

"A value is valuable when the value of value is valuable to oneself."

--- Dayananda Saraswati

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Imran in exit mode

PAKISTAN'S Prime Minister Imran Khan, having lost his carefully crafted majority in the national assembly and having reached the edge of a political precipice, had only two options as he faced the nation on Thursday night: either to call fresh elections or call it quits. Principal Opposition parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by the Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto families respectively, have made it clear Imran must quit – while Pakistan's all-powerful military too is baying for his blood. Economy's downslide was one reason for the public upheaval against Imran. Fact is, a stable government is next to impossible in Pakistan's troubled post-Independence history. Lack of scruples has been a dominant character with both the politicians and the military there.

In a way, Imran Khan lacked full legitimacy as the last elections had not given him a majority. The majority was crafted at the instance of the military and he was being referred to as the "selected" – not elected – Prime Minister. Khan tried to do a job and got along well with the military brass for the first couple of years and then fell out with them. To keep pleasing the military was no easy job for any prime minister. The military always took the upper hand in matters of national security and foreign policy – which effectively meant the generals running a parallel administration. This was evident also in the way the White House held parallel consultations with the generals alongside the elected governments in relation to matters of mutual interest. The scenario meant successive prime ministers were often at the mercy of the military brass, undercutting the cause of democracy. With the Supreme Court too stepping in often for "course corrections," a strong democratic rule for Pakistan is just impossible. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is in exile in London. Benazir Bhutto remained in exile for years in UAE and elsewhere, and returned home to fight and win polls, only to be assassinated within hours of her arrival.

Pakistan is also where army generals seized power and eventually hanged the elected prime minister – Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979. Once out of power, what fate awaits Imran Khan is anybody's guess. Khan's relations with India had not been antagonistic; rather, he often spoke highly of India and its systems. He could not check the pro-Kashmiri terrorists' offensives against this country also as these were masterminded by the Pakistani military brass itself. Yet, the IAF attack on Balakot terror camps left Khan – and the generals -- squirming in their chairs. Imran Khan's impassioned plea on TV will not move the military brass but he has split all for the world to hear.

Opportunities knock: Is Meghalaya opening the doors?

By Patricia Mukhim

Since Covid started receding and travels within the country having resumed we have had foreign diplomats from Germany, France, Japan et al come knocking at our doors essentially to explore possibilities of economic collaboration with Meghalaya. Each diplomat placed at the Consulate in Kolkata or the Embassy in Delhi has a particular beat and has to be in touch with state governments of the eight states apart from Bengal, Odisha etc. Last month when German Ambassador, Walter Lindner visited Meghalaya he had a mission to check out areas of cooperation, particularly those related to the environment because Germany is deeply concerned about climate change and is passionately looking at climate change mitigation. Lindner is concerned about Meghalaya's deteriorating ecosystem caused by unregulated stone quarrying and sand banking which he witnessed on his way to Mawlynnong. He had also read about the ghastly coal mining tragedies and the illegal coal mining that carries on unabated. In my short interface with Lindner, I could see that he was indeed very anxious. However, he was also enthused by the fact that young people in the villages are trying to conserve the living root bridges with assistance from national and international funding agencies.

Last week we had the French Consul-General, Didier Talpain visiting Shillong. He met up with academics and administrators in the Government. He also took time off to visit the Mawphlang Sacred Groves to familiarize himself with the cultural practices and belief systems of the Khasi people. The diplomat must also have been adequately briefed on the traditional institutions and their role since his host for that morning was Mr John Kharshing, spokesperson for the Khasi chieftains (syiems). Mr Talpain was very keen on collaboration in sports and academic exchanges apart from other areas of mutual interest.

In November 2021, Japanese ambassador to India, Satoshi Suzuki and his wife were here. They met a cross section of people from government, NEHU, media and civil society at Asian Confluence. Presentations were made by Government representatives, led by Chairman, Farmer's Empowerment Commission, KN Kumar, on the agricultural products of Meghalaya and how the state is now ready to export some of those niche products like turmeric, mushrooms, buckwheat etc. The Japanese Ambassador was very excited at the prospect of such collaboration. Mr Suzuki also visited the Nongpoh Civil Hospital to see how the oxygen generation plant that

the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the Government of Japan had set up, was functioning. Two other plants are in Civil hospital Tura and the Jowai maternal and child hospital.

What's visible is that international collaboration is helpful but only if the Government of Meghalaya is able to focus on this matter and to constantly follow up what has been discussed. Otherwise, we have these foreign diplomats coming, seeing, meeting with a few government officials and if they are fortunate, the state chief minister and then returning to their respective destinations without any follow-up action. It would be in the interest of Meghalaya therefore to have a designated cell in the Department of Commerce or MBDA to liaise with these foreign visitors who are looking at prospects of a positive cultural, social, educational and economic exchange. And we are not looking at assistance only. Its time we speak to these repre-

sentatives on equal terms. We need to be able to show them possibilities for investment or assistance for processing techniques.

In a conversation with this writer, Talpain said that at one time in the distant past, the French too engaged in rat-hole coal mining but gave that up in favour of a more sustainable form of mining. It would be educative for the Government of Meghalaya to study how the French made this transition. I recall once long ago during the MDA Government's first tenure some ministers, including the present environment minister, James Sangma had visited some mines in the US to be educated on better mining methods. But apart from one of the ministers then making a calendar with all the photographs of the visit, including a visit to the casino, Meghalaya learnt nothing from that adventurous journey.



While academic Institu-

that is the stumbling block. Government of Meghalaya needs to seriously consider these 'real' possibilities and come up with a roadmap for entrepreneurs. This is the reason why we need a dedicated Department or Cell to push through these export potentials. If there is no dedicated manpower with ample experience in processing, marketing and export then it is pointless attending these international business meets.

Meghalaya is blessed with immense possibilities in agriculture. I had pointed this out in the past that our farmers produce ginger to the point of there being a glut in the market and the prices just sliding down, leaving the farmers in distress. States like Kerala that produce ginger have been processing it to produce oleoresin extract since 1991 where 5 ml of the ginger extract sells for Rs

120. This can either be used for cooking or to spice up a cup of tea. It's difficult to fathom why Meghalaya has not invested in processing. Look at how our pineapples rot because their shelf life is so short. We neither have cold storage facilities nor export linkages. We also have not been able to get Government of India to negotiate with Bangladesh for the use of Chittagong port. Why can't the Ministry of MDoNER make common cause with all the 8 state governments and put pressure on the Centre for trade linkages? Something's got to give. We cannot keep producing only for the local market where the bulk of the produce just rots or is sold at throwaway prices, thereby leading to farmers' distress.

Institutions of national eminence based in Meghalaya such as the IIM -Shillong, the NIT and NEHU have an onus to engage with the State Government on these key issues. Fortunately, now the Lakadong turmeric is fairly widely known because some of us do active promotion of the spice and zero in on it as the gift of choice for visitors to Shillong or take them with us as gifts when we travel outside.

Within the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) there are a number of verticals such as the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship. If this can be made the line Department with a senior level official taking personal interest it might help to lift Meghalaya's farmers to the next level. Mr KN Kumar has himself written several hope-giving articles on the trajectory that he envisages for farmers to take off. But there is a whole value chain that needs convergence. The farmers will produce but he/she cannot also process the produce. Some other agency has to do it on a business model. Similarly, the processing unit will have to find the market which, in this digitally linked, globalised world is not so challenging. One only wonders what we have done in 50 years and why we have not produced the entrepreneurs that will market our products.

What we have done on the contrary is rely on an extractive economy of coal and limestone mining and gouging out boulders which we are selling to Bangladesh via Tamabil to the tune of 300 trucks a day. What will happen to this state when all its forests are gone and it is reduced to stark barrenness? We need to exit from extraction, mining and quarrying if we want to save this degraded environment. It's time to find alternative economic activities for the upcoming generation. So, Mr Conrad Sangma as the leader of this State, please give your undivided attention to this issue if you care enough!

In search of a robust revenue model

Dr. Sridhar Kundu

The state government of Meghalaya has increased its budget for the year 2022-23 (BE) by 9 percent over its previous year. In the last five years, the state budget has increased over 18 percent per annum. Rise in government expenditure is an indication of expansionary fiscal policy which is required to influence growth and economic development of the state.

For any government, the rising spending needs to be matched with an equal or higher rise in revenue. Any shortfall of revenue growth would result in a deficit. Financing of this deficit through loans, borrowings and other means add on to the public debt.

For Meghalaya government, growth in revenue maintains a slower pace compared to growth in expenditure. In 2022-23, the revenue growth is estimated to rise by 5 percent and in the last five years, the growth has remained about 15 percent per annum. Relatively lower rate of revenue growth results in accumulation of debt. As on March 31, 2021, total outstanding debt of the state government stands at Rs. 13461 crore which is about 39 percent of state GSDP. The annual average growth of outstanding debt is about 10 percent in the last five years.

Public expenditure plays a critical role in economic development. One important measure to restrict piling up of debt without limiting the growth in public expenditure is to increase the state's own revenue resources.

At present, a major share of state's revenue resources comes from central sharing of taxes which is constitutionally mandated in a federal form of government, and centre's grants-in-aid. State's own revenue excluding central share of taxes and grants shares is a negligible 21 percent of total revenue in 2022-23 (BE).

In the state government's total own revenue, tax revenue shares a larger 79 percent, and the rest 21 percent of revenue comes from non-tax sources. In the last 10 years, this revenue growth has witnessed a wide fluctuation. Estimated tax revenue witnessed a negative growth of less than 1 percent in 2022-23FY.

The state government needs to have a broad-based, progressive, and reliable taxation system to feed its rising expenditure. A larger tax base would improve the tax buoyancy and help in more contribution to the state's total revenue. Next, a larger share of direct taxes in total revenue would increase its progressivity. Direct taxes generate less incidence on consumption. Third, growth of tax revenue needs to be sustained and made less volatile. With these three characteristics in mind, the state government could redesign its revenue model with considerable focus on following areas,

a. Agriculture income tax- it falls under the state list and the state government obtains legislative power over its functioning. This tax has remained as one of the contentious issues in India's political domain. As a result, many state governments including Meghalaya do not have taxes on agriculture income.

Nature of distribution of agricultural land in the state shows that the government can expect some tax revenue from this source. According to information from India Data Portal, about 46 percent of land area is owned by small and marginal farmers. These farmers own land with a size less than 2 hectares. But a larger share of land area i.e., about 55 percent of total agriculture

land is owned by medium and semi-medium farmers. People having land size of 2-5 hectare and 5-10 hectare are called semi-medium and medium farmers respectively. Large farmers are defined as people having land size of more than 10 hectares and they share only 1 percent of total agricultural land area in Meghalaya.

The state of Assam with similar type of distribution of agriculture land collects tax from agriculture income but revenue from this source is declining. In 2021-22 (BE), total revenue was Rs. 8.7 crore. But, during the 1990s, the state was collecting over Rs. 1000 crore per annum from this source. Information from India Data Portal shows that about 49 percent of agriculture land area in Assam is owned by small and marginal farmers, 41 by medium and semi-medium farmers and the rest 10 percent by large farmers.

b. Property tax – collection of property taxes by the state government has witnessed a declining trend over the last two decades. In 2006-07, revenue from property taxes was Rs. 120 crore and it came down to Rs. 26 crore in 2021-22 (BE). Stamp duty, which constitutes a larger share in total property taxes, has remained in the range of Rs. 10 crore to Rs. 20 crore during the last two decades. Declining growth of revenue from property taxes is accompanied by higher growth of urban agglomeration especially in the cities like Shillong, Tura and Jowai, which is unlikely.

c. Goods-passenger tax- this tax is imposed by the state government for transport of passengers, goods, and services within the state. This tax is advocated for its contribution to reduce social cost and negative externalities in terms of pollution. Total tax collected under this head has come down from Rs. 36 crore in 2007 to Rs. 10 crore in 2021-22 (BE). The growth of road and transport sector in the state in the last one decade seems to have less impact on tax revenue from this source.

d. State excise- growth of revenue from state excise has remained volatile. In the last two years i.e. 2021-22 (RE) and 2022-23 (BE), revenue from this source fell by 4.02 percent and 2.8 percent respectively. Growth of excise is likely to have a positive relationship with economic growth of the state. In the last two years, the state GSDP registered an annual average growth of over 8 percent.

State government collects excise from sell of liquor, diesel, petrol, and motor spirits. It is one important source of revenue for the state government. In 2022-23, its share in state's own tax revenue is estimated to be 14 percent of state's total revenue.

e. Non-tax revenue- it is collected by the state government for its provisioning of various services such as, education, health, water and sanitation, public administration etc. In the last five years, the growth in non-tax revenue stands about 15 percent per annum despite having a lower base.

All the revenue sources discussed above can excel with higher growth performances with the help of a better administration reform. The reforms would be in the direction of making revenue collection process simple and affordable. The government machinery needs to take the administration to each doorstep. More engagement of people in the administration process would facilitate increasing revenue and help in earning the trust of government.

(The writer is Sr. Economist, Bharati Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business)

Letters to the Editor

Points to be noted by Education Minister

Editor, "The UGC to write to states on adoption of CUET," sends shivers up the spine of our Higher Secondary passed students. When the Education Minister disagreed with the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) on grounds that MBOSE students would be disadvantaged, it made all happy. To reinforce his stand on CUET that it puts our students at a disadvantage the Education Minister should look at what three renowned educationists have written on the topic "Experts divided on CUET."

Sudha Acharya, Chairperson of National Progressive Schools Conference said "Many state boards use NCERT books while some have their own books (like our MBOSE). So ICSE and State boards will be at a disadvantage."

Delhi University Prof Rajesh Jha said, "The CUET will pose a disadvantage for students coming from rural areas and other state boards. (Listen to this dan-

ger!) Coaching institutes have already started coaching for CUET.

Again Delhi University Prof Abhi Dev Habib said, "The CUET forces its syllabus on everyone. Education is in the concurrent list and there are state boards involved. Multiple Choice Question (MCQs) will start guiding schools in Classes 11 and 12, and the MCQs are tricky questions. Even in NEET and JEE, we see students requiring coaching to clear the exams. It will be the same with CUET. "Why is the Centre hell bent on NEET and CUET is a mystery of mysteries, but only doctor aspirants know the reason. It is top secret and it is to make NTA coaching centres in all urban areas all over India millionaires. Coaching in India is a prosperous industry just like the automobile industry.

What is happening in our country is that there is no empathy for meritorious, hard working but poor students. If after hard resolute work from KG to 12, reading NCERT or State board text books, with good score in Physics Chemistry and Biology for studying medicine and good percentage in Higher Secondary in the subject one loves as Hon-

ours, with family inspiration, then finally NEET or CUET will stand in the way. Believe me there is something fishy in our education system. The Supreme Court can examine the matter to save poor, meritorious students.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) has tortured NEET aspirants by charging lakhs of rupees to be spoon-fed. The poor who cannot spend Rs 4-5 lakhs as coaching fees would now become victims of CUET. Our poor students who wish to get into good colleges of various universities would then have to forfeit their seats because they might not make it through CUET.

Yours etc., W. Passah Ex HOD Electronics St Edmund's college.

No fence-sitting please!

Editor, Kudos to M. Khyriem for the humanitarian letter titled "Peace hath her victories no less than war" (ST March 30, 2022). Mr Khyriem has rightly advised all to be courageous and not sit on the fence when we have to make a choice between good and evil. No wonder why great minds like Desmond Tutu

and Martin Luther King have expressed their outrage over "neutrality" through their enlightening statements, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor," and "The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict" respectively. However, the society in general or the "mainstream" either zealously support the muscle-flexing powers or provide passive support to them through hypocritical stance of "neutrality!" Not exactly a result of cowardice; rather popular endorsement of violence gives rise to such a pathetic mindset.

Let's take the case of Will Smith slapping Chris Rock right on the stage of the Oscar presentation ceremony with several hundreds in the audience and the live proceedings being watched by the world. Smith holds every right to get offended by Rock for cracking a joke on the former's wife but he could have verbally expressed his outrage in a civilised tone. Smith could have even sued Rock in Court. But Smith doesn't hold any right to physically abuse Rock. Yet he did commit the unpardonable act. But did it truly shock the world at large?

Probably not. Rather within a short span of time after displaying such barbarism; Smith received a thundering standing ovation from the audience on receiving the "Best Actor" award for the film 'King Richard'!

Smith might be a quality actor genuinely deserving the award, but all his artistic excellence stands next to nil when contrasted to this ugly behaviour! So Janai Nelson, the President of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, has worried aloud in a tweet, "the way casual violence was normalized tonight by a collective national audience will have consequences that we can't even fathom in the moment". No wonder why vulgar and brute individuals to leaders are gaining top popularity in every sector of the society! No wonder why megalomaniacal leaders regularly feature in top popularity rankings despite failing in matters of governance; their only "trump card" being bankrupt rhetoric, war mongering, relentless chest-thumping with blatant play of hate-card directed at the "enemies" and these tactics indeed capture the imagination of the society! Hitler had emerged as the cynosure of the eyes

of the German people with disastrous consequences. Yet we are not ready to learn our lessons from history!

As far as the "neutral" fence-sitters are concerned, Pastor Martin Niemoller has a few sane words for them- "First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out, Because I was not a Communist! Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, Because I was not a Socialist! Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, Because I was not a Jew! Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me"! Whether they would pay heed to it or not is their prerogative, but active supporters of devilish acts and "neutral" fence-sitters indeed invite unfathomable consequences by normalizing violence.

Yours etc., Kajal Chatterjee, Via email

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"A national debt, if it is not excessive,
will be to us a national blessing."

— Alexander Hamilton

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AFSPA versus Democracy

SO the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA) has been withdrawn from The Armed Forces Special Powers Act was first implemented by British Viceroy Linlithgow to quell the violence that followed the Quit India Movement led by Indian freedom fighters in 1942. The Movement at the time became leaderless as the leaders had to take cover from British assault. Ironically the Act was amended and applied to a part of the country by leaders of Independent India. Its not important to know where the AFSPA has been lifted from but where it is still invoked from April 1.

While the NDA Government feels it is doing justice to the states of the North East by reducing the areas under AFSPA, the question is why some areas in the four states of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam are still considered 'disturbed.' One look at these areas in Nagaland will inform us that they are either brisk commercial hubs or areas bordering Myanmar which are difficult to police. In the commercial hubs of Nagaland people are subjected to extortion and intimidation by Naga militant outfits who are respectfully referred to as Naga National Workers and the extortion money is referred to as taxes. Since the state police don't operate freely due to the unholy alliance between the NSCN(IM) and the state government an independent force has to do the dirty job. In Arunachal Pradesh, Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts border the Mon District of Nagaland which is the area dominated by various factions of Naga militants on one side and the ULFA and Bodo militants on the other. The above areas too are declared 'disturbed areas' and AFSPA has been extended there for 6 months beginning April 1. In Assam, the 'disturbed areas' tag has been withdrawn completely from 23 districts and one sub-division of the state's 33 districts. Only nine districts and one sub-division will still be tagged as 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA.

The manner in which AFSPA is being lifted in Manipur reeks of an ethnic bias. Most of the areas where the AFSPA has been revoked are in the valley. AFSPA was revoked from areas under Imphal Municipality since 2004. So as of now AFSPA is enforced only in the hill districts of Manipur where the NSCN(IM) and other Kuki outfits operate. As has always been the case in Manipur the politics of the hills and plains continues to be the twisted tale. Of 60 seats in the Assembly 40 are from the Imphal valley and only 20 in the Naga inhabited hills. If the Modi Government wishes to prove its nationalistic fervour as it repeatedly demonstrates then it should simply revoke all colonial laws of which AFSPA and sedition are the most abrasive and contentious.

