Damon beaten up. What was their reaction when they first read the script? Well, it's better than making Matt Damon cry and beating up a little boy. I just thought that was the right thing to do, right... I mean I shouldn't be beating children. It wasn't just about beating Matt up, one of the most fun moments I had on the sets was when the prop guy brought a nor-

mal sized bicycle over and I said no, we are going to have a bike about that big for Matt (points to a much smaller size) and put him on that. Matt's obviously been a good sport and we have been good friends for a long period of time and there are very few actors in the world that are capable of being Jason Bourne and killing people and turn around be the buffoon who cannot do anything right. That little boy is something spectacular. He should be in front of a camera. He's normal and fun and both the boys were actually fantastic.

Why do you think the Coen Brothers never made the 1999 film with you? It's an interesting thing... they tried for years and I think they started writing in the mid 80's. A lot of things happened. I think they have done film similar to this.

They changed a few things and other writes had come on, so things were changed a little bit and the film never got made. Also a script can get caught up in a studio and the producer and the fees can get tied to it.

What was the most challenging scene for you to direct in this movie?

I would think the one with Karimah (Westbrook). The trickiest part was we were in a very racially diverse neighbourhood in Fullerton, California and we had about 350 extras who were going to hurl a lot of racial slurs and say a lot of pretty terrible things that are against any decent human beings'... what you would think as okay. To go around saying it to everyone that we are going to do something really awful and it's going to feel terrible... we all just felt sick.

Was Damon your first choice to play the role of Gardner (the character in the film)? Also tell us, you have been known to be a prolific prankster. Was casting him a prank too?

Matt was always the second choice. He was the best available. I have never seen a goat shaved before (laughs hysterically). Jokes aside, he was always the first choice for the film. This wasn't a prank. I do pranks when I'm bored on the sets and have nothing else to do. When you're directing you don't have a whole lot of time to do terrible things. I benefited from having three wonderful actors. You can plan everything but you'll still require smart, intuitive actors to carry you over the finish line and if you can't...you get Matt... (IBNS/TWF)

(Images by Radha Bose/IBNS and Paramount Pictures)

Mix it right for the best effect

By Ranjan K Baruah

It is difficult to find a person who does not love to watch movies or listen to music. Music has been an integral part of our life since ages. Music or songs are important part of movies too and hence there is always demand for good music.

With the advancement of science and technology there are new sophisticated equipment in the music industry. One of the career options related to this is audio or sound engineering.

Audio Engineering is all about capturing sound, recording, copying, editing, mixing and reproducing sound using electronic and mechanical devices. It involves both production and post production tasks. Audio engineering is one of the most admired and promising career amongst young generation that offers immense opportunity in the field of film, video production, sound broadcasting and advertising both in India and abroad. To be good in this field, a lot of dedication and interest is essential.



name by being in this profession. Most of the aspirants prefer places like Mumbai for these courses as the exposure is more.

There are immense potential in this field as the region is rich in music and with involvement of new techniques and equipment, innovations can be done. These innovations will promote the music of the region and at the same time many may get involved in the profession for which aspirants need dedication and also proper training and exposure.

All those who are interested in this field must have information related to different types of music. Concentration, patience, good understanding, good sense of pitch, timing and rhythm are the other flair needed for an audio engineer. They must be proficient with different types of recording media, such as analog tape, digital multi-track recorders and workstations and computer knowledge.

Update

JAM: IITs conduct a Joint Admission Test for M.Sc (JAM) to provide admissions into M.Sc (2 years), Joint MSc-PhD, MSc-PhD Dual Degree and other Post-Bachelor Degree Programmes at the IITs and the Integrated PhD degree programmes at IITs and to consolidate Science as a career option for bright students from across the country. JAM 2018 examination will be held on February 11, 2018. Last date for sending application is October 10.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)

BRIDGING THE GAP

Community colleges can support the Skill India Mission, says SPAN writer *Burton Bollag*

For many educators, community colleges are a key part of the education system of a 21st century economy. In India, however, they remain a small part of the higher education landscape.

Community colleges typically offer two-year professional degree programmes that are more practical and less theoretical or academic than three- or four-year bachelor programmes. Indian advocates of two-year colleges say they have been inspired by the big role such institutions play in the United States, where they enrol nearly 38 percent of all undergraduate students.

These advocates believe the two-year model could do much to support the Indian government's flagship Skill India programme.

"There is a huge gap between the demands by industry and entry-level candidates with the required skills," says Rahul Choudaha, who holds a doctorate in higher education from the University of Denver and is now the chief executive officer of DrEducation, LLC, a New Jersey-based global higher education research and consulting firm.

Not only are two-year colleges needed to meet the growing demands of the economy, but they are also a crucial instrument for social mobility, according to Xavier Alphonse, founder director of the Indian Center for Research and Development of Community Education (ICRDCE) in Chennai. The organization established and oversees more than 230 community colleges in at least 17 states in India.

In an essay, Alphonse wrote community colleges "empower the disadvantaged by helping them develop skills that will lead to gainful employment." He goes on to say two-year colleges can "make a qualitative difference in the lives of the urban, rural and tribal poor, and women."

Like other Indian advocates of two-year colleges, Alphonse says he has been inspired by the significant role of community colleges in the United States.

The US model

Ajay Mohan Goel, former executive vice-president of the Bengaluru-based Wadhvani Foundation, was one of the



Jillian Gross, Fulbright-Nehru scholar, in Pune

leading architects of a 2012 project of the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development to develop community colleges inside three-year bachelor colleges. "Our original vision," says Goel, "was that 5,000 three-year colleges would establish community colleges within themselves; a further 1,000 would transform themselves into a [full-time] community college."

Goel also led a trip of senior Indian officials to the United States to learn more about the community college system. "We studied the American model

intensively," he says, adding what they saw "is extremely relevant" to India's education needs. Today, Goel is the co-founder and principal consultant at the Uttar Pradesh-based Skills Management Group, which provides consultancy services on skilling and entrepreneurship.

Indeed, community colleges play a big role in the American higher education system. There are nearly 1,300 of these colleges in the United States, with more than seven million students enrolled in degree programmes. Less than

40 percent study full-time, while the rest are working adults who take classes in the evenings and on weekends. The average age of community college students is 28. The average cost of attending a four-year college in the United States is \$25,409 (approximately Rs. 16,36,000) per year, almost half the average annual household earning of Americans; though the best schools can cost more than double that amount. Community colleges, on the other hand, cost much less and are generally open to everyone who has graduated high school.

Benefits of community colleges

These colleges serve two purposes: preparing graduates for a job, and enabling access to a bachelor's degree programme by allowing students to transfer credits earned to a four-year college. In the United States, "there is a very smooth transition" from two-year to four-year colleges, says Choudaha, something that is very rare in India. Forty-six percent of the students who graduate from a four-year college in the US were enrolled at a two-year college at some point in the previous 10 years, according to a 2015 report of the Virginia-based National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

In India, the government is focusing on using short-term technical training programs to meet the country's skill needs.

"I'm not arguing against them," says Jillian Gross, a Fulbright-Nehru scholar and doctoral student at the University of Michigan, who recently conducted a study on the expansion of the community college model in India. But, she adds, while technical training teaches students how to meet a specific job requirement, two-year colleges provide a broader education to help students throughout their careers.

That education includes soft skills like communication, teamwork and critical thinking, says Gross. When they are of sufficient quality, community colleges enable "individual transformation" and "the possibility of upward mobility." (TWF)

(Photograph: SPAN)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 17, 2017

Mercury opposite Saturn on your solar return chart indicates a good year ahead. Your closest relationships will require more focus this year, as they challenge you to honor your feelings over your thoughts and develop more intimate connections. Higher education will also be on your agenda, as you prepare to move to the next level in your career. Become a mentor or volunteer, as it can instill new purpose into your life. In the process, you'll end up getting much more than you give. With a little more information, you can deal with the primary cause of a health problem, rather than the symptoms, and eliminate the problem once and for all.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake new assignments. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. Your ideals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you indicated this week. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your work status may change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will take you places now. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities that come your way.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your self-confidence gets a boost and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adapt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has been establishing strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace and make it more modernized and equipped with good infrastructure. Also, circumstances or your own reserve may prevent you from openly declaring or expressing your feelings.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider society is possible during this week. You adopt new styles and spend on luxury items. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance during this week. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You would maintain balance of the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey with includes pilgrimage is on the cards. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. This time takes some kind of pressure on professional and personal aspects. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be frustrating. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There is perfection and beauty in emotional and personal relationships. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. This is altogether a happy and relaxed period for you. Remember to be thankful. Mental pursuits, new learning, and all forms of intellectual activity are favored. Your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what

you set out to do. You should maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way otherwise you will become frustrated and dull. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You would be emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness. Sometimes you would protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egotistic people. Some associations would be competitive in business but you shine and work well in your field of activity. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you meet new and unusual people. Your hobbies, moments spent with family, all come into focus. Some lifestyle changes made by you begin to show results.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

New associations and beginnings in work areas as some unknown opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity to your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled in this phase. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings excellent opportunities for people in show business and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly on your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long term investments and speculations for financial gains.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You play the role of the senior in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. You will be considerably more proactive, healthy, and focused.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The planetary configuration brings more stability in relations and professional life. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new method to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and fond of the life of the home and family. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association with senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at the work place, which boosts your confidence. You use your best talents and co-relate all activities to boost the business and work opportunities.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This phase brings excellent work opportunities for people in teaching, hotel, finance and in communication fields. You would impress people from your communication skills as this brings positive results in matters related to love, family and professional relations. You would express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or you write. Health remains good during this period. Excellent professional opportunities await those students who have completed their education in fine arts, drama, music and finance. Your romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence, and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings will be therapeutic.

Power of women

By Soma Bhattacharjee

"Great dancers are great not because of their technique, they are great because of their passion". - Martha Graham

This "passion" of Monica Chanda, Artistic Director, Gitanjali Dance Academy, was portrayed by her dancers, staging her seminal dance production, 'Devi-The Triumph' on September 3 at U Soso Tham Auditorium. The day marked the celebration of the 17th Annual Function of the dance academy, which saw a colourful showcasing of talent ranging from the toddlers to the senior-most students of Gitanjali.

The various recitals had a message to convey; if the toddlers, performing, most delicately to an improvised rendition of Tagore's "PhulePhule" spoke about letting our girl child fly to where the sky is her only limit, the production, 'Devi - The Triumph' brought to climactic point the essence of the female prowess once it is awakened.

"Rooted in the classical dance style of Bharatanatyam, we however included the vocabularies of Chhau, the martial art form of Orissa, as well as Acro-Yoga, to describe the ascent of the feminine energy within our bodies," says scriptwriter Madhubanti Chanda.

The music arranged by UpmanyuBhanot from Delhi had completely mesmerised us all. Shillong's very own Saptarshi Chakrabarty's melodious crooning was an apt accompaniment. The budding artistes lived through it throughout their performance and swept the crowd away in awe, leaving all women rejuvenated on her strength and others to ponder upon.

The later part of the evening had transported us into another realm by the thundering performance of Vidha Lal and Abhimanyu Lal ensemble through their Kathak recitals.

Students of Gitanjali perform at U Soso Tham



"Maybe everyone can live beyond what they're capable of."

--- Markus Zusak

The Shillong Times

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Political Opportunism

THE political churning happening in Meghalaya today reminds us of the clichéd phrase, "Old wine in new bottles." The same corrupt people who have eaten up our roads and defaulted on our water supply systems are going to re-enter the political arena with a change of uniform. In fact, the opportunists are looking for the safest way to be re-elected. One question remains an eternal conundrum: Will the people of Meghalaya elect those who have let them down again and again? Will they look for new candidates with no track record of sleaze or will money be the final arbiter? Money power which has been repeatedly equated to 'winnability' has been the deciding factor for every election. Otherwise why would an illiterate businessman be favoured above one who has a broader socio-political concern? And above all, why would businessmen and contractors be given the opportunity to loot the system upfront? Don't we have ourselves to blame for giving charge of the treasury to those with a propensity to put their hands in the till and for giving short shrift to candidates who do not have the financial clout to bribe the voters? The fault lies in the voters, not in the candidates and that is where the correction should start.

Very often the rural voter is blamed for the poor choice of elected representatives but that is not always the case. Even in the city there are candidates that win by sheer dint of muscle and money, both. And the arguments from the electors are often bizarre. They elect an MLA who will serve their personal interests; the collective and social interests be damned. In such a situation the desire for change is a futile pursuit. The same set of representatives, with minor changes, will bounce back to occupy seats of power in the Government. People of Meghalaya are not yet ready to shake up the system. Whether the next Government will be a better one is no guarantee. The fault lies in our inability to understand that short term personal interests will and has always compromised the larger interests of the State of Meghalaya.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Quake resistant buildings imperative for NE

High rise constructions in urban areas and especially state capitals in the North East pose a potential hazard as the North Eastern Region is among the 6th highly seismic areas of the world. This was stated by Prof S. Arya, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Roorkee while addressing the valedictory function of an NEC sponsored training programme for civil engineers on earthquake resistant design of buildings and bridges in Shillong on Friday.

Mr Arya, who is also, associated with the UN's International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-2000), said that it is time for concerned governmental measures to shift the emphasis from relief after the disaster to awareness and preventive measures before the natural calamity. In this context, State governments in the North East should utilize the know how already available and execute all development schemes with inbuilt safety measures against earthquakes. He recommended that some engineers be sent to Roorkee every year to do post graduates courses on earthquake resistant construction designs.

Meghalaya Minister for Urban Development, Mr A Lyngdoh, congratulated the 35 participants from Nagaland, Arunachal, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya and Central Government organizations, and said that the need for scientific designs can hardly be overemphasized in this seismic region. In California,

one of the most earthquake prone region of the world, scientists have evolved designs for high rise buildings, he said. The proposed Shillong Development Authority has been set up with a view to restricting the growth of unplanned high-rise buildings, Mr Lyngdoh said.

"10+2 to, rationalize education"

Students should shun the path of violence since it interferes with their academic careers and hampers the process of development. This was stated by the Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Mr D D Lapang at the parents' Day function of Mizo Modern High School in Shillong last week. Mr Lapang, who was the Chief Guest at the function, spoke of the govt's "aspiration" to provide "quality education" and make it more "job oriented" by providing vocational training facilities to the students which he said, while reducing the number of aspirants' to white-collared jobs would increase the availability of technical manpower.

Mr Lapang also spoke of the govt's plans to change over to the 10+2 system of education to "keep pace with the rest of the country". Commending the School for its service towards the cause of education in the State, Mr Lapang hoed that the teachers and parents would make the best efforts to educate their children and impressed upon the students to work hard in order to "face life's challenges successfully and with confidence."

Rising to the Challenge of a Liberal Faith

By H.H. Mohrmen

The Unitarian Union or 'Ka Senglang ki Nongmane Wei Blei' as it is known in Khasi is celebrating its 130th anniversary on the September 18, but the occasion also raises questions whether the liberal church has lived up to its values and principles. The first church in the region was started on this day in the year 1887 and simultaneously a school was started which was aptly named Unitarian free school because it does not teach Catechism nor did it have any Bible class or impart any religious teachings to its students with an objective to convert them to their fold.

In one of the church's celebration, the chief guest on the occasion the then Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya BM Lanong raised a pertinent question as to why in spite of more than hundred years of existence, the growth of the church in terms of numbers is very small. The growth of this church which has 'respect for other religions' as one of its principles is numerically small when compared with others because unlike other churches, it does not proselytise. The reason is as G.N. Marshal stated in his book. Here is a church that does not convert but merely receives those who come to its door seeking acceptance.

Underpinning its stance on the principle of respecting individual faith, the church not only encourages mixed marriages between its members and their spouses who wish to retain their religious affiliation prior to the wedlock, but its ministers also officiate at many such marriages across the Khasi Jaintia hills. The church does not excommunicate any of its members for marrying a partner who does not belong to the same religion and it does force its members to forcefully convert their spouse to their own church. Therefore one will find that there are several inter-denominational or inter-religious marriages within the church.

Some people perceive being liberal and tolerant towards other religions as weakness. They assume that this happens because the church does not have firm principles and hence its members too lack commitment. But the church considers it as its strength and encourages its members to look for wisdom from

different religions to help them have an enriching life and also to use Holy Scriptures of different world religions to enhance their worship experiences and make life more meaningful.

But irrespective of its numbers, the church which has 'deeds not creeds' as another of its principles, focuses more on improving a person's life and in reaching out to others who need their help and support and see it as their main obligation in life. They also consider speaking out and fighting for what they think is right, against all odds as another of their duty. Hajom Kissor Singh Lyngdoh Nongbri the founder of the church in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and in Karbi Anglong during his time initiated a move against the selling of illicit liquor when he was appointed the Dewan of Hima Khyriem in the late eighteen hundreds.

Unitarian church is perhaps the first in the history of the churches in Meghalaya to ordain a woman as a pastor who after her training at Meadville Lombard Theological School, Chicago was appointed as a minister in the Union. Of course, before Rev Darihun Khriam, the Union already had Rev Annie Margaret Barr who was then the official representative of the British Unitarian working in the region, but Kong Barr saw herself as an educationist and a social worker than a missionary. Khriam is therefore the first native woman to break the glass ceiling and become the first ordained minister but if gender equality is what we are looking for, Unitarian church is where women are treated at par with men.

Not only can women be ministers in the church but they can also be elected as members of the church committees, the highest decision making body in the congregation. The term used for the members of this committee is also gender sensitive and rather than calling them Rangbah Balang, they are often called 'dkhot ka komiti balang' which is more gender inclusive. Even at the highest levels of 'ka Senglang ki nongmane wei Blei' which is the union of the Unitarian churches in the region, women have the same rights as their male counterparts to be the members of the board

and they are called ki dkhot ka board or board members.

But the Unitarian church in the Khasi - Jaintia Hills and Karbi Anglong is yet to make public its stance with regard to the contemporary LGBT issue. Benjamin Lyngdoh's article which appeared in The Shillong Times a few weeks back asked a very important question, 'What will the church do when gay or lesbian couples approach the church to sanctify their bond into wedlock.'

It may be mentioned that before Benjamin's article, this column had in 2009 carried an article on the issue of LGBT rights titled 'Standing on the side of love'. I have had my fair share of misconception about lesbians and gays when I was introduced to the issue in 1989-90 in England, and like any other person when first introduced to the subject, my initial reaction was, 'This is a western problem', and 'We don't have such people in the region'. But when my friends suggested that I go back home and look carefully then I realized that it is only natural to have members in the community with different sexual orientation.

It may also be mentioned that the Unitarian churches in both England and USA were and are still in the forefront of fighting for the rights of the LGBT community and the Unitarian churches in England were the first to marry gay and lesbian couples in their churches, when it was legalised recently. But surprisingly, the church here is maintaining a mute silence on the issue. When I asked the President of the Union Rev D P Pariat about the church official's stance on the issue of LGBT, his response was 'that we believe that we are children of God.'

The other principle of the church is dignity of each and every person, therefore it is duty bound for the church to fight for the rights of individuals and his or her freedom of expression. The question then is, why is the church shying away from its responsibility? Unitarians also believe Jesus to be one of the greatest teachers and also accept as true that if his teaching is summed up

it will also help prevent any kind of convulsion.

Yours etc.,
B J Syiemlieh
Shillong -5

NEC Rejoinder

Editor,
Under a news item headlined "Rs. 10 crore swindled: Manipur Speaker" under North-East Briefcase at page 4 in your esteemed daily of September 15, 2017, it has been alleged that Rs. 10 crore meant for opening a mechanized pottery unit has been swindled and that the fund was released by the North Eastern Council.

In this connection, we would like to place the following on record:

(i) At the request of the Govt. of Manipur, NEC had sanctioned a project titled "Special Type of Pottery and Stone Chip Allied Products Production at Nungbi, Ukhrul District, Manipur" at a total project cost of Rs. 3.42 crores (Rupees three crore forty two lakh only) in the Financial Year 2013-14. Out of this, NEC's share is Rs. 3.08 crores (Rupees three crore eight lakh only)

in one word it would be 'Love.' Love the Lord your God and love your neighbours as you love yourself, said he and Rev David Edward Lapasam (the first native Unitarian to be ordained a minister in the early 1900) in one of his hymn describes Unitarian church as, 'Ka Niam iei i'u Blei, iei i'u brier' (A religion that loves God and loves man) St. Paul himself illustrated the significance of love when he says 'now abide in faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love' (I Corinthians 13:13). 'Love bears all things, love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails' (I Corinthians 13:7-8).

The Unitarian church which also proclaims - 'love is the gospel of this church' already has a strong foothold to support the LGBT community in the state and after the Hon'ble Supreme Court's landmark ruling on privacy, there is no legal hurdle for the church to reach out to the community and support them in their fight for their rights. A liberal church which is not bound by dogma(s) or any Holy Scripture is free to listen to the dictate of one's conscience and support those who are neglected and marginalised.

Speaking about the role of the church, Theodore Parker a Unitarian in the last century said: 'Let us have a church that dares imitate the heroism of Jesus, seek inspiration as he sought it, judge the past as he; act on the present like him; pray as he prayed; work as he wrought; live as he lived. Let our doctrines and our forms fit the soul, as the limbs fit the body-growing out of it, growing with it. Let us have a church for the whole man: truth for the mind, good works for the hands, love for the heart; and for the soul, that aspiring after perfection, that unflinching faith in God, which, like lightning in the clouds, shines brightest when elsewhere it is most dark.'

A liberal church is therefore called to rise up to the challenges of the contemporary society and address the issues with a clear conscience as one is given to understand it and with great love.

being 90% of the project cost and State Share is Rs. 0.34 crore (Rupees thirty four lakh only). The project is being implemented by the Industries & Commerce Dept., Govt. of Manipur; (ii) NEC has so far released 2 (two) installments totaling Rs. 2.59 crore (Rupees two crore fifty nine lakhs only) of which the last installment of Rs. 1.23 crore (Rupees one crore twenty three lakh only) was released in June 2017. In fact, we have been informed that the last installment is yet to be released to the Implementing Agency by the Govt. of Manipur;

(iii) As per the progress reports submitted by Govt. of Manipur, the physical progress of works is commensurate with the amount of funds released to the Implementing Agency.

As can be seen from the facts above, the statement that Rs. 10 crore has been swindled is factually incorrect. Moreover, this is an ongoing project under implementation by the State Govt. of Manipur.

Yours etc.,
Gautam Chinty
Adviser (BIT)

Rahul Gandhi was candid in his interaction at Berkeley Congress- Vice President has to take forward this approach

By Harihar Swarup

The BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi are determined to make Rahul Gandhi a leader by keeping the Congress Vice-President in focus. Credit also partly goes to government blunders that seem to have infused a new life in Rahul Gandhi's otherwise not so impressive political career.

It is not often that Rahul Gandhi is taken seriously. But last Monday (Sept 12) at the University of California, Berkeley, he played the role expected of him. It was not the Congress Vice-President as seen before, reading a prepared script with manufactured indignation. He appeared relaxed. Shedding past inhibition, he said, he was ready for the job of Prime Minister, subject to organizational elections. With an image persistently smeared through a campaign of calumny run by the "BJP's abuse machine", it is not easy for Rahul Gandhi and the Congress to do the repair job, reignite passion and reinvest in a winning work culture.

The Modi government has made mistakes, yet the Opposition looked too slow and lethargic to politically exploit them. For instance, the GDP has taken a two per cent hit because of demonetization. This is what Dr. Manmohan Singh

ministers P.Chidambaram and Jairam Ramesh, to break the back of the agitation in the state "for nine years". For him, then, to stand back now and assume a safe distance from the Congress failing and failure, does not seem proper.

Be it dynastic politics or the Congress's credibility crisis on corruption and secularism, or its lack of deliberative capacity, Rahul Gandhi is part of the Congress problem, and in fact, more responsible for it than most. Leadership is about taking ownership when things go wrong.

Rahul had doubtless put up a spectacular performance at Berkeley but, one wonders, why he chose a foreign country to talk about India's internal problems. This is not a healthy practice. How people of California are concerned about India's problems? Had the Congress vice-president talked of what he spoke at Berkeley, in India, the impact would have been greater. Prime Minister Modi too had made the same mistake—of talking about Indian's internal problem—in a foreign country and for that he was criticized.

A war of words erupted between the BJP and the Congress over Rahul's attack on Prime Minister Modi in his address to the

Once again it was a surprise at Berkeley to see Rahul candidly accepting that the Congress has become "arrogant" after 2012 and stopped conversing with ordinary people. He also admitted that Modi was a better communicator than him and even praised the PM's "Swachh Bharat" and "Make in India" initiatives.

had predicted. Yet the Congress did not go to town with it. At Berkeley, Rahul did mention Modi's "top-down" work style but how is the Congress different? Its "high command culture" has often come in for criticism. Intra-party democracy is not exactly throbbing in the Congress. Rahul's initial efforts to broaden the Congress base and break the stranglehold of it from a handful of established political families raised hope but were resisted and finally laid to rest.

Once again it was a surprise at Berkeley to see Rahul candidly accepting that the Congress has become "arrogant" after 2012 and stopped conversing with ordinary people. He also admitted that Modi was a better communicator than him and even praised the PM's "Swachh Bharat" and "Make in India" initiatives. Then he articulated the ruling party's failings as never before: revival of the Kashmir problem, creeping violence in society, the killing of independent journalists, ill effect of demonetization and lack of jobs --- issues benefiting an Opposition leader. Berkeley could mark a new beginning both for Rahul and his party.

Rahul has been vice-president of the party since 2013, but by his own admission, he has been playing a larger and key role for much longer than that. Responding to a question on Kashmir, for instance, Rahul claimed that he had worked "behind scenes" and "silently" along with the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and union

students of University of California, Berkeley. The BJP accused Rahul of "trying to belittle" the PM on foreign soil while the Congress hit back, holding Modi guilty of insulting India abroad. "The fact that he chose to belittle the Prime Minister is not surprising, in fact, it is expected". The I&B minister Smriti Irani told reporters "after failing to connect with the people, Rahul chooses a platform of convenience for beating his opponents".

However, the Congress defended Rahul and attacked Irani for being an "apologist" for Modi. "It is the present Prime Minister who is guilty of insulting India on foreign soil. It is wrong to accuse Rahul of having said anything which is belittling. It again betrays the streak of intolerance and criticism by the BJP and the present government", senior Congress leader Anand Sharma said.

Irani also took on Rahul for his remarks that dynasties were common to all political parties. "A failed dynast today chose to speak about his failed political journey to U.S. Indian democracy gives opportunity to merit and is not beholden to dynasty", she said.

The I&B minister said Rahul's remarks that dynasties and dynasties were the fulcrum of democracy were an anomaly as she went out to point out the modest back grounds of President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Modi and argued they rose on the basis of their merit. (IPA Service)

"Tears shed for another person are not a sign of weakness. They are a sign of a pure heart."

--- José N. Harris

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 40 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017

Need for uniformity

THERE has been much airy talk but little action for years about legislating a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Social injustices that arise from the lack of such uniformity are all too obvious in Indian society. Public opinion, especially of a minority community, is swayed by ignorance and prejudice. This community is vocal against encroachment on religious freedom, heedless of the fact that its opposition goes against equality in the eyes of the law. The vote bank issue unnecessarily obtrudes on the debate. The Union Government is now awaiting a Law Commission Report on UCC. UCC will naturally be in conflict with Sharia. The government has codified laws of Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Parsis. It is true that many women are perhaps unable to exercise their rights even under these codified laws. That chokes progress towards UCC in respect of Muslims. It is however agreed among all enlightened people that religious personal laws should not dictate or regulate matters pertaining to marriage, alimony and inheritance. Of course, the question may arise that the BJP government at the centre may not be in a position to pass a law that draws a clear line between state and religion affecting even the majority community. Hindutva pressure groups doubtless make one wonder if India's secularism enshrined in the Constitution is indeed a reality. On the other hand, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, a petitioner in the Triple Talaq case, wants the government to codify Muslim personal law.