Lessons to Learn from Lanka

Spending borrowed money on unproductive projects is a curse

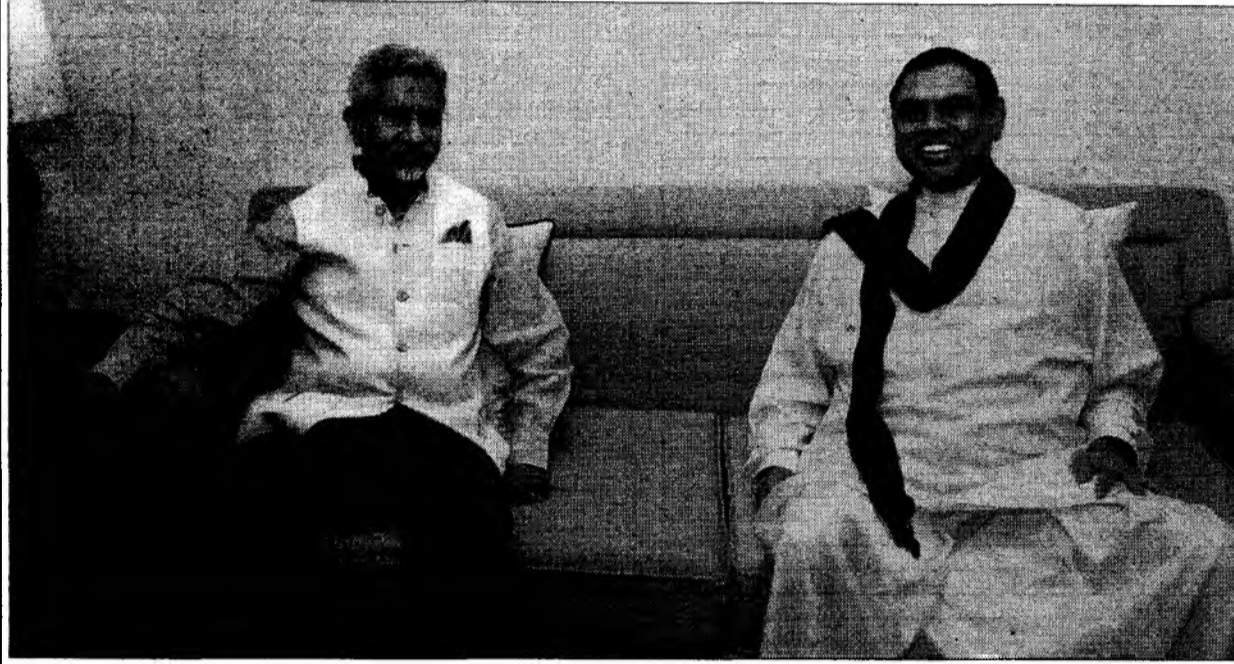
By TP Sreenivasan

Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend," warned Shakespeare many years ago, but nations make it a habit of borrowing and often living beyond their means. Sri Lanka, a fairly prosperous and successful nation, developed the art of borrowing from Peter to pay Paul for years and appeared to be doing well. Colombo was the paradise for Indian shoppers for foreign goods long before India liberalised its own economy. It became

with Sri Lanka's record of dynastic rule, poor governance, and corruption, President Gotabaya was not very keen to go to these institutions, which have tough conditionalities. The choice, therefore, for him was to go to friendly countries like China and India, which have chipped in. But since the country is in a deep financial crisis, he went to the IMF also for consultations. In its report on the consultations issued on Febru-

ary 25, the IMF identified the possible reasons for the present situation—the severe pandemic that hit the island, vulnerability to external shocks and high risks to public debt sustainability, the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in 2019, policy changes including tax cuts in 2019, contraction of the GDP

first. India stands with Sri Lanka. US\$1 billion credit line signed for the supply of essential commodities. A key element of the package of support extended by India' tweeted the External Affairs Minister. So far, India has extended \$1.4 billion support to Sri Lanka, through a \$400 million RBI currency swap, deferral of a \$0.5 billion loan, and another half-a-billion dollar as a line of credit for the country to sustain its essential fuel imports. A leading expert on Sri Lanka in India



a consumer state which paid for its ship-to-mouth existence from tourism and tea. Even the long conflict and war did not break the back of the country as Chinese largesse poured in to build infrastructure much beyond their needs. Each succeeding government borrowed more and more in the expectation that it will be for their successors to repay the debt.

The debt spiral has finally caught up with the Gotabaya government, driving the population to desperation on account of the debt service burden which was 96 per cent of the GDP in 2019 and 119 per cent of the GDP in 2021. The projection is that the public debt will remain 64.2 per cent of the GDP till the year 2026. Prices of essential imported commodities have risen to unprecedented levels and there is a trickling of economic refugees to India. Sri Lanka has no choice except to reduce imports, adopt a tighter monetary policy and build foreign exchange reserves. But instead of counting dollars in his hands, President Gotabaya is counting days for a possible dissolution of Parliament, now that the deadline of March 20 for dissolution is over. The election is expected to provide a commercial break like in a TV show to distract the public.

Normally, countries in such dire straits resort to loans from international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. But

by 36 per cent due to loss of tourism, loss of access to international sovereign bonds market and the alarming deficits amounting to 10 per cent of GDP. It did not mention the long Civil War, which resulted not only in financial loss but also in the loss of significant Tamil intellectuals and civil servants. The IMF recommended a tighter monetary policy, the building of international reserves, and prudent management of infrastructure facilities like the Colombo Port. Since none of these is easy to accomplish, no amount of possible assistance is going to rescue Sri Lanka from its tight spot.

To restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability, IMF has recommended the implementation of a credit

pandemic, it has predicted a bleak economic outlook in the short and medium-term.

China is reportedly considering a Sri Lankan request for a \$2.5 billion credit to overcome the present crisis. The Chinese ambassador to Sri Lanka confirmed that China is considering a \$1 billion loan and a \$1.5 billion credit

of the Observer Research Foundation believes that Sri Lanka now has become more confident about India than China.

The successive Sri Lankan governments have been generally socialist in their approach, and their projects are aimed at pleasing the public. These governments have a tendency to undertake populist measures with borrowed money, which do not produce sufficient income even to repay the loans. Money is available in plenty, but unless they are invested in viable projects with adequate returns for paying the interest as well as the principal, the consequences will be disastrous. The present controversy in Kerala on the government's pet project of building a superfast rail service revolves around this obsession. There has been resistance to the project not only from the opposition, but also from the public on considerations of losing land, and environmental degradation. The resistance movement has only hardened the position of the government, but unlike Sri Lanka, Kerala has supervisory authority in the Union government, which keeps an eye on the debt burden of the state. But the Sri Lankan experience of spending borrowed money on unproductive projects beyond its means and running the risk of endangering people's lives should be a lesson to learn from Lanka.

(TP Sreenivasan is a former diplomat)

"The debt spiral has finally caught up with the Gotabaya government, driving the population to desperation on account of the debt service burden which was 96 per cent of the GDP in 2019 and 119 per cent of the GDP in 2021."

Modi government using all means to curb powers of state govts

By Sushil Kutty

The last time Union Home Minister Amit Shah stood up in the Lok Sabha to discuss the affairs of a state, that state was bifurcated and broken into two union territories. This time around, Shah has done the opposite—merged three municipal corporations into a single block with ramifications still not clear, except that this merger of Delhi's '3 MCDs' could be panacea for a severe bout of election fear psychosis gripping the BJP following the AAP's Punjab landslide.

The MCD elections were just round the corner, and the BJP had a troublesome three-some anti-incumbencies to ruin its sleep, and chances at the hustings. The merger of the '3 MCDs' would help stave the BJP's election blues for the time being, at least, push them ahead by two years.

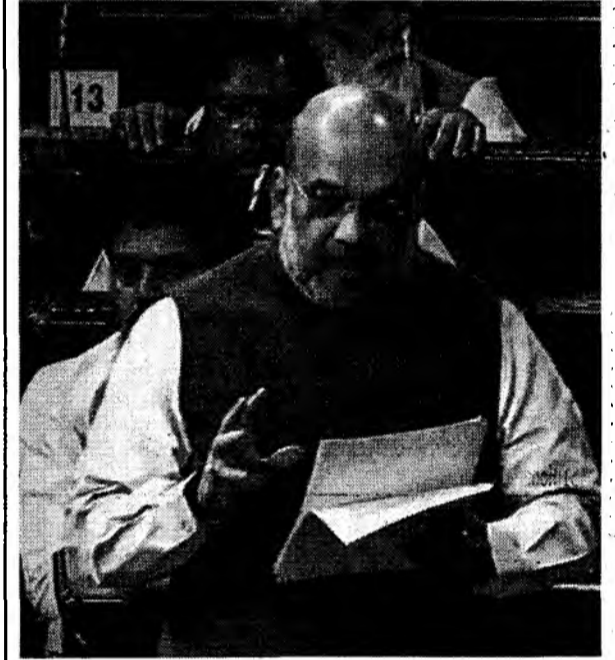
But the BJP explained the merger differently. In the words of Shah, the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill, passed in the Lok Sabha on March 31, 2022, seeks to unify the '3 MCDs' of Delhi into one "integrated and well-equipped entity to ensure a robust mechanism for synergised and strategic planning and optimal utilisation of

MK Stalin's Tamil Nadu. Today, even as Delhi was talking about "corporation merger", the Tamil Nadu chief Minister was in town to inaugurate the DMK's "national office."

While in town, Stalin also discussed TN's share in the GST and other centre-state concerns. In the debate on the unification of Delhi's civic bodies in the Lok Sabha, DMK Member of Parliament Dr Veeraswamy Kalanidhi asked why the hurry to pass the Bill?

The DMK needs more such "national debates" if Stalin wants national recognition. That said, why shouldn't the opposition parties get together and mount a collective campaign against the merger of Delhi's '3 MCDs'? It can be turned into a national issue because Delhi is India's capital, it's where Rashtrapati Bhavan is, where Parliament is, where the seat of India's government is.

It goes without saying that the AAP will make the '3 MCDs merger' into an election issue, and won't stop railing till even after 'the cows come home. It's not emotive, but it can be turned into a national issue. If the UPA and the Trinamool don't want to be deprived of



resources."

The bill was passed by voice vote. Amendments moved by Opposition MPs were rejected outright. When annulling Article 370 and bifurcating J&K, the National Conference and the PDP reacted with anger and frustration. Similarly, the merger of the '3 MCDs' left the Opposition in the Lok

this election issue to fight the BJP, they shouldn't allow the AAP to run away with it.

That said, does the charge that everything the Modi Government does is to weaken the federal structure stick? Well, a goal as cohesive as 'Hindu Rashtra' cannot be achieved without getting a grip on the federal structure. Also, post the AAP

"The BJP government at the Centre has been chipping away at the foundations of India's federal structure religiously and perfunctorily ever since Modi became Prime Minister in May 2014. At least that has been the running allegation, and the argument."

Letters to the Editor

Archaeological site - Nartiang

Editor,
The Archaeological site at Nartiang, Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya is home to one of the tallest monoliths in the world. The monoliths were erected in honour of the erstwhile rulers and kings. It is believed that the tallest monolith Moo long Syiem which is eight metres long, was erected by U Mar Phalynki a lieutenant of a Jaintia King. It is also believed that the monoliths were erected to commemorate the victory of the King in a battle. Nartiang has a strong significance to the local people as religious festivals and rituals are practiced there from time to time.

It is understood that the monoliths were erected between 1500 AD and 1835 AD. Nartiang is situated approximately 65 kilometers from the state capital, Shillong. The monoliths are described as menhirs and dolmens by the locals.

The monoliths dates back to many centuries and there

are several beliefs about their origin. While many believe that each monolith marks an event or an individual, some believe in the legend of the King and the Old Woman.

The Monoliths of Nartiang are magnificent archaeological structures. Surprisingly this is not known to many and even to the people of the State. The monoliths of Nartiang should be considered rare assets and pride of not only of the State of Meghalaya but of the country too. Care must be taken to preserve the monoliths along with their history and local beliefs. Visitors marvel at the sight of the monoliths and wonder how they were lifted and erected there when there was no technology whatsoever.

Students from all over should be taught through folktales not just about the history and origin of these mesmerising structures but their significance to the values and beliefs of the society as a whole and the future of the monoliths.

In fact, the authorities should look at the possibility of obtaining a UNESCO her-

itage status for the monoliths of Nartiang and showcase it to the world.

Yours etc.,
Albert Nongrum,
Via email

Nutritional rights

Editor,
This refers to the recent Medical Study Report "The Global Burden of Disease" wherein it mentions that one in five person dies due to nutritional deficiency!

The report carries immense significance vis-a-vis the increase in consumption of denatured, hybridised and inorganic food globally. With the emergence of the era of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, the nutrient density of the soil has further depleted resulting in lack of nutrition in earth's produce. Although due to Green Revolution and Genetic Modification Crop production has increased but production of quality food has decreased. Malnutrition apart from causing various health hazards

also results in decreased human productivity which directly or indirectly affects the economy of the nation. It is important that the government makes it a priority to provide high quality food to the general public by emphasizing on organic cultivation. People should be made more aware about quality nutrition through education and awareness programmes through various media. It is high time that along with education quality nutrition also becomes a part of our fundamental right.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati.

Violation of rights of accused

Editor,
The opposition parties are up in arms over the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022 introduced by the Central government in the Lok Sabha. The Bill authorises the law enforcement agencies to collect, store and

analyse the measurements of all convicts and detained persons including their physical and biological samples. As per the Bill, police can take the measurements of persons suspected to be involved in a crime, arrested, detained etc. The National Crime Records Bureau of India (NCRB) can collect, store and preserve the records of such measurements. The NCRB can use the measurements for different purposes. The draft law seeks to repeal Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920.

According to the government, the existing law has limited scope whereas the new measurement techniques give credible and reliable results. However, there are several drawbacks in the Bill. Undertrial and persons suspected to be involved in criminal cases will have to give their measurements to police. A person cannot be called a convict until proven so. By taking an innocent person's measurements, that person is deprived of his rights to privacy. Those who refuse to give such measurements will be charged under Section 186 of the Indian

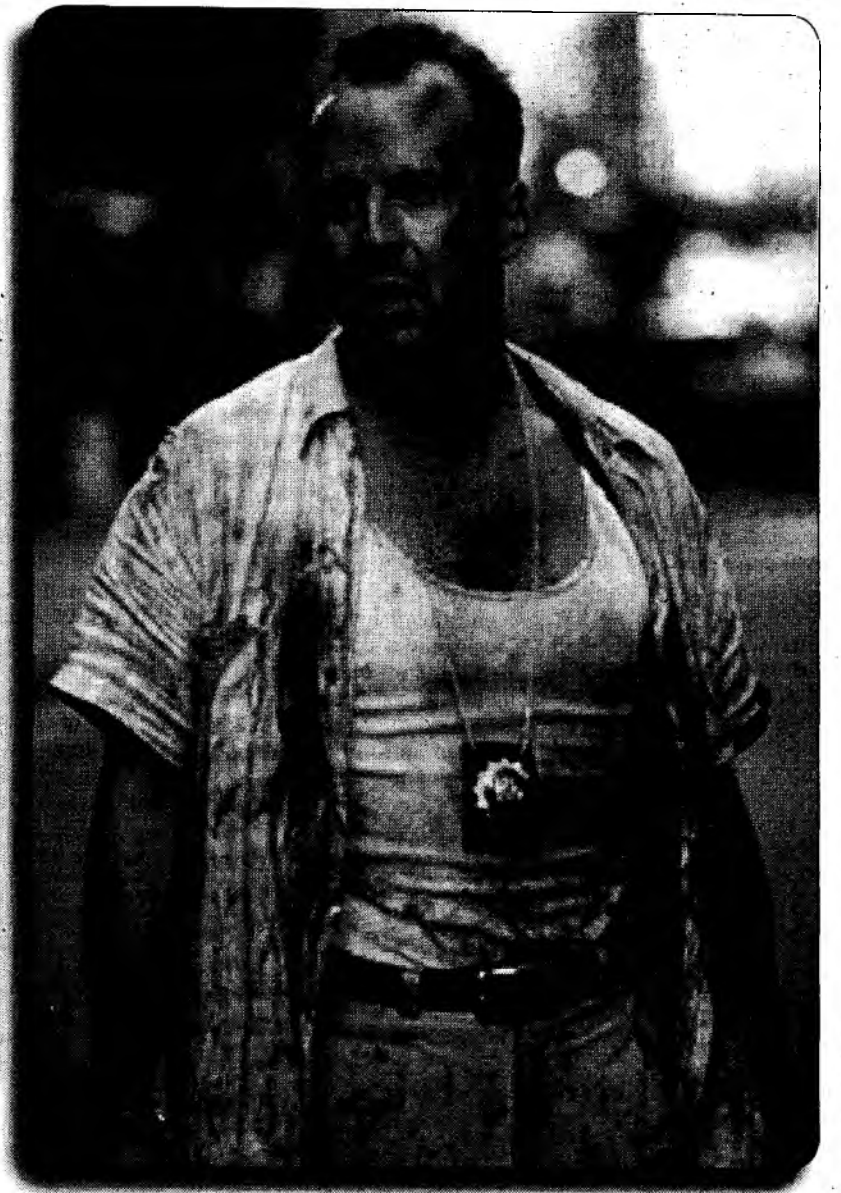
Penal Code.

Another drawback is that modern techniques and technologies will have to be developed for taking such measurements. Also, use of force to take measurements violates the rights of prisoners. Further, it is against the basic principles of law and the principles of the Constitution. Apart from this, there is no guarantee that if a person is released, discharged, or acquitted the records will be destroyed. Since it is done with the permission of a court, it may take time. Besides, the person concerned may not get any information about the destruction of the records. Considering these deficiencies in the legislation, the government needs to make necessary changes in it.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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

Aphasia – the condition that ended Willis' Hollywood career?



After a career spanning 40 years, 67-year-old actor Robin Williams has stepped away from acting due to a diagnosis of aphasia, including a diagnosis of post-stroke aphasia.

Willis' family members have felt statement that he never had any problems. You're not alone.

Aphasia is a communication disability caused by damage or changes to the language or words of the brain.

Often considered a condition with "getting worse" aphasia can in fact in practice improve a person's life.

How does aphasia affect people? A person with aphasia can have difficulty speaking, reading and others. Aphasia impacts everything from conversations, negotiating, expressing emotions, storytelling, asking questions...

Primary progressive aphasia can occur in younger people, but is most commonly diagnosed between age 50 and 75.

One-third of people who have had a stroke will also experience aphasia. While it's most likely to affect older adults, brain injuries, strokes and tumours causing aphasia can also affect children, adolescents and young adults.

Based on current stroke statistics, it is estimated that at least 140,000 Australian live with aphasia.

Despite the high rates and evidence of negative impacts, awareness of aphasia in the public and health-care professions is low.

What else plays a role? A person's environment has a big impact in enabling or disabling people with aphasia. The social determinants of health influence the way someone experiences, recovers from, and lives with aphasia. So people who have good access to health care, who hold high social positions, are wealthy, and have the support of an engaged family may be less impacted by the condition. Willis can be grateful in this respect.

The impact of aphasia is not just felt by the person with aphasia. The psychological and social impact, as well as the disability resulting from aphasia on the family is significant.

How is it treated? There is no cure for aphasia. But interventions such as speech pathology can make a massive difference. Though there is no "one size fits all" approach.

Speech pathologists are experts in communication disabilities. They work within multidisciplinary health-care teams across a variety of hospital and community-based sites.

This includes working with medical, nursing and allied health professionals such as psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and physiotherapists.

Be aware of the signs of stroke and aphasia associated with dementia. This may include difficulty finding the right word, mixing up words or sounds (for example, "cat" or "gog" for "dog"), using nonsense words, not being able to get any words out or not being able to understand others.

If these changes are sudden or accompanied by a facial droop or difficulty moving your arms or legs, treat it as a medical emergency and seek urgent medical attention.

Willis and his family demonstrate love and strength in facing aphasia "head on". Their sentiments of embracing social connectedness and to continue to live by Willis' words of "Live it up" provide hope for others with aphasia around the world.

We can all play our part in being more effective communication partners for people living with aphasia. *(The Conversation)*

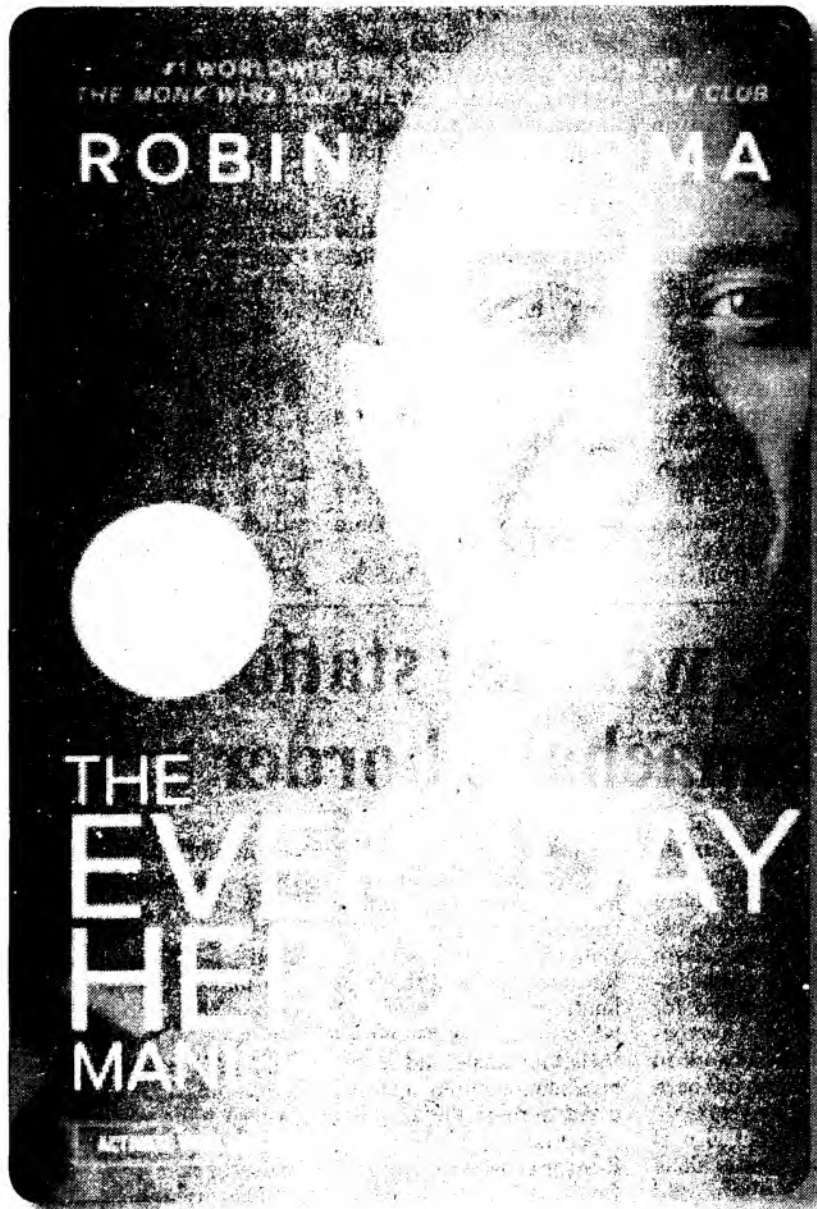
Interventions for people with progressive and post-stroke aphasia are tailored to the person, their family and community, with consideration of many factors including aphasia diagnosis and cause, severity and type of communication difficulties, level of participation in communication-related activities, the communication environment, their goals, mood and quality of life.

New and improved treatments are also being developed.

Do I have aphasia? What should I look out for? Sudden or gradual decline and changes in communication, personality, behaviour, memory and thinking skills should be investigated by a doctor.

This could be a local GP, neurologist or geriatrician. A speech pathologist can also be a part of this process.

'Heroism is the root of all success, joyfulness and spiritual freedom'



For over 20 years, Robin Sharma has been a performance coach, a speaker, a professor, a motivational speaker, a revolutionary system for achieving the highest ambitions of your life. His masterwork, *The Everyday Hero Manifesto*, is a blueprint for success and tactics for achieving it.

that is part playbook for explosive productivity, part instruction manual for leading a world-class life and part universal guide to becoming a spiritual heavyweight that lifts the world.

After the success of over 12 books, Sharma has launched a new one titled *The Everyday Hero Manifesto*.

Sharma speaks exclusively to *IANSLife* about his new book which attempts to transform people's lives and help them achieve undefeatable positivity, spiritual freedom and undisrupted discipline to get rare-air results in life.

Who do you think is a Hero? What trait defines a Hero for you? Is it the success or the qualities and virtues?

Robin Sharma: A hero-or an Everyday Hero as I call one in my new book-is a so-called ordinary human who refuses to behave like a powerless victim. Our world tells us that we must be famous and great to be a hero yet there are wider versions of heroism. The baker rises at 5 AM to prepare beautiful goods. The coder who does their work to Beethoven-composed music. The single parent who works super hard to care for their children and yet radiates positivity and goodness. Such souls-too-are heroes. *The Everyday Hero Manifesto* shares a transformational methodology on how anyone can recode their lives to become far happier, more productive, braver and more peaceful.

A lot of your books are on leadership, wisdom and virtues of life. What inspired you to write a book on heroism?

Robin Sharma: Great question! Heroism is the root of all success, joyfulness and spiritual freedom. Once we learn the rules and daily habits of heroism, we not only rise in our work, become more confident, enjoy richer days and get beautiful things done, we also reclaim the self-honour that so many of us have lost. Through life's trials, hurts and busyness.

Discipline happens to be one of the toughest areas to conquer for the current generation. Procrastination is a new-age monster. Your book is an instruction manual for discipline as well. How did you discover this problem that people face?

Robin Sharma: Yes, the book has a number of key chapters on building world-class discipline so we materialize our promise, make our ethical ambitions real and lead the lives we want, versus being reactive and living our lives like a 5-alarm fire. I should mention that *The Everyday Hero Manifesto* also explains the science and tactics for rest, renewal and feeling more alive. As I write in the book: "success without soulfulness is an empty victory." Being self-disciplined is incredibly

important to winning yet so is enjoying the process of your life.

I added these chapters on building heroic self-control so we become fitter, stronger and more productive in this world of dramatic distraction and limitless interruption after working with so many clients who have shared that they have mighty dreams yet failed to have the discipline to get them done.

The title *The Everyday Hero Manifesto* leads me to the word *Manifestation*. How important do you think is it to wake up every morning and manifest your dreams?

Robin Sharma: Interesting! I used "manifesto" as the work distills the method, models and protocols from my mentoring of billionaires, sports icons and movement-makers. It's a complete instruction manual for a soaring life.

Yet, you're right. We must grow our skills at creating the ideals that speak to the higher angels of our greatest nature. And I do think a great and joy-filled life comes from waking up (early) each morning and spending our days creating success and soulfulness, in a way that feels right to us (rather than on some definition sold to us by society).

Your book *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* was a huge success and loved by all. It's been 25 years since the launch of that book. Do you think your thought process has changed or evolved in these 25 years?

Robin Sharma: Absolutely. And I confess to this in *The Everyday Hero Manifesto*! I've grown a lot and experienced so much over these past 25 years (much good and some tragic). I used to believe in the importance of living in such a way so as to leave a legacy, so those who remain after we die will admire how we've lived. Now, I believe that worrying about your legacy is a waste of time. Because we'll be dead! Just a pile of dust, in a colourful urn. The key is to live beautifully while we're alive.

I also used to believe that to be ultra-productive one must work harder. Now I believe that "elite performance without deep recovery is a fool's sport." Rest is not a luxury. It's a necessity.

Finally, when I wrote *Monk*, I was very into a super-austere life. While my life is still quite simple and I can be monastic sometimes, I'm more balanced. I enjoy being in the world and savouring its gifts (good food, films and splendid friends) while also tending to my spiritual growth.

You're an inspiration to many people. Who is your inspiration in life? What quality of theirs do you admire the most?

Robin Sharma: My mother and my father. My beloved readers from across the planet who model heroism and creativity and kindness daily. Mahatma Gandhi. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Hedy Lamarr, Madame Curie, Kobe Bryant, Muhammad Ali.

How would you describe a beautiful life?

Robin Sharma: Splendid question! One that balances creativity, honest productivity and elite performance with family, peak health, noble values, community service with a lot of joy and fun. *(IANSLife)*



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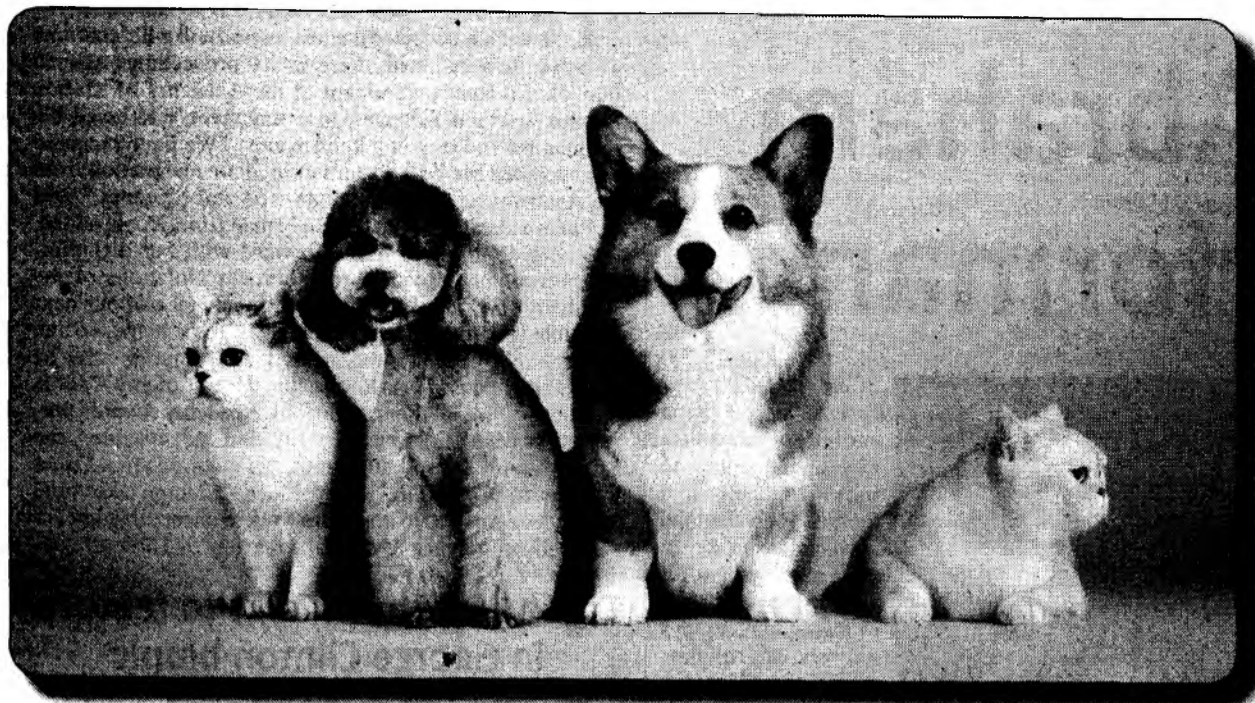
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Pets, children make the perfect pair



Love requires no words, and neither does love care about the shape and size. The adage perfectly sums up the bond between a human and an animal. Pets perfectly encapsulate the notion of unconditional love since the relationship with them is filled with endless hours of cuddling and joy. They give us affection, teach us responsibility, and are the best stress relievers. Nothing could ever match their pure sensation of sincerity.

As a parent, who only wishes for the best for their child, what could be better than getting them a furry friend to help them grow and learn valuable life lessons? Here's a look at some ways in which pets can enrich your child's early years:

Pets help in developing emotions and qualities in kids

Animals rely on others for their needs, and caring for them is an excellent method for kids to learn nurturing and caregiving skills. When children see a dog running to the door when it wants to go outdoors, it makes them wonder about their needs, and how they can help.

And, when a child is able to fulfil their pet's needs, they feel accomplished, and it also teaches them to care for someone other than themselves.

Apart from that, pets also help the child learn basic emotions such as kindness, love, sympathy, responsibility, and respect.

The kids learn key lessons from life

Owning a pet is an excellent method to teach your child about responsibility and empathy. If you have a pet, it allows you to teach your children about the impact their actions have on the pet. For example, if the child is acting hyper around the pet, the dog may get uncomfortable.

So, a child's interaction with a pet will help them understand that their actions have consequences, which can hurt someone.

This life lesson will help children develop empathy skills, allowing them to protect others from abuse and make them better human beings.

Furthermore, they will develop an intolerance to animal cruelty, and they will replicate the same



behaviour under all circumstances.

Interaction with pets improves the physical and emotional well-being of the kids

The COVID-induced isolation and prolonged break from physical school is affecting a kid's physical and mental well-being. As a result, pets can make excellent companions for kids. Simply snuggling on the couch with their beloved puppy or kitten or an animal of their choice can improve a child's mood and reduce stress as feel-good endorphins are released while playing with animals. Moreover, children understand that animals

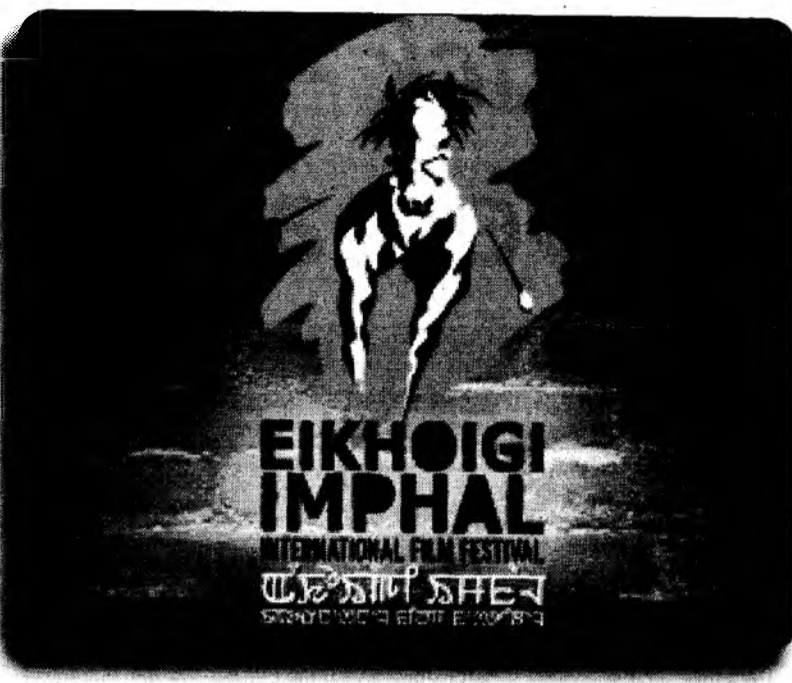
provide unconditional affection, and they can be themselves with the pets. This sense of protection and security is essential for both their physical and emotional well-being.

According to scientific research, human-animal interaction (HAI) has a good impact on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Animals help reduce loneliness, improve social behaviour, reduces their stress levels and bridges the gap between the child and their family.

Animals are true confidants

Animals are great listeners; they never interrupt or judge you, making a child feel more comfortable with them. Children enjoy reading books to their pets, which helps them improve their reading skills

Manipur hosts first-ever international film festival



The first-ever international film festival, supported by Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry, will begin here on April 2, officials said on Wednesday.

Manipur Film Development Society (MSFDS) Secretary Sunzu Bachaspatimayum said that in the 5-day long international film festival – 'Eikhoigi Imphal International Film Festival' – 11 feature films, 8 non-feature films and one short film would be screened.

Films include those from Iran, Germany, Korea, Philippines and Norway would be screened.

The official said that two Manipuri films – Romi Meitei's 'Eigi Yum' and Haobam Pabankumar's 'Nine Hills One Valley', acclaimed Khasi (Meghalaya) film, 'Iewduh', directed by Pradeep Kurbah and Assamese film, 'Ishu', directed by Utpal Borpujari will also be screened in the festival.

Bachaspatimayum said that the festival being organised jointly by MSFDS and Manipur State Film and Television Institute (MSFTI), with financial aid from the Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF) under the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, DFF package of films made by master filmmakers of India such as Satyajit Ray, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G Aravindam, Girish Kasaravalli and Mrinal Sen will be a special attraction of the EIIF-2022.

Director of the critically acclaimed documentary film, 'All That Breathes', Shaunak Sen will be present during the festival and share the experience of his cinematic journey. Besides, filmmakers like Rajdeep Paul, Sarmistha Maiti and Kaushik Hafizee will take part in the festival along with their films.

DFF Deputy Director Tanu Rai will also participate in the international film festival. The festival envisages to fill up the void of a veracious cinematic culture particularly in the state of Manipur, the MSFDS Secretary said.

He said that in between the breaks of film screening, there will be musical performance by local artistes. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, APRIL 3, 2022

Sun conjunct Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give favorable results. The planetary situation is very favorable for you. You will be busy in prayers and meditation. You will prosper in your business. You will have gains. New job offers will come to you. You will also invest your money wisely. You will receive the blessings of elders. You will take some concrete decision in business. You might get inspired with new ideas. There are chances of success in business. Your social circle will expand. You will make new plans for making money. Whatever work you think of, will get done. Planetary position is in your favor. You will discharge all your responsibilities well and your financial side will be strong. You will move ahead with a positive outlook. Visitors will drop in and you will remain busy in welcoming new. There will be property disputes with your brothers and matter will resolve.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
There will be flurry of activities this week. Your self respect and dignity will increase. You will also be a lot more confident. You will perform your task with ease. Even your colleagues will seek your aid and advice in doing so. There will be stability in your career and business. Your efforts at acquiring money will be successful. This is going to be a success achieving week. Your government related activities will gather momentum. Your dues will get cleared. You will also get victory in legal matters. You will also explore additional sources of income. There will be peace and harmony in family relationship. You will discharge your domestic responsibilities very well.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
There are happy events taking this week. You will feel a lot more secure about your future ahead. Your time is good. You will make good gains in your business. None of your work will be pending. Students will focus on their course and complete their studies. Your image will also improve. You will have monetary gains and will solve your finance related problems. Your health will be at its peak. It will be mentally pleasing days. You will keep your family members and relatives happy. You will also participate in fun activities. You will keep your partner in good humour and spirits. He/she will feel uplifted in your company. You will have no complaints with your colleagues. Even your boss will support you a lot. Thus you will be able to move forward and strike a balance between work and happiness. These are good days in terms of money. Your enemies will become active and try to trouble you without getting much success.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
You will be at the peak of your career this week. Those who were waiting for a long time to push their careers will also get lot of support. New job/business offers will come to you. You will never be short of funds. You will alone bear the brunt of your office problems and household problems. You will never lack tolerance. Patience and ability to coup pressure under most trying circumstances will be your plus point. You will perform your tasks well. There will be no arguments in your house. Your talent will get reflected in front of everyone. You will also join some enlightening task. The people will be impressed with your personality. It is a good time for people related with media, writing, fashion, students and professions. There will be lot of entertainment.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
Time will be highly beneficial. You will be busy in your work. You have a job on your hands to do. You will prefer to be a multi-tasker and also come out as real winner. In the process, you will get a little tired but will take time to relax also. You will also enjoy wonderful moments in the company of your family members. You also need to take care of your health. You will be eager about something and also will display your creative skills. You may plan for an outing with your family. As you will be able to achieve your targets, there is no need on your part to engage yourself in any extra work. Your enemies may hatch some conspiracy. Some obstacles too can be there. Mental tensions will be on increase. Financial projects will be successful. Happiness is on the cards. All the stars will be favorable. Your efforts will fetch you great results. You will get opportunities for making profits.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
There will be peace and happiness in your life. You will make all round progress. Your popularity will be on the rise. Your bosses and colleagues will support you a lot. Financial gains are indicated. Positive developments will take place on the work front. You will come up to the expectations of one and all. You will also not expect any help from any of your relatives who on the contrary will expect a lot from you. It will be pleasant experiences that fill your life. You will enjoy wonderful time and company of your partner. Love mates will understand each other well and will enjoy blissful moments. Memories of the past will bring smile on your face. The decisions of court cases that are pending will be in your favor. Works will gather momentum. Before making any investments in land, vehicle etc. check all documents carefully. You will get government help too. You will get a chance to fulfill your interests.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
These are days to get the best results. You will also enjoy a very positive phase in your life. You will also enjoy your life to the maximum. You will also plan to go on a holiday trip and enjoy your days fully. You will also get a responsible position in your job. Money will be spent on comforts. You

will plan to buy luxurious and expensive items. You will also get to differentiate between good and bad. You will be able to overcome obstacles with your good understandings. You will avoid an argument with your seniors on the good issues. You have to develop your tolerance level and face the situation boldly. You will also enjoy wonderful moments with your spouse. There will be improvement in your health. You will get peace of mind. You will overcome stiff challenges and move ahead.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)
The time will be spent on a happy note. You will have monetary gains. Your business will also witness growth. You will be determined to carry out the tasks. After a lot of ups and downs you will be able to manage the work. You will be very passionate and will remain committed to your partner. You will obtain happiness and pleasure. You will have happy days. You will work very hard and will get excellent results. You will have a pleasant disposition and will be patient. If some thoughts occurs to you it will be difficult to take it out. But it will turn out to be a good learning experience. You will make progress in your respective fields. Marriage of a family members will get fixed. Success is waiting for you.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
You will be very positive about your future. Your relationships with your boss and seniors will be good. Your income will increase and also your good luck. With time your name and fame will also increase. A timely help given to you will prove to be game changer for you. The advice of a friend can make your luck shine. You will have a positive attitude towards your children and family. You will keep alive your creative instincts. Husband and wife will have perfect understanding your opponents will try to prevail over you. But will be unable to harm you. You will feel like changing your job too. There are strong chances of getting money in business. You will be busy with preparing for festivals. You will come closer to your siblings. You will make every impossible task possible with your courage and bravery.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
There will be slight inclination towards spirituality. You will have some new interests and make yourself presentable. You will be getting excellent results in your business/work. Your personal life will get the cool breeze of love and romance. The small worries regarding home will dispel. Your angry nature will be harmful for you. Keep a control over it. You will pay attention to your health. Don't make investments without thinking. Everything that glitters is not gold is the saying that should be kept in mind while buying things. Spend wisely and only as much as your pocket always. Money will be spent on repairs of the house. After a lot of struggle you will finally succeed in getting a loan. Your work will get done with ease. You need to make best use of opportunities presented to you.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
You will fulfill your responsibilities with great aplomb. Disputes will be peacefully resolved. The time is very favorable. You will clearly reap the benefits. You will be most influential in society. Your name and fame will rise. You will get caught in a situation at your workplace where you will have to make a choice. Your efforts will get recognized. Your relations will become stronger. You will be busy in love affairs. You will not take risk in money related matters. Your relationships will become stronger. You will clearly reap the benefits in your professional life. Housewives will learn directions of division of property. There will be various activities in different directions. Your business partners will obey you. You will have monetary gains. People will acknowledge your skills and efficiency.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
Your hard work and efforts will finally pay off. Whatever task you will start, you will rest only after completing it. The time is very favorable. You will win the trust of the people around you. You will also come in contact with a distinguished person. You will receive money for your efforts. You never say attitude will win you lot of admirers. Your boss will be pleased with your efforts. Your partner will be your biggest source of strength. The respect you expect from others will be given by them. You will have the best stay in your house or work related tasks. Relations will be cordial between husbands and wives. You will give top priority to your house and family. You will work very hard in all fields whether it is financial, social or political. Your earnings will be good but your expenses will be high.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
Your time is very favorable. There will be a miraculous change in your behavior and personality. Problems that have been troubling you for a big time will get resolved. Despite several attempts your enemies will not be able to cause any harm to you. You will carry out your household duties nicely. There will be good understanding in the relationships between brothers. You will have to forcefully do the tasks that you don't like. You may also become a little upset but you need to learn to take the bitter medicine as well. It will do you good in the long run. You will get money. You will implement new ideas to expand your business. You will buy new things for your household. You will continue to move forward in your life. You will travel a lot and meet lot of strangers.

Becks excited about Qatar World Cup

David Beckham cannot wait for the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world. The Football legend, 46, has played and scored in three World Cups, and has witnessed Qatar's preparations for the 22nd edition of international footballs showpiece event.

Beckham gives a keen assessment of England's chances heading into the tournament, outlining what fans can expect when they travel to Qatar in November and December.

This is the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world. How important is that?

Beckham: It's a massive moment for everyone in Qatar and very inspiring. I've always talked about the legacy of the World Cup for Qatar – but also the legacy of the World Cup everywhere. That's what the World Cup brings to a nation – it's an inspiring moment. For Qatar, it's a chance to show off the country and its love of football, its history and culture. Having some of the biggest players in the sport descend on Qatar is a huge moment for the country and region.

It's going to be a compact World Cup, with all the stadiums near to one another. How will this benefit the players?