It flies in the face of reason why restrictions on polygamy, grounds for divorce or rules of inheritance should differ from one community to another in this age of consent. Patriarchal societies created unequal laws. It is not necessary to wait for the Law Commission Report. The government and civil society should push forward the cause of UCC without delay. Where is the room for debate?

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Laitkor JAC counters State Govt release

The Joint Action Committee of Laitkor has denied that it had agreed to the govt's proposal to set up a regulated market or a potato seed farm at the land earmarked for the now-aborted jail complex in Laitkor as has been stated in a press release issued by the

govt. The press release had stated that such an agreement was reached between the leaders of the Joint Action Committee and the Meghalaya Minister of State for Cooperation, Mr H.S. Shylla at their meeting on March 30.

A Passage Through Verrier Elwin (1902 – 1964)

By Sumana Paul

Northeast India in general and the town of Shillong in particular in blessed with a host of magnificent history, culture, life and events of many great personalities who have created a dent in the past glorifying the land in some form or the other. I take the opportunity to discuss on Verrier Elwin (1902–1964), an eminent anthropologist of the past century, who took the discipline of anthropology to gallant heights and was instrumental in framing the tribal policy of the nation that still bears testimony to understand the social and cultural dimensions of tribal situation in India.

I first came to know of Elwin about fifteen years ago through one of my old acquaintances (Dr. Gautam Kumar Bera, henceforth GKB), sometime in the early part of this millennium, who had just then published an article titled 'Verrier Elwin: An Anthropologist with Romanticism' in an international journal as a tribute to this great scholar on his centenary under the series Dramatis Personae of Indian Anthropology, a copy of which was given to me. He later publications included Passage through Aboriginal India: Anthropological Profile of Verrier Elwin (2008) and an edited volume titled Romanticism Remembered: Verrier Elwin after fifty years (2016). The readings fascinated me to understand this great scholar who had a varied exposure in the tribal domain of India, especially in central India and in this far flung part of the country, that is referred to as north east India. I had several rounds of academic discussions with my friend (GKB) on the tribal policy and its impact on education vis-à-vis its progress over this long passage of time since its formulation and inception in this country under initiation by Nehru-Elwin duo. As a resident of Shillong town for the last fifty years I had the dual pride of understanding Elwin since his family stays here and he was laid to rest here way back in February 1964. In addition, I also gathered additional information on Elwin from his daughter-in-law, Mandy Elwin Kharbuli (wife of Elwin's first son late Wasant Elwin) and their

During the period between 1928 and 1932 he was involved with the Indian national movement as an associate of Mahatma Gandhi and was later advised by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to work among the tribal people of the country. This was probably the turning point in his life for associating with the nation. His interests centered between Gandhians' demand for assimilation of the tribes among the Hindus, especially from the modernizing India, or mainstream freedom fighters and isolationist demand of the others such as British bureaucrats, and finally rationalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been reading

eldest daughter Faith Elwin Kharbuli, who is currently pursuing her doctoral research in history in NEHU. This is how my understanding on Elwin began. I am thankful to all of them for their academic pursuance and creating an understanding on one of the luminaries of the past.

Born on August 29, 1902 in Dover, Kent, England, as the eldest son of Edmund Harry Elwin, an Anglican Bishop of Sierra Leone, who died young of yellow fever and Minnie, Harry Holman Verrier Elwin grew up in a modest environment of early twentieth century England, educating himself in Theology at Merton College in the University of Oxford, where he was Charles Oldham University Scholar and Matthew Arnold Prizeman. Securing first class degree in both English Literature and Theology, Harry became Vice-Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford at the early age of 24 only. In 1927, at the age of 25, he became the Chaplain at Merton College.

At Merton, he was doing well with a promising career ahead when his spiritual search – mystical rather than missionary – led him to come to India to join the newly formed Christa Seva Sangha, an Anglican Order, in Pune (Maharashtra) with a serious possibility of becoming a monk. Genealogically India was not new to him since his maternal grandfather William Laban Holman worked for the East India Company. Elwin's mother, Minnie, was born there.

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Elwin's writings, evolved a policy of national integration of the tribal folk, while encouraging them to develop as per their genius.

In the post independent era the Nehru-Elwin duo provided the countrymen a five-point action plan as five fundamental principles of development, called Nehru's Panch Sheelformulated on the 9th day of October, 1958. With the formulation of such principles, the foundation of India's tribal policy was laid. The community development model extended to tribal areas and Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks were set up to ensure real development for the tribals. There was an over emphasis on subjective factors, the attitude of the agents of change, need for sympathy and understanding of the real problems that were gripping the country particularly in the areas which were occupied by the tribal people.

I chose to have Elwin as the focal point of discussion since it is felt that Elwin has become a victim of academic amnesia, at least among younger generation. In reality, probably, Elwin changed the definition of anthropology in India. GKB finds Elwin's work as visually stunning; academically mind churning that provides food for thought and attests that Elwin strikes a chord with Indians and Westerns. His fantastic career graph and legacy are a result of his hard work, inspiration, and the courage to never take the same road twice. His books are a compassionate universe – they may bend the laws of reality, yet they are ethically sound.

GKB has an understanding that the anthropological world and culture move in a connected as well as in a parallel manner. But, more importantly, there is a Western view, especially colonial view that Indian anthropology ended sometime with Elwin, soon

after his demise. But Indian anthropology continues to evolve from this rich heritage and is vibrant today. It contributes to the understanding that the history of anthropology runs parallel across many places. Elwin's work helps the readers to reflect on the need to consider multi-centrism of anthropology and creativity. There is wonderful work and a huge heritage everywhere waiting to be discovered by others, especially the West.

GKB also has certain things in his mind to defend Elwin's works. Early in his career, Elwin was faced with the conundrum that all ethnographers must try and resolve at some point: 'How can I (VE) be modern and unique and true to myself'? In this context, it was being Indian. What makes Elwin a great ethnographer, beyond merely an accomplished poet, was his resolution to this puzzle. Elwin found his voice in central India and the 'flat technique' that was in opposition to the Western lifestyle he was trained in at Oxford. The medium was a tropical country instead of Western climate, the subjects were indigenous population and rural rather than the wealthy Western patrons and the technique was Indian in its representation, in contrast to the Western realism. Elwin borrowed but never mimicked. His line and perspective had the sophistication to transform indigenous tribal life into high life. Beyond the academic beauty is the fact that Elwin's search for cultural independence was taking place simultaneously with the fight for political freedom. It was the search for the modern Indian identity. And, it was this idea that increasingly attracted GKB over and above the 'love at first sight' based on the lyrical beauty of his writings.

(Sumana Paul is a senior faculty in Women's College, Shillong pursuing research in tribal and cultural studies).

Bullet Train replaces India-Japan Buddha Symbol

By: T.P Sreenivasan

The penetration of China, Japan and South Korea into Asia, Africa and Latin America was referred to as "silver bullet diplomacy" or "cheque book diplomacy", as it was the economic push that enabled them to establish themselves in poor developing nations. China continues to use the silver bullet to expand economic and political influence in these countries, while Japan has moved on to a more sophisticated approach of developing mutually beneficial cooperation in trade and commerce, leading to political clout for itself. The unprecedented warmth of the welcome Prime Minister Shinzo Abe received in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the wide ranging agreements reached there showed the extraordinary range and depth of India-Japan relations. If the Buddha was the symbol of cordial relations between India and Japan in the past, today it is the bullet train, which has become the symbol of progress through technology that the two countries have agreed to foster.

PM Modi's "demonstrative diplomacy" broke all records in both language and body language when he used all the possible superlatives for his "best friend" and repeatedly embraced him. He put the sour and sweet visit to China, the pains of demonetisation and petrol prices and the general down turn of the economy behind him to roll out the red carpet and to stage a roadshow to stress the importance of the visit. The bullet train for which the foundation stone was laid by him and "Abe san" was characterised as a reflection of the fast speed of India's economic development.

The Joint Statement issued by the two Prime Ministers was one of the most extensive and forward looking documents signed recently by India, embracing all aspects of political, economic and cultural relations. Gone are the days of the bitter exchanges between India and Japan on nuclear non-proliferation issues and today, nuclear cooperation is an anchor of the new relationship. The whole exercise was to move toward a "free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific", with a new partnership among India, Japan, the US and others, as seen in the "Malabar" exercise in the region, which has already caused flutters across the Himalayas.

The Statement celebrated the "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" between the two countries and the significant deepening of bilateral relations in the past three years and the growing convergence in the political, economic and strategic interests, based on the firm foundation of common values and traditions, as well as on an emerging consensus on contemporary issues of peace, security and development. The Prime Ministers decided "to work together to elevate their partnership to the next level to advance common strategic objectives at a time when the global community is faced with new challenges."

For Japan, which professes to be non-militaristic in its approach to security, the words used in the statement on security in the Asia-Pacific region broke new ground. The statement pledged to reinforce their efforts to align Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy with India's Act East Policy, including through enhancing maritime security cooperation, improving connectivity in the wider Indo-Pacific region, strengthening cooperation with ASEAN, and promoting discussions between strategists and experts of the two countries and to enhance defence and security cooperation and dialogues, including the MALABAR and other joint exercises, defence equipment and technology cooperation in such areas as surveillance and unmanned system technologies, and defence industry cooperation.

The economic cooperation sections of the statement are

very detailed and specific in support of India's economic reforms and projects such as "Make in India", "Digital India", "Skill India" etc. indicating the readiness of Japan to invest heavily in the relevant areas. Even an area of contention relating to higher IP standards, undermining import of affordable generic medicines into Japan was sought to be dealt with by a reference to pharmaceuticals as an area of cooperation.

The entry into force of the Agreement between India and Japan for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy was welcomed as the Agreement reflecting a new level of mutual confidence and strategic partnership in the cause of clean energy, economic development and a peaceful and secure world. Similarly, it was acknowledged that outer space is an ever-expanding frontier of human endeavour and welcomed the deepening of cooperation between the space agencies of the two countries in the field of earth observation, satellite based navigation, space sciences and lunar exploration.

Any direct criticism of China was carefully avoided, but the statement highlighted the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes, including through full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to the threat or use of force, and in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The two Prime Ministers also reiterated their desire and determination to work together to maintain and promote peace, stability, and development in the Indo-Pacific region, in a thinly veiled reference to Chinese expansionism in the region. But there was no restraint in the case of North Korea, which was condemned for its development of nuclear and missile technology and its threat of use of force.

India received the fullest endorsement of its concerns about terrorism when Japan joined India to condemn, in the strongest terms the growing menace of terrorism and violent extremism. They shared the view that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is a global scourge that must be forcefully combated through concerted global action in the spirit of "zero tolerance". They called for Pakistan to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks including those of the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai and the 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot. They looked forward to the convening of the fifth India-Japan Consultation on Terrorism and to strengthening cooperation against terrorist threats from groups including Al-Qaida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lakshar-e-Tayyiba, and their affiliates.

The strong partnership between India and Japan to seek permanent membership of the UN Security Council was restated and support was expressed for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and APEC. The differences between India and Japan on climate change were papered over with a commitment to the Paris Agreement and related international agreements. A long list of measures for people to people is the icing on the cake of a model relationship.

The new relationship between India and Japan, exemplified in the Abe visit reflects Japan's own emergence out of the US security and foreign policy umbrella, which had inhibited development of relations with India, in spite of many cultural and historic links. The increasing threat from China has added urgency to a security partnership, which is likely to flourish in the years to come.

(The writer is former Ambassador of India of the IAEA, Chairman, Academic Council and Director, NSS Academy of Civil Services and Director General, Kerala International Centre).

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGRIHMS X-Ray unit pathetic

Editor, The Shillong Times published a news item (September 9, 2017) on the functioning of NEIGRIHMS and also subsequent rejoinders (September 12, 2017 & September 14, 2017) from the authorities representing the Medical Institute. These reports and rejoinders came to my attention only recently as I was away and without access to your paper. Hence this delayed response to a very critical concern highlighted by your esteemed newspaper. NEIGRIHMS was established with the hope of providing top-notch health care services to people in this hinterland. However its functioning has left much to be desired. A casual probe through the internet reveals a number of deficiencies and anomalies that plague this premier institute. I agree that some of these can be attributed to the nascent state of the institute. But most of them can be ascribed to the quality of service culture that is being institutionalised at the centre.

Here is a personal anecdote to bring home the point. During a recent emergency visit to the hospital (August 18, 2017) to seek medical assistance for what seemed like an ankle fracture, for my sister,?

I was asked by the Doctor to get an emergency X-ray administered. When I went to get the "Urgent" X-ray done, I was told, after a waiting time of 40 mins that the machine needs to be cooled down for an hour as, after conducting 100 X-rays since morning, the machine had overheated. This "cooling period", that coincidentally dovetailed the lunch hours, was subsequently raised to 2 (hours) with over a 100 more patients still in the queue. When I questioned the justification for this action I was pertly asked to complain to the higher authorities if I so desired. As I needed an urgent x-ray administered, I had to rush to Woodland's Hospital in the town to get it done. Should this be the quality of services and machines on offer at a premier medical centre like NEIGRIHMS? This regrettably is only a personal anecdote. A conversation with other patients who had come from far flung areas of the region revealed that the supporting staff especially at the registration counter, were also often rude and impolite.

It is unjust and immoral that a premier medical centre, funded by the taxpayers and embodying the hopes and desires of a whole region, should offer such inferior services?.

I am seriously considering seeking legal redress through a PIL in the High Court. I request members of the public to kindly express their experiences at the

Institute without waiting for a journalist to write a report and perhaps later for be sued for th?at? action.

Yours etc. Rajesh Dev University of Delhi, Camp:Shillong

Horrible road to NEIGRIHMS (New Shillong)

Editor, This road is 5.4 kms from Demseinong junction and it runs 14 kms to join the National highway 44 at Diengpasoh which connects to Guwahati and Silchar. It also connects Shillong City to all the national institutes like Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Institute of Hotel Management (IHM), Institute of Fashion Technology (IFT), North Eastern Institute of Ayurveda & Homoeopathy (NEIAH) etc and the long awaited Meghalaya Assembly building which, of course is yet to come up. From the look of the road it does not appear important enough from the State PWD's and Govt's perspective. NEIGRIHMS has become operational at Mawdingiang from 2006 and is now into its 11th year. At present there are approximately 1500 patients per day attending the hospital and 40% of them come from other neighboring States with the majority coming from

Assam's Barak Valley. I wonder what impression they have of this road and of our Government and particularly of the PWD.

Now for almost a year there is apparently some renovation/repair work going on but in a very shoddy, unorganized manner. I'm only talking about the stretch from Demseinong to NEIGRIHMS/NEIAH the national Institutes of health and family welfare which may travel to. It has taken nearly one year to work on the 2 km stretch from Nongmynsong to Itshyrwat with no sign of completion at all because the road is totally destroyed by the activities of the contractor. They have left the finished part to the mercy of the summer rains and moved on. That means, the road will be repaired only after the whole stretch of the total length is completed. Have you heard any sensible person do that? In fact this road was repaired some years ago along with the road around Polo through Demseinong, Pynthor and Golfink. The difference between the two roads is that the Polo road was repaired with Wet Mixed MacAdam (WMM) whereas the road to NEIGRIHMS was done only with Water Bound MacAdam. Stone aggregates used in WBM are larger in size compared to WMM. But in case of WMM, aggregates and binding materials are premixed in a batching plant or concrete mixing machine and then brought to site for overlaying

and rolling. The main difference between the two in terms of quality control are (a) the process in the latter can be done only by a highly qualified contractor (b) it costs more, but lasts longer. High quality smooth roads can be made with this process and can be completed at a faster pace. WBM is a process where materials are mixed on site and involves lesser expenditure but gives more scope for manipulation. They last only one summer. This is how the maximum number of roads in Shillong are constructed. The question is who decides which roads are to be done by which process and on what basis is the decision made? Thank God the summer season is nearly over otherwise we would need a boat to reach NEIGRIHMS or the so called New Shillong!

Here again, I saw the contractor who used to repair this road every summer end, equipped with only red soil and small boulders to fill the pot holes. Earlier he came with a jeep and a trailer. Now he uses a Maruti van which nearly reached its end life cycle carrying materials for the repair work! Where are the contractors who used to repair roads at night and during holidays too? The workers who repair this important road, start work at 10 am and stop at 5 pm just like babus working in

Govt offices! People say that nowadays the contractors are graded and allotted works on the basis of their proximity with the ministers/high officials and not anymore on their capacity, efficiency or experience. The Department concerned has to prove them wrong. But are the engineers listening or have they reached a point of being deaf despite having ears and failing to see though they have eyes? Does our PWD have only mud and stones?

Fortunately we can still reach that part of Shillong via Umpling and Mawpat which have to handle heavy traffic. Hence the road condition in both places has also deteriorated. It leaves people with the choice of driving over smaller potholes or bigger ones. Will the PWD pull up its socks? Will the Chief Minister drive on this road at least once? The whole stretch of 6 kms from Demseinong junction to NEIAH can be blacktopped with WMM in just a few weeks! I appeal to the concerned authority to please redeem your pride and not sink into the morass of corruption hook, line and sinker!

Yours etc., Name withheld on request

"Festivals are fun for kids, fun for parents and offer a welcome break from the stresses of the nuclear family. The sheer quantities of people make life easier: loads of adults for the adults to talk to and loads of kids for the kids to play with."

--- Tom Hodgkinson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 41 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2017

The police and the people

THE Bureau of Police Research and Development has compiled data on the police force of the country. Almost 21% of sanctioned posts are lying vacant. That means there is one policeman for 663 people while the ratio should be 1:518. 56,944 police personnel are sanctioned for 20,828 VIPs. The list of VIPs is no doubt bloated. 150 cops for a population of 1 lakh-That is a lamentable situation. Conviction rate in India was 47% in 2015. The rate is just 21.7% in the case of crime against women. In the case of women, most accused are acquitted. All this shows the incompetence of our police. Take the case of prolonged and fruitless search for the murderer of Shashi Tharoor's wife. The government is largely to blame. It is argued that there should be greater administrative autonomy in the IPS hierarchy. Even Police Commissioners and Inspector Generals have their hands tied with state Home Ministers pulling the strings. The way the rape in Kolkata's Park Street was executed is a glaring example.

Failure to create a staff police force has made policemen on the job overworked and pitifully stressed. In a study done in 2014, the Bureau of Police Research and Development, 68% of surveyed SHOS reported that their subordinates worked more than eleven hours every day and 73% had to work on off days. Non-conviction, refusal to register FIRs, low conviction rates and above all, corruption are the result. Police reform is still just talk. Meanwhile, the police acted miserably in the recent outrage in Haryana and Bengaluru. No wonder kangaroo courts and khap panchayats rule the roost and deliver instant justice. But can a democracy have a police force that is still largely the rulers' police? The question begs for an answer.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Exit Hokishe Sema

Mr. Hokishe Sema is on his way out. There are few precedents of an outgoing Chief Minister not being considered fit even for membership of the new Assembly to be next constituted.

Nagaland goes to the polls on Jan. 21 and the list of Con-gress candidates is out. The significant omission in it is the name of Mr. Sema and it appears

to be deliberate.

The ex-CM made all possible efforts (a few like observance of a bandh to demonstrate popular support behind him rather ill-conceived) to get him back in the reckoning but obviously failed to mollify the wrath of the Congress (I) High Command which belies even the party's own pattern of working.

TO THE EDITOR

Value of soul over soulless body

Editor,

After reading the letter titled, "Disgusting, cruel and inhuman cremation" (ST Sep 15, 2017) I have to agree with the writer about the manner in which the dead bodies are being handled in some crematorium. This portrays the lack of sensitivity in the management and labourers involved since for them it is just a chore. Indeed the act needs to be condemned and those who manage the crematorium should inculcate a basic affable attitude towards their duty considering the deep emotional attachment of the family members with the deceased.

Before proceeding further I just want to make it clear to the writer of the letter that the following views are not meant to contradict his thoughts but a general overview of some acts we witness in our daily lives. The writer's letter opens up a new window of thoughts for me, on how we value life; the dualism of our attitudes towards the dead and the living. These are some of the questions contradicting my own moral attitude. In rural

areas we often witness people coming from far away distances to attend funeral rituals with no real emotional or familial bonding with the deceased. The moment they see the dead body they start crying and shed buckets of tears as if on cue. And when they are done with such rituals they appear normal and start having normal conversations. Tears are usually connected to strong emotions. We shed tears when we are overjoyed or very sad. It is not possible to release tears under normal circumstances unless one is an actor. So kudos to our ladies for performing an act that defies science.

The other ritual I witness is when a sick person is hospitalized. He/she is bombarded with visitors bringing with them loads of food items when the patient can barely swallow a morsel of food or digest it. A more painful habit is when the patient has to strain himself/herself to converse with the visitors, especially those not very familiar to the patient. I believe a patient is hospitalized in order to heal quicker and to have mental and physical rest. In fact the best hospitals restrict visitors since the patient is the whole focus here. The sick need more of medical attention and less of putting up with visitors.

Life, death and suicide in the Khasi thought

By Fabian Lyngdoh

According to Khasi thought, human life is precious and honourable; there is no place for honour killing, prestigious head-hunting and laudable self-immolation in the Khasi thought and practice. The Khasis believe that human beings are created by God not out of the dust of the earth, but in heaven before the creation of the material world, and they came down to live on earth and to take care of it. The sensible world is believed to be as eternal as the spiritual, and every Khasi wishes that his clan shall ever exist, and clan members shall continue to come to the earth through birth and go to the spiritual world through death.

But the Khasis never surrender or commend any of their clan members to death however old or terminally ill the person is. They would go on finding the reasons why he/she is ill. Even if there is likelihood that death would follow at any moment, they would never say that there is no more hope. To say so, is considered 'ka jingkren sang' (sacriligious curse). It is only when all religious divinations can no longer reveal the reason of illness, and all medical efforts and religious sacrifices fail to save a person's life, and he/she finally dies, then the fact of death is accepted. However, they never say that it is the will of God, but that he/she was struck by 'ka tyrut' which is a violent spiritual force. Even when a very old member of the clan dies, the Khasis never say that he/she simply died, but it is because 'ba la pom ka tyrut ka smer' (struck by ka tyrut). In death of whatever nature, the final act of terminating a person's earthly life is an act of ka tyrut. That is why at the death of every clan member, when the sacrifice of 'u larkrad-lynti' is performed, declaration is made to the effect that ka tyrut has struck.

When a person meets with a violent death called 'rap-tyrut', through murder, accidents, childbirth, or attacked by animals, it is not only that he/she is struck by ka tyrut, but that his/her remains shall also be haunted by it while his/her spirit wanders about without rest and abode. The bones of clan members who die of violent deaths can be deposited into the clan's religious cairn only after purification through the

ceremony of 'ka sait tyrut' so as to drive away ka tyrut from their bones and calling upon their spirits to come and dwell in them. But in the case of suicide, when man himself takes the place of ka tyrut to strike and terminate his own earthly life, there are no religious purification rites among the Khasis; there are only religious rites to guard the living members of the clan from the poison of ka tyrut called 'ka raibi'. The spirit of a person who committed suicide is believed to merge with ka tyrut. Hence, even if the religious ceremony of ka sait-tyrut is performed to drive away ka tyrut, it would be impossible as the spirit of the deceased is believed to have embraced it and become its agent. Suicide by hanging called 'sdiem phasi' must be a later phenomenon as it is not mentioned in any of the Khasi folktales. The form of suicide that is mentioned in Khasi stories is 'noh-iap', that is, to jump to death into a cliff, or waterfall, or into a river or in any other place where people rarely visit so that the question of retrieving the body and performing religious ceremonies did not arise.

In Khasi thought suicide was contemptible and condemnable; it very rarely occurred in the past, and there is no mention of it in Khasi mythology or historical tradition as an excusable and honourable act for whatever cause. A fast unto death for whatever cause is 'ka sang' (sacrilege) among the Khasis. Nothing else is more important than life, and 'to live' is the greatest of all virtues. For the Khasis, it is better to live somehow than to die at all.

But today, we witness increasing rates of suicide everywhere in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and it seems to occur more among the males than the females. Last year in one village in Ri Bhoi District, three males and one female aged between 15 to 20 years died of suicide one after another within two months. And, close to a village where I reside, last year a young male aged 17 years also died of suicide. Then in July this year another young man aged 22 years also died of suicide in the same village. Not long after that, this month, September, 2017, a young man aged about 30 years also killed himself and a week later two adult men died of suicide

during their bad times? Have we translated our spiritual and religious life to practical everyday experiences of developing empathy? In this tight and busy life, we might question the possibility of managing time, but the answer lies with how we prioritise our time. If we value something we can always make time and develop a hierarchy of priorities, with the one we value the most at the top. The fact is time will always be the same but priorities may change depending on our taste and affinity.

In this digital age we have gained a lot but we have lost a lot too. The quality time of being physically in touch with each other is corroded by social network, helplessly enslaving us to rely on gadgets to maintain our relationships. How can we hold to ransom our golden bonding with our close ones merely on a decade old technology?

To conclude, in this letter we can pick up two important thoughts. One is to give time to exhibit our love and respect when a person is still breathing (A breathing soul not a lifeless soul) and when they are still aware of our presence rather than thronging the rites of performing rituals with the lifeless body, when the soul can clearly sense the faux in

on two consecutive days, and a young woman was rescued by her aunt from a suicide attempt while the burial ceremony of one of the men was in the process. All these cases occurred in the same village. In another village, last year a man was rescued by his son from a suicide attempt in front of his own house. At the beginning of this year, two other adult men were rescued from suicide attempts within three months in the same village. In all these cases, suicide was committed or attempted to be committed by hanging, and not by 'noh-iap'.

It seems that suicide is now an epidemic. The reason is not because of the spirit of ka tyrut as people of old believed, but because of certain sociological factors prevalent in the present society which social scientists have to dig out. I am one of those who believe that suicide is not in the natural instincts of animals or human beings. It happens only among human beings because of sociological factors. The society is supposed to be the fountain of love and the bedrock of physical, mental and spiritual refuge for every individual. If the suicide rate in any community is on the rise, it may indicate the existence of two important factors. The first is that, the fictitious self-image with unlimited freedom and aspirations which does not concur with reality has been fraudulently created among the people. The other factor is that, the nature of society as the fountain of love, and the bedrock of physical, mental and spiritual refuge is diminishing by the day despite claims of pastoral and institutional care by various religions and churches. Growth of faith in any religion or church denomination does not mean only the increase in the number of registered members and the grandeur of religious celebrations, but it means much more in the strengthening of love in the human society where members, in solitude or in collective living, find physical, mental and spiritual refuge.

I would like to put up a

few points to ponder on what is happening in our society today. I have observed in several cases of deaths by suicide, cows, pigs, chicken and fish were slaughtered for a feast-like gathering to celebrate the event, and a beautiful coffin is made and adorned with numerous wreaths to honour the deceased. If so much honour is bestowed upon a person for committing suicide, would not other lovelorn individuals, wearied of life and drained of hope, aspire for such honour though it is not in life, but in death? It seems that a kilogram of chicken is too costly to celebrate the birthday of a son or daughter, but all sorts of meats are affordable to celebrate a suicide. I have also noticed in a number of burial ceremonies, where the local community church leaders, after performing the religious rites, casually declare that the soul of the person who died of suicide has gone to heaven. In a situation when, to the perception of the young hearts, the world has become like hell, would they not be encouraged to go to heaven by committing suicide? It is real foolery to believe that the performance of certain forms of prescribed prayers and hymns would be sufficient to determine the destiny of a person to heaven or to hell.