Beckham: It's a huge benefit. The furthest a team is going to have to travel is 40-45 minutes on a bus. In the World Cups I played in, it could take two or three days to recover from the game and the travelling.

The tournament will take place in November and December. For many countries, it will mean the World Cup takes place in the middle of the football season. What kind of benefits will that have?

Beckham: As an England player, we went into every World Cup after a gruelling season in the Premier League, which is one of the toughest leagues in the world. When you come to the end of the season, you're exhausted and it takes a while to recover – more than a few weeks. This time, it will be mid-season, so this is perfect for English players – and other teams – who can go into the tournament with a real opportunity.

With many players coming in fresh, are you expecting a better standard of play during this World Cup?

Beckham: Without a doubt. You always expect a high standard during the World Cup – but coming in mid-season, the standards are going to be even higher. The weather is going to be perfect, the stadiums are amazing, the facilities are amazing, the fans are going to have a great time. It's set up perfectly.

What are your expectations for England heading into this tournament?

Beckham: My expectations for England are always high. Ours fans will have high expectations – and rightly so. I feel Gareth (Southgate) has done an incredible job. We've got a team that's been together for quite a few years. You can't really call them a young team anymore – but many of the players are pretty young, while they also have experience in there with the likes of Harry Kane. I feel this is a real opportunity for us. We're coming into the tournament in good form. We just have to keep that up.

Who is England's key player?

Beckham: I would have to say Harry Kane. He's a leader, he's our captain and he's our goal scorer. With him performing at the highest level, he's massively important to our team.

England will be one of the favourites to win the tournament – but who will be their main rivals?

Beckham: When you think about the World Cup you automatically talk about Brazil, Argentina and France. They are all great nations who have won many tournaments. Another country I am excited to see play is Denmark. I think they could be the surprise package. They've had a good lead-up and always do pretty well in major tournaments. I'm also looking forward to seeing the host nation, Qatar. They have a young team who have been together a long time. They know each other well and I think they'll be boosted by the atmosphere in the stadiums.

What advice would you give to players playing in their first World Cup?

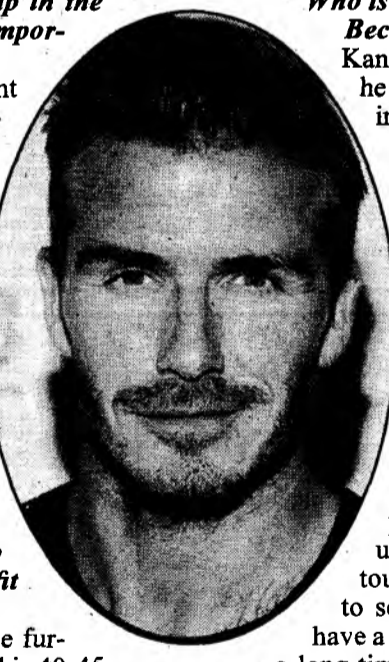
Beckham: Enjoy it. The World Cup is the pinnacle. It's the best and highest level any player can reach. My advice is to enjoy it because it might be the only one you're involved in.

You've visited many stadiums here, when you walk out on the pitch, how much do you wish you were still playing?

Beckham: I'm 46 years old but I still feel I can put my boots on and play in a World Cup. Even at my age – which is not old – I still feel I could play in the Premier League or La Liga or for England. When I walk into a stadium I always want to put my boots on.

What's your message to the fans heading to Qatar for the World Cup?

Beckham: They're going to have a great experience. In the past, fans have had to travel between games but in Qatar, they're going to be able to go to more than one match a day because it is such a compact tournament. I think the fans will enjoy what Qatar has to offer. There will be great food, a warm welcome from the local people and lots to see and enjoy besides the football. (IANS/Slife)



"The future influences the present just as much as the past."

— Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Games that Khan plays

THE swift political developments in Pakistan on Sunday have seen the end of the Imran Khan-led governance started in 2018, but the Opposition has less reason to cheer. The rejection of the no-confidence motion against Khan by deputy speaker of the national assembly, citing flimsy grounds, was unexpected but part of a counter-offensive by the cricketer-turned politician. While creating conditions for early elections to the national assembly, Khan has thrown the ball back into the people's court and perhaps cunningly projected a narrative that the no-confidence motion brought forward by the Opposition was done at the behest of a foreign power – the United States. This could put the Opposition on the defensive in the run-up to the polls that's promised in three months' time.

Anti-US sentiments are strong in Pakistan in recent decades, also as Americans were seen to be playing games against both Pakistan and Afghanistan through the War on Terror – that ran parallel to the sprouting of Islamic militancy in the geopolitical region. The US had used Pakistan to drive away Russians from Afghanistan, but those like Osama bin Laden it had trained and sent to the region for this purpose eventually turned against the US once the Russians exited from the scene. Laden later began targeting the US and used his Al Qaeda to inflict lasting wounds on the US through the 9/11 attacks. Yet, the huge financial and military aid that Pakistan received from the US, in iterations, to carry forward the War on Terror since 9/11 proved to be a lure to the Pakistani establishment. It used these huge financial allocations and hi-tech weapons from the US supplies, instead, to strengthen its military might against India.

The foreign policy shifts that Khan sought to effect in recent years have not gone unnoticed. It is not easy to run with the hare and hunt with the hound for long. Yet, Khan strengthened Pakistan's ties with China and went one step ahead to establish stronger relations with Russia. Notably, when Vladimir Putin launched the invasion on Ukraine, Khan was scouting around through Moscow. Aply guided by the Pakistani military generals, Khan has also been meddling with Afghanistan's affairs such as to neutralize the influence that India had with the landlocked nation. While Imran Khan somewhat saved his face now and even as the national assembly is dissolved, it will be worth watching as to who will have the last laugh there. In all fairness, Khan was a 'bearable' adversary for India in Pakistan.

Seeds of the future

By H H Mohrmen

If food is also part of our culture, then stories of how people are connected to their crops and foods are colourful yarns that make the fabric attractive. The importance of food in the culture of the Jaidbyrniew Hynñew Trep has never been a popular topic of discussion until the coming of the North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) in the picture. It is a matter of surprise that despite the fact that we eat food every day, yet the food narrative is missing from the ordinary discussion of people. Food is a very important part of culture and if this one thread is removed from

lost seeds because it is not only part of our culture and history but our future also depends on the seeds that we have.

Seeds are our legacy
Seeds are an integral part of society. Whenever a new family starts in the community, at some point of time the mother would take a fistful of seeds of different crops that she grew and hand it over to her daughter. This almost ritual-like activity is normally performed before the daughter leaves the house. Seeds have not only

Agroecology Learning Circle for resilient, integrated and innovative natural resource management' is funded by World Bank under the aegis of Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA).

It was during the sharing of stories by the farmers that we came to know about the tradition that the staple food of the Khasi, Pnar War and Bhoi is not a single crop only. It is only very recently that rice became the staple food of the different regions of the state. In fact the crop which serves as the staple food for

ties that the government started providing rice through fair price shops and rice became the staple food of the people. Before that they depended on the three varieties of millets to feed themselves. For Sita Merry Nongrum of Umsaw village, Mawkyntrew block Phan Karo (sweet potato) has always been one of the major food crops which they also used as a staple food. Kynsaibor Shadap of Madantiang, Ri Bhoi district, said that yam was at one point of time the staple food of the people in the region. But the most interesting story was that of Sohriew Sib (Job's tears) by Ambious Umsor



the cloth, then the structure, the pattern and strength of the cloth is also affected. Food also depends on seeds and the story of food is not complete without the seeds from which it originates.

CBS and regaining of the lost Seeds

The story of Community Seed Banks (CBS) that we have promoted begins with the sad tale of the lost seeds that were once part of the community's agricultural practices. Some would say that being sad is not a good place to start a new venture but the truth is farmers are lamenting about this irreparable loss.

During the rice festival in 2019 organized by SURE and supported by NESFAS, custodian farmers, knowledge holders lamented about the rice varieties that the area has lost. Even the Deputy Commissioner of West Jaintia hills Garod L.S.N. Dykes, who is a native of the region recalled that the rice varieties which were popular during his childhood days are nowhere to be found now.

Rice is just one example of a native species that is being replaced by hybrid seeds provided by the government to the farmers. Traditional rice varieties vanished when the government in good faith introduced the high yielding varieties to help augment rice production in the state. The CBS in Mulum is now trying to locate and salvage as much as they can the rice varieties that the people used to grow in the region. The story is in fact similar everywhere, therefore the story of CBS is also the tale of regaining our

been part of our tribal lives; in fact every seed has stories and traditions connected to it. Seeds therefore are a rich legacy that has been handed down from one generation to another.

From Custodian farmers to Community Seeds Bank

By tradition individual farmers keep seed and few farmers in the community are custodian farmers. Custodian farmers are not only the keepers of indigenous knowledge connecting to farming practices in the region, but they also have diligently keep the seeds that they have inherited. The keepers of seeds are always proactive farmers and often leaders of the farming community in the area. The CBS is a coming together of such individuals in the farmers' community with the sole intention of protecting, preserving and sharing the seeds that they have.

Our security is in the varieties

It is a well established fact that tribal lives depend largely on the vagaries of nature for their survival; therefore it is only wise that they do not rely on a single crop as their staple food. There were stories where one crop failed and people were saved by another. The story that people in the past did not rely on a single crop to feed their hunger came rather unexpectedly. It happened when the famers shared their stories during the Community Seed Bank Exchange visit program organized by NESFAS and SURE at Mulum village. The program which was part of the project titled 'Empowering Indigenous People through

the people varies from one region to another. It is obvious that the crop which is the staple food of the people also largely depends on the topography of the area they live in.

Different regions, different crops, different staple food

Rice is the staple food for people living in the Pnar areas of Jaintia hills where the natural features of the region are plateaus with hills and valleys. It is also interesting to note that the culture and traditions of the people in the area revolve around the crop and even their festivals are based on the annual calendar of rice cultivation (Mohrmen HH, Cultural History of Jaintia hills in Stories, Stones and Traditions 2021). Similarly in the War Jaintia area the topography of the area is steep and the region experiences a subtropical climatic condition, which only makes the area a perfect match for jhum cultivation. In the southern slope millet was their main crop till not so very long ago and they even have traditions like Longhai which is connected to jhum cultivation of millet (ibid).

It is therefore not a surprise that the cultures of the Pnar who live on the plateau revolve around rice, while that of the people who live in the War area revolves around millet. But other regions of the state also have their own crops which serve as their staple food.

Crops which are also staple food

Kong Bibinia Rani from Nongtraw village said that millet has always been the crop which provides staple food for the people in the area. It is not until the seven-

from Khapmaw, Mawkyntrew block. Umsor said that sohriew may not serve as a staple food of the people, but it is an important part of their food. People not only eat it during leisure time but it is part of their lunch.

Not relying on food from outside: lesson from COVID-19

If the state depends only on rice and wheat as our staple food, the future of our food is not safe because the products come from outside the state through FCI. One lesson from the pandemic is that during a crisis it is not prudent to depend on food from outside. Lockdowns can affect the supply of food to the state and there will be food security only if we have ready supply of food within the state. The state will be self-sufficient in food if we do not rely on one or two crops for our staple food and using two or more crops as staple food is also nutritious. COVID-19 also taught us that vegetables and wild edibles foraged from the field and forest was our major support during lockdowns due to COVID-19. Therefore to grow locally and eat local is not only a catchy slogan but it is also healthy and economically viable.

No one can live without food and as the wise Native American Chief said, 'we cannot eat money.' Our future is bright only if we have robust food systems, which means not relying on one crop for our dietary needs and not depending on food from outside as our staple food.

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Behind the Kashmir Files

By Kamal Baruah

They sneaked into the battlefield, packed their kits, locked travelling trunks inside barracks and finally jumped onto the trucks to Kashmir. The life of a soldier moved on into the chaos and lawlessness that took over the valley. Most of them were just 18+ and knew nothing about combating terrorism and instead planned a special celebration after the Republic Day Parade. The contingent seemed to be filled with joie de vivre after the best marching trophy at Rajpath but an order shocked them like a horrible nightmare.

The Transit Camp at Race Course Road was spooked that night like never before. All previous postings had been cancelled by Vayu Bhawan. They had no idea about it. It was the day prior to the grand finale of RD Parade 1990, when the Rawalpindi shooting incident took place. On the morning of January 25, motorcycle-borne terrorists fired from automatic weapons at unarmed IAF personnel killing Squadron Leader Ravi Khanna, Corporal D.B. Singh, Corporal Uday Shankar and Aircraftman Azad Ahmad, while they were waiting at the bus stand.

The military strategy to-

in overcrowded camps. Kashmir belongs as much to Kashmiri Hindus as to Kashmiri Muslims. The propriety of the citadel of human awakening and freedom had ignited the complete exodus of the entire race while the civilized nations of the world failed to respond to the barbaric uprooting of an entire race of people.

The valley also suffered from the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) at the same time. Soldiers faced threats from militants for being uniformed personnel. Facing Quick Response Training (QRT) was tough because of the dreadful wild-weather of winds, rains and cold bites. As nights were compulsory blacked-out, we lost our way in the dark and then suffered sudden snowfall. The rays of the morning sun reflected back from the thin blanket of snow trapped over the surface that blurred our eyes. The silent valley was unpredictable and catastrophically unsafe. You never know when a bullet from an AK-47 or a rocket launcher would land on us.

There was mortar shelling on forward posts along the LOC. Life was never easy. The troops lay behind



wards the valley had been reviewed. Soldiers moved with convoys on the Jammu-Srinagar highway. Men in blue became no longer friendly with the valley. Pakistan-sponsored terrorism through misguided Kashmiri youth in the name of azadi and insurgency by Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) escalated after the disputed assembly election in 1987 that forced five lakh Kashmiri refugees to leave the valley after a campaign of genocide started since January 19, 1990.

The recent movie 'The Kashmir Files' helped to awaken many to the horrors of genocides. I had a special connection with Kashmir valley as I had also been part of that RD Parade contingent over the timeline of Kashmir during the 90s. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was then the Home Minister during the VP Singh government whose fame rivaled that of Chief Minister Faruk Abdullah for appointing Jagmohan as Governor. Soon the CM resigned, the Governor suggested the dissolution of the Assembly and JKLF conspired to incite riots and violence against the Kashmiri Pandits.

No one has listened to them although they numbered over half a million. This is how human rights was reckoned as trivial in Kashmir. The world had also turned a blind eye to over 1000 murders of innocent unarmed and helpless men, women and children which had taken place in the valley over the span of one and a half years at the hands of trained self-styled freedom fighters of Kashmir. They were packed shoulder to shoulder on the road and became refugees in their own country. Refugees suffered, died of infection and disease

barbed wires at the most wonderful mountain valley road at Uri-Muzaffarabad. Normal life often came to a grinding halt amid violence being unleashed by terrorists and separatists. But the most unforgettable memory of Kashmir is the colour of the mountains that changes at different hours of the day. We saw stunning snowfall hit the blue mountains all of a sudden. Then amidst the breeze we see olive green military posts. The picturesque panorama is not just beautiful but covered by tall grass where cannabis grows in abundance. The army intensifies its search for infiltrators along the three-tier border.

Over the years terrorists attacked pilgrims and escalated the valley to a conflict zone. Yet our energy and enthusiasm for life was very high. We went besides the Jhelum and Indus, beneath Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Ladakh at leisure despite unprovoked shelling over Jammu, Rajouri-Poonch. We also retaliated with missiles befittingly at the cross borders at Kargil. We felt alive seeing the river flow abundantly. The hustle-bustle of shikaras, houseboats and the grace of paradise suffered a major jolt. The travel and tourism industry suffered a great jolt due to the unrest and uncertainties. Nevertheless Kashmiri Muslims continue to struggle for the basic needs of life.

India professes to be a great secular democratic country. In the name of humanity the Government must do justice to the Kashmiri Pandits who have been relegated to the status of refugees in their own country. (The author is a former air warrior)

Letters to the Editor

Suggestions on traffic management

Editor,
School going children are experiencing the worst nightmare of their lives with parents patiently bearing the pain. It appears incurable any longer. What cannot be cured must be endured BUT endurance has its limits. Hence I offer a few suggestions for Govt to ponder upon.

(1) The traffic police are manning the Barik Point to Civil Hospital to Anjalee petrol pump. Our daily experience is that though the stretch has a white line central divider, the bulk of traffic comprising light motor vehicles that are allowed to ply for the day do not obey the traffic rules. Right before the eyes of our policemen, there is a centre with law abiding drivers flanked on the left and right by those believing they own the road and are in a motor racing event. This disrupts the up-going school vehicles bound towards Laitumkhrah which is the much-touted education hub. Why does the outbound traffic that returns after drop-

ping school children need to break all rules of human civilization, and to cause delay to the incoming vehicles? The cure for this should be that the registration plates should be clearly visible both at the rear and front. Police should be equipped with cameras to record the errant drivers. After scrutinising with the District Transport Officer (DTO), a warrant order with fine and if warranted the license should be seized and the driver jailed. If police don't have the mandate to take action as above then the law becomes a big joke!

(2) There is need for serious research into the reasons for the traffic mass. Unless the DTO and traffic police are overhauled and both are made to sit and meticulously find solutions there will be no cure to the conundrum.

(3) Step By Step School should stagger its school timing by at least 40 minutes. Why? This will enable the vehicles returning from Laitumkhrah to drive without being caught in a traffic jam at the Step By Step school junction.

Traffic police should ensure that drivers observe the etiquette of refuelling at petrol pumps. There is no

denying that Marbaniang Pump (Fire Brigade) is the busiest pump in town because it has a reputation for accurate weight and quality while other pumps don't. I request the Traffic Police to ensure that traffic flow is not disrupted because vehicles queue up at Marbaniang Petrol Pump. Petrol pumps should remain open up to 10 PM to allow the motorists to refuel without causing traffic jams. Traffic Police must be knowing this but do not communicate it to their bosses. Let the SP Traffic be at this spot so that he knows where the ailment lies.

(4) Ambulance movement ten years ago the good Samaritans had requested hospitals to welcome traffic accident victims. It was enacted as law. So ambulance drivers should have tele-communications facility with police to direct them to the nearest hospitals not in terms of distance but in terms of time taken to reach the hospital. This would save lives at times when life seems to weigh less than a feather. This should be applicable to all emergency services. Huawei had practised this method in UK.

(5) Pollution Under Con-

trol (PUC). Let us be honest with ourselves. Suppose the registration no. is now at V or X. Assuming that 60% of vehicles are scrapped or a few are in workshops, how can motorists who are law abiding citizens, reach the testing centre which is easily accessible? And all of a sudden our Union Transport Minister N. Gadkari, made innocent motorists to lose sleep for no fault of theirs. If a person has taken a loan to purchase a vehicle for school and office duty and if the pollution test fails the car can be seized and scrapped. This appears to be a bonanza for car dealers.

Let the Government be more proactive in matters of life and death. If the above humble suggestions are accepted with a resolute mindset, our school children and patients in urgent need of speed will be greatly relieved.

Yours etc
M. Khyriem
Shillong 14.

Craze for Science education

Editor,
Meghalaya, the so-called

"hub for education", has registered a decline in the quality of education in recent times. While this may be one of the umpteen letters on the state of education in our state there are certain details mentionable here. It's well known by all that, in the higher secondary schools, Meghalaya reflects competition of, say, the Delhi University admissions. In certain schools one must belong to the "crème de la crème" to get in. The rest of are mostly students who take up Science due to parental pressure and who try to get into any school that admits them. What happens next is pure business.

The sky-rocketing fee structure for the Science stream is troubling to even consider for families that live from hand to mouth, but the parents struggle to meet those expenses anyway. It's necessary for one to be aware and not to be ignorant about the situation of the Science stream in higher secondary schools. Many such schools take in hundreds of students in Class XI, who, as mentioned earlier, may or may not prefer Science at all, but have been forced to take up the subject. Parents who can afford then send their children

for private tuitions, thereby incurring extra expenditure. Students who can't cope with Science are then filtered out and dropped out the following year. These students then experience emotions of depression, lack of confidence and shame. Not only have they lost one year in doing something they may or may not have ever wanted to do but they also lose interest in the whole idea of studying.

The whole process then repeats the following year where fresh students have to undergo the same experience again. Why can't all schools have a proper structure to help students pick a stream suitable to them? Why can't parents stop the age-old practice of forcing their children to take up Science, in accordance with the typical; Asian stereotype? We can simply look around us and ask- are all successful people only those with a Science background?

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

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"The government solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem."

--- Milton Friedman

The Shillong Times

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Politics of avarice

MEGHALAYA bucks the trend when it comes to voting. Political parties and their ideologies or manifestos matter little to the opportunistic voter. Yet the dance of democracy has begun in full swing with leaders of political parties boasting aloud that people are making a beeline to join their parties. As if that means anything at all. The political party merely provides a uniform for old timers to be seen in new colours. They are old wine in recycled bottles. At the end of the day we all know and have internalised the fact that - 'Money Matters' and political parties are ready and willing to admit candidates they do not need to fund but who will fund their own election campaigns. Such candidates are labelled as "winnable." Winnability is not measured by any moral or ethical standard for there is no longer any such standard in Meghalaya society. Today the voters are ahead of politicians. The unifier is a common feeling that elections are a 'now or never' opportunity to make whatever money is possible from contesting candidates. Avariciousness is the new normal and new candidates longing to serve the state and to prove to the voters that money is not the only criterion for winning elections are being scoffed at as naive and idealistic.

It is not the voter that has turned mercenary. It is the politician that has whetted the appetite of the voter since the past two decades when business tycoons (by Meghalaya's standards) started joining politics, not to serve the constituency or the cause of democracy but to make it easier for themselves to do business. Hence, we have an MLA that owns a construction company being appointed Minister, Public Works Department in what is a direct conflict of interests. It's a different matter that the majority of MLAs are also contractors and businesspersons because politics has become the new business model - a politics of aspirations.

Today voters are not apologetic about voting for those that pay them the moolah. In this aspect the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commission have absolutely no control over money changing hands by the crores during the election season when the campaign period begins. Instead of asking the political contenders some pertinent questions about (a) what blueprint they have for taking Meghalaya to the next level in terms of economic development? (b) how do they envisage creating job opportunities for the thousands of qualified but unemployed youth? (c) questions on whether sustainable mining is possible etc., we have pliable voters who sing and dance during elections meetings. This has reduced democracy to a farce in Meghalaya.

No Straitjacket Solution to The Assam-Meghalaya Border Disputes

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

All governments, in the past and present had made sincere efforts to resolve the one hundred forty-eight years old border imbroglio and the future generations must not be overburdened by this. But why is the MDA Government so secretive on the Reports of the Regional Committees and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on borders with Assam? It also fantasizes that it is "the only Government" which is serious about it and none others. This is a dangerous practice in democracy. Although this Government had convened sporadic meetings with selected non-governmental groups, but it was learnt that they were only given verbal updates and no written reports whatsoever were shared in those meetings. The Reports and especially the MOU which was the final outcome of the various exercises should have been put in the public domain soliciting discussions and also debated in the State Assembly before inking the MOU in Delhi.

The Constitutional Boundary of Meghalaya is defined in section 5 of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act 1971. It can be read with section 3 of the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act 1969 and para 20 of the Sixth Schedule. The boundary of Assam and Meghalaya runs to a total length of 885 Kms. Thus, along this length and in locations like the Block I and II, Basistha-Khanapara, Jirang, Nongwah, Langpoh sectors etc in Khasi and Jaintia Hills and in eighteen pockets in Toporpara, Hallidagang, Boglarbheeta-Kalapara, Rongsai-Pesaldoba areas etc in Garo Hills District that tensions frequently arose and had also cost innocent lives.

From 1875 to 1970, the areas of conflict fell under the Inter-District boundaries within the erstwhile Province and composite State of Assam. It was the dispute between the Kamrup and United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Districts, the Mikir Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills and Goalpara Districts respectively. In 1875 the demand was made to transfer the ten Khasi villages in mouza Nuniyah from the Kamrup District to the Khasi Hills. It was submitted and noted in the file No. 206J of 1875 Nos 1-10 that, "it was an old standing grievance of Nongpoh people and the boundary between Khasi Hills and Kamrup is being laid down on the principle of giving all lands contained in any Khasi State to the Khasi Hills. But there are ten villages in and about Nongpoh which are not apparently included in any Khasi State and which pay revenue (house

tax) at Gauhati... these villages want to be again included in Khasi Hills. It is a pity the point was not raised when the boundary question was up. Reserve it till that question comes up again."

The demand gave rise to the appointment of boundary commissioners which comprised the Deputy Commissioners of Kamrup and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts, vide letter No 1668 Fort William the 23rd November 1875, "in order to determine whether villages of Nuniyah and other hamlets connected with it lie within the boundary of Kamrup or the Khasi Hills Districts." However, the Chief Commissioner of Assam noted in his reply, "...that the Deputy Commissioners of Kamrup and Khasi Hills are now engaged in defining the boundary, and as there are many points for consideration besides that connected with Nuniyah, Col. Keatings desired that the appointment of these officers may be made general to determine the boundary between the two Districts."

The decisions of the Boundary Commissioners were published and the boundaries defined, vide Home Department Notification No.1430 Dated 14th September 1876. Also, the boundary of Garo Hills was described and defined vide Judicial Department's Notification Dated July 1875 to be read with notification No. 229 R. Dated 25th January 1929. According to former Chief Secretary, J.M Phira, "the Inter-District boundaries of the erstwhile composite State of Assam have now become an Inter-State boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam... that the aberrations in Inter-District boundaries are bound to expand into differences on Inter-state boundary. This is precisely the problem that Assam and Meghalaya are facing..."

There was not so much problem in Jaintia Hills until the creation of the Mikir Hills Autonomous District Council and the subsequent inclusion of Block I and II within the Mikir Hills District in 1951. The people of Block I and II vehemently resented this inclusion, but till date the resolution remains elusive despite efforts to solve the crisis.

Every government finds itself in limbo trying for a permanent solution to the border disputes, especially in the Khasi Hills sectors whereby the British Government for its own administrative convenience detached many territories from the purview of the Syiems (native rulers) and brought them

under the administration of the District of Kamrup in Assam. The core issue in this protracted negotiation on borders between Assam and Meghalaya also lies in the interpretation of para 20 (2) of the Sixth Schedule. The provision says that, "the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District shall comprise of the boundaries which before the commencement of the constitution were known as the Khasi States and Khasi-Jaintia Hills..."

The Assam-Meghalaya border is a jagged line and since the British era various principles had evolved while determining the boundaries. During the period 1875-76 the Boundary Commissioners went on the principle that land belonging to Khasi Chiefs should be in Khasi Hills. They also adopted the straight-line approach which had the effect of taking portions of certain Khasi territories into Kamrup. In the instant case of Basistha-Khanapara sector the Chief Commissioner held that "the geographical must yield to political considerations... that he would not put the Khasi Chief partly in Kamrup and partly in Khasi Hills but if it is convenient for any good reason to attach a whole estate to Kamrup, he would be prepared to accept such an arrangement... if for the purpose of making the boundary a good one from the geographical point of view... the Deputy Commissioners could affect any exchange of land but between Chiefs or between any Chief and British Government, the Chief Commissioner would sanction such an arrangement."

The ethnic principle was applied for Block I and II in which the tribe-wise comparative population was to determine the boundaries of the Mikir Hills and United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. That the Census Reports of 1951 and 1961 were to be the basis of comparison among Mikir and non-Mikir population and the transfer of Block I and II from the Mikir Hills to Jaintia Hills will be determined by the population figures. However, this principle had never worked as both the States did not concur on the method of collecting and analysing the data. Thus, the matter remains inconclusive.

It will be a great dishonour to the predecessors to believe that the MDA government headed by Mr Conrad K Sangma is the only government which can resolve the border disputes. For the benefit of turncoats and others who are brown-nosing the Chief Minister, the first person to stand up in defence

of the territory in the Khasi Hills was a Shillong Sing who demanded the transfer of ten villages in mouza Nuniyah from Kamrup to Khasi Hills in 1875. Both the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council and the Hima Mylliem had strongly objected to the definition and interpretation of its boundaries as prescribed in the 1876 notification. The Syiem and Durbar of Hima Mylliem submitted before the Chandrachud Committee in 1986 thus- "...the boundary of Mylliem State is not affected by the definition of the notification published in 1876 as Mylliem being an Indian State and is not part of Khasi & Jaintia Hills or British India..." The series of replies and statements on Inter-State borders made by Bah B.B Lyngdoh on the floor of the House between 1972 and 1975 is plain indication of the humongous efforts made in the past.

We the people are yet to know the principles adopted by the present Government, but on ground we had already witnessed that the people are not happy with the give and take arrangement. From the villages of Malchapara, Sabari in Nonglang Sirdarship to Pilangkata-Khanapara and Raji Marwet, the residents are in grave despair of being forced to live as minorities in Assam and they vehemently opposed the transfer of their villages.

As the way forward, tenable and practical solutions must be explored by both States. Firstly, Assam must undo its big brother attitude, rather show magnanimity. Secondly, traditional institutions of Meghalaya must immediately devise a robust and workable system for documentation and registration of land and property under its purview. Thirdly, both the States must facilitate people to people interface along the borders and allow them to decide what is best for them. Constitution of a statutory border monitoring commission with equal representation from both States, equitable representation from communities living in the borders is imperative. It shall act as a quasi-judicial body and have powers to resolve conflicts and monitor economic developments, besides ensuring the border populace of full participation in grassroots governance. Along the Inter-State borders there are economic hotspots and both the States have to ensure that people living in those areas are not left out in the process, but must partake in the economic gains.

Parting shot: Only when you disregard people and history will you buy the MOU on border disputes which was inked recently.

How private hospitals thrive in a failed system

By Jagdish Rattanani

Three big hospital chains are under the scanner but every private sector hospital should watch out as the CCI begins to act

Seven years ago, and long before the Covid-19 pandemic was to bring devastation to India and the world, a consumer filed a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Max Super Speciality Hospital Ltd. in New Delhi. He noted that a syringe issued from the hospital's in-house pharmacy had a marked-up MRP and was sold to in-patients at almost double the price at which it was available outside, and alleged collusion between the syringe manufacturers, Becton Dickinson India Pvt Ltd and the hospital chain. A six-member bench of the CCI in November 2015 found merit in the case and ordered the Director General to investigate.

That marked the beginning of a long journey that has hit the headlines yet again now in the post-pandemic world, with reports that the CCI has issued show cause notices to three large hospital groups, Max Healthcare, Apollo Hospitals and Fortis Healthcare, seeking to know how they fix prices of drugs and medical devices used for their patients.

At one level, this looks like extraordinarily slow progress in a case that could have prevented a lot of misery to ordinary citizens from hospitals overcharging in all kinds of novel ways in the midst of the pandemic. Think of just how much was being added to patient bills on account of PPE kits alone, not to speak of a host of other consumables that doctors and surgeons use and are charged to patients, often at exorbitant rates. It was the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) that in an unrelated 2018 investigation reported "unethical profiteering in a failed market system", with some material and drugs being charged by hospitals to patients at margins of over 1,000%. This wasn't a random figure; the NPPA report put out a table that listed, item by item, the extortionary mark-up prices that patients were forced to pay. As an example, "IV infusion set non-vented (RMS infusion set), SS3062" by Romsons drew an unbelievable margin for hospitals of 2,112%; syringe disposable, 2ml, Luer lock", by Lifelong Meditech Ltd., delivered a margin of 1,596%, laying bare what can only be called dacoity by daylight that the hospitals have been able to get away with for long. This was the data collected, investigated and reported by a government body as we, then unknowingly, headed into the pandemic that on official count alone killed over 500,000 people in India.

Slow as its actions have been, the Competition Commission also deserves to be complimented for widening its investigations from one hospital group named in the original complaint to more players after its investigations uncovered the deep rot in the super speciality system of hospitals. For example, CCI investigations reported that Max Super Speciality Hospital in Patparganj, New Delhi 110092, "had earned huge profit margins ranging from 269.84% to 527% in the financial year 2014-15 and ranging from 276.96% to 527% in the financial year 2015-16 by sale of different syringes." The numbers are astonishing and even more shocking when considered in the light of the fact that the hospital "has been compelling its in-patients to purchase products only from its in-house pharmacy once

they are admitted..." to quote a CCI three-bench follow-up order of Aug. 2018. The bare facts tell us of the minds at work at the highest levels in these hospitals - a systematic hunt for places and niches where bills can be inflated, a distortion of processes to defeat the very idea of price control and to gain unfair competitive advantage from those who are vulnerable and have nowhere else to go at a time of medical distress. When large hospital chains are found in this exploitative behaviour, it brings the added disadvantage of tarring all private hospitals. The few good ones find themselves bracketed in public perception with the large number of bad ones, making this an unwanted and unwinnable game of private versus the public sector healthcare system. This builds a mob mentality, with issues that are entirely different being debated while the rogue players get away.

Though this looks like a case against a few hospital chains, and the show-cause notices may not mean that guilt has been established, the reality is that hospitals big and small have now become part of a culture in which doctors have become money spinning machines in institutions that no longer hesitate to set targets and drive revenues. This trend has been normalised and it now needs to be put down with a heavy hand, not only in action by the CCI but by a plethora of agencies that must act together against extortionary behaviour. The current set of practices heralds the death of the medical system in India, with the little focus on professional excellence and more on the number of patients signed off, surgeries completed and money collected. Active malpractice is just a step away at this stage. At one end, this will inevitably lead to runaway costs that India cannot live with. At another, it will lead to a precipitous decline in service quality. Doctors who are known to be good can't get better in such a system because the moneybag doctors and managers/administrators will tend to get ahead. This also means our best medical professionals need voice and policy support to resist this ugly trend from within the wards and operations theatres where they work to fight disease and save lives. There are still any number of honest and well-meaning doctors who live by the Hippocratic Oath they take to serve but they find themselves increasingly crowded out.

As the CCI pushes its case against the biggies, and hopefully drives it to its logical conclusion, every single hospital in the country will be looking see how this pans out. Also watching will be manufacturers and international suppliers who would know that even syringes have space to make a margin of 1,500% and above in India. It was only recently that the international medical device manufacturers put up a stiff fight on stent pricing before the government acted and forced them down. All kinds of pressure was mounted on the government to not act then; having acted, the government delivered a signal achievement and sent out a strong message that India will not let its citizens be exploited. It must now do the same, if not more, against some of our hospitals and perform a thorough post-pandemic clean-up.

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

Letters to the Editor

Can't let our guards down

Editor, Following the decrease in the number of Covid-19 infection cases, some states have dispensed with mandatory wearing of masks. It must be understood that wearing of masks is one of the restrictions imposed by the government during a spike in Covid-19 cases in the country. The governments of Maharashtra and Delhi have relaxed the restrictions on compulsory wearing of masks in public places. Wearing of masks has been made voluntary in these states. A sudden drop in positive cases has made these governments make such a decision. They are under the impression that the virus has weakened and it is not likely to return. However, those who know the characteristics of viruses, will never show complacency when it comes to combating viruses. Viral infections may show a sudden decrease but there is every likelihood of their return. Scientists and experts have predicted that many countries may face the fourth wave of the pandemic. Many European countries, China and the USA are faced with a rise in positive cases. A

new variant of the virus called Deltacon has been identified by scientists. To make matters worse, a new Covid variant XE which is more dangerous than any strain of Covid-19 has been found in the UK. While a majority of people believe that the pandemic may turn into an endemic, scientists are warning against completely doing away with mandatory wearing of masks. Wearing masks is a precautionary measure against the pandemic. Some countries that had done away with it paid a heavy price for that mistake. True, there is no need to wear masks for a long time. However, there is no harm in continuing this practice. As there is no evidence for complete disappearance of the virus, we need to be alert. Given that protection from the vaccine is temporary, the virus may return by changing into another variant. While restrictions cannot be imposed for a long time, we need to resign ourselves to the new normal. Yours etc., Venu GS, Kollam

School or retail shop?

Editor The parents of students

of Pine Mount School, Shillong have been asked by the school teachers to purchase face masks sold by the school. This is another jewel in the crown of the school. Instead of focussing on teaching they are now involved in business practices. Masks are available everywhere now and the school cannot and must not ask the students to buy it only from the school at a hefty price of Rs 200 for 3 masks. Is the mask certified by the WHO or some health agencies that will prevent the virus entry? It is just another mask which is commercially available and nothing special. Schools are to provide education and not become a retail establishment. Please focus on education at this crucial time instead of commercial profit. The State Education Department should ask for an explanation from the school on this matter. Yours etc., D. Swer Shillong

Uniform Civil Code

Editor, Article 44 of the Indian Constitution postulates the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It reads "the State shall endeavour to secure for the

citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". It is among the Liberal-Intellectual classification of the Directive Principles of State Policies. This article mandates that there should be a uniform law on personal matters such as marriage, inheritance, adoption, divorce, etc. Recently, the new Uttarakhand CM, Pushkar Singh Dhami, announced that a panel of experts will be formed to examine the possibility of implementing a UCC in the state. With the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections will the BJP govt at the centre bring another big push with the UCC apart from the past adventures such as GST, Demonetization, Art 370, etc.?

It is imperative to take into account that India is a diverse pool of culture and customs with approximately more than 19,000 languages and 700 tribes spanning across the length and breadth of the country. While it should be noted that UCC will bring equality in a prevalent patriarchal society, as highlighted by Firoz Ahmed Bakht, Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University, in his petition to the Supreme Court, it should also be considered while formulating the UCC in the future that suggestions

from all spheres of society should be considered and that political gimmicks in the name of religion, just to garner votes, should stay aloof to not exacerbate the already polarised, divided country and to ensure that the UCC is truly liberal in spirit and character. Yours etc., Kevin M Shangpliang, Via email

Deplorable Mawbah Road

Editor, The stretch of about a kilometre long Mawbah (Barapathar) Road is in a deplorable condition now. There are a lot of potholes. The side edges of the road have been broken and denuded at several places, by the sewage water flowing from the ill-constructed drains. This has made the road narrower at its entrance. Pedestrians find it extremely difficult to let the vehicles pass, especially during rush hours in the morning and evening. This road was last repaired and renovated thoroughly during the end of Mr Paul Lyngdoh's tenure as MLA in 2017-18. At that point the bundle of water pipes which were laid by the side of the road, at the uphill of its entrance, have been

routed under concrete covered culvert. This has provided great relief to vehicles as well as to pedestrians till date. Also, at several lengths culvert covers were provided making the road wider. At present because of prolonged non-maintenance, the road has weathered and its surface is eroded in several places. Culvert covers are missing or broken at several places making the road dangerous to commute during the evening time. This road is a very important one because it is an approach road to five graveyards belonging to different religious sects and cremation sites of greater Shillong besides being the lifeline of the thickly populated Mawbah (Barapathar) Village. Hence concerned State authorities and also the local MLA is fervently requested to spare their valuable time to steady the condition of this road and do the needful to repair it, at their earliest, preferably before the onset of the monsoon rains. Yours etc., Krishna Chettri Shillong-2

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

"To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe."

--- Anatole France

The Shillong Times

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Rudderless Congress

PAIN was palpable as Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi addressed party parliamentarians on Tuesday. The drubbing the party received at the five-state assembly polls was the last straw on the ailing camel's back. She called for unity and said she would try and accommodate the views of all in the attempts at revitalizing the party. This is easier said than done. The G-23 group of senior leaders are hemming and hawing for some time. Their future too is at stake but fact is none of them has the outstanding profile to stand upfront and chart a new course for the party.

What was often stated remains true of the Congress party even now. The "family" is the glue that binds its constituents together. It started as the Congress-Indira after the epic split in the Congress party in 1969. It functioned on Indira Gandhi's charisma. Nehru family was still the toast of the season. This scenario has changed over the years despite the sacrifices the family made for the country. The corruption of the UPA period hurt the image of the Congress as also Sonia Gandhi badly. There is a sense of utter hopelessness today. The Hindutva push per se is not the reason. The Congress as an entity failed to keep up its organizational heft in every state. Yet, the party is there everywhere. What it lacks is a strong leadership. Sonia Gandhi has serious health problems and cannot travel.

At a stage where the Congress party has no leader outside of the "family" who carries abundant clout or possesses a national appeal, the only way forward is to keep the family in the forefront. It had two options to explore in recent times; namely to try out Rahul and Priyanka. When Priyanka was given charge of Uttar Pradesh, expectations were that she would effect a noticeable turnaround there. This hope has fallen flat. On the other hand, Rahul Gandhi is steadily strengthening his profile; and his speech in parliament at the start of the budget session was widely appreciated. Sonia Gandhi herself was in favour of handing over the baton to her son. The old guard that thrived under her, which had their own vested interests, wanted to delay this leadership transition process. That stage should be past now. An informed view is that the baton must be passed on to Rahul Gandhi without further delay and it should now be up to him to make a last try – for the Congress to sail or sink. Organisational polls at state levels can still be attempted at, to rejuvenate the party.

What if Jesus was present today..

By Albert Thyrnang

in this man's blood."

This presentation is not to provide the illusive answer as to why Jesus was put to death. The objective is different. Jesus could be blamed for his own death. The preacher foresaw his demise. Not necessarily because he was God. It was common sense. In his ministry he had constantly called the Pharisees and the Scribes 'hypocrites'. Literally meaning 'separated ones' the Pharisees considered themselves holy and the rest, especially those under Greco-Roman influence, outcasts. The experts, the Scribes parsed the law of the Ten Commandments into bits so much so, it became an agonising burden on ordinary people. They themselves were far from being religious from the inside. Jesus called them 'whitewashed tombs'. Jesus broke the Sabbath

abandoned Him. The Apostles were about to follow suit. But Jesus did not change His stand. He did not call the crowd back and say, "I made a mistake. You need not follow my teaching." Had He done so he would have had many more friends and followers! His popularity would have risen sharply. Jesus did not look for popularity ratings. He did not care about public approval scores.

Jesus asserted He was God's son and the Saviour. The Jewish leaders could not accept it. For them it was blasphemy. Hence they schemed, plotted and conspired against Him. But Jesus did not alter his position. To escape death he could have denied his claims. He could have denied his 'true nature.' He could have pretended not to be one. He could have compromised on his true identity.



observance by performing miracles on the 'Holy' day. Though work was completely forbidden he challenged the Pharisee saying the 'Yahweh's day' was meant to do good. Jesus' friendship with the 'unclean', sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors also drew the ire of his opponents.

Jesus knew that if He were to continue to call out the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes He would be in serious trouble. He anticipated that the leaders would plot against him if He carried on healing the sick on Sabbath. He could have avoided conflicts by ignoring the misdeeds of the religious leaders of his time. He could have escaped the wrath of his adversaries by adhering to the narrow interpretation of Sabbath rules. Had he compromised on his conviction he would have prolonged his works for much longer. He did not. He paid the price.

Jesus' teachings were hard. He said, "I am the Bread of Life. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me." No one could accept this statement. All those who had gathered to listen to Him

He could have confessed the contrary to Caiaphas before the Sanhedrin. He would have been acquitted. But He made no bargain. He faced the consequence. Jesus died for the truth. It was his own fault!