Though we have no concrete scientific evidence, it would be healthy and good if authorities of whatever religion or church denominations take serious note of these realities to instruct the local community leaders to differentiate between normal death and suicide, and not to perform pompous religious burial or funeral ceremonies in case of suicide be he/her of any clan or kur, so that young minds and hearts might not perceive suicide as honourable, and spiritually rewarding. Let those who are alive take more care of the living, and let God take care of both the living and the dead, so that the menace of suicide would not plague the human society.

our heart. Secondly, the importance of rationality and reasoning to strengthen our understanding and if required to question and correct the age old faulty rituals. A famous quote from Albert Einstein says, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about the solutions". His 55 minutes is well spent in solving the WHY part and the 5 minutes on HOW. The importance of WHY is to develop a rational mind which can potentially solve many bad practices in our daily lives.

Yours etc.,
Sonia Kharduit
Shillong

Looting the public with exorbitant parking fees!

Editor,
Parking fees in Shillong vary according to location and authority. On September 17, 2017 I parked my car on the roadside at Motphran near Pynursla Indica stand for roughly about 20 minutes but surprisingly the

Leadership in Meghalaya, whether in politics or religion is stale. Stale as in out-of-date. This is probably because we live on drama. I am not just talking about our love for Hollywood soap operas or Bollywood serials or these days Korean serials that make sure we are glued to our seats at specific times of the day. I am also referring to how as a people we perceive reality on politics and religion in our state. Meghalaya's current situation is similar to the Hollywood serial, "Game of Thrones." Corruption, poverty, political dynasties and cunning alliances are everywhere. Apparently, the current dispensation is perceived as unable to fulfill the promises it made when it started out in 2013. Mining and NGT, trafficking of women, drug menace, bad roads and communication in rural villages, price rise of basic commodities, GST, traffic congestion in the city etc. These are but some of the heartbreaks that beset us, so that social media outbursts are become the in thing. And as in our beloved soap opera, we have a need to paint someone or something as a villain.

And similar to what happens in our serials, from somewhere, our hero should arise. We have a roster of heroes from which to choose. We have the likes of Mukulji, Lapangji, Ardentji, Paulji, Ronnieji, Donkuparji and Shibunji vying for the iron throne, with their promises of deliverance from the plagues afflicting this state; each promising what will be a brighter future if they end up on the judgment throne.

This is not a problem per se. In fact, I am quite happy that finally, our people are showing as much enthusiasm in choosing their leaders. What I am afraid of is how most of the leaders are clinging on to power and are not ready to share responsibility. What I am afraid of is the number of different portfolios each one is holding on as if no other citizenry is capable of discharging it. What I am afraid of is their greed for power. This shows their insincerity. They are afraid that someone will know their wicked deeds if they share power and responsibility. The more power they hold, the more wicked they become because they can't perform any of their duties well. This is evident in the lives of so many leaders in our society, be it politics or religion. Please remember, the problems that we face cannot be solved by just one man or woman alone.

The truth is, if we are to move forward as a society, there must be collective action from all strata, all sections of society towards a culture of discipline, integrity, hard work and excellence. Except for God, there is no one-person solution because the ills that we face have been and are being made by lakhs of people living together in an abode of cloud that shares international and national geographical boundaries and cultural barriers that invariably cause misunderstandings in the long run.

The state has had more than 10 CMs - the first CM Captain Williamson Sangma. Probably he and SC Marak are the only two to complete a full term of five years in office. We have had 11 elections but we are still stuck in the dilemma of mediocrity. What most of us do not realize is that for every election in the past, there is a 'chosen one' who we deemed capable of saving the entire state. But

Will the Government authorities look into this anomaly at the earliest?
Yours etc
Manuel Carey Lymba
Shillong 08

Change! When will it come?

By Michael Makri

this only leads to heartbreak because with this mindset, the end result will always be the same: disappointment. We know full well that when we cast our votes, we are choosing someone who will take charge in determining our direction as a state. But this does not release us from performing our more important duties as citizens of this state. We are misled by our belief that the roles we play in society are of less importance compare to the role that political leaders play. Nothing is farther from the truth. We can still be something without these messianic leaders, but our leaders will be nothing without us - the citizenry. Let me tell you in all truth, no matter whom we vote for, our state will not magically transform into a developed state with poverty, crime, or natural or man-made disasters becoming things of the past. All these candidates cannot make this state great on their own. The future of this nation depends on each of us that make up this whole. It is we, you and I, who can do something for this nation. It starts with thinking collectively for the sake of the future generation. It begins when we think of others as much as of ourselves.

For change to happen, it starts with children and teens stopping to chase after cheap thrills and concentrate on improving their skills so they can be productive instead of merely unproductive. It starts when young parents plan their families so that they can provide for their children's basic needs-and yes, this includes quality education. It starts when businessmen do their utmost to understand the financial woes of their employees and let these guide their decisions. It begins when pedestrians learn to walk or cross in the proper lanes. It begins when the formators understand the formees. It begins when drivers observe traffic rules. The list of what we, the citizenry, can do to help build our society is endless!

Leaders have failed to deliver on their promises in the past. But that is to teach us how crucial is the cooperation between our leaders and the people. An honest leader cannot make the necessary changes if the people remain resistant to positive change, to personal and collective discipline, and to authority. My hope then is this: that whoever wins the 2018 elections, we will set aside our biases and prejudices and learn how to cooperate, for once. And to the candidates who win, I only plead that you be the one who has enough political will to change the system that has weighed down the progress of our state for so long.

For change to come, for the better Meghalaya is simple: competent and honest servant-leaders plus cooperative and hardworking people. It is difficult to come by because the price to pay is to deny our own instinct to go for the easy way. But I would like to think that we are not gifted with this much resourcefulness for nothing. It is only a matter of will as a people, if we really want positive change to occur. Whether change is coming or not, we must first ask if we are capable of being the real-life hero of our own in the grandest Meghalaya soap opera in which we'll ever stars: our state's future, no less- "the Scotland of the East".

Leadership in Meghalaya, whether in politics or religion is stale. Stale as in out-of-date. This is probably because we live on drama. I am not just talking about our love for Hollywood soap operas or Bollywood serials or these days Korean serials that make sure we are glued to our seats at specific times of the day. I am also referring to how as a people we perceive reality on politics and religion in our state. Meghalaya's current situation is similar to the Hollywood serial, "Game of Thrones." Corruption, poverty, political dynasties and cunning alliances are everywhere. Apparently, the current dispensation is perceived as unable to fulfill the promises it made when it started out in 2013. Mining and NGT, trafficking of women, drug menace, bad roads and communication in rural villages, price rise of basic commodities, GST, traffic congestion in the city etc. These are but some of the heartbreaks that beset us, so that social media outbursts are become the in thing. And as in our beloved soap opera, we have a need to paint someone or something as a villain.

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"Only in the darkness can you see the stars."
--- Martin Luther King Jr.

The Shillong Times

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Rohingyas not refugees

MUCH debate is centred on whether India should offer refuge to the Rohingyas who are facing persecution in their home country - Myanmar. The first point is that Rohingyas are not refugees in India. They are illegal immigrants as much as the Bangladeshis who enter India illegally are. Rohingyas have entered India primarily through our porous borders with Bangladesh in North East India and Bengal, in the same way that Bangladeshis have done over decades. Every country should have strict laws and clear policies on how to deal with illegal immigrants. Unfortunately India lacks clarity on this issue. As a result many Rohingyas and Bangladeshis have made use of our faulty official systems to obtain voter IDs and PAN cards. They then pass off as Indian citizens. How long can India adopt such a soft stance vis-à-vis its borders. It is time to seal the borders and make it difficult for illegal immigrants to cross over because it ultimately means that Indians have to share scarce resources with non-citizens.

By deporting illegal immigrants India would not be violating any international convention. We are not signatories to the principle of "non-refoulement" where a country cannot send back asylum seekers to a country in which they could face persecution on various grounds. Rohingya Muslims are not asylum seekers as they did not apply for asylum in India. They have simply entered India illegally and settled down. Were we to expel them to Bangladesh from where they came, we will not be endangering this Muslim population which Myanmar identifies as Bengalis, to persecution. Even the non-refoulement principle excludes those refugees who may pose a danger to the security of the country in which they are present. In the case of the Rohingyas there are ample evidences that terrorist groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army with links to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are operating in the Rakhine province. Earlier in 2014 Rakhine was declared a key region for jihad by Islamic State leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Considering that no country in the world today wants to shelter refugees, it would be naïve on the part of India to succumb to pressure from human rights activists to embrace the Rohingyas. There has to be a policy of Indians first in this country!

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Development plans of West Garo Hills reviewed

The first review meeting of the District Planning & Development Council of West Garo Hills for the current year, which was presided over by the Meghalaya Minister for Power Mr Atul C Marak who is also the Chairman of the Council.

The Meghalaya Minister for Community and Rural Development, Dr R C Laloo, who was also present, stressed the need for increasing the tempo of development activities and threw light on the means of solve the internal problems of development blocks.

Water wars: Brahmaputra and Indo-China relations

By Nawaz Yasin Islam

AN OVERVIEW OF INDO-SIAN RELATION

On 1 April, 1950, India became the first non-socialist bloc country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. Prime Minister Nehru visited China in October 1954. While, the India-China border conflict in 1962 was a serious setback to ties; Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's landmark visit in 1988 began a phase of improvement in bilateral relations. In 1993, the signing of an Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the India-China Border Areas during Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit reflected the growing stability and substance in bilateralities.

India-China relations, though occasionally showing signs of peace and cooperation, have often been afflicted by tension and mistrust. With the potential to make big contributions to regional peace and development, these two Asian powers have, by design or accident, themselves been the sources of regional tension and insecurity to some extent. Besides their internal dynamics, the interplay of interests and moves of their neighbours, and several external powers would have significant bearing on the equation and relations between them.

The search for water resources in China and India has persistently been a source of tension between the two countries. Chinese efforts to divert the water resources of the Brahmaputra River away from India will worsen a situation that has remained tense since the 1962 Indo-China war. The melting glaciers in the Himalayas as a result of accelerating global climate change will have a dramatic effect on this river's water supply.

China is historically involved in river water sharing disputes with almost all its neighbours including Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Brahmaputra river water sharing is the major flashpoint between India and China. China has been building dams after dams in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra which is called Tsangpo in Tibet. India has objected to it but there has been no formal treaty over sharing of the Brahmaputra water.

Further, China has not been forthcoming in sharing

the details about water level in the Brahmaputra, which puts a large tract in the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam to the risk of sudden and huge flood. India is now planning to build nearly two dozen dams on the Brahmaputra and its tributaries to deal with the flood problem.

The river's three names, the Brahmaputra (India), Yarlung Zangbo (Tibet), and Jamuna (Bangladesh), reflect the complicated fabric of ethnic groups and International Communities living along its banks. The Brahmaputra flows through some of the most heavily disputed and unstable areas in South Asia. China and India currently dispute 83,000 km within the basin. Much of the boundary between the two countries is based on administrative units that do not shift with the rivers as they change course or level over time.

The border disputes have further fuelled misgivings between the two neighbours, especially India's threat perceptions regarding China's leverage as the upper riparian, a position it feels can potentially be utilised as an instrument of aggression both politically and strategically against India being a lower riparian country. Added to this are dynamics such as Climate Change, melting glaciers - one of the fastest in the world, depleting aquifers, fluctuating precipitation patterns, heat waves and excessive flooding which have aggravated existing hydro-political fault-lines. Expanding economies, water-intensive irrigation practices and a burgeoning middle-class with increased domestic demand have also accelerated the region's progression towards one of the most water-stressed hence water-antagonist regions in the world.

CHINA'S RACE TO CHOKE THE RIVER SYSTEM

China's dam building and diversion ambitions on the Brahmaputra River have also piqued India. A dam burst in May 2000 in Tibet triggered a flash flood downstream in Arunachal Pradesh causing widespread loss of life and key infrastructure. India was infuriated. A lack of hydrological data meant India was unaware of the approaching floods. The event further raised the spectre of frequent flash floods and additional silting

in the river downstream, while also providing credence to Indian fears regarding China's capacity to create droughts at will, by storing water upstream in dams, during key harvesting season downstream in India.

The commencement of the Zangmo hydro-electric dam by China in the middle reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra's name in China) in 2008 further generated apprehensions within India. India perceived it to be a step towards the eventual diversion and drying up of the Brahmaputra River. China's withholding of hydrological data, which it deemed its internal matter, only intensified speculation of the coming water conflict between the two states. The recent blocking of a tributary of the Brahmaputra amidst India's revisit of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan, seemed to have confirmed Indian misgivings. Within the milieu of China's envisaged China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor (CPEC) which links its North-West Province of Xinjiang with Pakistan's strategic southern deep-sea port of Gwadar, any tinkering with the IWT could result in serious consequences for CPEC with many of its constituent schemes dependent on the rivers covered by the treaty. This new dynamic has realigned the strategic calculus of the region in general and its hydro-politics in particular, enabling China a steady encroach upon significant stakeholder positioning within the region.

In the wake of Indian reservations, China continues to defend its position by contending that it only plans to build run-of-the-river dams for electricity generating purposes with little impact on India's water security downstream. While not a direct threat to Indian security, run-of-the-river dams can however cause grave ecological disturbances in the long term and compound the impact of floods such as the one in Uttarakhand in 2013 which was triggered by a cloudburst.

The 'Grand Western Water Diversion Plan' by China aimed at diverting

water at the Great Bend towards China's arid northern region is yet another cause of concern for India. The Brahmaputra River makes up 30 per cent of India's water supply. If China proceeds with the project, it could significantly decrease both the quantity and quality of water flowing into India.

A SOLUTION ALONG THE LINES OF PANCHSHEEL TREATY

Post April 29, 1954, a lot has changed with regards to the points discussed as the principles of peaceful coexistence. Respect for each other should be revived along the lines of this codification signed at Peking. What cannot be ignored here is that besides the massive ecological and environmental issues, the dams in Tibet, constructed by China can be disastrous for India at a whole new level. As highlighted by prominent glaciologists, the dams can unleash their fury during earthquake or in the worst case scenario, an intentional destruction can easily be used against India.

Rather than covertly acting to divert water resources from one country to another, the protection of the shared resource of water supply might be a focal point of cooperation rather than conflict. China and India could work together to protect surrounding communities from increased flood hazard due to climate change by strengthening flood management policies and adaptation measures.

The current scenario can only see a logical end provided an institutionalised mechanism of dispute management is adopted between both the Asian giants. The immediate short term solution to the growing dissent could be by means of improving diplomatic communication, more transparency by way of all-year hydrological sharing of data and exchange of information regarding infrastructural development in the area. In the long run, however, both the countries along with Bangladesh need to develop effective and innovative frameworks of resource management.

Modi-Abe Bonhomie 'Japindia' vs 'Chindia'

By Dr DK Giri

The India-Japan bilateral summit between Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shizo Abe was viewed in the media as an occasion for introduction of the Bullet train in India. Well, that is really a simplistic understanding of the evolving strategic partnership between the two countries. Let us recall that a decade ago, the western countries including those of EU, and the US were talking of "Chindia's" competitive threat to their economies, as the economies of China and India were growing fast. Similar acronyms are evolving here in Asia, with the Japindia (Japan plus India) emerging rapidly in response to Chinpak (China + Pakistan) on the economic corridor, and OBOR, one belt and one road, etc.

The significance of the relationship sprinting into a 'special, strategic and global' partnership between New Delhi and Tokyo should not be lost on observers and experts of India's foreign policy as well as international politics. In fact, the 12th annual summit, the 4th between Modi and Abe was on this very theme of 'global and strategic' partnership.

What were the highlights and the outcomes of the Summit? What is well known is the project on high-speed (bullet) train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai. Undoubtedly, this will lead to a quantum jump for India in skills and indigenous capacities at the highest level of manufacturing in engineering and locomotives. There are catty criticisms of the project which allude to the poor conditions of existing railway network compared to the high-tech quality bullet trains. Such voices are heard whenever a new technology is initiated or quality brought into the system. Quality in one area will inspire and engender quality upgrade everywhere else.

However, on the partnership, in addition to the bullet train, the summit reiterated the resolve of New Delhi and Tokyo in working on the multi-polarity and stable balances in the Asian region. It is no secret that the US under Trump is embarking on isolationism, looking inward, thereby vacating the space in Asia and elsewhere vis-à-vis security. American policies imply that other countries should contribute to the world security or defend their own. This shift in US foreign policy has prompted China to feed its territorial appetite and fuel its expansionist tendencies.

It has found an obliging partner in Pakistan. China is wary of India's rise as a rival power centre in Asia, and Pakistan has its unsatisfied anti-India stance, mainly over Kashmir. Japan's concern over China and India's with Pakistan bring New Delhi and Tokyo together as they realise their combined strategic weight, economic might and military power can contain China.

The joint statement issued after the Summit stated, "the two leaders affirmed their commitment to their value-based partnership in achieving a free, open and prosperous Asia-Pacific region where sovereignty and international laws are respected and differences are resolved through dialogue and where all countries, large and small, enjoy freedoms of the global commons, development and trade." This may sound as usual diplomatic statement, but reading between the lines, it becomes obvious that "peaceful dialogue" is a counter to China's belligerent and bullish approach to border issues, and Pakistan's non-maintainable claim on Kashmir by using cross-border terrorism.

There were also serious exchange and uniformity of views on North-Korea's nuclearisation which is a major worry for Japan; cross border terrorism, a continuing concern for India, ASEAN's centrality to the region, where both India and Japan have a stake vis-à-vis China, North China Sea where China is making unlawful territorial claims while surreptitiously usurping under water space.

Both leaders resolved to align India's Act East policy

and Japan's Indo-Pacific engagement. There was an outline drawn for building an Asia-Africa growth corridor, which again will counter China's ambitious OBOR project. Japan pledged to support India's national development programmes. Japan, unquestionably, is the pre-eminent economic partner of India. In the Summit, the atmosphere was friendly and highly congenial. The warmth of interaction, mutual trust and confidence observed around Abe's visit were remarkable. The intimacy between the two countries has been evolving since a decade, dating back to the 2007 address of Prime Minister Abe to the Indian Parliament titled "Confluence of Two States".

Aligning their Asia strategies is leading to a close alliance between the two nations. In the UN General Assembly taking place this week, India, Japan and the US are likely to take a common position on North Korea. In fact, there was a trilateral meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the three countries on the fringe of UNGA. Both Washington and Tokyo are seeking help from India in making UN sanctions against North Korea effective. New Delhi has promised to explore the proliferation linkages in building up North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. The hand of suspicion points to China and Pakistan.

Both the US and Japan are extremely wary of the tipot of North Korea which is bent upon testing nuclear bombs and hurling them across Japan. The situation is dangerously critical as Donald Trump has threatened to wipe out North Korea unless the latter restrained from throwing bombs at Japan and threatening the US with its bombs. India is expected to give them a hand in averting this impending catastrophe.

By most calculations the strategic partnership between India and Japan will grow deeper irrespective of the nature of leadership in either country. Undeniably, the political leadership is an important variable in bilateral relations. New Delhi and Tokyo would try to consolidate the partnership in mutual interest as well as their respective national interests. India will like to cultivate Japan for investment in sustainable infrastructure. Second, New Delhi will pursue Tokyo to access civil nuclear technology from it to meet the energy appetite for India's growing economy. Third, India would like to secure high-end defense technology from Japan. Fourth, Japan is the most formidable ally in containing China. Fifth, India needs Japan, like it needs Israel to get the US on its side.

On the part of Japan, India is the important partner for variety of reasons. One, China, Japan's archrival is a major actor in international politics. Tokyo will need New Delhi's support to contain China. Second, Japan needs to step in and defend its interest in the region in view of the decreasing engagement of US in the region. Third, Japan would engage in India following the growing US interest in India. Fourth, Japan needs India's help in securing trade and energy networks in critical maritime space. Fifth and the obvious, Japan would like to tap India's market potential.

The only hurdle that can hamper the growth of partnership is the "famed" Indian bureaucracy. India's defence officialdom is cumbersome. It fails to prioritise strategic decision making over processes and procedures. A prize deal on defence equipments namely the US-2 amphibian aircraft from Japan is still under negotiation. Now, we have a new Defence Minister, a political green horn but seen to be administratively competent. It will be interesting to watch Japindia evolve into a solid axis in Asian politics, and bilaterally in trade, economy and defence. The onus is more on New Delhi in view of its complacent and less flexible foreign policy bureaucracy. --INFA

(The writer is Prof, International Politics, JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGRIHMS should learn to handle issues internally

Editor, Apropos the news report, "NEIGRIHMS clears the air on medicine issue" (ST Sep 14, 2017) the NEIGRIHMS resident doctors community strongly condemn the comments made by the Institute's law officer wherein he has accused the department of Cardiology, CTVS, Neurosurgery and Interventional Radiology of apparently not procuring medicine items from the hospital pharmacy based on an allegation that some person had filed a complaint about the same. Regarding this matter the NEIGRIHMS Resident Doctors Association believe that it is important to establish the veracity of the allegations and to handle such issues within the Institution and not using the media to sort out internal matters of NEIGRIHMS. This sort of callous and unsubstantiated

statements in the public domain will affect the patient-doctor relationship which is of prime concern for the proper functioning of the Hospital. Such incidents only serve to lower the morale of doctors especially the resident doctors who are the workhorses and backbone of a medical institute such as NEIGRIHMS.

Resident doctors work tirelessly and selflessly and at most times they work over and above their call of duty to render unconditional service for the patients and the Institute. In the present scenario in India where violence against medical personnel is increasing, such careless and irresponsible statements by the administration will only serve to worsen the situation and resident doctors are the first to suffer as they are ones who deal directly with patients and attendants on a day to day basis.

NEIGRIHMS is the only centre of excellence in the whole of the North Eastern Region and caters to the needs of people in general and the local indigenous

tribes of Northeast in particular. They come to this institute with great expectations, trust and confidence. Trust and faith are the cornerstones of a healthy doctor-patient relationship and such administrative blunders will affect this sacred bond.

Healthy criticism and complaints are welcome but should also be dealt with in an appropriate manner. The NRDA will not tolerate attempts to projects the image of the institute in a negative way. NEIGRIHMS has grown tremendously in terms of patient load from a mere 3000 patients to over 3 lakhs patients per year in a short span of 10 years. NEIGRIHMS has been a blessing for the people of Northeast India and the above super-specialty departments have contributed significantly in terms of patient care and growth of the institute. One must refrain from such activities that adversely affect this hallowed doctor-patient relationship

Yours etc.,
Dr Tony Ete (President)
Dr Synrang Batngen

Warjri (Spokesperson)
NRDA (NEIGRIHMS Resident Doctors' Association)

Neglecting public property in Jowai

Editor,

The lake (Nan Kasari) adjacent to the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Jowai wears an ugly look. The lake has become a dumping ground for garbage which is randomly thrown and where mosquitoes breed. The vendors around this place are breathing in the foul air emitted by the Lake. It really pains me as a concerned citizen to see the destitute look of this lake. In the past there were blooming lotuses all round but now there are no more Lotuses. However since this lake was fenced off by the Fisheries Department without draining it to make it clean as was done in the past, more dirt is added in and around the Lake. The only saving grace is that there are no more suicide cases related to the Lake. For this the credit goes to Fisheries

Department. During the tenure of Tining Dkhar as the Deputy Commissioner Jowai a kind of round electric object was placed in the middle of lake with the idea of beautifying the lake but this round object was there only for a brief period and has become a waste. The foul air which comes out of this lake endangers the health of the commuters especially the vendors around it. It is surprisingly that this Lake which is so close to the office of the District Head and is the only Lake in the town should also be the dirtiest lake.

Adjacent to the Lake there is also a park but this too is so neglected that it does not merit to be called a park now. Who knows there may be trees that could crash because their roots are exposed and they could pose a danger to the walkers. For instance, one tree at the junction on the way to Government Boys' Higher Secondary School, Jowai looks rotten in the lower parts and could come down at any time. It could endanger the commuters

especially the students who pass through this junction.

The park at Mynthong adjacent to the Residence of the Deputy Commissioner is also abandoned and left untouched with overgrowth all around. Though the park was repaired it is left half done and is now taken over by weeds and bushes. I appeal to the care takers of these public properties to maintain them regularly and also look after the cleanliness of the town. I'm sure the people of Jowai who do not like to see such filth will cooperate with the authorities. Will the concerned Department clean up the parks so that they would not be an eyesore and also add to the beauty of the town?

Yours etc.,
Omarga Laloo,
Mynthong Jowai.

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

"The worst thing about that kind of prejudice... is that while you feel hurt and angry and all the rest of it, it feeds you self-doubt. You start thinking, perhaps I am not good enough."

--- Nina Simone

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 43 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

Chakmas and Hajongs

THE Supreme Court had told the Centre and the Arunachal Pradesh Government in 2015 that citizenship should be conferred on Chakmas and Hajongs as soon as possible, preferably within three months. But nothing was done in two years. A week ago, the Centre gave a commitment that the court order should be enforced. But minister of state for home Kiren Rijiju who is from Arunachal Pradesh said that the order was not implementable. He wanted modifications to ensure that the rights of the local people in Arunachal Pradesh were not curtailed. All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) is happy with Rijiju's statement. But the Union and State Government have exposed themselves to the charge of being unable to take a firm and ethical stand.

Migration and citizenship are ticklish issues in India's North East. Chakmas and Hajongs came to India as refugees from Bangladesh in the 1960s and were settled in NEFA which is now Arunachal Pradesh. A treaty was signed with Bangladesh in 1972. It was agreed that the refugees would be granted citizenship rights. Five thousand of the original fourteen thousand eight hundred and eighty eight persons settled in Arunachal Pradesh are still alive. But the refugee population has increased to nearly a lakh. Many were born in India. They have all along lived in refugee settlements in Arunachal Pradesh. It must be made clear that Chakmas and Hajongs should not be a threat to the cultural identity and social fabric of the indigenous population. The problem arises from the availability of only meagre economic resources and limited job opportunities. Much depends on Rijiju's attitude. BJP's big plans for the north east may otherwise be set at naught.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Buffer stock for North East

The Union Minister of State for Civil Supplies, Mr. Sukh Ram's recent announcement in Shillong that a buffer stock for two months would be created for the hill states of the North East before the onset of monsoon will be highly welcomed. This is particularly so in view of the past experiences, especially that of last year when several parts of the North East remained to be landslides resulting from excessive rainfall. The National Highway 44, which is widely regarded as the life line of North East, re-mained

out of commission following a massive land-slide near Sonapur in Meghalaya. This put tremendous economic pressure on Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and two southern districts of Barak Valley in Assam. In Meghalaya, too, the extraordinarily high rainfall tore life asunder. And to cap it all, the recurring floods in Assam, the gate-way to the entire region completely disrupt all surface transport every monsoon. Viewed against this backdrop, Mr Sukh Ram's announcement will be endorsed by every State Govt in the region.

NEIGRIHMS: A Privilege or Entitlement?

By Patricia Mukhim

No other health care provider is written about as much as the North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS). This is good because the management of these machines if they do go kaput which is inevitable with such a huge population of patients requiring their services on a daily basis. I also learnt that the armed forces stationed in Shillong, also come to NEIGRIHMS for treatment and diagnosis. My question is: What about the Military Hospitals? Are they not able to cater to their own personnel? Can civilians get treatment at Military Hospitals? Similarly, should the armed forces personnel crowd a health facility meant for civilians?

Lest I be accused of leaving out other Departments of NEIGRIHMS which also play yeoman's role in patient care, let me also place on record that the Departments of Medicine, Surgery, Gynaecology and Urology also have their aces and each is trying to perform to the best of its ability. There is a palliative care centre for cancer patients too which you would not see in a private hospital. Even if there is a palliative care unit in a private hospital you would have to pay through the nose. In fact, private hospitals today have become so mercenary that they automatically weed out those who are not capable of paying and cater only to the affluent. I often wonder how such exploitative models are encouraged in a poor country like India, and, what are the corporate social responsibilities (CSR) engaged in by private hospitals. It would be enlightening if we could see this in the public domain.