Today we see truth being sacrificed on the altar of convenience and self-interests. We know the truth is not told. When USA said Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons we knew it was a lie. Fake documents were even created to justify the war. When America says it wants world peace, it is not telling the truth. America has waged war all over the world. The present Russian-Ukraine war is pressed on by the super power for political and financial gains. The European Union is guilty of the same. When we appreciate and promote Kashmir Files we know that the same people will not tolerate a 'Gujarat Files' or 'Ayodhya Files' or 'Muzaffargarh Files'. If such movies are made vandalism will probably take place.

In our state, we know it is a lie when the state government asserts that there is no illegal mining. One year

before the Assembly elections, we see the circus of individuals quitting one party and joining another. They praise their new party and fire salvos at the party they have been part of in the past. Their tall claim is to serve the people. But the public knows they do so merely to secure a ticket in the up-coming election since their former party does not assure them one. They don't blink an eye for broadcasting lies.

We mourned the death of Fr. Stan Swamy in July last year. The 84 year old priest was a Jesus-like figure. The activist of the Jesuit order was arrested on false charges. He testified that fabricated evidences were planted on his computer. He knew beforehand that if he carried on working for the tribals the mining mafias would collude to target him. He knew if he kept speaking out against the government of the day he would face persecution. Other intellectuals, activists, journalists, poets and others too have faced legal actions on framed charges for not toeing the line of the present dispensation.

The Church admires these noble souls but has little guts to speak the truth. Last December, during Christmas, when harassment against Christians surfaced in the media, the Church offered no protest. The Christian and political leaders of the predominantly Christian states of North East too gave the slip. In Meghalaya the Church has absolutely no word on illegal mining and transportation, on the various scams and other issues concerning the society. If Jesus was present were present here and now would He be silent? We liturgically celebrate His life, death and resurrection throughout the year but are His values kept?

These days this author is asked to 'tone' down his criticism of the Church. The response is simple: Why don't these complainants write the toned down version of the Church. Why direct others to do so? Secondly, what has been in black and white is not all. One can't say it is the tip of the iceberg but certainly much more dirt is there. A real mess! The other day someone called from Jaintia Hills and endorses, "What else can be said when from 2011 to 2016, and until today we don't have a bishop. There is nothing to guess about the state of affairs. In the logo of the Synod 2023 a bishop is shown walking with the faithful. We don't have a bishop. With whom do we walk together?" Anyone has an answer? Where is the identity of the Church? If Jesus was back physically he will certainly come down hard on the concerned leaders. He won't just glorify the Church? He might found another Church. The challenge is to persevere in the truth and be ready to face the consequences.

Decoding the Russian invasion of Ukraine

By Ajay Patnaik

It is now common knowledge that NATO's eastward expansion towards Russia since 1999, adding 14 more members to the existing 16 since the end of the Cold War, has been the main reason behind Russia's actions in Ukraine, with which it shares a border of some 2,295 kilometres. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is a relic of the Cold War and was formed in 1949 to defend Western Europe and North America against the Soviet Union and its allies. Countering it was the Soviet Bloc's Warsaw Pact alliance, which was dissolved in 1991. The continuation of NATO and its expansion eastward created an imbalance that threatened post-Cold War global peace. This became clear from the unilateral bombing of Belgrade (1999) and the invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

Along with NATO expansion, a spate of regime changes in the post-Soviet space, including a violent one in 2014 in Ukraine, created a spectre of encirclement for Russia. This process dates back to 2003, when a pro-Western regime came to power in Georgia after orchestrated protests aided and abetted by the West. Before the violent protests in 2014 in Kiev, a regime change had already taken place once in Ukraine in 2004. Viktor Yanukovich, the former Prime Minister who was ousted in 2005 came back as President of Ukraine in 2010 but was ousted again in 2014 because he was not seen as sufficiently pro-West and was perceived to be "soft" towards Russia. Earlier, during the beginning of the US invasion of Afghanistan, two American bases had come up in 2001 in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which created more insecurity for Russia.

Vladimir Putin, unlike his predecessor Boris Yeltsin, decided to counter the Western moves through an integration process in Eurasia (comprising post-Soviet States). The two organisations – Eurasian Economic Union (2015) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (2002) – have re-established Russian leadership in the post-Soviet space, even though only a few States have joined these initiatives. Ukraine, the most developed State after Russia in the region would have been a strong pillar of this integration process. Obviously, at a time when the West was pushing to take NATO to Russian borders, Viktor Yanukovich (the Ukraine President from 2010-2014) could not be relied upon to serve the purpose of orienting the post-Soviet States towards Europe. His removal in 2014 paved the way to draw Ukraine closer to the West and bring NATO right to the Russian border.

In a hard-hitting speech a decade-and-a-half back, at the February 2007 Munich Conference on Security, Putin criticised the United States' monopolistic dominance in global relations, and its "almost uncontained hyper use of force in international relations". The warnings in Munich did not stop NATO from encouraging Georgia to join the Alliance and a referendum was held there in 2008 to approve future integration with NATO. Ukraine since 2014 followed a similar trajectory when 7 February 2019, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to change the Ukrainian constitution in order to help the country join NATO and the European Union, and on 12 June 2020, Ukraine joined NATO's enhanced opportunity partner interoperability programme. NATO recognised Ukraine's contribution that day in a Press Release that said: "This status is part of NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative, which aims to maintain and deepen cooperation between Allies and partners that have made significant contributions to NATO-led operations and missions ... Allies highly value these significant contributions, which demonstrate Ukraine's commitment to Euro-Atlantic security."

At the June 2021 Brussels Summit, NATO leaders reiterated the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine would become a member of the Alliance. Ukraine began joint military exercises with the US and other NATO troops between 20 September and 1 October 2021.

What are Russia's objectives in Ukraine?

In many post-Soviet States, the nation-building process has excluded ethnic minorities, their languages and cultures. The ruling nationalists have ignored the multi-ethnic character of post-Soviet states. This happened in Georgia, where two break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were sought to be forcibly integrated in 2008. This led to a 12-day war with Russia following which these two regions have become independent. Being on Russia's borders, South Ossetia and Abkhazia have become buffer areas, preventing any hostile forces and missiles being placed close to Russia.

Ukraine is facing a similar situation. It has strong divisions along geographical and cultural identities. The western part is more Europe-oriented and people there mainly follow Roman Catholicism. On the other hand, people in the eastern part of Ukraine are Russian-speaking or of ethnic Russian origin and follow Orthodox Christianity. The nationalist takeover of Ukraine made the Russian speaking population and areas the target of huge offensive by the Ukrainian army and their right-wing supporters like the Azov battalion (a right-wing, neo-Nazi former paramilitary group that became a unit of the National Guard of Ukraine, based in Mariupol, in the Azov Sea coastal region) since 2014. This resulted in the death of nearly 15,000 persons. The alienation of Russian-speakers has created an opportunity for Russia to pre-empt further NATO expansion and create a buffer zone along its border with Ukraine.

When Russia declared military operations in Ukraine, the twin goals it worked with were demilitarisation and "de-Nazification" of Ukraine. Having achieved a certain amount of success in terms of destroying much of the military infrastructure of Ukraine and pressurising President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to agree to a status of neutrality during the talks with Russia, Moscow is moving very systematically to achieve the other objective. It is around eastern and southern Ukraine that the Russian-speaking population mainly lives. Most of the Donetsk and Lugansk provinces, which are part of the Donbas region, have been taken from the Ukrainian forces. These areas along with southern cities like Mariupol and Odessa are the ones where since 2014 Ukrainian forces along with the ultra-nationalist battalions have inflicted maximum repression and damage. In the process of taking control of these areas, Russia would be inflicting greater damage on what it considers "neo-Nazi" groups.

When on 1 April 2022, Russia made the freeing Donbas region one of its main objectives, it was also indicating that it is going to create a buffer along its land and maritime border with Ukraine. The southern part of Ukraine, especially its two main Black Sea ports of Odessa and Mariupol are of immense strategic importance, since Russia's main navy is located in the Sevastopol base on the Black Sea and Mariupol will create a vast land corridor between Crimea and Donbas. The buffer zone addresses the long-term security interests of Russia, even if in future Ukraine reneges on its promise of neutrality.

(Dr. Ajay Patnaik is retired Professor, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Meghalayans gear yourselves for a revolution

Editor,

Apropos of Albert Thyrnang's article, Case of the Mawhati MLA and our collective response" (ST March 30, 2022), as a regular reader of The Shillong Times, I must say that Thyrnang's articles are downright honest and revealing. His articles also speak of his grassroots connection. These are the kind of articles that challenge us to question how some people in power are able to amass wealth while Meghalayans in the countryside are becoming poorer. The way I see it, today Meghalaya has been mortgaged to a set of moneybags who are all out to exploit every single opportunity to enrich themselves and their kith and kin. How long can Meghalaya (the state and its people) carry on like this? Is anyone willing to answer these questions of life and death? Look at the trajectory at which we pitch our economy. They are all related to exploitation of the environment. Thankfully we have a conscientious High Court

that is taking cognizance of the destruction to the environment due to unregulated coal and limestone mining; stone quarrying, sand banking and charcoal production by cutting down trees. As a senior citizen I worry at the future we are leaving behind for our children and grandchildren.

Is there none that can fight back these disruptive forces? Are our pressure groups blind to the illegal mining and transportation of coal? Why are they stunningly silent on this issue? Isn't it because they are all beneficiaries of that kitty? The landslide on the Shillong-Dawki road was waiting to happen, what with the road expansion scheme and the daily blasting carried out by NHIDCL. This road would have been perfect for a railway line that would have caused lesser damage to the environment. But no. There are groups and even politicians with vested interests who regularly raise their bogey against railways coming to Byrnihat and beyond. Meghalaya is a state with over 30 lakh population. Why are we allowing a few people to decide on our behalf, especially those are

not even elected but have held the state to ransom for decades? This has got to end. Many business persons have asked why the Government does not also take their views on the railways since it works out easier for them and more cost effective if goods are transported by trains? Only those working in the interests of the truck lobby are against railways. And the Government has no spine to tackle them. Meghalaya actually requires a Chief Minister like Himanta Biswa Sarma to discipline all these untoward forces that sap at the economy of the state on the pretext of protecting their people when they actually protect their own self interests.

It is my fervent wish that people like Albert Thyrnang who I believe is Principal of a school in Assam's Karbi Anglong District, is posted to Meghalaya to revolutionise the entire education system by talking about issues relevant to our state and its governance, in the classroom so that our youth begin to raise tough questions not just from the government but also those forces that claim to represent us. We are not dumb to be represented by

people of all shades who are actually against our interests and whose only long term interest is in electoral politics.

At 50 Meghalaya and its people must be willing to change, first by throwing out all these sitting MLAs. Second, they must form a united front that will transcend politics and ego and together make a long term, medium term and short term vision for Meghalaya in the next 50 years. If people vote back this same group they are voting in people who will put entire Meghalaya up for sale. Do we want that to happen in our lifetime?

Yours etc.,
G. Lyngdoh Mawlong,
Via email

Where's your conscience UDP?

Editor,

After the MoU on the boundary issue was signed we were surprised to read the news in the front page of The Shillong Times, "Boundary pact: UDP wants Govt to revisit certain areas," (ST April 4, 2022). So what has

gone wrong? UDP is part of the MDA so why were these issues not taken up internally? Where was the UDP when the MeECL was going to disenfranchise the Shillong and Jowai circles in what was a complete sell-out to RECPDCL? The UDP has never taken up the matter of rat hole mining which is illegal mining and the illegal transportation of coal.

Why do I smell a rat here? Perhaps it has to do with losing out the green pastures of the UDP. For four years the UDP has supported the MDA Government and clinging tight against all the storms and acts of omissions and commissions and letting their boss, the bosom friend of the Assam CM, without any proof nor knowledge of boundaries, ready to conclude an MOU and give away our rights to Assam. Worse is the political scenario in which all these parties of the present MDA Government will continue to reign forever and ever and Meghalaya, the Abode of Clouds, will turn into an abode of coal dust that would exacerbate climate change.

Yours etc.,
F. Lyngdoh
Via email

Ban liquor shops

Editor,

This is to bring to your kind notice that the National Highway near the Veterinary hospital has become a hot spot for vehicles to stop in the evening and buy liquor from the two wine stores along the roadside. They play loud music and drink alongside which causes many problems to the people passing by the road in the evening. The street lights are also not functioning well. If traffic police are present they don't stop for a long time but most of the time traffic police is not there and it becomes a party spot by the roadside. It is also a genuine request to the MLA to look into the matter and install CCTV cameras in the interest of the safety of the general public walking through the lane.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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"The more things change, the more they are the same."

--- Alphonse Karr

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya High Court's exemplary rulings

ON rare occasions have courts taken such strong note of dereliction of duty from the State Government but this was warranted in public interest. The irony is that a Government tasked with protecting the interests of the State and its people by conserving the environment and which is provided adequate resources to do so, is instead complicit in the act of wanton illegal mining thereby defrauding the state exchequer of much needed revenue. All regulatory authorities have failed to check the impact of such anthropogenic activities on the environment. The Justices were bang on target when they pronounced that Meghalaya is quickly transformed from the Abode of Cloud to the Abode of Anarchy. That the Advocate General's office has spent a total of Rs 20.22 crore between 2018-2021, all paid from the public exchequer to defend the State's malpractices particularly in the area of mining is a mockery of the system. A question on this issue was raised in the just concluded Assembly session.

Meghalaya has reached a point where public disenchantment with the system is complete. Even the apex Court order that had passed strictures on mining and ordered the State to adhere to the MMDR Act 1957 and stop rat hole mining has failed to get its orders implemented on the ground, in the absence of an independent monitoring agency. Its near impossible to correct the system unless strong penal action ensures that those who regularly flout the laws, especially those that affect the environment and which in turn affect humans and other living beings, are put behind bars. Take the case of a particular Deputy Commissioner who was serving in East Jaintia Hills when the Ksan mining tragedy that killed 15 miners inside a rat hole. He presided over the illegal mining saga then and continues to do the same when posted as DC South Garo Hills bordering West Khasi Hills where the Nengchigen illegal coal mining saga was revealed. It is reported that the DC South Garo Hills visited the mines after the media reported the matter. Is it possible that this Deputy Commissioner has no inkling that coal mining was happening there or was he posted there to facilitate what he successfully did in east Jaintia Hills? Catastrophe of governance occurs when those entrusted with maintenance of law and order break it with impunity.

The other question that arises is whether such officers will have to face legal action or will they continue to get away with their repeated wrongdoings? Whose cause are they serving? The public cause or that of political executives, because the crumbs flow to their own kitty too, else why would they risk their careers to facilitate wrongdoing?

Give change a chance

By Janet Hujon

The outbreak of party-hopping capers clearly signals the arrival of election fever. For no matter what we hear from the various candidates this definitively tells us that politicians become politicians because they are investing in themselves and no one else. A career in Meghalaya politics has much to commend it ensuring that not only you and your children but also your children's children, can live happily ever after. So why bother to change course.

Already we have been treated to various photo opportunities and plans, telling us that our future welfare is the government's concern. Meanwhile the opposition, desperate to get re-elected, pronounces loud and clear

regularity.

Why, is the electorate so unwilling to take on change? And don't tell me it is only about the money. Most voters are educated and therefore one would hope, critical and discerning. Moreover not everyone is so poor that they need financial inducements. So let's quit pretending. Is it because we are promised a share of the celebratory cake and we don't want to pass up on this opportunity, even though we know full well that such transactions are not exactly above board? Perhaps we want the old guard to return so that we can then sit in judgement over them, feel virtuous - 'it's all their

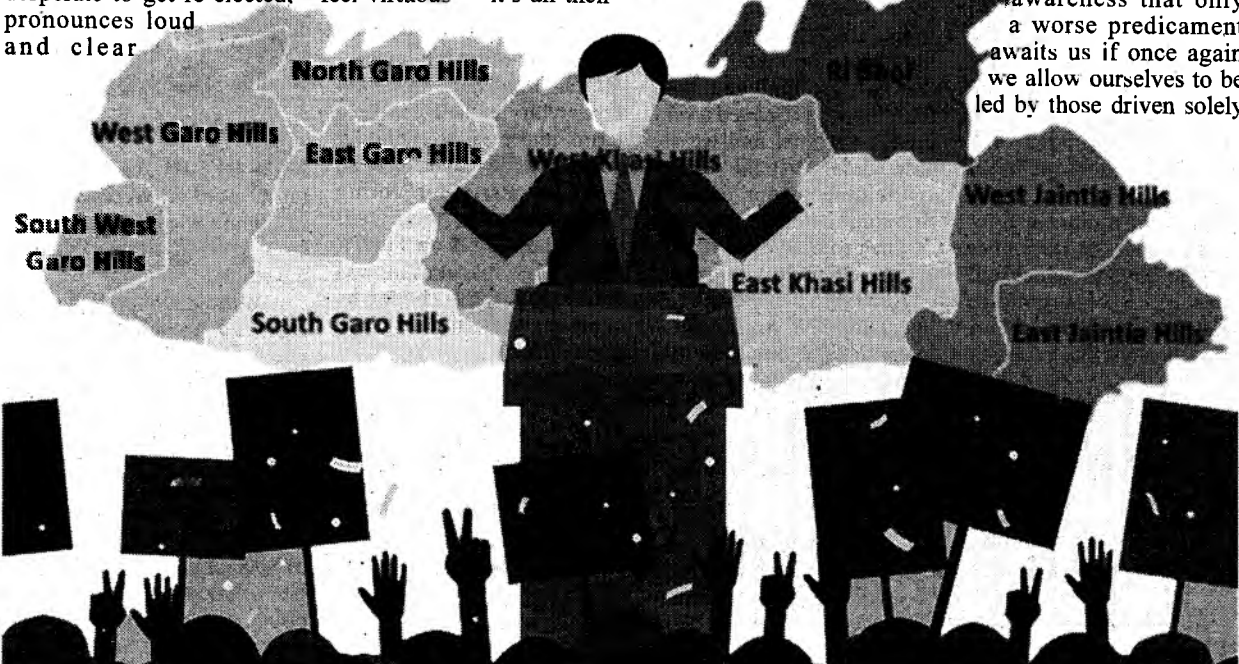
fault' - and ignore our own complicity in the whole sorry state of affairs. Or are we still clinging to the traditional belief that the older, familiar politician is 'experienced' and therefore somehow more qualified than anyone new. Really? That may have been true a long time ago when elected politicians were fired by ideals to serve the State and not themselves, when they listened and empathised, instead of walking around deaf and blind to everyone's needs except their own outrageous cravings.

to do with the original meaning of the word - that which is morally right. Those in high places have created their own (amoral) climate and it is defined solely in material terms. Do not go to such a universe to look for the old qualities of integrity, honesty and hard work for such standards have long been out of fashion - you will only find a life of ease. "Greed, for lack of a better word, is [seen to be] good", for it can provide us with all the opportunities and trappings of life sans struggle and boy don't we all want that. This is the Achilles heel that those in power are only too aware

of and that is how they lure recruits to their camp setting a dangerous precedent. Dazzled by this life of plenty, aspirants wait in the wings, learning the rules of engagement in readiness to ascend the throne of ease. What a misuse of intelligence. This will only ensure that the future of Meghalaya continues to remain in the hands of a navel-gazing few and you might as well kiss goodbye to the pursuit of a greater good ('good' as in welfare). Or if we cannot attain the top job, we readily cosy up to the 'powerful', believing that somehow in the glare of reflected glory we will end up looking and living like them. Strangely enough the latter saddens me more than the shameless wealth-grabbing tactics of the powerful. It is as if we are admitting that in ourselves we are not worthy but can only acquire some significance when in the presence of the rich and powerful. Why have we allowed a tiny minority to brainwash us in this way? There is more to us than we dare to imagine.

Yet after decades of bitter disappointment perhaps there is hope. We now increasingly hear the voices of those who by naked ambition. That is why these newcomers into the fray do not waste time talking about grand, insane projects like turning our wildernesses into a zoo or damming the Umngot. Instead they rightly focus on issues long ignored by the ruling dispensation like the urgent need for job creation, harnessing local potential, a response to the plight of teachers and ASHA workers, the marginalized, the poor and a halt to environmental vandalism. They know no fanfare can accompany such projects but the beguilement of a show is definitely not on their agenda. They are not afraid to court controversy, they do not shirk the awkward or the ugly for they know what we should all know that the work of any government is to ensure opportunity and justice for all.

The time has come to revise the way we think, see and act. Time to admit that Meghalaya is and has been dysfunctional for a long time and only we can reinstate the land of promise that our homeland once was. By saving Meghalaya we are also saving ourselves. So sticking with the devils you know should no longer be an option.



Party hopping is not new - it is as old as Meghalaya. Yet while we endlessly criticise this pathetic piece of opportunistic performance, we still choose not to carry our denunciation to its logical conclusion. We do not punish those who betray us. Instead we reward them with the Assembly-seat-Oscars they are looking for. Why, despite the criminal wastage and exploitation of government and natural resources, are we still willing to entrust our futures into the same hands? Surely no one in their right minds could possibly enjoy this replay of the previous five years. Yet history repeats itself with alarming

frequency. It also seems to me that there are also those who believe that if someone comes from a 'political' family, then that is enough. But best of all (or worst depending on your perspective) if candidates can flash their material wealth around, then that means they have power. It means they have the cojones to smash through glass ceilings that have long barred the tribal from saying he or she can be as good as any other rich Indian tycoon, and now with a Lamborghini negotiating our pot-holed streets we are now as 'good' as anyone anywhere. Yes in the corridors of power what it means to be good, no longer has anything

to do with the original meaning of the word - that which is morally right. Those in high places have created their own (amoral) climate and it is defined solely in material terms. Do not go to such a universe to look for the old qualities of integrity, honesty and hard work for such standards have long been out of fashion - you will only find a life of ease. "Greed, for lack of a better word, is [seen to be] good", for it can provide us with all the opportunities and trappings of life sans struggle and boy don't we all want that. This is the Achilles heel that those in power are only too aware

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We live in a world where the mantle to lead a state or the country has gone into the wrong hands - the coal barons and those parties that shout from the rooftops that they are 'lovers of the 'Jaidbynriew.' One example is enough. Look at the flawed reservation policy that had devastated our Khasi and Jaintia students and unemployed youth. This motion when taken up in the Assembly for corrective action was defeated by voice vote, without even a discussion. And the most painful fact is that the HSPDP and UDP did not help. God help us if these same politicians return in 2023. Do they have an ounce of shame to still continue to preach their love for their people?

The revolution should follow a democratic process. Sadly, Dr Ambedkar who is credited to be the architect of the Indian Constitution never thought that election to the State Assembly or Parliament would involve crores of rupees, attainable only by coal barons (a milder form for mafia) and corporates. Each of us have a responsibility to guide the electorate and tell them only 2 points. (1) Those rich candidates who will help you once in five years with your children's school fees; hospital

fees, new books or hand you lakhs of rupees to clear debts will take back all the money by not building roads where needed; not providing drinking water; not paying salaries to your kids' teachers etc. (2) A week before the polling day they will come all out with freebies like a quintal of rice or 50 kg of sugar etc. The electorate must be counselled not to accept these freebies but instead teach these politicians a lesson not to be forgotten.

A revolution needs eyes and ears. Sniffer dogs are good canvassers for they always smell a rat at any cunning and witty plan of this MDA Government that so far shows it is corporate centric. The MDA is in league with persons owning cement plants, steel plants and is now ready to sell off the red buses to the lowest bidder as scrap since these maxi taxis and long buses are taking space by the roadside where they are parked after having been abandoned by an apathetic government.

Yours etc.,
J. Kharmih
Via email

since it does involve an All India Service officer and perhaps some senior politicians. As citizens we the people of the state would be highly obliged to the Chief Secretary if she will help expose this criminal nexus between politicians and officers. We have to name and shame in cases of corruption in Government. It will be a public service she will be remembered for.

The above news writup speaks of Meghalaya as an 'abode of anarchy'. There is another one in the making right before the eyes of the Transport Department but one which this Department is yet to take action on. I speak of the outrageous charges by local taxis on incoming passengers arriving at the ISBT, Mawiong for onward transit to the city. Local taxis charge Rs 40 per passenger of a shared taxi, one in front and three in the back, from Mawiong to Motphran. This comes to a total of Rs 160 but the same taxi will charge Rs 300 from ISBT Mawiong to Motphran. Why this discriminating overcharge of Rs 140 for ISBT passengers from the same embarking point to the same disembarking point? It is not understood. Now this again is sheer looting of ordinary citizens. I demand that the Transport Department wake up and take re-

medial action on the matter. I hope that this too is not a state-sponsored extortion by opportunistic taxis done under similar "Incidental" authorization by the babus of the transport department for we have had enough of anarchy perpetrated by the state itself.

Yours etc.,
Johnny Syiemlieh,
Via email

The Clarion Call

Editor,
Apropos of the letter, "Meghalayans gear yourselves up for a revolution," by G. Lyngdoh Mawlong, (ST April 6, 2022) let us all wake up to the revolution. Every day we read in the newspapers and have seen with our own eyes that the time is ripe for a public revolt. By revolution, it does not mean that we go to the streets to burn effigies of politicians or tyres. Each one of us who has a concern for Meghalaya has a great responsibility to go to the electorate to discuss strategies on how to select the representatives who sincerely wish to serve the state and its people. These committed souls as we all know have no money to bribe the voters.

Imran Khan pushes Pakistan into a major constitutional crisis

By Sankar Ray

Pakistan's Prime Minister Kaptaan Imran Khan is in an existential crisis that pushed him personally into a political quagmire. His stature worsened further following the crucial observation by the Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial during the hearing of a suo moto matter following the dismissal of National Assembly of Pakistan on Sunday by the President Arif Alvi on the prime minister's advice that the NA Speaker erred in rejecting the no-confidence motion. The meaning is clear that reference to Article 5 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan is incongruent.

The CJP's remarks came in the midst of hearing of the suo moto case related to the constitutional dilemma following the ruling by the NA deputy speaker Qasim Suri and the subsequent dissolution of the lower house on the advice of the PM Imran Khan. Incidentally, NA Speaker Asad Qaiser was reportedly unwilling to a ruling as per Article 5. Earlier, Attorney General Khalid Javed had told TV anchor Humid Mir in Geo News programmed Capi-

account". Pakistan People's Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari ridiculed Imran Khan saying that instead of 'playing till the last ball, Imran Khan had run away with the wickets. He said that the president, prime minister, NA speaker, deputy speaker and anybody involved in this act on Sunday had committed high treason.'

Pakistan's internationally well-known TV personality Amir Liaquat Hossain and a member of PTI snapped fingers at King Khan, "I would like to say that the Prime Minister has proved that the opposition was doing right, I am announcing to leave the PTI, who has deviated from the Constitution and who is deviating? The decision will be made by the court but unfortunately this game was played to remove General Qamar Bajwa"

A leading English daily made a blistering attack on the premier, "With the parliamentary process pulverised on the orders of a leader who continues to hold it in deep contempt, Pakistan has been thrown into the dark abyss of a constitutional crisis. It seems, in retrospect,



tal Talk that voting was a must on the no-confidence resolution against the PM Imran Khan on 3 April 3 under the Constitution. The deputy speaker Qasim Suri, a member of ruling PTI, chaired the session and promulgated dissolution of NA. He blocked the confidence motion that Khan had widely been expected to lose. Hence the ruling assuming that a foreign conspiracy was behind the no-trust motion ,was considered unconstitutional by many. Heading the five-member larger bench that included Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Munib Akhtar and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail are also part of the larger bench the SCP is looking into the matter in terms Article 63(A) of the Constitution that suggests disqualification on grounds of defection for not obeying the parliamentary party directions in the election of the prime minister, chief minister or vote of confidence or no confidence or money bill etc

Former PM Nawaz Sharif said on Sunday that Prime Minister Imran Khan and all characters involved in the "conspiracy" against the nation are guilty of high treason and should be tried under Article 6 of the Constitution. He tweeted in chaste Urdu, which, translated freely, read "Today, a man obsessed with power trampled on the Constitution. Imran Khan, who puts his ego before the country and the nation, and all the conspiratorial characters involved in this conspiracy are guilty of serious treason to which Article 6 applies. Abuse of Pakistan and desecration of the Constitution will be taken into

Whether the NA session is to be reconvened to pave the way for no trust motion is to be awaited. The defeat of the ruling PTI-led government is certain as support from 172 NA members in favour of the government is almost impossible while more than 190 members are likely to vote for the motion. Kaptaan Imran Khan's grip on power has been steadily weakened over the past two weeks. His rhetoric on the alleged role of foreign powers in Pakistan's domestic affairs has proved vacuous. Even many in his party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf are not convinced that the USA backs the no-confidence motion, hatching a grand conspiracy to remove him. The premier stated, 'they are against me because I am against corruption' to 'I am being removed because I am standing against the West, particularly America, for pursuing an independent foreign policy'.

The high-powered National Security Council headed by the PM sat to discuss the so-called diplomatic cable which, the PTI government claimed, had evidence of the US plot seeking a regime change in Pakistan. The NSC decided to issue a demarche to the USA. But Pakistan's military top brass pooch-pooched the allegation. The isolation of Kaptaan is more than evident. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Bureaucrats facilitate looting of the State

Editor,
So finally the cat is out of the bag ! It was long suspected but it was spoken in Chinese whispers as it relates to abetment of and indulgence in corrupt practices by officers of All India Services occupying senior policy making desks in the Meghalaya Secretariat. The above observation is based on the Shillong Times news report Dated April 6, 2022 and splashed in the front page of the paper with the title "Abode of clouds appears to be abode of anarchy". So a long suspected secret of corrupt, weak-kneed and obliging a.e.licking officers working in tandem with unscrupulous politicians has finally come out in the open. Let's discuss how this happened with regards to the news report mentioned above.

A full Bench of the Meghalaya High Court made its pronouncement on a PIL filed by a concerned citizen that 'the abode of the clouds appears to be an abode of anarchy and quite alarmingly it may be state sponsored'. The news report further goes on about an amendment to the

Meghalaya Minor Minerals Concession Rules in 2018, wherein the word "Incidentally" was included. It now appears that this word was intentionally and surreptitiously inserted with the whole intention of subverting the law and to assist the illegal mining of minor mineral including limestone, boulders and river sand despite Supreme Court and NGT rulings to the contrary. It is no secret that the above rules were amended by the Forest Department and the Secretary in charge of the department in that period must have cleared insertion of such operationally damaging words. The devastation to large swathes of environmentally fragile land because of illegal mining is to be seen to be believed and all this was possible because the 'Kotwal' mandated to guard the environment decided to become the 'Chor' responsible for looting the environmental wealth of our state.

The High Court has made this amply clear by observing that there is executive complicity in the matter. It is the ardent request of this writer to the Meghalaya Govt and the Chief Secretary, who has now been directed by the court to check such 'Incidental' looting of the state, to not cover up the matter

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

"It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped."

--- Tony Robbins

The Shillong Times

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Corrupt dynasties

THE formation-day celebrations of the BJP this week saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi warning the nation of the dangers of dynastic politics. Clearly, his reference was not just to the Congress party, but also to what has become a general trend in regional politics in state after state.

On the one side, the BJP has neutralized the influence of the Congress run by the self-anointed "first family" or the Nehru-Gandhi family that had been re-christened as the Gandhi family, appropriating for itself the legacies of both Independence stalwarts Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. That political enterprise is steadily losing steam, so much so that Modi and the BJP have less to worry about now.

In a democracy, it is principally the people's will that is reflected in successive elections. At the same time, all these political dynasties are wallowing in corruption, which is a guarantee also to the further rise in the graph of corruption in the bureaucracy that they lord over.

Letters to the Editor

Alternatives to tackle Jowai's garbage

Editor, On the April 5, 2022 one news item states that the Urban Affairs Minister of Meghalaya has informed the public that each and every village approached for creating a landfill (dumping garbage) has vehemently protested the move.

if need be, a local incinerator will be of great use. The details for executing this idea can be worked out by each and every locality according to their own needs. This is where the Dorbar Shnong will have to rise to the occasion like it did wonderfully during the pandemic of 2020.

A concerned citizen, Name withheld on request

Tackling traffic snarls intelligently!

Editor, This is a request to The Shillong Traffic Police as well as the Rangbah Shnong

Meghalaya High Court to the rescue of despairing citizens

By Patricia Mukhim

Sometimes nature comes to the rescue of hapless citizens. The Madras High Court's loss is Meghalaya's gain and I say this because Meghalaya now has a Chief Justice who was hounded out of the Madras High Court simply because he stood for certain principles of justice.

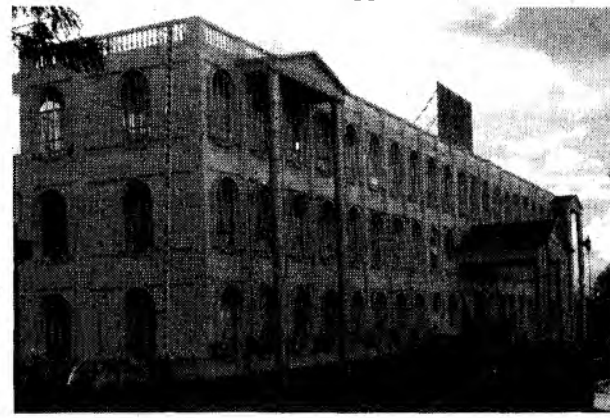
Environmental disaster awaits Meghalaya if we continue to 'exploit' the earth through ruthless, unregulated mining, large scale quarrying of boulders of which at least 300 trucks a day are sold to Bangladesh via the Tamabil border, all without a Mining Policy in place.

Large sections of Meghalaya's citizenry are afflicted by a deep sense of dystopia and as someone has correctly stated, 'environmental disaster is the backdrop to this modern dystopia.'

In April 2010 Mukul Sangma took oath as Chief Minister of Meghalaya and in November 2012, Meghalaya came up with the Mines and Minerals Policy 2012. This Policy lists out many pious objectives including reclamation of abandoned coal mines and greening up such reclaimed spaces.

tion an area should have more than 250 naturally growing trees with a girth size of 15 cm or more per hectare for the place to be regarded as forest. In case of a bamboo dominant patch, more than 100 naturally growing clumps should be present per ha.

The sad reality is that nowhere in Meghalaya will anyone find such a place to call a forest. This was done to facilitate forest clearances and alienation of land for coal extraction and limestone mining in forest areas and to clear the forests for setting up



cement plants. It is not understood why limestone is classed as a minor mineral. As per Section 3(e) of the Mines & Minerals (Development & Regulation Act) 1957 "Minor Minerals" means building stones, gravel, ordinary clay, ordinary sand other than sand used for prescribed purposes, and any other mineral which the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette declare to be a minor mineral.

The Department of Forest & Environment, Government of Meghalaya had 37 check-gates out of which, 23 check-gates were established along the inter-State boundary in order to prevent unauthorised transportation of forest minerals and to ensure payment of royalty and other fees.

At the rate at which all these minerals, sand and boulders are being gouged out relentlessly with no respite in sight, Meghalaya's hillslopes are coming down one after another and with serious environmental consequences. Very recently,

the Meghalaya Government had said it would apply the MMDR Act 1957 for coal mining. As far as 'minor minerals' are concerned the State notified the Meghalaya Minor Minerals Concession Rules (MMMCR), 2016 to regulate grant of leases and quarry permits for minor minerals. Clause (g) of Rule 2 read with Schedule III of the Rule provides that limestone of any grade may be termed as minor mineral when it is used in kilns for manufacturing of lime used as building materials.

Under Section 40 of the Meghalaya Forest Regulation (Application and Amend-

ment) Act 1973 read with Rules 2(a)(iii) of the Transit Rules under the Act, no forest produce shall be removed unless covered by a transit pass issued by a forest officer, in token of full payment of amounts due to the Government. The CAG report 2019, pointed out that there was non-realisation of fee for issue of transit pass. The State Forest Department failed to realise fees amounting to Rs 11.87 crore at the check-gates while issuing transit passes to 1,18,682 trucks, transporting limestone outside the State

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There are many who want to speak out against all these wrongdoings but have no platform. Some have decided that "if you cannot beat them, you join them," hence people in droves are joining the NPP in recent times. They hope the Party will get a majority in 2023 and there will be merry-making thereafter for the next 5 years.

Sadly Meghalaya seems destined to slide further down the precipice where we stare at a black hole of hopelessness.

ernment's notification but has also led to non-realisation of fee of Rs 11.87 crore to the Government. The case was reported to the Forest and Environment Department, Government of Meghalaya in July 2019. The Department in its reply (March 2020) stated that minerals accruing from mining lease areas under MMMCR, 2016 are certified as non-forest produce and collection of export fee is not applicable.

The CAG observed that the reply is untenable as per Government's notification (October 2013), whereby fee for issuing of transit pass is required to be levied on trucks carrying minor minerals from any forest or non-forest area. Since the audit observation pertains to the period October 2016 to March 2018, the notification mentioned above was in effect and therefore, fee for issuing of transit pass is required to be realised.

Subsequent notification of January 2020 was not applicable in these cases. Thus, the non-realisation of fee for issuing of transit pass on minor minerals exported outside the State has resulted in loss of revenue to the State exchequer. No further reply was communicated up to September 2020. Due to absence of proper procedure and controls of the DFO to direct the check-gates officials to realise the fee against transport passes issued, transporting minor minerals outside the Country/State passed through three check-gates without payment of transit fee resulting in a loss to the exchequer of Rs 11.87 crore.

But the above is only the tip of the iceberg. On a daily basis monetary transactions happen where payments do not accrue to the State exchequer but pass through private hands, as happens in the mining and transportation of coal.

At one time the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests also held the office of Principal Secretary Forests which can and perhaps has resulted in conflict of interests. Such appointments, while they may serve short-term political interests, are detrimental to governance. The same is being repeated where Forest Department officials are now holding administrative jobs because they dance to the tune of political executives.

This is Meghalaya's plight and a blight on the state. There are many who want to speak out against all these wrongdoings but have no platform. Some have decided that "if you cannot beat them, you join them," hence people in droves are joining the NPP in recent times. They hope the Party will get a majority in 2023 and there will be merry-making thereafter for the next 5 years.

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Supreme Court has to take an early decision on electoral bonds

There's too much delay in ensuring transparency in political funding

By Nitya Chakraborty

It is good that the Chief Justice of India N V Ramana has agreed to take up for hearing a pending petition challenging the Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018. The 20th tranche of electoral bonds opened on April 1 this year and it will continue till April 10. It would have been better if the Supreme Court would have heard the plea before this in the interests of ensuring a level playing field in political funding and establishing transparency, but this has not been given that priority yet. It will now be in the best interests of the democracy if the petition is heard as early as possible.

Earlier on March 24 last year, the Supreme Court in its hearing on electoral bonds petition expressed right concerns about the misuse of electoral bonds but dismissed Association of Democratic Rights prayer to stay fresh sale of the electoral bonds. As a result, the bonds sale continued from April 1 to 10 in 2021 and the same is in force this month also. But an earlier petition challenging the bonds sale is still pending and now the CJI N V Ramana has agreed to hear this pending plea.



The important point which the learned judges, especially the then CJI S A Bobde missed in 2021 hearing was that this electoral bond issue is just a small part of the BJP government's systematic efforts since its coming to power in 2014 to steamroll the opposition parties through financial muscle power and thereby ensure its governance through funding by the big corporates. In the process a unique system of quid pro quo has been institutionalised in the Indian business world which was never in existence in this country's history since Indian independence.

The functioning of democracy in the states in India as also at centre is under threat due to this money power. The level playing field has been lost for the non-BJP parties and all these have been possible due to the huge resources mobilised by the BJP through corporate donations, active support of the big traders and the big funds supply by the overseas Indians close to BJP as also the VHP dominated overseas religious bodies.

There is nothing wrong for the BJP in collecting funds from its supporters. It is entitled to do so as any other political party. But the problem is when it tweaks the laws in its favour in a partisan way through its hold over the government and makes use of the central agencies in hounding the moneyed people who, in some way fund the opposition parties. The use of the central agencies like ED, CBI and the IT department has been so blatant that no corporate takes any risk to be involved with the Congress Party which is still the main opposition in the country. As a result, the coffers of the Congress have reached an all time low and in many states which went for assembly polls, the state Congress units desperately clamouring for more funds as they were outmatched by the fund rich BJP.

The electoral bonds can be purchased by the corporates but the names will be known to only issuer meaning State Bank of India and not the Election Commission. This means the names will be known to the centre and as the present government is known, the few people who dared to donate some funds to some opposition parties, will be blacklisted. The big houses are generally dominated by businessmen with Hindu faith, they have general sympathy for the BJP and that has grown in the last two decades, but many of them also sense democratic values and they are interested in giving some donations to other non-BJP parties. Even they are scared. In 19 tranches since 2018, bonds worth Rs.9208.23 crore were sold. Political parties encashed bonds worth Rs.9187.55 crore. Nearly eighty per cent were received by the BJP. This amount collected by the BJP, is only a fraction of the total funds for elections spent by the ruling party during poll campaigns. There is a fear among the industry people that any support to its rival Congress Party in terms of donations, will be frowned upon. As a result, the main national rival, the Congress is starved of funds and is ill equipped to match the muscle power of the BJP in elections. Anyone of the business world in India will talk in confidence that they can not run business by ignoring any request from the ruling party. Those who are very close to the BJP, are prospering and this gives a signal to the others which path to follow. It is a precarious situation now. Many of the young scions, alumni of Harvard or Yale who have ideals and who care for real democracy to thrive in India, are becoming unhappy at the present trend, but they love their business, they look for expansion and they have to fall in line. Who can take a big risk of annoying ruling dispensation at this time of pandemic when every corporate is struggling to survive and sustain. The Attorney General K K Venugopal in last year's hearing presented a confused picture in reply to the CJI query when he said that the bonds have ensured white money, not black money through cash. The issue is really not that, the issue is transparency. Why the Government and through that the ruling party will know who has bought the bonds and in whose favour? Further, this bond can be repurchased which opens up the possibility of dubious transactions. It is a double benefit for the ruling party. These days, nobody will take the risk of doing such transactions in favour of any opposition party. If it is done for the BJP, the concerned corporate will be safe. There will be no raid. The CJI must assess what is the percentage of the electoral bonds benefitting the BJP till now and how disproportionate this is. The 20th tranche of bonds is on till April 10. The CJI N V Ramana will be doing a great service to Indian democracy and the Constitution if he stays the next issuance of electoral bonds. That will be our CJI's best contribution to the cause of Indian democracy before his retirement in August this year. (IPA Service)

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"The only antidote to mental suffering is physical pain."

— Karl Marx

The Shillong Times

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Centre's new admission policy

THE UGC announcement that all undergraduate admissions to central universities from this academic session will be based on a common entrance test - the Central University Entrance Test (CUET) instead of the marks secured at the Class 12 exams is fraught. The announcement came barely three months before university admissions and while the Board examinations were going on. The UGC has premised this change on the rationale that it is student friendly and that it will provide a level playing field to students coming from different states and boards which have wide variations.