Coming back to NEIGRIHMS, it would be fair to say that every director who came in tried to do his best but a health and research centre requires a breadth of vision that few possess, least of all doctors coming in from the government sector. They have simply implemented blueprints coming from the top and mainly from bureaucrats or technocrats whose brief ends only with the brick and mortar part of the institution but not its heart - caring, healing and preventing illness. At one time NEIGRIHMS was supervised by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) because it took too long to kick-start. Now it is back with the Union Health Ministry which again is a problem since many of the things that

administrative complex. This will be a great boon to the people of the region since cancer is a growing concern across states. However, what is worrying is the menu in the NEIGRIHMS canteen from where patients and their relatives usually get their food from. Since Dr Thappa joined the Institute, the canteen has stopped serving non-vegetarian cuisine. I brought this to the attention of Dr Thappa but he brushed the concern aside saying that no such directives were given to the canteen management. But the menu I managed to procure tells the real story. There is vegetable momo, vegetable patties, vegetable paratha and cup noodles (this last one is an unhealthy food item). The rest are cakes and muffins all of which have very little nutritional value and are not diabetic-friendly. The menu is signed by no less than the Director himself. The people of this region are not vegetarian by culinary choice. They get their proteins from meat. While it may be difficult for canteens to provide a choice of meat, they can at least serve fish and chicken which are normal fare. I can't understand why a new menu should be introduced with the joining of a new Director.

Finally, as to whether NEIGRIHMS is an entitlement or a privilege, I would like to believe it is both. It is a privilege that we now have access to the best treatment within the region and don't have to flock to Vellore, Delhi, Mumbai or Chennai for medical care. It saves time, money and undue stress for the patient and his/her family. As an entitlement, we get free or subsidized diagnostic facilities and treatment. Medicines may not be completely free but they are sold at rates that are lesser than market rates.

Considering that NEIGRIHMS caters to the people of all eight states, it is incumbent upon all state chief ministers to take interest in this Institute and help it in its journey. Similarly, the Members of Parliament from the region ought to show a sense of ownership too and engage with the Union Government to give a fillip to NEIGRIHMS. As of today, NEIGRIHMS is an orphan out of whom much is expected but very little is given by the public.

The Director also informed that a 250 bedded, cancer unit and medical college is coming up adjacent to the

directors would like to see implemented are killed by red tape. If NEIGRIHMS is ostensibly modeled along AIIMS, Delhi then why is it not given the autonomy that AIIMS enjoys?

Recently there have been news reports and letters to this newspaper complaining that the X-Ray unit gets heated up and patients and their attendants are kept waiting for hours. This means that there are not enough X-Ray units or that patients have far exceeded the numbers envisaged. I wonder how the Director is tackling this emergency because that is what it is. There are too many people in this country who cannot afford private health care. Government institutions will therefore continue to be overburdened. But this also means that NEIGRIHMS should speak out and tell us the exact position. Sweeping the dirt under the carpet will not help anyone!

I recently met the Director Dr Thappa who informed that he had kept a complaint/suggestion box outside his office so that complaints are addressed within the Institution instead of people running to media for every grievance. And that is a problem I wish to address in this article. NEIGRIHMS belongs to the public of this region. Instead of rushing to the media why don't patients and their relatives meet the Director and lay out their grievances before him? On his part the Director is expected to be empathetic and not defensive. Heads of Institutions need to be exposed to the public so that they learn firsthand what is ailing the Institution. Every institution also has its share of internal politics. Where two or more individuals live and work together politics is inevitable but it need not be destructive. The Director is expected to embrace all shades of opinions and to set standards of behaviour that can be emulated by juniors and peers. Every institution also has its ethical standards which all are expected to follow, including the head of the institution.

Every institution also has its share of internal politics. Where two or more individuals live and work together politics is inevitable but it need not be destructive. The Director is expected to embrace all shades of opinions and to set standards of behaviour that can be emulated by juniors and peers. Every institution also has its ethical standards which all are expected to follow, including the head of the institution.

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10,000 children die in every 7 days owing to acute malnutrition and people's absolute penury. So much for Modi's achhe din!

Be that as it may, I'm much obliged to Desmond Lyngdoh and others who have highlighted the undeniable fact of govt. employees' habitual lack of punctuality which has now assumed sickening proportions. Courtesy these writers and critics, the State Govt has perhaps taken cognizance of the matter and passed a circular vide No. PER (ARC) 27/92/Pt. 1/284 dtd. 5.9.2017 which strongly warns late-comers to office with strict follow up punitive actions. I hope that henceforth this latest Govt. order would be observed by all concerned in letter and spirit for the betterment of our own state.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

India remains outside global economic upswing

Modi government needs to act fast for growth

By S Sethuraman

It is now universally recorded that the Indian economy has taken a beating from the abrupt ill-planned demonetisation of November 2016, compounded by the hasty launching of GST, posing new challenges to business, trade and services.

Caution underlies the revised downward projections for India's growth to well below 7 per cent, in most institutional forecasts, for fiscal 2018.

All this may be unpalatable to our Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley, who has perfected the art of brazening out of every awkward situation for the Modi Government. But in the face of mounting criticism at home and abroad of policies which have slowed down growth, and with telling data, the Prime Minister himself seems to realise that the ground under his feet is no longer as hardy as it seemed thus far.

And Mr Jaitley also conceded at last that "policies and investment" have to be looked into. There is growing view, even globally, that the world has had enough of "hyper-globalisation" and austerity regimes, which had slowed wage growth and widened income disparities. Opinion has gathered momentum that countries would now need to ease fiscal policies and ensure that public spending goes for "growth-inclusiveness" and long-run supply build-up.

At the global level, growth has gained momentum since the second half of 2016 and is now projected to rise from 3.1 per cent in 2016 to 3.5 per cent in 2017 and to 3.7 per cent in 2018. While China continues to be the main global growth engine, India's share has slackened. Indeed, OECD estimates China's growth in 2017 at 6.8 per cent (from 6.7 per cent last year) to be above India's 6.7 cent this year.

Even as the Finance Ministry launched its routine budgetary exercises for the next February budget 2018/19, Mr Jaitley has had to summon colleagues of key economic ministries and consider what kind of package of measures could begin to make a difference to get out of the current slump to ensure that India's aborted growth is restored to a sustainable level of 7 to 8 per cent. The Prime Minister now awaits a tough package to stimulate the economy without India straying off the fiscal consolidation course.

According to OECD, the latest to come out with its Interim economic Outlook for 2017, while there are "positive surprises" in China and Russia, among major emerging economies, India's growth projection has been revised down to 6.7 per cent in 2017 due to "transitory factors". (Demonetisation, GST). UNCTAD in its Trade and Development Report has also projected 6.7 per cent in 2017 (as against 7 per cent earlier) listing demonetisation, GST and corporate deleveraging as factors slowing down the economy and making recovery difficult.

It is going to be quite challenging for the Finance Minister to evolve a set of urgent measures, without having to wait for another four months in the budget preparation, which would invoke a revival of business investment and stimulate demand in the economy. His tentative proposals to arrest the growth decline and reset the economy on a course of sustained recovery may involve selective tax cuts and withdrawal of some of the higher GST rates and

cesses, for both goods and services.

The outcome of his ongoing consultations with colleagues dealing with trade (which has a significant share in overall growth), railways and other infrastructure and the Chief Economic Adviser would be presented to the Prime Minister who would be briefed in detail on the implications of what in short may be taken as a fiscal boost to a sagging economy as well as its implications in terms of safeguarding fiscal rectitude.

Whether it would also be job-creating would depend on the nature of the fund injections and programmes to be financed. But the economy as a whole and its structural problems had not commanded the Prime Minister's attention as much as needed over the last three years. Otherwise, India would not have come down to this slowdown syndrome and jobless growth. His Government needs to do more self-inspection so that whatever has gone wrong gets rectified.

The research studies brought out by RBI and SBI (State Bank of India) have veered towards the imperative of greater public spending on both infrastructure as well as growth-inclusive programmes. UNCTAD report has called for a global deal for coordinated expansion of economies led by increased public expenditure which would generate employment and crowd in private investment as well.

RBI itself had cautioned in its annual report that the transitory factors that brought down GVA to 5.6 per cent in the first quarter of current fiscal year are not allowed to get entrenched. Though the first quarter slowdown is in part attributed to GST challenges, OECD says in the long run, GST is expected to boost investment, productivity and growth.

India's growth has been steadily declining from a peak of 7.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2016/17. The SBI report takes a grim view of the prospects unless Government intervened "to use fiscal policy as a tool to rev up the economy"

Although the economic upturn is more synchronised across countries with expanding investment and trade, OECD says, growth in emerging market economies will depend on deeper reforms. China has stepped up its public infrastructure investment. In India, while Government says it is investing more on infrastructure, business investment has remained weak and possibly because of lack of structural reforms which the Modi Government has deferred for the present.

OECD says India should give priority to public spending that yields "higher benefits for growth inclusiveness and long-run supply" such as in areas like education, hard and soft infrastructure, family benefits and health investments. With inflation rising (both food and fuel), as indicative from CPI and WPI data over the last two months, and CPI expected to be in the range of 3.5 to 4.5 per cent in the second half of current fiscal year, further monetary easing seems ruled out at the October meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee chaired by RBI. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Suicide no answer to life's problems!

Editor,

This refers to the article "Life, death & suicide in the Khasi thought" by Fabian Lyngdoh (ST-Sept 20, 2017). Here, I would like to point out that suicide is not an economic problem or a generational tic. It's a problem with a broad base and terrible momentum, a result of seismic changes in the way we live and a corresponding shift in the way we die. It is noted that people die by suicide for a number of reasons, however, the majority of the people who take their lives suffer with an underlying mental illness and substance abuse problem at the time of their death. Possibly, when one commits suicide then it is that single moment when one does not care for anyone, neither parents, nor family or friends, but just want to culminate his or her life for one particular reason.

Apart from depression, people also commit suicide out of bitterness, insecurity, rejection, revenge and impulsive behavior. Youths

are more likely to commit suicide as development is forcing youths to the condition of hopelessness. This isn't always the case though, as millions of people live with depression and never attempt or die by suicide, but with awareness, education, and treatment, people can be helped so that suicide does not become an option. One must keep in mind that whatsoever may be the reason in life, suicide is not a solution to any problem. One must be strong enough to face the realities of life. One must accept both good and bad with open arms and do not let anything disturb oneself.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

Plight of college teachers!

Editor,

We would like to bring to public notice that majority of the college teachers of private institutions of the State are struggling to survive. Our salary is meager with some of us earning barely four or five thousand rupees monthly. Our work load is heavy. Even though we are not government

officials, we fulfill our duties and responsibilities for the youths of the state and the nation. We are part of state and nation brick builders.

Five years ago before election, the Chief Minister, Dr Mukul Sangma created four new districts. In that inaugural speech he had promised to uplift the districts and the state of education. He had also given an assurance to provincialise one college from each district. Those promises gave us hope and made us feel alive again and empowered us to make more sacrifices. Sadly, now the next election is at hand but the Chief Minister's promises remain unfulfilled. We request the CM to kindly help us college teachers to survive and also to have mercy of the poor students who need access to good education under capable teachers.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

On compassionate appointment!

Editor,
Apropos Desmond

Lyngdoh's letter which appeared in your daily (ST 6 Sep, 2017), I wish to state that the writer ought not to exclusively confine his disillusionment against govt. employees only, especially the low-grade functionaries as being 'excessive drinkers'. As a retributive justice, Mr Lyngdoh has jumped to conclusions that, "Govt servants in the state therefore do not deserve any special consideration in the form of compassionate appointments". In this context, I would like to refresh his memory by going back to the 1990s and early 2000s when Shillong and its adjoining areas were at the height of insurgency. In one of the many tragic incidents which I'm in the know of was that of a chowkidar of the office of the Directorate of Mineral Resources (DMR) at Risa Colony, Shillong, were he had selflessly sacrificed his life to successfully avert the theft of the monthly salaries of this Directorate's staff. Thereafter, a family member of that deceased chowkidar must have been appointed on compassionate ground. Incidentally, I have seen a good number of govt employees who are teetotalers and driver who, for no fault of theirs, died in

accidents while on official duties. And to top it all, many of our Hynniewtrep youths who served as defense personnel, security forces etc., died fighting the nation's foes or the insurgent groups like in Garo Hills and elsewhere. These brave hearts had, in their prime of youths, become timeless martyrs for a noble cause they had professed and one of the family members of such personnel could have been rehabilitated in employment on compassionate grounds for the supreme sacrifice of a dear one. Hence, those appointees on such humanitarian grounds in different establishments must have been deeply hurt at Lyngdoh's sweeping generalization on compassionate appointment. I would like, therefore, the latter to apologize to such unfortunate star-crossed appointees who have lost their loved ones for having made supreme sacrifices.

Further, Lyngdoh's assertion that in Meghalaya almost 50% people fall under BPL category, it is also far grimmer a fact that in India

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"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming."

--- Pablo Neruda

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 44 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2017

Journalists' life on the line

THE gory death of Santanu Bhowmick a journalist with a local television channel in Tripura should set the alarm bells ringing. Bhowmick was covering a political event at Mandai where the Indigenous Peoples' Front of Tripura (IPFT) had clashed with the police. Bhowmick was attacked by a mob at a spot where there were no policemen and he succumbed to his injuries. This month alone several journalists were killed at different places. Most of them are from small towns and mohallas and not so well known. Those who are 'famous' become the subject of much television debates on the metro channels. Each time a journalist is killed there are condemnations and expressions of solidarity from different media related organisations but there is no persistence in following the cases to their logical end. Assam alone has lost over a dozen journalists who were killed for reporting on insurgency. In India's North East the threat has always been from insurgent outfits who have banned newspapers, intimidated editors and killed reporters for not toeing their line. Thus far the Government has not shown any inclination to take the cases of journalists being done to death, seriously. The lives of journalists in this country hangs by a thread!

As a profession, journalism is the least paying and most insecure one. It is a sad commentary on the profession that quite a few journalists today subscribe to political ideologies and have no qualms about it. The CPI (M) functionaries in Tripura have claimed that Bhowmick was a member of the Party. This is surely going beyond the brief of journalism. It would be difficult therefore to ascribe the reasons for Bhowmick's death to the discharge of his journalistic duties alone. And this is the problem area today. Some of the leading journalists of the country today seem to owe their allegiance to the ruling party. So what happens to journalism in such cases? Is it not completely compromised?

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Multi media campaign at Mawkdok

A multi media campaign was organized by the Directorate of Information & Public Relations at the Rural Integrated Information Centre at Mawkdok on the Shillong-Cherra road recently. The Meghalaya PHE Minister, Mr S P Swer who was the chief guest, said that the rural information centres set up by the State govt have played an important role in motivating young talents into various fields of

development. Various developmental departments including the Industries, Social Welfare and Sports & Youth Welfare departments participated in the campaign.

The officers of the departments explained to the people the various plans and schemes drawn up for implementation. An archery and singing competitions and a football match were the other highlights of the function.

Lies, damn lies and statistics. That too in sworn affidavits. Which trash Modi's war against corruption. Who else but our mai-baaps who cock a snook at the safedi ke chamkaan swatchh image. Any wonder then that our netagan's greatest asset is his lie-ability.

How else should one react when a PIL by NGO Lok Prahari in the Supreme Court makes one do a double take and underscores for the umpteenth time that politics is a profitable business. The petition zeroed on 26 Lok Sabha and 11 Rajya Sabha MPs alongside 257 MLAs whose income and assets grew over 500% to 1200% between two polls 2009-2014 as reflected in their election affidavits.

Consequently, it wants the election law amended for a candidate to disclose his and family's sources of income at the time of filing nomination form. Presently, he discloses only his, spouse, children and dependents assets but not sources of their income through which they came to possess these.

Throwing down the gauntlet to the Modi Sarkar to practise what it preaches to the aam aadmi, the Court asked it to prove its anti-black-money credentials by listing the action against lawmakers. "Tell us what the growth rate of income of MLAs and MPs over the years is.... Don't make vague statements... when you say you believe in action, demonstrate it by telling us as to what action you have taken, that will show your bona fides... This affidavit is not worth the piece of paper it's written on," added the Bench.

Correct. Absurdly, the assets declaration format is neither standardized and nor does it reflect the current market value of our rulers wealth thereby resulting in discrepancies and defeating the exercise towards transparency. Asserted a tax official: "We know the properties, jewellery and other movables are invariably under-valued but can only send them notices."

Notwithstanding, tax authorities claim of discrepancies in income disclosures by only seven Lok Sabha MPs and 98 MLAs, the Court dared the

Our Millionaire Carpetbaggers

Netagan's assets a lie-ability

By Poonam I Kaushish

Centre to come clean. "You are not averse to electoral reforms but why have you not provided basic data and placed necessary details. Is this the Government's attitude? What have you done till now? "It is not about cleaning of garbage only," the judges queried.

Undeniably, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The assets of 165 MPs re-elected to the 16th Lok Sabha rose on an average by a whopping 137% from Rs 5.38 crores in 2009 to Rs 12.78 crores in 2014. That too when the average economic growth was slower at 4.7% and a slump in real estate prices! Worse, 113 of the 542 MPs described their profession as housewife, social worker and politics. Sic.

Scandalously, MPs' and MLAs assets grew over 500% to 1200% between 2009-14. Income of four MPs increased by 1200%, 22 others declared asset increase of over 500% and eight Rajya Sabha legislators showed a 200% rise. An

poorest candidates, with average assets of Rs. 79 lakhs. The Trinamool Congress' Uma Saren is the poorest MP with assets under Rs. 5 lakhs.

The highest increase is BJP's Bollywood star Shatrughan Sinha whose wealth grew by a whopping 778% from Rs 15 crores to Rs 131.74 crores in five years. Followed by BJD's Pinaki Mishra whose assets increased from Rs 29.69 crores to Rs 137.09 crores(362%).

Assets of BJP MPs' Varun Gandhi grew by Rs 30 crores, a whopping 625% and Karnataka's PC Mohan from Rs 5.37 crores to Rs 47.58 crores (786%) BJP veteran Advani saw his assets rise by 114%.

The Congress is no better. Ex HRD Minister Kapil Sibal's wealth saw a 258% increase in assets from Rs 32 crores to Rs 114 crores between 2009-2014. Less said the better of former Lok Sabha Speaker

The Government should acquire all ill-gotten, under-valued property. Realtors could be hired as consultants to verify a property's market worth and the property thus acquired could be publicly auctioned. Mercifully, this would ensure more 'honourable' and better returns.

Assam MLA declared over 5,000% raise and his Kerala compatriot over 1,700% since the 2011 Assembly elections. Showcasing nothing costs a nation more than a cheap politician.

Questionably, how can unemployed jan sevaks amass huge wealth? How did they earn it? Is there any law or rule which asks them how they acquired it? Do they pay proper income taxes? What about 'black' money? Reports suggest many leaders have Swiss bank accounts. But our tax authorities have still to unravel these and the Panama Papers while Pakistan has already sentenced its Prime Minister Sharif.

Clearly our Right Honourables declarations are only eyewash. While an average Congress MP is worth over Rs 16 crores, his BJP colleague has assets over Rs. 11 crores. Badal's SAD legislator is worth around Rs 40 crores. The CPI(M) has the

Meira Kumar whose wealth of Rs 10.15 crores during the 2009 elections tripled to over Rs 38 crores (279%) in 2014.

The regional satraps are not far behind. Samajwadi SP supremo Mulayam's properties grew by 613% and bahu Dimple's by 210%. Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar's ladli Supriya Sule is next with her assets more than doubling from Rs 51.53 crores to Rs 113.90 crores (121%). Less said the better of chara scam Lalu and family.

School-teacher-turned-Dalit messiah Mayawati brazenly explains her vast prime real estate holdings by asserting if a Thakur and Brahmin can be crorepaties why not a Dalit ke beti. Why not indeed! Mum's the word when it comes to the dazzling diamonds she flaunts on her birthdays, 'affectionately' given by her garib bhakhts. Bluntly,

it pays rich dividends to be a politician.

Given that corruption is such an old song that our netas all sing along in harmony Modi appears serious about his pledge of a sleaze Mukht Bharat and eliminating black money. But this might not be effective in breaking the vicious circle of unaccounted money polluting the vitality and health of our democracy.

More so, in an era wherein conduct of public affairs is for private advantage and amassing tremendous personal fortune through abuse of political power is one of the perks of our polity's trade as emphasized by the increase in wealth.

Notably, the Courts will have to devise a mechanism that will make netas think ten times before they take ghos, tell a lie or conceal anything about himself or his "dependants" a term which needs to be strictly defined.

The Government should acquire all ill-gotten, under-valued property. Realtors could be hired as consultants to verify a property's market worth and the property thus acquired could be publicly auctioned. Mercifully, this would ensure more 'honourable' and better returns.

Further, the income tax department should tally the affidavits with our leaders I-T returns. And, if need be hire auditors to ensure the IT returns and affidavits match to the last digit. One could also consider a restriction on the number of terms a person can hold public office. Our leaders like Caesar's wife need to be above suspicion and lead by example.

Clearly, Modi has to cleanse the rot in the political backyard and stop banking on our leaders' self-proclaimed honesty and morality. Let the people squeeze the last drop of their "safedi ka chatkatkar" to rid the polity of its increasing fifty and dirt. It remains to be seen if NaMo will walk his talk of cleaning India of sleaze not only refuse. Remember when truth becomes a casualty one ends up with only babble and bluster. What gives? --- INFA

UN warns of severe crisis

Poor's money at risk

By Shivaji Sarkar

Even as Finance Minister Jaitley looks for new ways and methods to rejuvenate the Indian economy, the world economic outlook appears to be bleak. The new UN report underscores the global economy appears stuck.

Undeniably, the financial system is facing a grave crisis and the people have to be cautious about its safety and fairness. Spelling this out, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report on Trade and Development blames a combination of factors for the sinking world economy. And calls for ending austerity, clamping down on corporate rent seeking and harnessing finance to support job creation and advocates infrastructure investment, specially as this has frozen across the world.

Asserted UN Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi, "It is a combination of too much debt and too little demand at the global level", adding "this has hampered sustained expansion of the world economy".

Unfortunately, every bit of what he says is true about the Indian conditions notwithstanding some reforms like GST.

Worse, according to UNCTAD the world economy is not lifting off. While growth in 2015 was almost flat at around 2.6 per cent it was slightly better than 2016 when it slumped to 2.2 per cent. Today, it notes that India and China have come down to the same level at 6.7 per cent.

However, India's internal figures suggest it is even less than 5.7 per cent. Naturally, this is a cause for concern for Jaitley and solutions are not easy as the Government is facing a cash crunch on the one hand and people are getting squeezed under a heavy tax burden. The GST has yet to settle but income-tax is eating into the purchasing capacity of the salaried class, supposedly the mainstay of the Indian market today.

In such a scenario, Latin America seems to show the "biggest turnaround at 1.2 per cent growth The Euro zone growth touched 1.8 per cent but lags behind US, which is at 2.1 per cent. Importantly, the main obstacle to recovery is fiscal austerity or what in Indian parlance is "cutting down expenditure". Interestingly, the UNCTAD report finds that 13 of the advanced economies experienced "austerity" between 2011-2015.

Besides, for India trade will remain a problem as exports have not grown and imports have not slumped. Consequently, the trade balance is massively distorted. Gloomily, hopes of its correction are not seen by UNCTAD. Also, global demand remains sluggish as world over there is a lack of jobs as a result people do not have money to meet their needs.

Pertinently, UNCTAD had laid the highest hope on growth of emerging economies, particularly India and China, but now it states "they are facing significant downside risks. Debt levels continue to rise without real signs of robust growth and there concern about political instability, falling commodity prices, higher interest rates in the US and a stronger dollar". All these are virtual key risks for the Indian economy.

Another concern that India recently faced is being seen to be a global phenomenon. Think. Net capital flow is shrinking --- reminiscent of the 2007-08 global meltdown scenario. Also, net private capital flow that had reached about \$ 200 billion in 2011 has shrunk to negative levels since late 2015 and has yet to recover.

The deregulation of financial markets is being seen as the biggest problem. It increases inequality and instability. The rise of the top one per cent super elites is a

major problem, says the Kozul Wright. This trend leads to severe inequality and spells a precarious future as investments would be insufficient, no job growth and welfare provisions would weaken. All these are seen to be manifesting in India's economy.

The report lambasts the bail-outs that were announced after the 2007-08 meltdown. In the Indian context, though at that point of time it was not needed, it has led to massive bleeding of bank reserves, estimated at Rs 12 lakh crores (Rs 12 trillion).

Undoubtedly, this was the bonanza to large corporate world-wide. It bled Governments and public savings and led to rise in irrational bank charges across the world. Alas, India which that had maintained a distance from this global phenomenon unwisely succumbed to the corporate lobbies taking its burgeoning economy downhill. The correction now is a difficult economic and political task.

Further, increased automation in India's IT sector has resulted in people being thrown out of jobs. This is another concern for UNCTAD whereby the system is "becoming unduly biased in favour of a handful of large corporations". This precarious situation has seen a few corporates have made massive gains and now some are looking for bankruptcy cover.

This has given a severe warning. "The failure to correct the excesses of hyper-globalization (corporatization) is not only jeopardising social cohesion but diminishing trust in both markets and politicians and increase inequities.

While calling for a change in the global system, even as UNCTAD finds the way difficult, it avers the world has to come out of the grip of finance --- banks and related organisations. The total banking sector assets since the 1990s have more than doubled in most countries, including India, with peaks at 300 per cent of the GDP in some OECD economies. India has of late also gone into the clutches of banks and financial institutions leading to high costs, extortions which are adding to peoples' miseries as these organisations favoured large corporate while fleecing the average common savers. Thus, the aam aadmi's money is at risk which finally leads to the doom of the market and economy.

Hence, UNCTAD calls for an end to financialisation as it has led to indebtedness across the non-financial sector, increasing to 188 per cent of the global GDP crisis. Steps like demonetisation are also financialisation and leads to severe "income disparity".

Among some of the measures for correction, it calls for a global dialogue like the Marshall Plan of 1947 charted out by IMF, World Bank and General Agreement on Trade Tariff (GATT).

Last but not the least, the UN body calls for labour's strong voice for higher wages and bringing down tax rates as this mostly deprives about half of the earnings of the wage earners.

Clearly, Governments have to come together to take people out of the clutches of big houses and financial sharks. If this happens the global economy would see a turnover else it would continue to shrink as "income equality" (poverty) may continue to rise, the report warns. Therefore world Governments must make the report a bedrock of the policy framework. --- INFA

On Rohingya issue

Editor, In your editorial "Rohingyas not Refugees" (ST Sep 21, 2017), you have stated that Rohingyas are not refugees but they are illegal immigrants like the Bangladeshis who enter India illegally. In this regard I would like to inform you that the UNHCR has issued identity cards to about 16,500 Rohingyas in India to help "prevent harassment, arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation". So can these be equated with Bangladeshi illegal immigrants? Their identification by one of the esteemed organizations of the world must be seriously considered. You have also stated that by deporting illegal immigrants India would not be violating any international convention. You must be aware that UNHCR's India office has said that the principle of non-refoulement was considered part of customary international law

and binding on all states whether they have signed the Refugee Convention or not. For the sake of argument even if I agree with you, but does it befit our country with the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and which has a long tradition of receiving refugees to throw them to their place of persecution to be killed therein? You also suggested that by expelling them to Bangladesh we will not be endangering them to persecution. How can you arbitrarily suggest that they should be expelled to Bangladesh, without consent from the authorities in Bangladesh? Border Guards Bangladesh are all over the border and will block their entry and their lives might be endangered. When we can give refuge to Tamils of Sri Lanka, Tibetans and to Pakistani and Bangladeshi Hindus then why not to Rohingyas? Is it because of their religion?