But the UGC might not have considered this decision after exhaustive consultations which is imperative in a country like India. Class 12 students have been taken by surprise and are not ready to sit for yet another examination, more so after having missed classes during the two year disruption by the pandemic. Having put their best foot forward for the Class 12 exam and are now told it will count for nothing. Reports suggest that students will only get a fortnight to prepare for the CUET and that they will be marked for five different subject papers. If the UGC had thought through this matter from the point of view of the students it would have launched the CUET from 2023, thereby giving them enough time to be mentally prepared for the same.

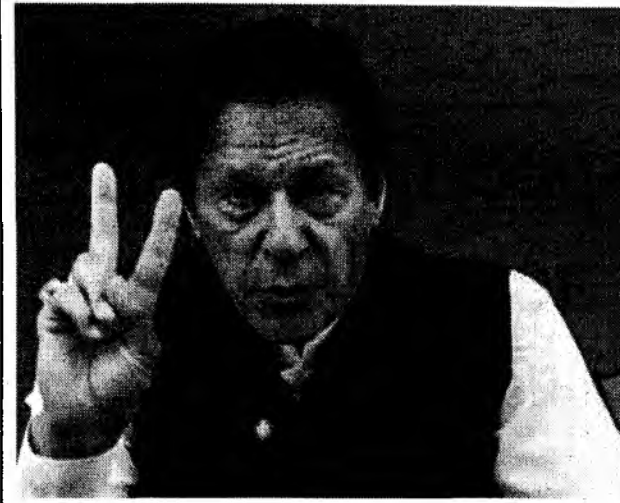
The reason behind this national level test akin to NEET is that there is a suspicion that some states pep up the marks of their students to give them undue advantage. Hence the claim for a level playing field. It appears that in this country today there is a huge north-south divide and those occupying important positions in the Government and academic institutions feel that students from north India are not getting a fair deal. And since most of the institutions of national importance are based in Delhi which is also the seat of Government, far reaching decisions are taken in the national capital without a care for states beyond the power centre in Delhi. Actually it is the examination system that needs to be revamped up to make it fool-proof by adopting a transparent marking system. CUET like NEET will also perhaps result in opening up of more coaching centres for this common entrance test too. What happens to students that cannot afford coaching? Surely this country can adopt a better rationale by normalising marks across all boards as the criteria for admission into undergraduate courses than the CUET. But whatever be the apprehensions of the UGC, it is not democratic to take such decisions without a country-wide consultation. Not all wisdom resides in the national capital.

Why two nations bowled out two prominent netas

By Rajdeep Sardesai

These aren't the best of times for cricketers turned netas in the sub-continent. In Pakistan, Imran Khan has been forced out of the prime ministerial chair after losing a parliamentary majority. In India, Navjot Sidhu has resigned as Punjab Congress chief after the party's electoral debacle in the recent assembly elections. While the political context of Pakistan and Punjab are vastly

different, there are striking similarities in the rise and fall of the two leaders that hold important lessons for those who seek to make a mark in public life beyond the boundary.



different, there are striking similarities in the rise and fall of the two leaders that hold important lessons for those who seek to make a mark in public life beyond the boundary.

Take Imran Khan first. He came to power in Pakistan in 2018 as the charismatic and inspirational hero who was promising to break the dominance of his country's dynastical and corrupted elites and build a 'Naya Pakistan'. For a citizenry disenchanted with the traditional politicians, Khan aroused high expectations as a potential game-changer. That he was also widely perceived to be the all-powerful Pakistan army's 'chosen one' was seen to have made his task just that much easier: the puppeteers in uniform could ride on Khan's popular appeal to control the power apparatus without threatening his chair. Khan it appeared had the goodwill of the people and the support of the army, a surefire success formula in Pakistan's game of thrones.

Sidhu too was made Punjab Congress president with the assured backing of the Congress's First Family. Sidhu's access to the Gandhis meant that he was guaranteed pre-eminent status within the deeply factionalised state unit that had just ousted its long serving chief minister: Sidhu's picture with Priyanka Gandhi Vadera was widely circulated to legitimize his elevation. Like Imran, Sidhu

could claim to be an anti-establishment hero who was taking on the ancient regime of Punjab's family-centric, big money politics. A crowd-puller who was being pitched as a face of the future, the dramatic rise of Sidhu appeared unstoppable just a few months ago.

So why did the star value and anti-corruption crusader

Imran category either as a cricketer or a politician - Khan, after all, did struggle to build his party for years unlike Sidhu who had a soft landing as he moved from the BJP to the Congress -- but the motormouth Sardar's self-image is of a similar superhuman figure who, as he kept reiterating in speeches and interviews, was given the

God-given task of guiding a chaotic Punjab to a better future. For Sidhu, the Congress party organization was incidental: he could override internal structures and even the chief minister's office to establish himself as Punjab's ultimate savior. Having successfully led the revolt against the party's ageing satrap, Captain Amarinder Singh, Sidhu seemed even more convinced that his time had come. The mistake that both Khan and Sidhu made -- as did Trump in Washington -- is in failing to recognize that there are limits to fierce individualism replacing institutional cohesion in a democratic set-up. In the United States, Trump was inciting people to disrespect an electoral verdict, almost creating a recipe for anarchy with the violence last January at Capitol Hill. Khan too now appears to be urging citizens to revolt against his rivals by making bizarre claims of a 'foreign conspiracy' and call for street protests. A sulking Sidhu too in the run up to the elections repeatedly threatened to resign from his post if his demands were not met.

In the process, all of them overreached themselves to the point of no return. Trump may have won a US presidential election as a rank outsider but he couldn't sustain his rise without the Republican party organisation by his side. Khan may have been a cult figure in Pakistan but forgot that his survival was

eventually dependent on not crossing the red lines set by the army, Pakistan's ultimate political arbiter. And Sidhu should have realized that his own future was inextricably entwined with that of his party: repeatedly attacking his own chief minister on public platforms was always going to be a recipe for a disaster.

Which is why it is important to recognize the limits of unbridled personality-driven

politics that attempts to bypass democratic checks and balances by focusing solely on personal appeal. The rise of populist leaders in the sub-continent and beyond might bring new actors and a certain freshness into the political system but if those individuals fail to provide effective governance and deliver on their tall promises, then they risk pushing democracy into further recession because of a loss of public faith in the political class in general. Writing off any politician at any stage is hazardous but Khan and Sidhu by getting bowled out because of their missteps have perhaps made it even more difficult for any future sporting hero to make the leap into politics. Which is a pity at a time when politics in both countries desperately needs new faces and ideas.

Post-script: Of the many Imran stories, my favorite is when he tried to stamp out match-fixing as captain. In the late 80s, with rumors swirling of several Pakistani players having taken money to 'fix' a final in Sharjah, Khan called an urgent meeting in the dressing room and said he was betting all the Pakistan team prize money earned so far on winning the match. Sure enough, the team won the game. If only political power play was as straightforward as a cricket match!

(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

Bangladesh defies pressures from USA to take a position against Russia

Media analysts point out West's double standard and NATO role in war

By Ashis Biswas

A section of Bangladeshi media analysts, unlike their more diplomatic Indian counterparts, has taken a distinctively acerbic view of the role played by Ukraine in Europe and elsewhere in recent years. The mainstream Dhaka-based media however is broadly supportive of their country's present neutral positioning on the war in Ukraine.

For the record, Bangladesh like India has called for moderation, seeking an immediate end of the Ukraine conflict and an early negotiated settlement. It has neither condemned Russia as the aggressor, nor imposed any sanctions against it following the call of the Western bloc. Dhaka regards both Russia and Ukraine as 'friendly' countries.

No wonder the censorious stand taken by some Dhaka-based observers on Ukraine comes as a surprise. They also endorse the official decision not to disrupt in any way all existing trade/business arrangements with Russia, regardless of mounting Western pressure to the contrary.

Some writers have also scathingly attacked the alleged double standards on part of the US/EU allies explicit in their contrasting reactions towards the endless Rohingya Muslim exodus to Bangladesh from Myanmar and to the situation now evolving in East Europe.

Despite Myanmar's established record of carrying out an anti-Muslim genocide for years, the West has not felt it necessary to impose crippling sanctions on the Naypitaw-based Army rulers. Analysts ascribe such western restraint to its policy of not offending the ruling army junta in view of the rich natural/mineral resource base of Myanmar, which it may need accessing for future development of manufacturing industries in the US or EU. As of now, far too many resource-rich countries like Russia, Iran or Venezuela have become political untouchables for the West.

Again, it is not a question of securing long term Western economic interests only. The 'tread softly in Myanmar' policy is also useful in not letting China have a free hand in South Asia.

By not declaring stringent Russia-like sanctions against the army Junta headed by Gen Min Aung Hlaing, it has been alleged, the West is securing its own long term economic interests. Assets worth only \$1 billion were 'frozen' by way of 'punishment' in addition to 'restrictions' imposed on a few people. No wonder followers of Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the pro democracy movement in Myanmar felt short-changed and declared that such leniency would only encourage more rigidity within the ruling Army against protestors who rose against the new regime.

True or not, this explains in part why Myanmar shows little interest in repatriating over 1.1 million of Muslim Rohingyas, former Myanmar citizens, driven out forcibly from the Rakhine province. Except for making promises to Bangladesh and advancing financial help occasionally, the US/EU bloc has not shown much initiative to ensure the return of the Rohingyas to the Rakhines.

The standard Western argument has been that economic sanctions against Myanmar will end up hurting the hapless Burmese community as a whole. In contrast, the US and Europe have imposed by their own admission the most stringent of economic sanctions targeting the entire Russian population despite their non-involvement in the present war!

Such an instant yet overwhelming reaction indicates that Western powers were

pre-disposed to bring about a regime change in Russia, culminating in the ouster of President Vladimir Putin -- never mind the hardship, sacrifice and high political/economic price that Russian people must pay/suffer in the process! It also exposes the fear of the declining West about the resurgent Russia backed by its major powerful ally, the new rising China', says Charubrata Ray, Kolkata-based analyst.

Bangladeshi analysts argue that not only have Western countries have announced sanctions, they are also pressuring other countries including India and others, to fall in line and cut off all financial engagements with Russia---period! This is simply unacceptable in the multi-polar world of 2022.

It is not surprising that most major countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have not followed the West. Bangladesh has announced that it would not in any way curtail any existing trade/business arrangements with Russia. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced that all ongoing projects, such as the construction of the \$12 billion nuclear power plant at Rooppur will continue as scheduled and the second such plant too would be built, on schedule.

Bangladesh as of now is suffering from a critical shortage of natural gas, which has hit its industries hard. Even in normal times it has a power shortage to contend with. It buys gas from neighbouring India and other sources. Its decision to set up nuclear power plants had been taken long back, keeping in view the long term energy requirements of its expanding local industrial/manufacturing base.

As for Ukraine: the country has always been a part of the US/EU bloc in matters relating to foreign policy. Despite its current denials issued under duress, the fact remains that Ukraine had always pressed for an entry into the anti-Russian military alliance, NATO.

Among major questions being discussed among Dhaka-based experts are the following: 'After the dissolution of the USSR, why was the membership of NATO increased from 12 to 30? Who is being targeted in Europe and why has it been found necessary for smaller entities like Montenegro, Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Albania, for heaven's sake! -- join a military alliance possessing a nuclear arsenal? Who has threatened them? Would the US ever accept the emergence of a military alliance at its doorstep, based off Panama or Cuba?'

More alarmingly, the NATO's exertions to further the cause of democracy and the pursuit of universal happiness were NOT necessarily restricted to Europe only. Like the erstwhile Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, older Western military alliance like the SEATO or CENTO exist no more. But that has hardly changed anything.

It has been NATO which has been involved in the long, and eventually fruitless military campaign in Afghanistan, an ill-advised misadventure leaving the Afghans with a ruined economy, a devastated country and countless poor people currently looking to recover the basic necessities of life!

It needs stressing strongly, troops from Ukraine had participated in the Afghan campaign. Today Ukraine is accusing that democracy has been trampled by Russia, its aggressor in east Europe. Its critics in South Asia point out that Ukraine had never protested even verbally against the mistreatment of displaced Palestinians and the loss of their human rights by Israel, backed by the West, at any level! (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Judicial activism most welcome

Editor,

Increasing news reports of this MDA Govt's inability to take charge of its collapsing control over environmental abuses apparently perpetrated by powerful politicians belonging to the ruling coalition has left many of us on the verge of despair. It became clearer by the day that unregulated exploitation of our natural resources, mainly through illegal mining of coal, limestone, boulders and river sand by powerful mining cartels, some actually owned and operated by close family members of ruling politicians, is spelling doom for the rich biodiversity that Meghalaya has and could actually spell doom for the whole state and its fragile environment.

It also became clearer by the day that this Government neither had the will nor the inclination to put a stop to these increasing environmental crimes. Therefore the timely intervention of the judiciary, actually the Meghalaya High Court, is a glimmer of light that has started to appear along this dark dismal tunnel of political patronage over the mining lobby. Judicial intervention over this glaring abdication of executive responsibility

is a most welcome step for the helpless citizens of the state.

The ST news report of April 8, 2022 over the High Court's observation over the need for quick urgent action to prevent further decay of our water bodies should be a wakeup call even for a Government that prefers to turn a blind eye to crimes by its own members. The Court's ruling over the need to close down Marten, which has reached its saturation point, and for the administration to find alternate land fill sites, is again a very welcome step. Well informed sources from within the Urban Affairs Department had indicated that the failure to find alternate landfill sites was not so much because of public objections but it had more to do with ministers with an avaricious mindset asking for their abnormally high commission over any such deals. So much for leaders who buy their way to power and for a greedy electorate that votes such criminals to power

Yours etc.,
Julius Phanwar,
Via email

Lessons from the Animal Farm

Editor,
Animal farm is a sat-

ire and an indictment of what happened in the former USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution. Thou shall not sleep in bed was changed to Thou shall not sleep in bed with bedsheets. 'Thou shall not drink liquor' eventually became, 'Thou shall not drink liquor in excess.' Things went out of hand and Stalin & Company ruled the former Soviet Union with an iron fist with absolutely no room for dissent. Dissenters were sent to the Siberian forced labour cum death camps known as the Gulag.

Let's go back to the start. The animals in the farm were ill-treated. Through the pain and agony, they suffered in silence. Then Old Major, the wise old pig saw a vision. A vision of hope and freedom. Freedom from the shackles of the tyrannical human masters. This vision inspired the animals in the farm to revolt. Revolt they did and they successfully overthrew their tyrannical human masters. In the real world, Old Major represented Karl Marx. Karl Marx's, Das Kapital inspired Leftists all over the world. Das Kapital is the Bible of people who lean towards the Left.

Leftists today who believe in democracy believe in democratic socialism. They believe that socialism can work in a democratic framework. Leftists in Meghalaya believe that they should fight for the right of the down-

trodden, irrespective of the communities they belong to. According to them, the fight is between the rich and the poor and the haves and the have-nots. Fair enough but what Leftists in Meghalaya fail to realise is that things are not as simple as they seem. In a country like India, there are different dynamics at play which make things like development a complicated affair. For the next 100 years or so, DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA WILL STILL BE COMMUNITY CENTRIC.

What the Khasi-Jaintia community needs are different kind of visionaries. Visionaries who will inspire the community to take on the outside world. Visionaries who will put the community above everything else. Visionaries who will guide the community into a better future.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Tragedy that could have been averted

Editor,
Many on social media have been crying for months on the nature of the construction and modalities of work carried out by the NHIDCL which are scary

as earthmoving is done over a precarious site. The other day two precious lives were lost due to a devastating landslide. We in Meghalaya do not learn from history on any subject, especially the tragic ones. In 1988 -1989, the State PWD equipped with only the traditional construction engineering equipment, with no JCBs, attempted to modify one of the world's most treacherous stretch, the Rngain on the Shillong Dawki road. Even with a soft attack and with utmost caution, the landslide could not be averted and for many months thereafter all Dawki bound traffic was routed through Jowai. It was a nightmare as by that time, the traffic rules and acts were violated by coal laden trucks with three times the permissible load.

This is 2022, when heavy earth movers equipped with power blades to plough and worse the blast hole punche, had wantonly destroyed the earth. When earth is raked beyond its nature-gifted capacity, it rebounds with deadly landslides. Yet we continue to blast through hills and dales thereby provoking mother earth to fight back.

Since the NH6 was started by NHIDCL lots of letters have appeared in this newspaper. There was dumping of red soil on the old road. When the rains came many buses, trucks and cars skid-

ded off the road. Hilllocks are wantonly sliced. A lady from Madanring, had some work in a house by the side of the Umling- Niangbari road. Sadly at night, the whole mountain caved in and red soil pounded on the hamlet, killing the poor lady. There was no follow up. Let us admit that callousness, with these powerful monsters, with wanton uncontrolled dynamite and with no proper survey of the soil or rock structure, will bring more such tragic news in the near future.

We extend our deepest condolences to the family of Rohit Kshiar and Dilibon Tansang whose lives were tragically ended for no fault of theirs. May their souls rest in peace. And please refrain from washing your hands off all responsibility and blame Climate Change for all disasters. We also hope that this time the Accident Tribunal, if at all it is serviceable, would do something to at least cushion the loss of the bereaved families though lives lost can never be brought back again.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

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By Ratan Bhattacharjee

NOTHING VERSE THAN WAR

Ratan Bhattacharjee on Ukrainian poets who have risen against the Russian invasion.

"My subject is war and the pity of war and the poetry is in the pity," wrote Wilfred Owen nearly a hundred years ago. Today, the same picture of devastation is being witnessed by poets all over the world who sing the pity of war.

In *Ballad of Bawling Babies*, a poem on the Russia-Ukraine war, portal reporter Mekhala Saram wrote: "Valour is mute/ So if war comes/ It will not be the sound of honour/ Of sturdy men in/ sturdy boots/ That you will hear/ What you will hear/ However/ Will be a ballad of bawling babies/ Broken, Ailing, Hungry."

Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie and Tsitsi Dangarembga are among more than 1,000 writers from around the world who have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in an open letter by PEN International saying there "can be no free and safe Europe without a free and independent Ukraine".

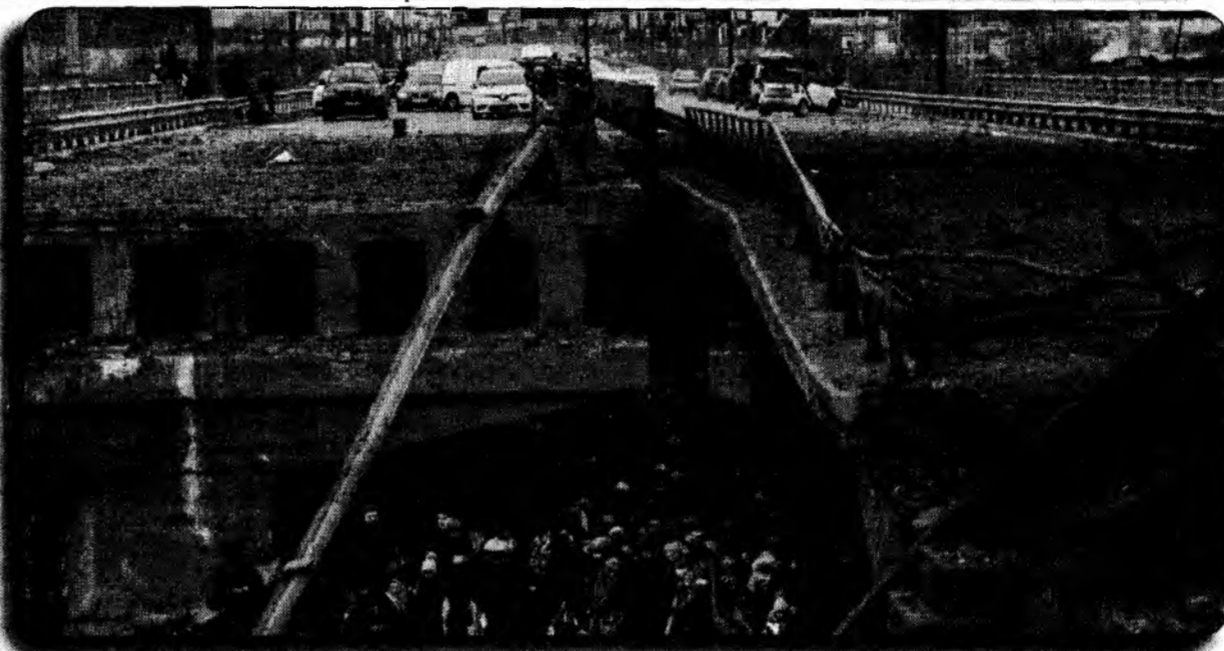
Poets in Ukraine, too, have raised their voices against the war. The devastating impact of war becomes evident all over their country where men and women are fighting Russian bombs with Molotov cocktails and stones.

Audrey Kurkov, the president of PEN Ukraine from Kyiv is constantly inspiring his countrymen with a video that says: "This is my city, my home, my country, my native land... I will never welcome occupiers."

After the war began, the renowned satirical writer said he "didn't feel ready to laugh at anything." Since the has been a large part of the modern Ukrainian literary canon since 2014, many writers of Ukraine are weaving tales of bravery and heartbreak for children to recite in school.

The works of poets of yore such as Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko are also being recited. The people hope that the world in future will appreciate the anti-war poetry of Ukraine.

Many are now of the opinion that Russian President Vladimir Putin has chosen the wrong country to mess with. Once a poet from Putin's own country wrote: "Whoever is making a jam in Russia/ knows there is no way out."



Today in Ukraine, when the soldiers are chasing the civilians, poets and writers, all are busy finding a way