Nearly 500 Rohingya Hindus have arrived in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar and they are given protection there without any religious discrimination. The

editorial also stated that there are ample evidences that terrorist groups are operating in the Rakhine province. But all these concerns are for the Rakhine region which is not in India. Nearly 7,000 Rohingyas have moved the Supreme Court, saying, there is not a single terrorist among them. They reside peacefully on privately owned lands rented out by Indian nationals, most of whom are Hindus. There had not been a single allegation of terrorism against any Rohingya ever since the community began living in Jammu. The local police conduct regular interrogation of all the Rohingyas and they cooperate with the police. Branding all Rohingyas as terrorists is both unfair and discriminatory. We cannot compromise with any terrorist activities and if there are any terrorists then the Government should take action against them. But the commoner must not suffer. The editorial stated that no country in the world today wants to shelter refugees. This is totally wrong as there are countries like Germany,

Greece, and others in Europe which have given shelter to refugees. An estimated 300,000 refugees are in Germany, following's Angela Merkel's open-door policy. Sweden has been a major destination for Syrian refugees. The Rohingyas are termed as the world's most persecuted minority and deserve human treatment by all of us.

Yours etc.,
ZA Siddiqui,
Shillong-2

Agricultural loan waiver

Editor, The much publicized farmer's agitation in practically all states requires a deeper study. So many loans turning foul due to draught or floods belies all reasoning. Who or which banks have advanced the loans and who are the beneficiaries of such loans? These loan have been advanced largely by the Rural Banks or Co - Operative Banks. Loans have been advanced to farmers who did not need bank finance.

Those who needed loans had to palm off between 40 - 60 % of the loan amount to middle men and / or bank officials. The waiver defies 'all tenets of prudent economics. The agitation is a reflection of a beggar mentality.

The Govt. succumbs to the same because of vote bank politics. If one borrows he is morally bound to pay and if it is a state of depression which is created by lack of due diligence at the time of advancing the loans, the same should stop. Then the likes of Vijay Mallya and Subrata Roy are no criminals. To ride over the crises the Govt. should give the affected farmers a little more loan at 0% or very nominal rate of interest and make a repayment schedule. This should be done only through a nationalized bank preferably the State Bank of India. Let the farmers also feel proud of their country and owe responsibility for its march towards prosperity and not beg for free sops. The present political gimmick

should be jettisoned.

Farmers should be agitating to find ways to alleviate draught and control floods - by linking rivers, dredging rivers, rivulets and dams rather than the annual feature of loan waiver (which is more a political gimmick). Farmers should be educated to force the Govt. to channelize extra water from flood affected areas to those regions facing droughts. They should feel proud of their country and not beg for waivers. Eventually the hole created by these waivers has to be paid by the genuine tax payer. The rising cost of commodities and products have dragged the nation into quagmire of a badly managed economy.

Yours etc.,
B.P. Goenka
Shillong - 1

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.

Don't waste, fashion it out

The urban waste that is generated around us today is mindboggling. But the same waste can have a new life, Maiyankini Bose finds out how

Slow Fashion is the new fast fashion and the recycling-upcycling the new age mantra. Four such brilliant initiatives have shifted the focus from fast to slow fashion, and using waste in a creative manner underlining the importance of a green and sustainable lifestyle.

Doodle it out

Started in 2014, 'Doodlage' is a Delhi-based slow-fashion brand dealing with recycling and up-cycling of industrial fabric and garment waste. All garment houses generate post-cutting fabric waste which this homegrown fashion brand upcycles to a brand new garment by patching and panelling them together. Just the way as doodles can never be exactly replicated, each product by Doodlage is also unique.

Says Kriti Tula, brand head, "Designing a garment out of fabric waste is like joining the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together by removing all the non-uniformity and defects separately from each fabric panel."

Operated by a team of seven designers, their successful collections like the Spring Summer Collection 2017 'Cloud Walker' replete with doodles, quotes and hand embroidery are all on natural fabrics. Their latest Autumn Winter 2017 collection named 'Dreams and Dystopia' talks about the chaos and social issues in the world around today.

Their recent participation in the event 'Restart Fashion' at Lakme Fashion Week gave a creative twist with their theme, 'Armchair Activism', using Converse India's upcycled plastic 'Lifaffa' fabrics with an addition of patchwork, prints and embroidery that were inspired by city grids and disappearing foliage. Strong slogans in prints and embroidery further pushed social causes in a fashion-oriented arena.

The brand is currently selling online on their website and through 40 other multi-designer boutiques in tiers 1 and 2 cities pan-India. Along with



they don't know from where to buy them from. Thus was seeded the idea of "Bare Necessities," adds Mansoor.

Currently, Zero Waste Lifestyle and Home products are sold online via Mansoor's website, Instamojo and The Style Salad. While offline she has presence with Organic Lifestyle store Happy HealthyMe in city's Indiranagar. Her products range from Lavendar bath salts, detergent, compostable bamboo toothbrush, organic peppermint toothpaste, etc. coconut fiber reusable spoon to stainless steel straw. This motley mix of green products is all made from recyclable materials ensuring nothing ends in the landfills. "Our future plan is to expand our range in products to transition into a fully sustainable lifestyle," Mansoor says.

Waste not, create

Sahaas Zero Waste is a socio-environmental enterprise by Sahaas, an NGO and managed by a team of ten members.

Their Zero Waste programme offers on-site solutions to bulk waste generated in tech parks and residential complexes by providing them segregation options at source.

Currently, it manages 25 tonnes of waste per day across Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. The wet waste is converted into compost or biogas and dry waste is prepared for recycling. It is sorted into categories like plastic, paper and metal so that they can be used in recyclers while the low grade lightweight multi-layered plastic like chips and biscuit wrappers are non-recyclable and hence used only in cement kilns.

"The bio-gas generated from wet waste is used to run bio gas vehicle used for waste collection from bulk waste generators," informs Vishal, programme manager, Sahaas Zero Waste.

As he says, "Waste managed at source becomes a resource and our main aim is to minimise the waste going to the landfills by formalising the sector and creating an impact on the society." (TWF)



(Top) Schematic diagram of Lifestyle Zero Waste model; (clockwise from above left) recycled chipboard, lavender bath soap, recycled chair, a model flaunts a slow-fashion look and Sahar Mansoor with her two-year-old carbon footprint held in a small glass jar

women's fashion, they also design bags and home furnishings from fabric shreds generated from left-over fabric.

Ethically sound

Ethic Attic is a new-age fashion concept based out of Indiranagar in Bengaluru connecting artisans and fashion patrons adhering to principles of fair trade. Spearheaded by Rema Sivaram and Pradeep Krishnappa, it promotes fair wages and zero wastage using their vast network of weaver clusters and artisans across India.

Keeping true to their brand ethos, they use only natural fibres like organic cotton, hand-woven Ikkat from Pochampally, linen (sourced from Jharkhand), Eri silk (sourced from Assam), bamboo and banana fibre and even lotus fabric generated from lotus stems.

"Eri silk is the only non-violent silk in the world as the silk worm is not killed in the process of silk extraction and grown only in Assam. That's why it forms an integral part of our collection," informs Sivaram, creative director.

Their boutique store housing Ethic Attic and other sustainable eco-friendly labels opened in Indiranagar recently.

The store is housed in an eco-friendly environment in the same space where they have earlier hosted the Slow Fashion weekends with pop ups from sustainable brands like Akaba, Common Oxen, Dori Designs, Nature Alley, Rouka and Vermillion in the apparel and accessory space. A first in Bengaluru, it proved to be a grand success.

Rema says, "Through this Slow Fashion event organised in the studio, we could conclude, that

consumers appreciate sustainable fashion and hence there is a need for a fully operating boutique stores housing multiple Slow Fashion brands together under the same roof."

Let's talk trash

Sahar Mansoor, a Zero Waste lifestyle enthusiast, started this venture by replacing plastic with green substitutes like steel, bamboo, paper, etc. of daily life use. In order to stop being part of the waste problem, she learnt the art of organic soap making which she now mass produces under her Zero waste label 'Bare Necessities', started in 2016.

"I started with Design It Yourself workshops on personal care products but soon realised not everyone can spare the time to manufacture them, and



Internet cosplays, webcamming on the rise

By Sudipto Maity

Move over internet pornography, the latest gigs to attract a large number of viewers is creative internet cosplays (costume plays) and interactive webcamming.

While keeping themselves away from the physical touch of viewers, these new tools are enabling models to earn more cash and more importantly in a much less time. "It's about selling your brain, not your body," says a cam girl to BBC.

The model, who identifies herself as Lana, says that she does not feel exploited as she treats the sessions as a performance. "I see it like a performance, like a show. But this is not a job for everybody — a lot of girls quit after a few weeks or even days, because they have this mindset that they're selling their body. Your mindset is what matters in this job. I have my limits, and I truly do not feel exploited," the model says. But not everyone agrees.

A former cam-girl, Oana, says it's not as easy as some people think it to be. Sharing her story, she says that she had to enter prostitution in Germany after she left her previous job of a camgirl.

Now she works in sex work prevention in her home town Bucharest. "There are girls who think they will just stay in front of the camera and make money. But all the things they do there will affect their minds.

The next step is prostitution. I see that now," she shares.

Webcamming between a male and a female is illegal in Romania, the country from where both Lana and Oana hail, but records have showed that it is a safe haven for cam girls.

Andra Chirnoageanu, the PR manager of Studio 20, where most cam girls in Bucharest works says it's better than office work. "It's psychologically damaging to stay 12 hours in an office getting paid a minimum wage," she says.

"Studio 20 is the largest studio webcam franchise in the world. It has nine branches in Romania, including one employing 'cam-boys' who service the gay market. Its other branches are in the Colombian city of Cali, Budapest and Los Angeles," a BBC report reads.

Andrea, who also teaches the models English, says she helps them out by teaching them about fetishes. "I teach them about fetishes — what a fetish is, why a person has one... We study Freud and a lot of psychology. And we study a book of gestures because women must be sensual, smart and beautiful," she states.

The PR manager is also not keen about calling it only a sex business and feels that webcamming offers more.

"This is not only a sex business as some people think — models have to speak with a member as if they are in a normal, online



relationship. Being able to discuss many subjects brings comfort to both parties," Andrea maintains.

While most models work from the studio, some prefer to work from home.

Sandy Bell, who is a graduate with two university degrees, makes about 100 Euros a day while working from home.

Others, such as Lana, who work from

the Studio 20 office, make about 4000 Euros a month, which is 10 times the Romanian average wage. The studio too takes home a similar amount from her sessions.

Live Jasmin is also responsible for the collection of payments from users.

The site is also the largest web cam host in the world, with 35-40 million users visiting it daily. The web cam industry, hailed

as one of the fastest money making source, generated around \$3 billion in 2016.

The other factor that is encouraging these models is the ability to choose between interaction and terminating a session. Sandy says, "What can a member do to me? If he crosses a line or even if he is rude to me, I just click the mouse and stop it. And I can talk to the administrator on the website and they ban the IP address, so the guy can never enter again even if he changes his nickname."

"I mean, those people are thousands of miles away from me. They don't touch you — nobody touches you. You go online alone and you work online alone. This has nothing to do with prostitution," she adds.

However, webcamming is not the only option models are resorting to for cash. Some are creating cosplays and erotic content and making a living out of it.

Stephanie Michelle is a dedicated cosplayer who creates 'naughty content' for her users. "I'm usually just wearing either underwear or some tight little tank top or nothing at all," she tells The Verge.

Cosplay or costume play is a hobby in which participants called cosplayers wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character.

Sources may include anime, cartoons, comic books, live-action films, television series and video games.

Though many have cried foul at Pa-

treon's policies, which unlike other social networking sites allows its users to display erotic content, the company guideline states: "Patreon is not for pornography, but some of the world's most beautiful and historically significant art often depicts nudity and sexual expression. Because of that, we allow nudity and suggestive imagery, as long as it is marked NSFW. Think of the policy as allowing 'R Rated' movies... but not porn."

However, users who subscribe to these models say it can be a bit 'disappointing' at times. "I do believe that we should support these models, but there are a few models that take advantage of the Patreon platform and mislead, scam, or straight up fail to provide 'rewards' to their supporters," says Ollies Meow Master to The Verge.

So what makes webcamming and cosplays so appealing? Experts believe that personal access is what keeps them glued, something that is not provided by pornographic sites.

The same also allows these models to strive for more. "On Instagram, you get 50 million people messaging you a day saying something crazy, and you never message back. But on Patreon, those are the people that are supporting me, literally, financially, so I'm gonna message them back," says a model who goes by the name Naughty Nessa. (JEN/TWF)

Ferrandinis' 75 years

(Continued from last week)

Commonly the missionary works of the sisters include rural tours, catechesis, health care and sanitation awareness, social service, education, family visits, youth counselling, vocational guidance, manual skilled training, evangelisation, manning shelter homes for destitute children and the aged including assistance in the parishes. To uphold the sanctity of their vocation, he (Bishop Ferrando) stressed the importance of five great loves or devotions — 1) for Jesus, 2) for Mary, 3) for Don Bosco, 4) for the missions and 5) for the people.

Archbishop Ferrando expired on June 20, 1978, at Genoa and his mortal remains interned at Rossiglione, but through Divine miracle after nine years his non-perishable remains were brought to Shillong as per his wish and permanently interned at St Margaret's convent Chapel, adjacent to the Provincialate. He was raised to the status of Venerable by the present Pope Francis last year. When Archbishop Mathias was transferred to Madras-Mylapore, many of the church's ambitious projects suffered setbacks for sometimes.

When Bishop Ferrando took over things started moving again at an accelerated pace, that through his sheer vision and fortitude the former stalled programmes saw fulfilment to completion. The prevalent situation during his tenure made him dependent upon the available SDBs, FMAs, RNDMs and SCJs for all the pioneering enterprises, until the MSMHCs came to the rescue. Later under arrangement with Archbishop Mathias, he got some diocesan priests also trained at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu; the first among Khasis was Fr Albinus Iawphniaw.

Reading through the biography of Ven Archbishop Ferrando, the writer would like to share more findings through his personal experience. During 1959 Bishop Ferrando celebrated the silver jubilee of his Episcopal ordination. One week before the annual Grand Eucharistic procession by first week November, 14 Bishops came to take part in the commemorative function.

On Saturday afternoon prior to the procession, a magnificent drill display was performed at the top first ground of St Edmund's School to felicitate the bishops and other dignitaries. All Catholic schools at that time took part in the programme. Don Bosco Technical School with its 260 contingent of boarders accompanied by the school band conducted by Bro Solomon Marak, Sdb came out in full strength. The writer also participated as a small boy. Since the dining hall in the erstwhile Bishop's house was too congested for accommodating the guest bishops and their entourage, a study hall of the day scholar students at the old building built by Fr Igino Ricaldone was vacated to convert into a bigger makeshift refectory.

The footfall at the Eucharistic procession from Friday onwards was exceedingly massive; those from far away rural areas travelled on foot because of poor communication. Bishop Morrow when he celebrated Mass in the school chapel, on Monday morning, told that the moment Don Bosco boarders appeared on the ground he was impressed with their skills and discipline and exhorted everyone to keep up this spirit of Don Bosco. In a private meeting with Fr Mario Bianchi, Sdb former Secretary to Bishop Ferrando, he narrated to the writer an interesting story.

In 1962 while Bishop Ferrando was attending the Vatican Council II meeting, the news of Chinese aggression on India was conveyed to him. He in turn informed the Bishop, while in great desperation himself rushed to meet St Fr Pio of Pietrelcina a Cappuchin monk and the last Stigmatist of the 20th century. He got the appointment immediately and Fr Pio led him to his private chapel. He asked Fr Bianchi to kneel and pray while St Pio knelt in front of the Blessed Sacrament praying intensely for Divine intercession; suddenly he saw a vision of a strange lady holding her child, covering the region with her mantle and driving away some strange looking beings. After one hour he

rose up and left the chapel with Fr Bianchi, telling him to return back to his Diocese in peace, because nothing will happen to it since the region has been placed under the protection of Mary Help of Christians. Indeed in no time the Chinese troops withdrew across the LOAC or Memohan line dividing the two countries.

In 2006, Stephen Memorial Secondary School, Mawroh observed the silver jubilee of its foundation. To commemorate the event a Souvenir Committee was constituted for the same. In this case the Souvenir Committee decided to publish a commemorative journal and initiate naming of the road, in honour of the founder and the school, extending from Mawlai Mawroh junction to Kynton Massar-NEHUpurition—1.20Km distance. The first proposal failed to take off due to deficient fund and insufficient manpower. The latter was tasked with the writer to carry out the decision. A representation was prepared to submit to the Dorbar Shong (Village Governing Body) Mawlai Mawroh, with copy to the Catholic Managing Committee (CMC), Mawroh for follow up action.

The writer being executive member of both the locality and CMC pursued the matter thoroughly, by which the Dorbar Shong acceded to the proposal and intimated its approval in writing to the school authorities. On this ground the documents were forwarded to the State GAD office for further action at their end, by the writer himself with due acknowledgement and was asked to wait till one month for official processing. Having not heard anything after three months, the writer inquired the matter from the dealing department but was told that no such documents were available.

He then approached the Commissioner & Secretary GAD Mr Peter W Ingty, IAS (later Addl Chief Secretary) with the Xeroxed copies of the relevant papers for which he kept with him. He recalled the file from the department concerned but got the same reply. He assured the writer that he would get the thing done and advised him to meet the Minister incharge for further action. The writer sought appointment with the GAD Minister Mr Conrad K Sangma (later MP Tura), who promised the writer to obtain approval in the ensuing Cabinet meeting. After five days the order came from the I&PR Director Mr Peter S Dkhar, IAS (later DC Shillong) to the writer's table for official notification to the media; simultaneously St Paul's Road from Polo Umkhrah Bridge to Shiyap (Belle Fonte) also got approval. Now Stephen Memorial Road Mawlai Mawroh bears witness to the fact of being the only road, named as a tribute to the founder of the MSMHCs Ven Archbishop Ferrando, in the whole world.

The pedestal at Don Bosco square, Shillong has its own story to relate. The monument was built for two important purposes by the then Bishop Mathias to commemorate the canonisation to sainthood of St John Bosco on Easter Sunday 1934 and ordination to bishopric of himself and Bishop Ferrando in November the same year. Its maintenance is being done by the Don Bosco Technical School and the Don Bosco Past Pupils Association, Shillong.

After the years passed by Fr Ganguly, CSC became the first local Bengali Archbishop of Dhaka and died. The cause for raising him to the status of saint is under process. Bishop Morrow of Krishnagar founded his own Congregation the Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI), with headquarters at Krisnagar (WB); so also Archbishop D'Rosario his society the Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco (VSDB), with its headquarters at Madonna Convent, Nongkseh, Upper-Shillong, Meghalaya. Both congregations are affiliated to the Salesian family. Incidentally out of 10 siblings in the Colussi family 6 entered religious life with Gaudio, Attilio, Dino, Daniel and Joseph as SDB priests while Sr Rina as FMA; the lone survivor Fr Luciano Colussi, Sdb is their cousin, working with the Australian Province.

(Opinions expressed are the writer's own)

Prey to superstitions

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Superstitions kill animals. This is my third article enumerating what illegal animal parts are being sold, by so-called Hinduism sites, to gullible buyers in search of magic to change their lives for the better. People have reached such a level of frustration and fear that they are prepared to spend money to destroy every other species in the hope that this will bring a change in their fortunes.

There are more lies about so-called Sacred Objects than any other items in the world — *shaligrams* (ammonite stones) *rudrakshas* (seeds of the Elaeocarpus ganitrus tree) for instance, but I am only taking those that involve animal lives.

I have already written about hathjodi, the penis of the monitor lizard and Siyar Singhi, the imaginary horn on the head of a particular jackal (neither the species, nor the bone exists).

The biggest fraud of all is the Nagamani, the magic stone that supposedly comes from the forehead of a cobra. It supposedly can be amber yellow, honey, dark green, light green, red, white or black (depending on the plastic available!)

It purportedly emanates light all the time and can be used at night as an alternative to an electric bulb. It can be seen from miles away like a helmet worn by a miner (except on the snake's forehead where it doesn't glow at all).

However, according to the sites, who need to have built in alibis when the items they sell for lakhs of rupees don't work, the "light emission is proportionate to the age of the snake who should be older than 30 years, and the stone from a younger snake does not possess that much light as that of an old snake gem."

So nagamanis are genuine from snakes but are not old enough or grown enough do not emit enough light. Some emit a pale green light only at night and only if they have been kept in the sun during the day. Some emit light only when they are kept on tree leaves, others when kept on flowers, some only do it outside the house and others — when no one is looking. Some light up on amavasya or no moon night. If it doesn't light up at all, then it is an 'ichhadharinagamani' which is even rarer and costlier in that it will light up at will !!!" Considering that the life of a King Cobra is about 17-20 years in captivity and half of that in the wild and normal cobras are even less, the chances of a finding an electric bulb in its head are non-existent. One site says that an opaque nagamani that doesn't emit light is also a nagamani except that it is a second level one and its real name is Snakestone.

Some nagamanis are solid like stone. Others are transparent. The sites hasten to add that the nagamani cannot be identified by a gemology laboratory, only by people who are experts in the Vedas (where it is not mentioned at all). There seems to be no settled idea of what a nagamani is — except its price and what it brings to the buyer: protection from snakes, devils and chronic diseases.

Every site accuses the other of selling fakes made of plastic or stone. Some say only the black ones are real and all the other colours are fake. Others say that only the blacks are fake.

Bill kiJer or Bill kiNaal is the umbilical cord of the cat which is almost impossible to get as the cat eats it immediately on giving birth. The only way it can be gotten is if you tie up a cat while it gives

birth, subject it to physical torture and cut the cord yourself.

This so-called cord, which is probably a human umbilical cord as these are often thrown away in hospitals, is meant for gamblers, stockbrokers, share investors and they must energise it with an expensive puja. It will then give lots of money and many buildings.

No one knows what the Garudmani or Eagle Pearl is. Even the sites do not ex-

and the secretion of the elephant's brain! And this unlikely mix is supposed to cure cancer, arthritis, impotency, childlessness and make you rich.

How do the sites identify it as authentic? All water touched by it turns to milk. It throbs in your hand. It drinks coconut water. To test it, sit in the Northeast direction with the gajamani in your right hand and close your eyes for 90 minutes. If you are a good person and your

BELIEVE IT OR NOT



Bill kiJer or Bill kiNaal is the umbilical cord of the cat which is almost impossible to get as the cat eats it immediately on giving birth. The only way it can be gotten is if you tie up a cat while it gives birth, subject it to physical torture and cut the cord yourself



The biggest fraud of all is the Nagamani, the magic stone that supposedly comes from the forehead of a cobra

Lion teeth which have been 'washed, brushed and cleaned properly'. Made into amulets they give strength and power



plain which part of the eagle's body this amazing stone comes from, but it is probably petrified and baked faeces. Its buyer, according to them, will develop keen eyesight, hunting skills, powers of observation, dominance over others, focus. He will soar like a bird and retrieve territory, becoming hugely popular as he swoops down. He will keep Rahu, Mangal and Shukra under his wings. All this in one piece of faeces evicted by the bird.

The same sites are selling lion teeth which have been "washed, brushed and cleaned properly". Made into amulets they give strength and power and every judge, ruler and army officer has only risen to the top because he keeps energised teeth in his pants. If I find any buyers, after this site owner gives his list to the police, they will also be head prisoners in jail.

The Gajamukta/Hathimani, or Elephant pearl, is touted as found in a very rare species of elephant (there are only two, the African and Asian). They come from "Airavata elephants" (a species only known to Indra the raingod and are a synonym for clouds). The pearl is a dull white piece which is a mixture of ivory, pearl, bone marrow, calcium, Vitamin D

chakras are clean then you will feel terrible pain in your heart, spine and head. If you feel nothing then you should buy it since you need to get your chakras cleaned up!

Owl feet are commonly found in the market and on sites. This extremely useful bird is now very threatened because it is captured and its feet cut and dried and sold as amulets that bring protection against illness and the evil eye.

Imagine a table full of lizard and jackal penises, bird faeces and feet, predator teeth, bits of elephant bone, pebbles and plastic, seeds and stones. Do you think this crackpot collection will give you riches and power or cure your diseases? Do you not sound mad?

Two sadhus met. What are you searching for, asked one. "I am looking for where God is" replied the second, "And you?" "I am looking for where God isn't," said the first. God and success lies within you, not in sticks and stones and the blood, bone and faeces of killed animals.

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

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 24, 2017

Moan sextile Pluto on your solar return chart indicates a good year ahead. Invest in higher education this year, to help you open the doors to a brand new career. Practice a healthier lifestyle by incorporating more exercise and reviewing your eating habits diet. In the process, you'll eliminate a lingering health concern within a few short weeks. Spiritual practices will increase your ability to adapt to the karmic changes you'll experience this year, designed to redirect your path on a personal as well as professional level. A new opportunity that appears soon will challenge you to move more independently, which will awaken the passionate entrepreneur within you.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week highlights friendship, romance and love in your life. You would be successful in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You would express your unique individuality, and if this involves changing careers or jobs, a new relationship, or a new hobby. Your domestic life takes on top priority. Making yourself feel comfortable and secure is paramount, and you have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support with family. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adapt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find novel solutions to problems now. Your efforts have been establishing strong professional base which brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace. This would help you to get better perspectives to achieve desired goals. It's time to expand your social and professional circle.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your ideas and goals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and overseas connections is indicated during this phase. Those connected with the media, journalism and arts get an opportunity to showcase their talent. Students in fine arts and related fields attain success and good results. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings is therapeutic.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Travel, contact and communication are the keywords of this period. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. Short trips and other forms of communication appeal strongly. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with outcasts and foreign people and this brings financial growth. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Students of Computer Hardware and Engineering achieve better results during this week. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and adopt new strategies in financial matters. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You would be successful in the fields of creativity, writing and entertainment industry or in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You would be able to make an impact on important people. Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake redecorating your office. You may especially enjoy working with a cross section of people. Your ideas are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, as your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections with new associates indicated

during this phase. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation of business associates and this brings financial growth. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. You expand your circle of influence and these new associates would prove to be beneficial in the long run. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Financial investments yield good gains. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period highlights friendship, romance, love and children. You give a new approach to love, children and creative projects. A new set-up in existing love affair or a new love affair altogether may be formed. Your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You are working hard and inclined towards more detailed work. An exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible in this period. An opportunity to expand business arises now. Increased connections and experiences come into picture. This is a period of growth as well as some form of blossoming. Your career, reputation and public life are influenced. This is a very fortunate time to arrange get-togethers, parties and fun. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this phase. You would become more particular about your health and diet.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be poor, tiring and frustrating. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs. You find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output. This is a good time to belong with a friend or a group who shares your own ideas and thoughts. You would attach yourself to unusual, more spiritual, friends. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to improve your health and well-being, such as regular exercise, more structured and productive use of your time, and so forth.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than avoid them as there would be victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love granted but show your love and appreciation. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and they would be profitable. Your professional skills, wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You play the role of the elderly in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This is a favorable period for people in sports, media and other related fields. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you are coming across as especially cooperative and graceful. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. It's a good time to join organizations and groups and to attend meetings or social events. This would be a right time to go for long term investments and speculations. This phase brings excellent opportunities for those in creative and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of desires particularly in your personal and domestic life. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence.

East & West are poles apart

CHINA: "The giant has awakened! Let the world tremble!"

ALSO CHINA: "We banned your tweet because it may cause our civilisation to collapse."

I totally don't get that country. Their messages are too mixed.

Mind you, the whole world is baffling these days. One of the defining questions of the modern era seems to be: What Is Your Position On Cow Poop?

Two news items that arrived in this columnist's inbox on the same morning highlighted the two main options.

An angry farmer used a farm machine to spray "a wave of manure" all over a law enforcement officer's vehicle, said a news item from Vermont in the US. There was widespread disgust at the act, commentators said. Covering your house with cow dung has huge benefits and will even make it proof against radioactive beams, a high court judge declared, according to news items from Rajasthan in India. Judge Mahesh Chand Sharma sang the praises of cow poop earlier this summer.

Clearly that US farmer should move to Asia and bring his dung-spraying machine.

What other news items highlight East-West differences?

A colleague pointed out that the US TV reality series 'I Married A Stranger' is now playing on screens in Asia. "But marrying a stranger is normal in much of South Asia," she said. To have the same shock ef-

fect, she suggested starting a reality TV series called 'I Married Someone I Knew'.

Reader Amitava Bose noted that the US beauty contestant who said "marriage is between a man and a woman" was considered by Westerners to have said something utterly outrageous while people from the East were left scratching their heads. "In the West, failure to be politically correct is a far worse crime than murder," said Bose.

former President Barack Obama, who was politically correct but committed extra-judicial murder (he got his men to sneak into Pakistan and execute Osama Bin Laden and four others, including a woman). Good point. Bose said that if I was ever arrested for assassinating someone in a Western country (unlikely), my best defence would be to say something like: "I supported transgender rights before it was cool."

This columnist, who has roughly equal numbers of friends who are Eastern and Westernised, liberal and conservative, tends to avoid these controversial issues. But I was delighted to hear about a case in Mumbai that should keep all sides happy. A woman named Aarav Appukkuttan felt her personality was male. A man named Sukanyeah Krishna felt his personality was female.

They went independently to a clinic for gender re-assignment — but met and fell in love, the media reported. Now the man-turned-woman plans to marry the woman-turned-man. Their case stomps violently on tradition, so liberals will cheer loudly, but will ultimately end up with a male marrying a female, so conservatives can also cheer loudly. Everybody's happy, just like the bride, in her macho suit, and the groom, in his pretty dress.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

I was sceptical of this, but he pointed out that the Western media is beside itself with hysteria at President Donald Trump, who says politically incorrect things but has not murdered anyone. The exact same media worships the ground walked on by

A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man.

--- Fred A. Allen

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 46 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

Sushma strikes out

INDIA'S external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, can mix diplomacy with hard talk. She said that while India produced IT power, engineers and doctors, Pakistan chummed out jihadis. She told the UN General Assembly that if Pakistan stamped out terrorists in its territory, the whole world should welcome it. She wondered how Islamabad could have the cheek to preach human values in India, referring to Pakistani Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's charge of atrocities in Jammu and Kashmir. Islamabad has been botching up all Indian initiatives to normalise and improve bilateral ties. She had obviously done a U-turn on a guftagu with former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. She did not pull her punches either about slamming the international community for being blind to terrorism as a global threat. That cannot be an internal law and order problem, she said. Sushma Swaraj, who had recently thawed the ice between India and China on Doklam urged it to drop its opposition to Pakistan-based Jaish-a-Muhammed chief Masood Azhar being designated as a global terrorist. At the same time, she held a brief for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic initiatives like Jan Dhan and demonetisation which were aimed at fighting poverty.

Swaraj also had a bilateral meeting with US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson. She raised the issue of terrorism and H-IB visas. Discussions were held in order to strengthen the US-India political and economic partnership. She is evidently trying to derive maximum mileage out of President Donald Trump's glare on terrorism in Pakistan and the Taliban. It's been a long time since India talked tough at the global high table and it is perhaps time for the world to take note of India's disadvantaged position vis-a-vis Pakistan which continues to fight subversive battles on Indian soil and literally bleed it with a thousand cuts.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Telecom Department reorganized in Eastern Region

The Eastern Telecommunication Region of the Department of Telecommunication has been reorganized into an "Independent Result Profit Centre" from Monday. The reorganization has been effected with a view to providing greater autonomy and flexibility in the operation of long distance transmission media and circuits by the body which is responsible for the maintenance of such systems in the North Eastern

states, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The Centre is headed by the apex Eastern Telecommunication Region Board and will be chaired by the Chief General Manager, Mr P S Saran who has reportedly been given adequate administrative and financial powers. The Chief General Manager has also been made responsible for the drawing up of a perspective plan and annual plans for operation and maintenance for the region.

Who will have the magic figure in 2018?

By H H Mohrmen

In the last few months it was the two national parties, the Congress and the BJP which have made tall claims that their party would reach the magic number of winning thirty seats in the ensuing Assembly election. Now even the NPP and the alliance of regional parties have also claimed that they will be able to come up with the magic figure since it is the desire of the people that the regional parties should come to power in the forthcoming election. Reacting to all these claims, a cynic friend with a sense of humour responded that, for the claims of all the political parties to come true, the house ought to have more than one hundred twenty seats in the next assembly.

Jokes apart, let us try to analyse the ground realities and see which party really stands a chance to cross the halfway mark, but before doing that, let us give all the parties a thumbs-up for accepting the fact as it is and coming up publicly that this time around none of them will be able to get an absolute majority. None of the parties dare to project that they would win more than thirty seats because their goal is to barely reach the halfway mark and accepting the ground reality will stand the parties in good stead.

This time the BJP's slogan of a Congress-free Meghalaya will not be a reality precisely because of the party's own doing. BJP's over ambition of winning the state on its own without making any kind of pre-election pact or understanding with its NEDA alliance will only help the Congress. The Congress is still a major player in state because it is still in control of the two Autonomous District Councils. So for the Congress, it is always better to have multiple contestants than a straight fight.

The recent development in the JHADC also proves that the Congress is still in control of the ADC when Thombor Shiwat who is suspected to be on Sniawbhalang's side was unceremoniously removed from the office of the CEM of the Council and was replaced by a Andrew Shullai a first time MDC.

The next best contender to the Congress is the NPP, but the party's lack of discipline is one factor that could hamper its chance. This was evident from the

fact that few months back the party's MDCs resigned en-mass to join the Congress and formed a new Congress-led Executive Committee in the Garo Hills ADC. NPP supporters can claim that they have a better chance of winning Garo hills since the party president has only recently won the by-election to the Tura parliamentary seat with a huge margin, but one cannot deny the fact that people's sympathy for the late PA Sangma also played a major role in the NPP president reclaiming the seat which was last occupied by his father.

The other factor that will play a role in the NPP's chance of winning some seats in the Khasi Jaintia region is because former

Congressman Sniawbhalang Dhar a tough fight.

The Congress is also going to allot the party ticket to a young man with a degree in electronics engineering and experience in being the head of State Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (SRES) to contest against the MLA from Umroi constituency. George Lyngdoh who also has prior experience in politics from his late father E.K. Mawlong is therefore not a greenhorn in the political arena. He may not have the kind of money his opponent has but he certainly is more qualified and also has the experience and the acumen

The pertinent question is what change can the party hope to bring when it is welcoming the same old Congress warhorses to its fold. If the Congress has shown them the door then that itself speaks volume about the non-performance of the ousted leaders.

senior congress MLAs whom the party had isolated were forced to enter the NPP camp. The pertinent question is what change can the party hope to bring when it is welcoming the same old Congress warhorses to its fold. If the Congress has shown them the door then that itself speaks volume about the non-performance of the ousted leaders.

While the other parties are finding it difficult to put up candidates in all the constituencies, the Congress still has a problem of plenty as many party men and women are applying for tickets to the Party to contest from all the sixty constituencies. This time around the Congress also has better candidates to replace some of the ousted MLAs as it is evident that the Congress is putting up a former bureaucrat who has better qualification and much more experience in public service than the incumbent MLA from the Nartiang constituency. Jopthiaw Lyngdoh, IAS, is going to give the ousted

to be a leader. The Congress is also planning to put-up a bureaucrat who is currently applying for VRS to contest against the suspended member and CEM of KHADC. HM Shangliang another high ranking IAS officer who hails from Mawsynram. He will give P.N. Syiem a tough fight in the ensuing election.

The Congress which has all along accommodated the mining lobby because most of the coal barons were part and parcel of the party then is now relieved of the pressure as most of the leaders have left the party to join the BJP. On the other hand it is also a blessing in disguise for the party because the business tycoons who are more of businessmen than politicians are no longer in the party fold. The Congress has been able to get rid of the businessmen in the garb of politicians from its fold and this is good for the party.

The other contender to the top spot is the alliance

of the regional parties and no doubt its tally will improve but the prospect of the alliance in the Garo hills region is not very promising. The history of the GNC the alliance constituent from the Garo hills region is also not very hopeful as the party has barely won two or three seats in the last elections.

In the last few weeks and months both the BJP and the NPP claimed that the lucky or unlucky 7 MLAs have approached the party high command and expressed their desire to contest on their respective party's ticket, but till now, except for the four ejected and one suspended MLA from the Congress, the independent MLAs who are also associate members of the Congress are still in a dilemma. The duo who have made public their plans to join the BJP are now uncertain of their fate as the BJP already has candidates who had worked hard to contest from their respective seats.

The other two Stephenson Mukhim and Hopeful Bamon have remained tight lipped about their next move, although some of Stephen's leaders had recently joined NPP in Delhi. Hopeful is the only one who has not made any indication of his next move. Hopeful will certainly not get the Congress ticket because Shitlang Pale is still the strong contender for the party's ticket, so Hopeful can again contest as an independent and he has the chance to win only if he has the support of Pala.

It is obvious now that the next election to the state assembly will be a four way fight and in any multi-cornered fight the incumbent party will always gain the upper hand. The only factor that will go against the Congress Party is the anti-incumbency factor, hence its success will depend very much on how it deals with it. If at all there is any party that is going to cross the magic number it will be the Congress. The Congress stands a good chance to at least be the Party which will win maximum numbers of seat and the saying which goes, 'the more the merrier,' will reverberate in all the Party's rallies along the hills and valleys of the state.

Myanmar govt has to act fast to generate trust among Rohingyas Relief operations must speed up while talks continue

By Harihar Swarup

Who are Rohingyas and why they are migrating en masse from Myanmar? Rohingyas is an ethnic community living in Myanmar for centuries but they are not treated as citizens of that country; neither they have voting rights. Denials of these basic rights to Rohingyas even though they have been living in Myanmar for generations, have resulted in revolt in young men of the community and they have become insurgents. The Myanmar army suppressed ruthlessly what they call "insurgency" and many innocent Rohingyas, who had nothing to do with insurgency, suffered. So ruthless was the suppression that a massive exodus of Rohingyas started to neighbouring Bangladesh and India. So far over four lakh of them have crossed over to Bangladesh and the exodus has been continuing. Thousands of them nearly 40,000, have crossed over to India.

Reports from Bangladesh say Rohingyas are lost, unattended and unaware of the fate that awaits them. Numbed by the brutalities witnessed back home in Myanmar, the only thing they know is the pangs of hunger and thirst as they struggle to survive.

According to the UNICEF, of two lakh-odd children who have crossed over to Bangladesh in recent weeks, at least, 1,312 have been separated from their parents. Aid agencies estimated the number of lost children will shoot up as

dealing with illegal migrants was part of the executive's exclusive policy domain and its validity could not be tested judicially. It urged the court not to entertain petition against deportation of Rohingyas.

With a mass exodus of Rohingyas Muslims sparking accusation of ethnic cleansing from the United Nations and others, Myanmar's de facto Prime Minister Aung San Suu Kyi said her country does not fear international scrutiny and invited diplomats to see some areas themselves.

Though an estimated 4, 21,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh in less than a month as their villages burned and hundreds were killed, Suu Kyi said the "great majority" of Muslims within the conflict zone stayed and that "more than 50 per cent of their villages are intact". The Nobel Peace laureate's global image has been damaged by violence since Rohingya insurgents attacked Myanmar's security forces. The Rohingyas fled their villages in the military crackdown that followed, and many of their villages have been burnt but members of the persecuted minority have said soldiers and Buddhist mobs attacked them.

Suu Kyi's first address to the nation since the violence erupted came days after she cancelled plans to attend the UN General Assembly, a decision widely seen as a response to international criticism. She assured Bangladesh,

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee says all Rohingya refugees couldn't be branded terrorists. "Let the government take steps against those who have terror links, but the misdeeds of the few can't be generalized."

more refugees arrive in Cox's Bazar. Most of these children are vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, either commercially or sexually.

Migrants from Myanmar are creating problems in India and the union government says inputs from security agencies and other authentic material indicated linkages of some of the unauthorized Rohingyas immigrants with Pakistan-based terror organizations. Many of Rohingyas figure in the suspected sinister designs of IS/IS and other extremist groups who want to achieve their ulterior motives in India, including that of flaring communal and sectarian violence in sensitive areas.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee says all Rohingyas refugees couldn't be branded terrorists. "Let the government take steps against those who have terror links, but the misdeeds of the few can't be generalized. We need to distinguish between terrorists and commoners", she says adding India's security could not be compromised, but "branding the entire community terrorist is inhuman". Someone should ask the CM how to sort out among large number of migrants, who is a terrorist and who is not? Some innocents are bound to suffer.

A galaxy of Indian lawyers including Fali S Nariman and Kapil Sibal have filed a petition in the Supreme Court on behalf of two Rohingyas Muslims opposing the centre's decision to deport migrants.

The government stood by its decision to deport illegal Rohingyas migrants and told the apex court that

India and other nations that Myanmar was prepared to take back the "refugees" after "verification process". This is not as easy as it sounds. The process is based on a 1993 agreement reached with Bangladesh under which repatriation was given to "those carrying Myanmar's identity cards", "those able to present other documents issued by relevant Myanmar authorities" and "all those able to furnish evidence of their residence in Myanmar".

It is doubtful that many among over four lakhs, who fled, carried their documents with them, or had any to begin with. Only in 2015, the Myanmar government cancelled Temporary Residence cards given to the Rohingyas from 1995. At the centre of the present crisis is Myanmar's refusal to accept the Rohingyas people as citizens of the country, and unless this is resolved, the problem is certain to continue. The Rohingyas are not in the list of 135 Myanmar's ethnic groups and the 1982 Citizenship Act makes it next to impossible for them to acquire citizenship.

The Kofi Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine state, appointed at Suu Kyi's behest, submitted its report on August 25, which said Myanmar should establish a clear strategy and timeline for the citizenship verification process. It has recommended a review of existing Citizenship Act. Suu Kyi referred this in her speech to say the doable recommendations would be implemented in the "shortest" time. Doubtless, that will not include the Citizenship Act overhaul. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

A cowardly act!

Editor,

The recent attack on the residence of sitting MLA of Shillong West, Paul Lyngdoh is an ugly truths that exposes the hatred among political contenders as it happened just before the elections-2018. This may happen to any other candidates of the constituencies if we are not alert and take precautions. The attack on Mr Lyngdoh's home is an uncivilized act of cowardice, which emerges out of jealousy and pressure from some external forces who seek to create ruckus and vandalism. This sort of action was not seen in Meghalaya in the past but it has erupted out of nowhere. Political vendetta cannot be at the cost of the candidate's and his family's life and property. It strikes at the root of constitutional rights and democracy. But the culprit fails to understand his actions which are like the opium of political mania.

The ends do not justify the means and this attack on Paul Lyngdoh merits condemnation by all right thinking people. Whether or not Paul Lyngdoh should be re-elected is left for the people of the constituency to decide in 2018. It is true that people want change in but they have to bring that change through their votes not by criminal acts. It is possible that MLAs are not able to fulfil the aspirations of their constituents. Someone, somewhere might be disillusioned because of unfulfilled promises or because of lack of development within the constituency. But all those aspirations need to be made public during election campaigns, not by personal attacks. Let the legislators' main concern be for the welfare of the people and not for political gimmicks. I hope the common people learn to put a full stop to this sort of violence and not be misled by money power and other illegal means.

Yours etc.,
Evarist Myrsing
Shillong-17

Why attack journalists and artists?

Editor

This refers to your Editorial "Journalist life on the line" (ST- Sept 23, 2017). It is indeed worrying to see that the attacks on journalists seem to be increasing both in frequency and brutality. The high percentage of journalists losing their lives while covering politics and corruption, reflects poorly on the law & order situation. Women journalists, in particular, are frequently threatened with rape and acid attacks. A journalist is also a citizen who enjoys the rights guaranteed by our Constitution. Freedom of expression is an inalienable right, and expressing an opinion about a film, or a policy, or a politician on a forum that calls itself social media is a natural extension of that inalienable right. Unless the nation wakes up together to reform and strengthen our institutions,

like the police and judiciary, such attacks will continue and our basic fundamental right to state protection will remain unfulfilled. We need to address the problem of impunity in journalists' murders to ensure that the press can work freely. Let us promote a safe and enabling environment for those who exercise their right to freedom of expression, especially for journalists & artists who perform their work without interference.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad- 15

Cosmological evolution!

Editor,

Scientists now have reliable information that it is cosmological evolution which has guided matter from simplicity to complexity, from inorganic to organic. Fossils document the increase in brain size of our ancestors. It has been noticed that life is hardly more than a combination of simple

chemicals operating in complex ways and the origin of life is a natural result of the evolution of that matter. Indeed, this new aspect of the research highlights Sri Aurobindo's vision.

In Sri Aurobindo, we find a pure optimism ~ a promise for our golden future. He said, ~ "There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution; he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior than him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will

remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mind and its slavery to ignorance."

This ascending evolution gives us hope that life is not meaningless. It has a definite purpose. One day, the cosmological evolution will make us more humane in future than what we have managed to become at present ~ "a thinking and speaking animal". So, what the song ~ "We are the world" says, is going to happen ~ "It's true we'll make a better day/ Just you and me." Indeed, we all are active participants in the cosmological relay race holding and passing the Batons of evolution!

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

"Every philosophy is the philosophy of some stage of life."

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2017

Medical seats restored

IT has been a harrowing experience for students allocated seats in the medical colleges of Assam. For reasons best known to the Government of Assam, the students from Meghalaya who had passed their NEET examination were met with rebuff when they went to join their respective medical colleges in Assam. On its part the Assam Government claimed that it had intimated the North Eastern Council which has nothing to do with the allocation of medical seats. This bureaucratic faux-pas has led to delay in sorting out the conundrum. Since Meghalaya is headed for elections soon and the Assam Health Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, is also the chairperson of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) which has its eyes fixed on the outcome of the Meghalaya elections, there is reason to believe that politics has played a role in this sordid mess.

Thankfully the Supreme Court has upheld Meghalaya's claim for the allocated seats and we can expect the students to join their courses sooner than later. However, what also needs probing is why the plan for two state medical colleges has not taken off yet? For the Shillong Medical College the Kolkata-based KPC Group was zeroed in under the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode on a plot of land measuring 23.8 acres. It is learnt that work on that site is on hold since the TB patients are not yet shifted to the new complex. So why choose that particular complex for a new medical college? The other question is why have a medical college on a small area of 23 acres when most other institutes are shifting to New Shillong because of the availability of land. With regards to the Tura Medical College, the Government has appointed Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL), a government undertaking to prepare the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the project. Interestingly the Tura Medical College is to be constructed on 99 acres of land which is nearly four times the size of the Shillong campus and will ostensibly accommodate 100 MBBS students. A Medical College is a growing institution and must necessarily have a multi-specialty hospital with it. Can all this come up on 23 acres of land in the middle of a congested locality of Shillong? Is this the collective wisdom of the cabinet or one person's opinion? We need clarity on this matter since the elected representatives don't seem to consider the matter important enough to be raised in the Assembly.

Why Indian economy has slowed down

By TN Ashok

Kumar and Neeraj Kumar Gupta -- are expected to brainstorm on the slow down.

At the end of the day, India on which foreign investors were betting on as the best place to invest after China, were holding on to their currency chests, government was holding the reins on public expenditure to rein in fiscal deficit, banks despite extraordinary war chests of currencies not willing to drop lending rates, manufacturing sector not willing to take any risk with further investments, all contributing to a vicious cycle of a monetary crisis that led to slow growth.

Only way to boost growth is for people to open up and invest and kick start the economy taking a calculated risk that's not tantamount to gambling but a definite step forward to recover the economy that's sagging now and in the pits. As former FM Chidambaram used to say Consumption leads to growth - to bolster consumption, BJP needs incentivise industry to resume manufacturing and invest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi postponed his Tuesday meeting review of the economy with top officials of the finance and commerce ministry for obvious reasons. The facts were not yet ripe for a review. One of the main reasons for this is the Indian Meteorological Department's prediction of the how the south west monsoon is going to end. After years of good monsoon, the SW monsoon has been slowing down, probably due to the El Nino effect with the equatorial currents heating up, since the last few years. Parts of India have been parched. Agricultural productivity is an important factor to take into account while calculating the nation's GDP growth.

The SW monsoon got off to a spectacular start in June starting from Kerala but after the cyclone tapered off, it slumped leaving many parts of north India parched and dry, especially Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. The IMD is yet to make a full assessment of the monsoon effect before the next monsoon. The North East monsoon sets in over southern India from October to December. The sowing and reaping seasons of both the summer Rabi and Kharif crops are at stake affecting the lives of millions of farmers in the country.

So, the Chief Economic Advisor Dr Arvind

Subramaniam wants to factor this into account before wrapping up his presentation to the Prime Minister and Finance Minister and top officials of the finance department on the growth prospects for the remaining quarters of FY 2017-18, that is September to November that constitutes the 2nd quarter, October to December the 3rd quarter and Jan to March the final 4th quarter. Right now concern is over the 2nd quarter.

Will the slowdown in the economy in the first quarter of FY 2017-18, April to June recorded at one of the lowest since 2014, when Modi came to power, at 5.7%, against the then 7.9%, continued unabated or will it taper off? This is the big question. The predictions within the RBI and rating agencies are residual effects of demonetisation and settle down effects of GST will continue to haunt the economy well into the 2nd and 3rd quarters, though gradually receding month by month. Industry is happy with the GST because they get input returns on raw materials, but traders are very unhappy, and small economy is frustrated. Services sector is still in shell- shocked by the GST.

GST is a worldwide phenomenon and no one can question its introduction as Modi government is only trying to adopt best practices of modern trading and economics to integrate with the global economy. The fault may be in the classification of goods in various categories which is hitting people most. Even in the United States, the highest GST rate is only 17%. Government probably needs to take a second look at the classification of the 5-tier rates: 2%, 5%, 12%, 18%, 28% and reclassify the commodities to fit them into different brackets.

The government is seriously concerned about the slowdown in the economy to its lowest in the last 10 years to 5.7% and perplexed because foreign exchange inflow is at its peak, 32 billion USD record flow last month, total foreign exchange reserves at a record near 400 \$ USD billion, banks are flushed with money after the

demonetisation nearly 1.7 trillion notes have come back into the system, terror funding has been dealt a blow, black money has come out, albeit even if it's in trickles, unproductive money stried in rice bins have come back into the system.

Then why the slow down? It's the mindset of the both the lender and loaners. Global recession is still not tapering off. Chinese economy is still overheated with piled up inventories. Europe is still struggling with the Greek crisis. US economy has picked up but the new dispensation does not give the same most favoured nation treatment to China and is seeking newer alliances with Japan and India to counter Chinese-Pakistan-North Korea axis for security reasons. China has a massive inventory of steel lying in godowns as there is no pick up from the west.

It's against this background that Modi called the review meeting on how best India should realign itself with the world trade.

Only two years ago, India outpaced a slowing China with its fast rising GDP growth. But the happy trend soon gave place to gloom as since 2016, the GDP growth has declined for six consecutive quarters, dipping to three-year low of 5.7% in the April-June quarter, with India losing the fastest-growing economy tag to China for the second straight quarter. "Government is keen to address structural problems facing the economy as well as transient issues with the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST), government sources said.

GST was to boost growth by 2 percentage points but technical glitches in the first two months of implementation created a scare of revenues falling way short of expectations. Sources say the two issues the PMO wants fixed quickly are sluggish exports and slow growth of private investments. Traders were exhausting their inventories to avoid paying GST.

(T N Ashok is a Corporate Consultant, Resident Editor and Writer on Economic Affairs).

A political revolution

By Michael Makri

Like me many of us in Meghalaya are expecting to see the 2018 elections as an opportunity for change and development and also opportunity to rectify the errors of the past. The 2018 electoral exercise should be seen as the transformational right of every voter to introduce a new set of our people's priorities and a new vision for our state, a new path of development for the coming five years. I am saying this because for so many years we have been cheated; we have been lied to, robbed of our dignity due to the effects that the many elections in the past have caused. Election promises, Parties' vision and mission change drastically after the election is won. In the 2018 elections therefore, we in Meghalaya are at the crossroads for change; change for the better or change for worse if we just cast our vote casually.

Officially, yes, there will be changes that we can expect to happen. There will be a new government, new leaders and faces that will occupy the seat of power and possibly a new set of ministers who will fill various posts. In all possibility there will be realignments of priorities and plans depending on

about electing a ruling government but about a movement that will radically change the status quo. We need a campaign that will not influence people to simply vote for a person, but for people to mobilize and be genuinely involved in the political process. We need a campaign that will put to the fore the people's interests for a mass-orientation and at the same time trustworthy and action oriented government. Can 2018's election see faces of new campaigners? Can we have a political revolution this 2018?

Deep down in the belief of every voter, a campaign is revolutionary if and when it can introduce radical ideas and make change happen. This sort of revolution will gather massive support from all walks of life. But will we have leaders as such? However, the enormity of this task should not stop voters from supporting progressive-minded candidates who will truly represent them in the government. Let us campaign therefore in this coming election for political groups that will advocate and fight for the dispossessed and marginalized sectors. After

The system is intact-the institutional functionality of bureaucratic processes, patronage politics, influence of traditional politicians and political dynasties, and ingrained corruption.

who wins the majority and who will stand as opposition in government. At the constituency level however there will be some old faces who had dominated for several years with the same tactics-or possibly new faces but carrying the same agenda. These are not the change that we the citizenry want. We want change in our societal life - better standards of living, better roads and communication. We want a dignified life because we elected leaders to help us reach this objective. We want a government that is by the people and for the people. It does not make sense that the government should impose rules on us to wear helmets for safety where the roads that it provides are riddled with potholes. These are the cause for accidents and deaths and not because one didn't wear a helmet. It does not make any sense when the government asks us to pay taxes even if we sell vegetables grown in our small farms when we don't know where the tax money disappears once it reaches the treasury. It does not any sense when the government asks teachers to be qualified to teach even in nursery classes when the government does not set standards for itself in education and administration. We want change, but not just a change of faces. We want a revolution.

But like it had happened in the past 11 elections, I'm inclined to believe that significant changes can happen in the political sense, but not in a fundamental and substantial way. The system is intact-the institutional functionality of bureaucratic processes, patronage politics, influence of traditional politicians and political dynasties, and ingrained corruption. These are realities that we cannot wipe out in simple election at least in Meghalaya, for as long as the old breed persists. Meghalaya's political system is so embedded that what is needed is no less than an overhaul. To change (or if not at least to modify) this system, we need to have an electoral revolution where a campaign is not

all, we have our future to lose if we let our fears take over our rage and might. Let us use all platforms available to campaign. Let us go for debates either at constituency level or state level bringing all leaders and candidates in a common platform to see who is competent and who is not. Citizenry! Will you sell your vote for the mere sake of a franchise that you are eligible to vote or will you want a revolution to take place?

Whether we like it or not, after our vote is cast, the results will be declared and some will win while some will lose. But after the elections, for revolutionary citizenry - our passion in defending our own fallible candidates should translate to broader fervour in fighting for our right to seek accountability. For revolutionists vigilance must be more intensified in demanding accomplishments from all candidates. As a revolution citizenry we have to elevate our role, not as mere spectators, but as active political actors in the project of our state and society. Revolution citizenries should not sit back, relax and allow ministers to minister the minimal. In this way, we will realize the political revolution, not as an elusive construct, but as a practical solution to our rotten system, which was running for too long in our society. In our small step toward becoming a progressive state, in our own significant ways, we can rise up and fight against special interests, rigged elections, and big money from some political parties.

It is high time that we in Meghalaya get a government that represents the people's interests and not the interests of the few wealthy and powerful goons who are taking our society for a ride just to meet their own selfish motives. With our collective movement, we can ignite the people's consciousness into something larger than ourselves. And that is what we call a political revolution with a human face. This is the need of the hour for drastic things to happen in our state. Citizenry! Shall we have a political revolution please!

TO THE EDITOR

Understanding Suicide

Editor,
This is in response to the article by Fabian Lyngdoh titled, "Life, death and suicide in the Khasi thought," (ST Sep 20, 2017) regarding suicide. Fabian Lyngdoh has clearly stated the Khasi position on life and death and he is an erudite man and prolific writer who commands respect when he speaks. However, I have to stand up for all those unheard, unseen and stigmatised people whom he mercilessly castigates in his article.

Suicide is a global public health problem that claims one person every 40 seconds worldwide. The rate in India and Meghalaya is showing this trend also and it is an incontrovertible fact that the rate is on the rise. We must also remember that for every completed suicide there are 25 more unreported unsuccessful attempts. The Government of India has enacted the landmark Mental Health Care Act 2017 which recognises suicide as an act of a person who needs urgent specialised psychological help and not a cognisable offence under the IPC.

Biblical scholars have not found any outright condemnation of the act of suicide in the Bible but what is the stated position of most of Christendom as far as the official position on suicide is concerned? Let us hope

that spiritual leaders will follow the legal position and practice their faith with humane and considerate feelings for those in distress. We know that this same Bible exhorts us not to judge.

For the Khasi the final act of taking one's life is immortalised through the legend of Ka Likai who gives her name to the world famous falls. We all share her pain and do not condemn her for her act but instead curse the nameless husband who forced her to take this extreme step.

I request the media, both print and electronic to be more sensitive when reporting suicides and do not use the term COMMIT but instead use DIE by suicide. This will minimise the trauma of family members who are known of as suicide survivors and who have to live a lifetime of self doubt, recrimination, remorse, self blame and stigma and through it all, face the eternal question WHY for every day of their remaining lives. The other 25 unreported attempters may then feel that someone understands their pain and may even be persuaded to avail of help!

Please remember that it is against all human instincts to take a life, especially one's own and it is not a perverted criminal mind that makes one take their own life but inconsiderate words, insensitive and unfeeling society, and a psychological distress that is unbearable, that does so. Let all who

read this know that every suicide is preventable if we take a minute to listen, understand and be a friend to anyone who expresses a desire to end their life. Please do not judge and instead gently direct them to mental health care which is available at all hospitals in Shillong, Tura and Jowai also. There is a 24 hour Toll Free Helpline that anyone can call at 1800 345 3655 at all hours of the day and night where free psychological support and help is available.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Sandi Syiem
Via email

Degeneration of human values!

Editor,
"It is the quality of our work which will please God and not quantity" said Mahatma Gandhi. Perhaps it is a human weakness that the more we get the more we want. But we also want quality in every sphere of our lives. We want quality food, quality drinking water, quality air to breathe, quality education, quality roads, quality health care, quality clothes, quality shoes, quality cars, quality entertainment, etc. As consumers, the query we have before the seller, after the price, is whether the quality of the product we wish to buy is good. We cannot and do not want to compromise with quality.

But the bigger challenge emerges when quality is

measured from yardstick set by others. Hence our own perception of quality is dictated by someone else. While we want clean and healthy drinking water, pure and good quality air to breathe, healthy and unadulterated food and much more it is equally true that our selfish pursuit of material wealth pushes us to pollute the water, air and surroundings. How can we have quality air and water without fighting those who are polluting our rivers, streams, forests, food and environment? How many of us can give up materialism and think of the collective good against personal advantage? We continue to grumble about everything under the sun but don't bother to extend our helping hand for the collective good in our words and deeds.

Man needs to understand that life has a lot to offer and that life finds meaning in the numerous actions we take. The path we choose and the choices we make defines who we really are. Hence life on earth must be lived purposefully because life is about love and compassion, friendship and camaraderie and unity amidst variety. In this way while seeking for the best of quality in every sphere of life man's intrinsic goodness must not be compromised. Man is the highest creation of God. He is showered with gifts of innocence, piety, purity and sanity but alas these gifts are now bartered for something material gain. The sorry state of affairs is the visible

deterioration of the quality of mankind morally, ethically and spiritually. Our inherent principles, innocence and goodness are replaced by fear, apprehension and trepidation. Human values have deteriorated and filled this world with pain, fear, anger and hatred. If human values were intact we would not have so much hatred, jealousy, anger, greed, assault, molestation, rape, murder, killing, dishonesty, treachery, deceit, etc.

Today life is more challenging for each one of us because it involves daily soul-searching. We need to introspect on our personal actions and journey in life. When we fail to combat actions that are detrimental to human values our life deteriorates. We lose our sanity and goodness, our purity of heart and mind that we are born and blessed with. What good would material wealth and quality be while there is an unabashed surrender of our innate good qualities of heart and mind to crass commercialism?

Aristotle writes: Quality is not an act, it is a habit." Can we make it a habit to imbibe qualities of goodness, piety, humility, modesty, tolerance, compassion, generosity and kindness? Yes! We surely can because we are carved in the image of God, blessed by the One above with assets that are priceless and invaluable!

Thereby we can make this world a living paradise; an edifice of love and togetherness.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Terrorism the present challenge!

Editor
This refers to your report "Swaraj attacks Pak at United Nations" (ST-Sep 24, 2017). India has never bowed before terrorism and will never do. Enough is enough! Terrorism is strongly condemned in all its forms and manifestations and stressed that there can be no justification whatsoever for any acts of terrorism. Terrorism of course is a major problem which is agitating every one of us. Terrorism is the greatest challenge for the world today as it is not only causing human suffering but also impeding peace & development. Both India & Pakistan should be pro active and should take some strict action against agents of terror before we lose more lives. India needs to put an end to all the terror outfits situated in their land permanently. We should be pro active and should take strict actions before we lose more lives.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

"Happiness is a choice. You can choose to be happy. There's going to be stress in life, but it's your choice whether you let it affect you or not."

--- Valerie Bertinelli

The Shillong Times

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Woman-unfriendly BHU

BANARAS Hindu University was once the hub of North Indian student politics. But it has now adopted an attitude to women which is not in conformity with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's, Beti Bachao slogan. A woman student was harassed on the campus last week. The way the University administration handled the case has raised eyebrows. The warden took the familiar objectionable line of asking questions about what the girl was doing late at night—a repeat of the initial response to the stalking case in Chandigarh some time ago. Protesting students were lathi charged by the police and many of them were seriously injured. True, chief minister Yogi Aditya Nath has ordered a high level probe but the attitude of the warden is shared by many in high places in Uttar Pradesh. So Modi's campaign for Beti Bachao has suffered a setback in his own constituency, Varanasi. The local administration has evidently not learnt from his enlightened outlook. Four women students were also attacked by blundering policemen on the BHU campus. FIR has been filed against a 1000 odd students. Five officials have of course been removed which may be construed as a confession of guilt. Why then are students hauled over the coals?

Obviously, BHU is still impregnated with a fusty patriarchal attitude. Last year, eight women were suspended for staging a dharna protesting against gender discrimination at the University. Hostels for women were not given vegetarian food, access to the internet and subjected to strict curfew timings. They appealed to the Supreme Court on those grounds but such restrictions did not apply to hostels with men. This kind of attitude decidedly violates the guiding principles of the Constitution. But what seems more ingrained which sets such principles at naught is the mindset in people who matter. It brings to mind a worrying matter. The Delhi High Court so eloquently sentenced to death the human beasts who raped and murdered Nirbhaya. Goodness knows when the sentence will be executed?

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Garro Hills coal mining

Much of the misgivings generated over Coal India taking over coal mining in Garo Hills should be removed by the Chief Minister assurance that this did not suggest "nationalisation of coalmines of the State," which it is not.

It has been explained that the Coal India Limited, a central public sector undertaking, was invited by the state government its self to undertake coal mining in Garo Hills and as such, this was no interference on the part of the Centre.

Modi regime is suffering from inferiority complex

A small growth rate fall is not a big thing

By Anjan Roy and Buddhadeb Ghosh

There is a sudden change in the air. From merry making over economic growth and buoyancy, the mood has suddenly swung into the opposite end. Many are speaking, including some in government, as if it is edging towards a crash.

Neither of these could be true. Neither was the economy flying near the sun nor is it down below the horizon. The swing factor was the revelation that in the last quarter growth clocked at 5.7 per cent. If 7.2 per cent was the expected growth rate for India, 5.7 per cent was not a far cry. Just around an additional one percentage point growth could after all be hit without too much of ado.

But then, where did it exactly slow down. Disaggregated figures of GDP growth give a hint. Surely industrial growth has been lagging behind for quite some time. It was just around 1 per cent and often slipped into the negative zone. Industrial capacity utilisation has been around 74-75 per cent on average. Even among the industrial segments, capital goods sector had been showing lacklustre performance. It also continued to show the same old riddle: it either grew heftily or it was crashing down deep into the negative.

However, the continued slack in the capital goods sector revealed one major weak spot. Investment has become like a distant star to be tracked with a telescope. That is because capacity utilisation is low, so that urge to make fresh investments is just not there.

Coupled with this, the high interest rates are damaging investment sentiment. Why? High interest rate means that investors will have to have "interest rate-plus level of returns". With high interest rates, which are the financing costs of investments, the investor got to earn more than the interest pay-outs to make that investment viable. So take for instance at 12 per cent interest rate, return expectations would hover around 17 per cent-plus to make that investment viable at the minimum. That is a difficult game at the present moment.

Why? Because, in a

situation where industry is saddled with underutilised capacity, the pricing power has shifted from the sellers to buyers. That is, industry and producers will not be in a position to jack up prices to recover more from their investment. This is further vindicated by the inflation figures which have been given out recently.

The disaggregated sectoral inflation figures reveal that manufactured goods prices have hardly moved. In fact, these have in patches fallen, when inflation has been guided only by rise in prices of select food articles. Thus, the manufacturers have not been able to meet the expectations of a price rise to fulfil their hopes of higher returns.

Secondly, there is another aspect to this growth slow down. The government is beginning to start suffering from its own success. The talk about GST introduction for a long time has depressed consumer sentiment. Now that GST is in place and its reach is spreading further afield, the consumer is getting rather inhibited in spending. Despite the talk of the rates being revenue neutral, its spread appears to have caught large swathes of the economy which till now did not simply pay taxes.

The taxes are thus inhibiting spending in these areas, there is reason to believe. Maybe, once again, the move to formalisation and tax compliance driven by the spreading GST network, covering even smaller and tiny sectors, are proving to be disruptive forces. At least for the time, these successes of the tax spread will hurt the functioning of the economy and thus drag the growth levers down.

Thirdly, although it is not yet clear, if the new system of indirect taxation is able to spread far and wide and tax collection increases heftily, it cannot but have an impact on consumer demand and spending. After all, tax revenues also mean drawing down the liquidity from the hands of consumers and investors and transferring these into government hands. And government is not always the best spender. Nor its spending has the best impact on economy. Some very rigorous recent studies

on the impact of public spending by RBI scholars do give such indications.

So the successful roll out of GST system will eventually result in a domestic consumption going down. In this eventuality, the government has to introduce fresh consumption demand. But there lies the riddle: higher government outlay might not be so beneficial. Additionally, emphasis on fiscal prudence would remain a check on this. So the government would be hamstrung in its efforts to spend and introduce a compensatory demand into economy.

But then, what is the way out. The short and easy step could be to turn the screws on imports. There is reason to believe that for at least last three years, imports were rising and a good part of domestic demand was being met from these imports. In certain sector this had become pronounced. Take for example steel.

Until last year, steel industry was facing a serious situation of lack of demand. With China facing a glut of steel production, Chinese steel was being dumped into the world, including in Indian markets. With complaints from Indian steel industry rising to a cacophony, as well as steel companies increasingly defaulting on their loans to banks, the government imposed duty on steel imports. In a year's time now, steel industry has turned around. Its production is rising, credit disbursement to steel units have once again resumed and the industry is no longer in the sick list.

Similarly, for electrical goods. Go to a market in India and try to buy simple and elementary electrical appliances manufactured in India, the chances are you will not find one. What you will find are well known Indian brands for electrical goods selling Chinese made appliances. They simply stamp their brand names on Chinese imports. That might be lucrative for individual companies, but disastrous

for the industry.

Thus, what are the possible steps the government could quickly take to address the incipient problem of slow down now.

For the short term, cut down interest rates, even at the cost of raising the inflationary pressures a bit. The chances are that with favourable monsoon and good supply lines, prices won't shoot.

Secondly, seek ways of compressing imports of consumer items. This can be done by partly raising tariffs and partly by selectively imposing non-tariff barriers. These could then translate into higher demand for domestic items.

Thirdly, government may consider to speed up its investment programme. Already, lot of investments in infrastructure sector have been lined up. Let these be speeded up a little. That may not immediately jack up deficit, as these would have been budgeted already.

Lastly, government should consult a government psychiatrist, if there are some. The present government is creating a crisis where there is none. A small little sluggishness in growth need not become a fully-blown out crisis. It is like taking every decimal point in the national income statistics too seriously. An economy is an organism, it can sometimes feel fine; it can also feel somewhat feverish.

The government seems to have some psychological problems: it has an insecurity issue. It always has to flaunt that now is the best of times. This also means the government has an inferiority complex. It feels someone else could have done better.

So then, advice to the government from lay persons: introspect about your thinking process, take a few modest steps (instead of always thinking of Big Reforms) and with luck, we should get over the slack. (IPA Service)

Rebuilding Kashmir: Is it possible?

By Ananya S Guha

There is no doubt that the border confrontation with Pakistan is no longer limited to skirmishes. It is actually a war going on, with daily exchange of fire. Pakistan continues to attack unabashedly with India understandably retaliating. Sushma Swaraj's speech in the UN Legislative Assembly, in retort to her counterpart's was indeed gutsy, but may have been cut short. Two wrongs do not make a right, and counter provocation may be just enough to cause further damage. Pakistan's image in the world is slowly going for a toss even in front of one of her best allies, the US earlier. So the damage control would be: keep a little quieter, hammer out the relevant points, that is all. Instead our External Affairs Minister chose to advice Pakistan, and pontificate on India's developmental progress. That will result in further retaliation, which has already begun.

Unless India understands that the focal point of the issue with Pakistan is Kashmir and Kashmir alone, there can be

developmental work there. Winning over the people is not to raise anti-Pakistan slogans but pro Kashmiri ones.

This is perhaps the most crucial phase of Kashmiri negotiations. Earlier India had for some time negotiated with it as an integral part of the country, but Pakistan hit where it hurts, and coupled with a general apathy towards Muslims in India, if not antipathy, things began to crumble. But rebuilding can be done. A national consensus cutting across party lines should be arrived at. The local government must be given more say in matters of day to day administration and coming up with ideas, in terms of rebuilding economy, society and education.

That brings us to the context of nationalism, precisely nation building. Instead of having this endless debate on nationalism visa vis patriotism, a la Bharat Mata, we should focus on nation building given the obvious flaws there. That cannot be

"The people of Kashmir, tragically enough are caught in the cross fire of terrorism and the army. The Indian army must act as offering panacea, rather than uttering threats. The politico-civilian lines must be clearly demarcated so that common people do not suffer wantonly."

no truce. So what can be done? Win the people of Kashmir over, alienate them from terrorists, draw up a course of massive campaign in the state, get them more into education, start more developmental work and mobilize youth for social and community work. The people of Kashmir, tragically enough are caught in the cross fire of terrorism and the army. The Indian army must act as offering panacea, rather than uttering threats. The politico-civilian lines must be clearly demarcated so that common people do not suffer wantonly. So, if the focal point is Kashmir, then there must be constant stock taking of what is happening there, army intervention, and dialogue between the government political partners must be continued regularly in the manner of day to day appraisals and problem solving. Once India veers to the state of Kashmir only, looking towards peace and developmental activities there, the LOC matter can take a back seat with vigilant activities carried out. Focus on the state, tell the people we are there for you, go into more socio economic measures, and take the people along. Otherwise an already discordant society will be fuelled by politicians of various hues and militants sneaking into the state. The policy should be dual: assuage sentiments and at the same time nab terrorists. Separate terrorism from common people, so that they do not feel caught in the cross fire. Tell them they are Indians and they need to be protected from terrorists. Easier said than done, but there should be massive internal propaganda for this. The solutions are: rebuilding education and socio economic and developmental work. Look at road conditions, road connectivity, subsidize rations in villages at least and try to go in for all round

done by shying away from diversity. If diversity has caused social, political, ethnic and religious discord then these must be tackled. If diversity has caused separatism and demand for state or country then the problems have to be solved by transference: local autonomy as has been done in North Eastern states, power and social economic autonomy or development. Things have improved in certain respects but in Tripura recent developments do not augur well. Manipur continues to fester. Nation building in the Indian experiment towards a consolidated nation state, still continues after seventy years of freedom. The dialogue is not between nationality and nationalism. The monologue should be nation building underpinned by the diversity of the country. This can be achieved by imaginative policies on developing villages, telecommunications beyond districts to the blocks, educational development focusing on school education, tackling poverty, housing and of course the much talked about cleanliness.

There is no need to talk about a developed nation now. Develop it first. Housing facilities for the poor should be a priority and track must be kept on sustaining BPL efforts. Nationalism and nation building are perforce realities based on indices of actually taking action on the above rather than falling back upon statistics. When there is actual development this will show.

So introducing process of development in backward and troubled rife areas is the first step towards nation building, rebuilding and consolidating Nationalism. No amount of intellectual debate will sort out the thorns, a legacy of foreign rule, and financial impropriety, draining off the country's resources.

TO THE EDITOR

Rape a social curse

Editor,

This refers to your eye-catching report "Over 400 rape cases pending in courts" (ST-Sept 25, 2017). Not a single day passes without a report on rape incidents. According to the law, rape of a woman carries a punishment which varies from seven years in jail or life imprisonment while for Police and other officials the proposed punishment is 10 years plus a fine. Under section 498 A (IPC) both physical and mental cruelty are punishable crimes but the authorities do not take action. According to the Government's statistics twenty five rapes are committed in the country everyday but the unofficial record is in very large numbers. Rape is a sexual as well as cultural attack which has become a great social problem today. The negative social attitude towards the victims of such cases creates serious psychological problems and people look down upon a victim of rape, whereas a woman who has gone through such a traumatic experience needs social and emotional support. Moreover the rape victim

has to undergo a process which is not pleasant for her in life. Thinking of our society has to be changed as there are many instances where the society advises the rape victim to forget the matter in spite of spending expenses in filing case. Law must demonstrate that it will come down with a heavy hand on offenders. There are many rape cases which have become the headlines of the leading newspapers but timely action is not taken. One should see that by giving a deterrent punishment to the rapist the evil of rape would not be solved. Once it is proved that the person is guilty of rape he should be hanged.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

Whither media freedom

Editor,

Your editorial, "Journalists' life on the line" (ST, Sep 23, 2017), is right in pointing out - "The gory death of Santanu Bhowmik a journalist with a local television channel in Tripura should set the alarm bells ringing." As a matter of fact, India has slipped three places from 133rd in 2016 to 136th this year in World Press

Freedom Ranking Index, which is released by the international free speech advocate Reporters Without Borders. In a political IPL match between the ruling and opposition parties, the media cannot take the role of cheerleader of any one team in a democracy. Indeed, the fourth estate must be the third umpire to help the umpires on the field. It is not cricket if the third umpire is to work under a reign of terror.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Suicide: Different perspectives

Editor,

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Sandi Syiem for pointing out in his letter "Understanding suicide" (ST September 26th, 2017) that I had mercilessly castigated people through my article, "Life, death and suicide in the Khasi thought" (Sept. 20th, 2017). It could have really appeared that I had done so judging from a particular point of view. The peculiar thing is that we human beings understand only about 30 per cent of each

other's thoughts and feelings (my own estimate), but we can still go on together for thousands of years, and thank God for that. Let us roughly estimate that man can express through his words or writings only 50 per cent of what he really thinks and feels deep in his mind and heart, and those who hear or read his words shall understand them in various ways according to their own viewpoints. But on the whole they shall understand only 50 per cent of what the words really mean as understood by the speaker or writer. Human language through words, only dimly portrays the speaker's real thoughts and feelings. Words are useful for the practical and utilitarian side of things, but when it comes to emotions and sentiments, as someone has sung: "You say it best when you say nothing at all."

But to the comments of a person like Dr Sandi Syiem, whom I highly respect, I feel obliged to respond, for by saying nothing at all would amount to silent contempt. I am grateful as his letter has indirectly reinforced my belief that no one can be so transcendental as to be able to view things and see the truth from a universal point of view. Our particular points of view are conditioned by many factors, such the

profession we are occupied with, the religious beliefs we are in, the experiences we have encountered in life, the situations of the immediate surroundings in which we live every day, etc.

I agree with Dr Sandi that it is against human instincts to take one's own life, and that suicide is caused by an insensitive and unfeeling society and the psychological distress that is unbearable. In my article I had also written that the society has lost its character of a physical, mental and spiritual refuge for the individual members. The peculiarity is that today's insensitive and unfeeling society seems to be made up of hypersensitive individuals. As individuals, we tend to become highly sensitive, but as a collective we become miserably insensitive. I leave it to others to argue, whether it is individuals' hypersensitivity and egoism that creates an insensitive society, or it is an insensitive society that breeds hypersensitive individuals. Whatever may be the case, my article intended to say that the society must be more responsive to problems of the individuals, and at the

same time to discourage the evolution of social practices that encourage or push individuals to suicide. There are many living 'Ka Likai' who need love and attention right now while they are still alive, but the society would probably shed tears with sympathy only when they are dead. Though developments in the field of psychology had immensely contributed in understanding the nature of the human mind and in solving many social problems, but I believe that religions still have a big role to play because psychology alone does not hold the key to all human existential problems, as the person lurking deep inside the unconscious mind is not only a mental person but much more of a spiritual being who is ultimately endowed with freedom in spite of the numerous mental chains binding him.

Yours etc.,
Fabian Lyngdoh
Via email

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

“Experience, as a desire for experience, does not come off. We must not study ourselves while having an experience.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Smiling Hills

THE great Indian festival has caused a cease fire in Darjeeling and the hills are smiling for the Pujas. Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) President, Bimal Gurung declared an end to the ongoing strike in Darjeeling for 104 days. It was in response to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's appeal to him to terminate the prolonged agitation. Singh said that dialogue should be the only way to diffuse a crisis in a democracy. An official level meeting will take place soon. The Home Minister's statement significantly contained no reference to the West Bengal government or to a tripartite meeting. Rajnath Singh's promise of holding talks within a fortnight should be fulfilled before the third leg of the bilateral dialogue between the GJM and the West Bengal government slated for October in Kolkata. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has all along reiterated that the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland was not acceptable but that the issue was not within the ambit of the state government. Meanwhile, the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) has been rebooted with Binoy Tamang as Chairman in place of Bimal Gurung.

Darjeeling woke up to a series of cellphone pings heralding the resumption of internet services and was back to social media with a vengeance. Online banking transactions have begun. Traders have announced their decision to be back in business. Vehicles have started running between the hills and the plains. During the 104 days of agitation, eleven persons were killed and several injured. Tourism and the tea trade had taken a bad hit. It is not clear yet if the GJM has taken a long-standing decision to cry halt to an unnecessary agitation. The situation will hopefully clear up before the end of October.

LOOKING BACK

May 1, 1989

Monitoring group to ensure price control

The Government will set up a monitoring group to see that the benefits of concessions announced after the budget presentation reach the targeted sections and prices are brought down, Finance Minister Mr S B Chavan told Lok Sabha today. Replying to the three day debate on the Finance Bill, which seeks to give effect to the 1989-90 budget proposals, Mr Chavan said this mechanism was set up since it was the usual experience that immediately after the budget presentation the prices were hiked and the subsequent concessions were not reflected in the prices.

Mr Chavan turned down the demand from members from all sides to raise the income tax exemption limit to Rs. 25,000 as it would be a big revenue loss which the government could ill afford. He said if the exemption limit were to be raised to Rs. 225 crores and 9,00,000 people would be out of the tax net. An increase in the exemption limit to Rs. 25,000 would mean a revenue loss of Rs. 550 crores within 1.7 million people going out of the tax net. On the front, Mr Chavan said the rate of inflation had come down. But there was no room for complacency. Every effort would be made to see that the consumer price index did not go up beyond a limit.

Mr Chavan said one opposition member had said that the Government had produced a pro-poor budget because of an election year. The member had at least recognized it as a pro-poor budget, which indeed, it was. He referred to the Prime Minister's initiative in ushering in the panchayati raj and introduction of the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana. The Prime Minister had taken the lead in introducing this revolutionary programme after touring the country extensively and talking to

various sections of the people. This is a basic thing he has given which eventually would lead to a strong superstructure, he said. Earlier, he said, the district collectors used to prepare the list of poverty stricken people, now the panchayats would do this.

PHCs inaugurated in Garo Hills

The growing complaints against the health services was attributed to the "lack of effective communication between the patients and the medical staff" by the Meghalaya Minister of State for Health, Mr C B Marak who urged upon the latter to establish a "personal rapport" with the patients. The Minister was inaugurating a ten bedded primary health centre at Bajenddoba in the East Garo Hills on Saturday.

Mr Marak also stated that the responsibility for shaping the State's destiny lies with the people who have to shoulder more responsibilities and cooperate with the authorities in health care programmes for the sources. Mr Marak also urged upon the students to take up science subjects to enable the State to tide over the acute shortage of technical personnel. Others who spoke at the inaugural function were the Meghalaya Director of Health Services, Dr S P Bhattacharjya and the District Medical Health Officer of East Garo Hills Dr P Barua.

Earlier on Sunday, Mr Chamberlin B Marak inaugurated a primary health centre at Tikrikilla in the West Garo Hills last week. Mr Marak, in his inaugural address, he, laid special emphasis on health education and personal hygiene in order to attain the goal of "Health for all by 2000 AD".

The impact of Demonetisation, cattle slaughter ban and GST on rural economy

By Phrangngi Pyrtuh

Rural India is at a critical stage. Rural distress is back with a vengeance and this time much of it has to do with faulty economic policies executed over the last few months. Despite India becoming a fast developing country it is still an agricultural country with about 830 million populations residing in the rural areas. Effectively, the economy of rural India is concentrated in agricultural related activities. So far India's growth story has been exclusive, one that benefits mostly the organized segment of the secondary and tertiary sectors. Liberalization and the resulting reform policies have not benefitted the rural economy and those who live rural India. With a substantial vote bank the key to political power in India lies in the rural areas. Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2014 election campaign promised to double farmer's income by 2022. Unfortunately political rhetoric is easier said than done. Different indicators have so far pointed to a downward spiral and pressure of rural income with increasing distress that have aggravated in recent months.

Unabated farmer's suicide in different states and continuous farmer's protest in the national capital and in different parts of the country are symptomatic of bad times. Schemes such as MGNREGS that remained a legacy of the UPA government continued to provide some form of assistance to the rural population and its income generating importance is realized even by the BJP government. The state of the rural population in India is precarious. The last thing they need is a government that is insensitive to their problems and basic living conditions.

In a span of eight month, the Government unleashed a spate of policies the effects of which are still being felt to this day. The impact of

these policies is felt most by the rural population. Demonetization, cow slaughter ban and GST roll out have further added to the woes and problems of the rural sector. Demonetization has contributed to a decline in the national income which at 5.7% is at a three year low. Many are sceptical of the economy picking up pace in the next few months with the effects of demonetization probably lasting more than anticipated. The effects of GST roll out will be clear in the coming few months but there are reports that certain critical sectors such as India's craft sector that is mostly rural based and offering employment to millions is suffering enormously.

We are told that problems relating to demonetization and GST are temporary and 'transitory'. These policies, we are told, are reform measures to consolidate India's growth story. Irrespective of these arguments it cannot be denied that the two policies have caused much hardship to people (even deaths), something which have not happened to India in its endeavour to reform and liberalize itself since 1991. The sector that bears the brunt from these reform measures is the rural sector.

Another tenacious policy that could completely dismantle the fragile economic set up in the rural economy is the cattle slaughter ban. Allowed to continue on its own, this policy could probably sound the death knell to the rural economy. The notification on Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules was notified on 26th May 2017 and stayed by the Madras High court on 30th May and finally by the Supreme Court on the 12th July. The Apex court specifically stayed the "No slaughter" rules issued by the Union environment ministry. The cattle rules

prohibit cattle trading except for agricultural purposes. In addition only bona fide agriculturist can trade cows etc in animal markets.

The three policies are not alike and have distinct identities and impact. While it may be reasonable (for some) to argue that demonetisation and GST are part of reform packages, the same cannot be argued in favour of the cattle slaughter ban. In fact the BJP government has asserted that it only seeks to prevent animal cruelty. The cattle slaughter policy is definitely not envisaged as a reform measure that India seeks to continue post 1991 liberalization. It is no wonder that it has generated more controversies than demonetisation and GST.

A comprehensive and objective reading of the cattle rules reveal complete lack of awareness and understanding of ground realities. It is simply not practical as it ignores long standing tradition and practices of the rural community on cattle usage and disposal. Moreover the rules of the policy are clear violation of market principles that has been the hallmark of India's growth story post 1991 liberalization. The cattle rules actually make mockery of the reform processes that have been going on in different sectors of the economy. For instance the cattle rules involve bundles of paperwork for cow traders that include identity cards and ownership documents after which the farmer needs to make not one but five copies of the 'sale' and submit it to the local revenue officer, the local veterinary officer, the animal market committee as well as one copy each to the seller and buyer.

The entire process of verification and

submission is nothing short of the license permit raj system that the liberalization agenda of 1990s sought to dismantle. The government that is keen to prevent animal cruelty has put in place a series of procedures that would provide opportunity for red tape, nepotism, corruption et al, features that plagued the Indian economy before 1991. The irony is that only the rural population will suffer the consequences of such an ill thought policy that may or may not have to do with religious sentiments. The Supreme Court realized the stress and hardship the bandh could cause to the farmers and stated that 'livelihood of people' cannot be compromised. New rules are being awaited and it is hoped that reason and not prejudices will prevail.

The point of the article is that the rural economy in India continues to be in doldrums even after liberalization process has entrenched the country. However nothing much has changed for the rural population post liberalization and policies such as demonetisation, GST and ban on cow slaughter will exacerbate rural distress which is omnipresent in the rural economy. Moreover, even after 20 years of liberalization the rural economy of India still remains the most regulated and controlled sector of the country. The cattle slaughter policy is an indication that there is hardly any government that cares for the welfare of the rural population. What the rural economy needs is liberalization that is specific to its requirement which is different from that of other sectors of the economy. The rural economy is a struggling sector. Policies such as GST, demonetisation and the ban on cattle slaughter will further maim it.

TO THE EDITOR

Vigilantism gone wrong

Editor,

The incident that occurred at Pynthor is not only unfortunate but also alarming. It is unfortunate because things should not have happened the way they did. One is appreciative of the fact that a conscientious citizenry is the need of the hour and the Seng Kynthei has highlighted their attentiveness by patrolling the locality between 12 midnight to 2 am every night. Thereby, the Seng Kynthei was doing their duties that night. But what was alarming, wrong and unethical was the way in which the matter was handled. There certainly was no need for the ladies to have taken the law into their own hands and to have humiliated the young girls to teach them a lesson. The ladies failed to think twice over the repercussions their actions could have on the young minds. These young girls are of the age of their daughters and no matter what, one is sure that none of them would have liked to see their children being subjected to such humiliation. What was needed at that time was a calm and serene mind rather than overpowering anger and rage to handle the matter effectively. If the act of the girls were immodest, in spite of the warnings and counselling decided upon, the matter should still not have been handled in such an inappropriate manner. As a result the dedication of the

Seng Kynthei to help maintain peace and harmony in the locality has lost its essence and meaning. Their efforts have gone to waste as the highlight is on their impulsive action rather than understanding why our young girls go astray.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Rail-Line or Trojan horse!

Editor,

On August 30th last when Mr. Rajen Gohain, the Union Minister of state for Railways had visited Shillong, it was reported that he had come down heavily on the present Congress led govt. of Meghalaya for putting on hold the Tetelia-Byrnihat railway project. Although the Minister had spoken the fact but he also indicated that he could not care less about the popular objection and fears raised by the KSU and other NGOs, some of whom since months back have had to suffer incarceration till date over this rail-line agitation. Notably, the core mission of the Central Govt. is to chart a scheme to connect a rail-line up to Shillong, and thereafter to other parts beyond. It pleases me no end to hear that the Union Minister concerned had averred that such communication links could definitely go the extra-mile in boosting tourism, generate employment scope for lakhs of unemployed youth; and to cap it all, the Minister assured, farmers could export their farm produce and thereby become

a game changer in the agricultural dynamics of Meghalaya. Such mind-blowing and rosy assurances ought to trigger off public movement to prod the incumbent State Govt. to resume the shelved railway-link construction without more ado. Further, this Union Minister has hinted that if BJP comes to power in Meghalaya in the 2018 assembly polls, the saffron party would give foremost priority to interlink viable parts of Meghalaya onto the railway networks and thereby bring about breath-taking developments to the State. And I, for one, can hardly wait to see such an ambitious project being transferred into reality.

However, in my sustained interactions with many an indigenous citizen and the intellectual elite in sequel to what the Union Minister in question had publicly asserted on rail-line connectivity, I was given to understand that it must be only a hidden agenda of the NDA led govt. at the Centre, who, by means of this communicative vista, can have access on to the Uranium rich deposits of West Khasi Hills where rail-transport can prove very handy in tapping and ferrying uranium out of the land of Hynniewtrep, not caring a damn about the incorrigible health hazards and the deadly ramifications owing to radiation-effects on us, as

self-evidently exemplified at Jaduguda in Jharkhand where the poor and ignorant folks have to grin and bear the interminable stigma of physical afflictions to date in the wake of flagrant exploitation of this radioactive metal. Incidentally, the Indo-China confrontation at Doklam has of late occasioned the belligerent Chief of Army staff, B. Rawat, to boast that India can deal with any twin and synchronous attacks from both Pakistan and China and this has lent credence that India is frantically exploring uranium sources nation-wide to make itself a strong country with nuclear capability against its immutable hostile neighbours. It is a natural corollary, therefore, that the saffron Govt. at the Centre should be keenly eyeing the so-called yellow cake of Khasi Hills. Rail links must have been contrived as a Trojan horse to mine this highly radioactive element from this land of Hynniewtrep. If that is so, will the indigenous and conscientious electorates of Meghalaya favour BJP and its associate allies in next year's elections to the State assembly?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong

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.

Dodging Anti-Defection Law Crooked party politics

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

Tamil Nadu today presents the most confused Party politics and utterly complicated political situations challenging law and conventions. Changes happen on an hourly basis making it difficult for people to keep track of them and it is a puzzle for decision-making authorities to handle them from an impartial and legally sound stand.

Pertinently, political developments since former Chief Minister Jayalalitha demise are as such a portrayal of the extent of manipulations possible in our political system and functioning as the capabilities and readiness of institutions and functionaries to make the utmost use of situations. This result is the emergence of several political lessons worth learning.

Events reached an important stage when 18 MLAs of ruling Party AIADMK were disqualified by the Speaker under Schedule 10 of the Constitution. They had submitted separate letters personally to the Tamil Nadu Governor withdrawing support to the Chief Minister. Interestingly, they seemed to have carefully distinguished their Party affiliation, support to the Government and support to the incumbent Chief Minister.

The disqualified legislators filed a petition in the Madras High Court against what they termed as "illegal" disqualification and urged the Court to quash the Speaker's order. The Court extended the stay of a floor test from 20 September till 4 October to determine a majority in the Assembly but refused to stay the disqualification of the 18 MLAs.

This interim order pending final disposal of the case restrains the Election Commission from declaring the 18 seats as vacant or issuing notification for conducting election to these seats.

Undeniably, the Court order partially favours all the litigants and interested parties in this case and concerns the very survival of the State Government and the Legislative Assembly. The disqualified MLAs neither got nor were denied all that they wanted. Consequently, the order bestowed them with hope and despair while they await the final verdict.

The disqualified MLAs have got relief that the court did not endorse their disqualification, however, not from continuing suspense about the future of their tenure. The case manifests yet another type of Party politics which is moving farther and farther away from public interest, popular opinion and political ethics.

Undoubtedly, the 32 years old Anti-Defection Law incorporated in the Constitution by the 52nd amendment once welcomed as a deterrent for "Aya Ram, Gaya Ram" politics has now entered a new phase thanks to professional politicians refining its use and abuse in State politics.

Veritably crooked politics in every instance of defection brings forth new possibilities of dodging the Anti-Defection Law along-with fresh interpretations of situations warranting the application of the law!

Notably, the disqualification of 18 MLAs has reduced the strength of the Assembly from 233 to 215 and lowered the majority line from 117 to 108. This can help the State Government's survival in the event of a confidence or no-confidence motion.

Therefore, a test at this point defeats the purpose of the defectors and disappoints the principal Opposition Party DMK which is not far from a majority. While the Court's final verdict is awaited anxiously by the political actors the nation would like to know how the judiciary can save the country from unethical politics.

Under the Anti-Defection Schedule, a member of Parliament or legislature may be disqualified for voluntary resignation from his Party or for disobeying the directives of his Party's leadership on a vote, plainly votes against the Party whip.

Importantly, this Schedule has been interpreted by courts on several occasions with reference to State Assemblies

as circumstances surrounding the behaviour of MLAs are different. Each time different issues arise requiring judicial clarification and decision.

Thus, voluntary resignation has been explained to include publicly opposing the Party of which one is a member or stating support to another Party. In the present case, the Speaker contended that the actions of the dissident MLAs showed that they were "making efforts to align themselves with a Party other than the Party from which they were elected".

Citing their stay away from the State at a resort in Karnataka, the Speaker contended that it clearly showed that they had distanced themselves from the Party and were in the control of persons outside the Party.

Hence, the details are not simple and need reading into behaviour patterns and activities of dissident members to determine violation of allegiance to their Party and disobedience to the Party mandate.

True, inner Party democracy is a valuable concept for promoting a democratic Government. It is generally acknowledged that when issues are discussed within Parties, different opinions and views might be expressed, but once decisions are taken they become Party decisions to which all adhere. This applies to election of leaders also and is an internal Party issue to be discussed and settled within.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons for the Anti-Defection Amendment states: "The evil of political defections has been a matter of political concern. If it is not combated it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles that sustain it".

However, the Amendment cannot prevent Party manipulations and groupism by disgruntled members for leadership without leaving or splitting their Party or openly defying its dictates. Therefore, endless litigations and uncertainty in Government have arisen in many States involving the Anti-Defection Law.

Indeed, growing controversies often shift focus to identifying the real Party which means taking the fight down to Party workers at all levels. In effect, the issue can only confuse ordinary voters.

The Schedule also allows two-third members of a Parliamentary or legislative Party to merge with another Party or form a new one. As a result the Anti-Defection Law has thus encouraged the politics of arithmetical victory in more than one way --- some trying to "construct" and others to "deconstruct" a majority by playing the number game whereby every member is an invaluable asset for the Party.

Personalities play a major role in this number game. It is a common feature in all States --- Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand etc. Loyalty is to a person and not policies, be it for constructing or dismantling a majority. Disqualifying dissident members has become an easy course for proving legislative majority in many States.

Under the Anti-Defection Law the Speaker is the final authority to decide on disqualification. For a Speaker elevated to the post with the support of his Party often after long years of service to fully tear away from his Party roots and act as a neutral judge is not difficult to imagine. This is a difficult though not impossible task.

The Supreme Court in a recent order stated that the ruling of the Speaker's decision is not final, but subject to judicial review. In some cases as in Karnataka in 2011, disqualification of dissident members by the Speaker was annulled by the Court.

In the ultimate, the Anti-Defection law has been made for protecting proprieties of politics and personal conduct. Clearly our polity has to fulfill the nation's expectations. ---

-INFA
(The writers is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

“The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of the Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.”

--- Carol P. Christ

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 50 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

Where is the youth policy?

MEGHALAYA is one state that has functioned for close to 45 years without a policy even in some of the most critical areas such as health, education and agriculture. Much has been spoken about a youth policy considering that Meghalaya, like India, is a young state with a youth demography that is both a boon and a challenge. A young population means that the state has to plan for job creation and skills development. Government can no longer be the job provider. It only needs to create the conditions necessary for the private sector to step in and open up job avenues. Skilling the youth in different areas of interests would enable them to start up their own businesses. Indeed entrepreneurship is yet to take off mainly because of the lack of access to finance.

In 2012 Meghalaya launched the flagship programme – the Integrated Basin Development Programme with several verticals that seek to address key sectors such as water resources, horticulture, fisheries, entrepreneurship etc. Several youths have been trained on entrepreneurship development and some have been able to launch their own enterprises. But they are still too few to be counted. In April this year, the Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Zenith Sangma had informed that the State Youth Policy would be prepared by the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development (RGNID), Chandigarh and that the first draft would be put up on the Government website for public viewing by June end. This Policy was to be the guiding frame work for the government, civil society organisations and the NGOs to plan and design the programmes, which will meet the aspiration of young people. Till date this Policy has not been seen on the website and nor do we hear of its launch. How long does it take to come up with a Policy and why use outside consultants for every kind of work? Does Meghalaya not have local resources to come up with a Youth Policy? Will the next Government be any different or can we expect policies to come up on key areas of development?

Businessmen as MLAs: Is this the new normal?

By Patricia Mukhim

Recently I was at a meeting where a former minister and MLA was launching yet another of his business ventures. Other honourable invitees included fellow MLAs holding various positions in the MUA Government. The honourables in their speech lauded the MLA-businessman for conducting his business so profitably and for his rapid wealth ranking since he started his political career till date. They went into raptures about how wonderfully their colleague has balanced business and politics. One of them however, could not resist the urge to take a dig at his colleague. He said the MLA-businessman was perhaps more successful as a businessman than a politician. The MLA-businessman named the venture after his children and said they would run it. His colleague rebutted saying that the MLA-businessman would actually be the real driver while his children would be the face of the business.

Don't ask me why I was present at the function. I must have been on one of my sleep-walking jaunts. It is my firm conviction that an elected representative who is a public servant paid out of the public exchequer cannot be running a business simply because it is a conflict of interest. More so if the person also happens to be a minister in charge of a department that is also directly related to the business he conducts. We have seen how the Public Works Department (PWD) which was given to Sniawbhalang Dhar who owns a road construction company ended up in our roads having more potholes than ever before. Shillong roads and those in the periphery are in the worst condition ever. We all believed Dr Mukul Sangma to be highly cerebral but it's astonishing that he did not envisage the outcome of giving the PWD to a businessman. I wonder if the roads as they are at present would be an election issue or whether we will forget the most important issues as the elections draw closer. After all this has been our forte! I would not even be surprised if both Sniawbhalang Dhar and his brother Ngaitlang Dhar are re-elected in 2018. That would not only be a slap on our faces but it would also send the message that corruption and scams are kosher in Meghalaya and

that those who continue to raise their voices against corruption are idiots who have not learnt to live with the system.

An MLA being a public servant is not supposed to hold an office of profit. What is a business venture if not an office of profit? Why should office of profit be construed as such only when a person is earning from the public exchequer? The book, "Faultlines in Indian Democracy," by G Ramachandra Reddy lays out the problems that threaten our Democracy. Even when a blatant act of corruption is pointed out by media there is no public outcry. MLAs/ministers strut around as if they are paragons of virtue. People continue to vote them because the MLA continues to buy them off with money and pays for their personal needs. That's the value of democracy in this country and we still wonder why we are going down the gutter. Speaking about gutters have we ever seen roads in any part of the country that are built without making provisions for drains? Well, you see many such roads in Meghalaya.

Reddy points out that MLAs/MPs must be held accountable for business of profit also and not only for Office of Profit (Art 191). When a minister is also running a business it is inevitable that he will bend all the rules to facilitate his own business. This happened in the infamous Bellary mining case in Karnataka where the business is run by MPs, MLAs and ministers and where the revenue accrual is to the tune of Rs 5000 crore annually. As a result the mining regulations, Forest Conservation Act and Environmental Protection Act are violated with impunity. When those who make laws themselves violate all the laws then it is futile to expect the ordinary citizen to respect those same laws!

It is high time to have a constitutional amendment prohibiting elected representative from profiting from business. This might be the only way to deter businessmen from entering politics and for better people with no money to burn during elections to contest elections. If the law does not permit judges and bureaucrats from running businesses why should politicians be exempted from this rule? As of now, though

MLAs/MPs/MDCs are public servants and are liable for criminal action under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, they cannot ordinarily be booked under the disproportionate assets case for income accruing from the businesses they conduct since income from such business is legal as long as it is not prohibited by the law and the Constitution.

Another major flaw of Indian democracy is to allow former militants with blood on their hands to contest elections just because they have surrendered. The argument is that this will help in bringing durable peace. But will the criminal mind (I use the word criminal here because as far as I am concerned the agenda of the HNLC has been plain and simple extortion. There is not even a hint of sub-nationalism in their movement against the state) transform itself into a law abiding temple? Julius Dorphang has proven that he does not care about the law. He knows that raping a minor girl is an outrage but he did it because he thinks the law will never catch up with him. After all, the law never caught up with him when he was the Chairman of the HNLC! The fact that such law breakers are able to win elections also speaks about the completely uninformed electorate that votes on the basis of emotions or because they were paid money or because the candidate rendered them some personal favour. This is the bane of democracy!

Ironically, the state as the custodian of public welfare is not doing much to deepen democracy. The Election Commission has followed in the footsteps of all those who promote their products in the NorthEast by producing a song video with the most popular singers, asking those who have reached the voting age to enrol themselves. The ECI apparently wants the youth to have a sense of stake-holdership. Also the ECI believes that voting will empower the youth with the agency of voice and therefore they will engage and not secede from the system. A rather simplistic ideal I would say

because the youth have been voting since 1988 but have they engaged on issues that threaten to disrupt the democratic process? Have the youth raised a strong voice against corruption? Have the youth blown the whistle on any case of corruption till date and followed it through? Isn't it a fact that as we get closer to the election date, several football clubs and youth bodies will approach the candidates and ask them for money, ostensibly to strengthen their clubs or to buy football boots and uniforms? Are the youth not the ones who demand money from candidates for picnics and sightseeing trips? So the ECI's argument of enrolling youth to make a difference to the quality of democracy does not cut any ice. If you ask me the ECI should be conducting mass awareness programmes which would include street plays, discussions in the rural outback etc on the diminishing returns of voting on the basis of clan, religion and for personal reasons. While voting is a personal choice there has to be a community discussion on what sort of candidates will be able to best serve the constituency.

It is also time to create platforms where voters can question their candidates on the promises made. Those who have been MLAs for the last five years must give a report card in writing to their constituents. This is a right we should demand. We need to know how each penny of the MLA fund is used. We need to know why the bulk of the fund is used up in the penultimate year and we also need to know who are the beneficiaries who have received cheques from the MLA and what are the grounds on which they qualify to receive that special assistance.

The problem with our people is that they believe the MLA is using his private funds to assist the needy. This is a fallacy that needs to be deconstructed and the ECI has an obligation to the people of this country to do more than just enrol voters.

The Rohingya conundrum

Editor,
This refers to Prof DK Giri's article, "What could India do?" (ST, September 13, 2017). In his famous 1893 Chicago speech, Swami Vivekananda said, "I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth." So if religion of the refugees like Rohingyas starts influencing the decision whether they are to be given shelter in our country or not then it will definitely show disrespect to Swami Vivekananda and his ideals. At a time, when we are celebrating his Chicago address, we must not forget what he had actually said in it, "We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

2019 poll priorities overtake economic woes

One such - electricity to all by December 2018

By S. Sethuraman

The Modi Government has sought to sidetrack gut issues in economy's decline, playing populism ahead of 2019, with a new promise to ensure electricity to all households in the country before the end of 2018. For economy watchers, his sop is revival of the discarded PM Economic Advisory Council (EAC), reconstituting it in his fourth year of office, to "analyse" issues and "advise" the Prime Minister thereon.

But this political gimmick cannot wash away any of the chronic ills besetting the economy with growth slowdown touching a low of 5.6 per cent (GVA) in the first quarter of 2017/18. Inflation is on rise, food and fuel in particular, also compounded by GST hassles, while the latest lowering of weather-dependant kharif foodgrain crop estimates would add another layer to the bleak price outlook in this fiscal year.

Manufacturing continues to be on low key and there are hardly signs of revival in investment or easing of stresses in the state-owned banking system. Government is cognizant of what needs to be done to restore health to the banking sector but there is dilly-dallying both in regard to enforcement of an action plan agreed on in consultation with RBI or moving forward on recapitalisation of select banks to facilitate resumption of stalled bank credit.

The Prime Minister and his political advisers had apparently decided that it would be politically unwise, at this stage, to concede ills of the economy, greatly attributed by critics, to demonetisation and a hasty launch of GST. For Mr Modi, demonetisation remains a total success, if nothing else it could at least be claimed to "clean up", the economy of the future.

To give in to other sectoral weaknesses as well, would amount to admission of failures in the "maximum governance" theory of the Modi Government. With RSS cadre reports also of signs of dissatisfaction in the country over emerging trends, a political strategy was considered expedient in run up to 2019.

Developments in UP entrusted by Mr Modi to Yogi Adityanath are far from salutary and the most recent student unrest and police actions in BHU add to unedifying spectacles in this largest state, a hunting ground for BJP. All this at a time when BJP leadership under Mr Amit Shah is determined to firmly secure the party's hold on power in Gujarat, MP, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan in state elections before Lok Sabha poll 2019.

Apparently sensing a weakening of the ground under them, given the visible unrest among students in the country along with continuing farmer distress and new agitations for reservation in jobs, the Modi-Shah duo held an extended session of BJP's National Executive to ward off immediate perils.

There was resounding endorsement of the leadership and its economic and foreign policies - areas where opposition attacks on the majoritarian party had become strident. The Prime Minister was praised in particular for his handling of

Doklam dispute with China and the assertion of India's interests in its vital region.

Moreover, the Pime Minister had the party adopt his "Sankalp Se Siddhi", ("New India Movement" 2017-22). a Modi five-year plan for BJP's continued dominance in the polity. He has also been promoting at the same time, in a reversal of history, an iconic status for the RSS idealogue, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in place of Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of Free India.

A six-point political agenda in BJP Political Resolution seeks to rid the country of poverty, terrorism, casteism, communalism, separatism and corruption to realise the Prime Minister's vision of a New India by 2022. Mr Modi has been seeking "transformative changes" to usher in a New India. First, Niti Aayog, his creature, was to come up with those changes. Its tentative plans made no headway.

And the Niti Aayog itself has now become headless and there is no indication whether it remains in place. The Vice-Chairman Mr Arvind Panagaria has already relinquished office and returned to academia (USA) while the No.2, Mr Bibek Debroy, renowned economist, has now been named Chairman of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (EAC). There are four other part-time members, noted economists.

The current economic slowdown involves issues of macro-economic importance and the new EAC may perhaps be asked to address them. Whether the new mechanism hit up by Mr Modi in a critical situation is asked to do so or not, a difficult situation is sought to be underplayed by senior BJP Ministers. Mr Gadkari, Minister for Transport, called it "teething problems" for GST while Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley, in a lowered tone, talked of "a little dip" in growth in the first quarter.

Mr Jaitley had earlier admitted to too low a growth in April-June which cannot be lightly dismissed and investment and related policies would have to be looked into. In Government circles, even a degree of fiscal stimulus was not ruled out. The other prevalent view is such a boost for growth may be of little consequence beyond worsening fiscal deficit at a time of a global write-down of India's growth outlook this year.

Even the RBI is expected to bring down its August growth estimate for this year at 7.3 per cent (GVA) when the Monetary Policy meets early in October. Despite rising CPI and WPI prices, Government would rather like RBI to turn accommodative from neutral monetary stance.

So, on a day the country was keyed to look for a composite economic package to be announced by the Prime Minister to stimulate growth recovery, with both fiscal and structural measures to strengthen demand and supply along with some reforms on further opening up the economy, the Modi Government has shown itself more concerned with populist schemes to entice the electorate in 2019. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Whither justice?

Editor,

The result of the personal interview conducted by the District Selection Committee Tura for the post of Lower Division Assistant was declared on the 26th of September, 2017. It is utterly disappointing to hear the news of the selected candidates. Ms Annie Valentina D. Shira, who is currently the Additional Deputy Commissioner of West Garo Hills and Secretary of DSC, Tura has selected her son, Achilles Tangrik D. Shira and daughter, Francesca Tigana D. Shira in the second and fourth positions respectively. According to sources, Francesca Tigana D. Shira did not secure the minimum marks in her typing test which is the preliminary examination for the selection in the written examination and tracing back to the academic records of Achilles Tangrik D. Shira, it is clear that he is incapable of securing the second position. Certainly, the question paper for the written examination and personal interview must

have been leaked to them. Ms Shira, the acclaimed MCS officer who also served as a teacher in Christian Girls Higher Secondary School, Tura for the past several years stated in the Examination Hall that "ONLY THE BEST OF THE BEST WILL BE SELECTED." This means her children are the best of the best but they never succeeded in the previously held MPSC and DSC examinations. However, under the chairmanship of their mother, a clandestine act takes place. This exam was a joke and the result has cost the time, hard work and determination of the deserving candidates who have now lost hope in DSC. No Secretary has ever disgracefully stolen the seats of the deserving candidates the way she has. A deaf ear has been given to the complaints made by the candidates and filing RTI served no purpose.

With high position comes great responsibility, however, A V D Shira has clearly deprived and practised fraud towards the deserving candidates. Is it fair to steal the rights of the youth who have dedicated their time and effort to achieve success and how long shall this continue?

Yours etc.,
Dalbot Shira,
Via email

Migration, citizenship and indigenous woes

Editor,

Migration is driven by demographic disparity, discrimination and opportunities. While Canada welcomed more than 40,000 Syrian refugees, 11 million Mexicans represent the largest unauthorized immigrant group in the US. India receives the world's largest undocumented migration flow of up to 17 million people from Indo-Bangladesh corridor. India witnessed 4.7 million Hindus and Sikhs migrating from West Pakistan after partition. Communal riots and economic stagnation during liberation of Bangladesh have forced minority Hindus to leave. The East Pakistan Displaced Person (EDEP) colony at Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi, Bihar, Orissa and Mumbai are where they are settled. People chose the Barak valley after Sylhet

joined East Pakistan. Kolkata saw mass flow of migration due to its industrial development. It is an undeniable fact that large-scale migrations have illegally taken place over many decades from Mymensingh to Assam and still continues. The indigenous Tripuris became minority in the princely state of Tripura.

The Indira-Mujib accord for granting citizenship to those that entered India by Mar 25, 1971 has created its own problems. The North East Frontier Agency, now Arunachal Pradesh made the mistake of settling the Chakma-Hajong as refugees in 1966. Now the Supreme Court has issued orders to stop evicting Chakma-Hajongs and instead to grant them citizenship with ST status despite the emotional concerns of the indigenous Arunachali. Mizoram has already drawn action plan by granting citizenship of Chakmas keeping the 2018 assembly election. The age old ethnic hatred between the Nagas and Kukis (driven out their homeland Myanmar in the 18th century) is well known. Rohingyas made headlines after the West Bengal WB, Mamata Banerjee expressed support for their

rehabilitation in India. They are not refugees as they entered illegally and none has applied for asylum. They have to be deported. Except Assam other NE states enjoy rights for indigenous people to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions. The 500 km Indo-Bangla border is yet to be sealed. AASU is fighting for implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord. Now the Assam govt is supporting citizenship for Hindu Bangladeshis. India just can't afford migrants anymore. Migration has significant implication for NE's demography, economy, socio-cultural framework and environment. Political parties utilize migrants as a convenient political vote bank. Above all a long term solution is necessary for both indigenous and legal migrant communities to live and work together in harmony towards the development of the state. Should India welcome illegal immigrants on humanitarian grounds?

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati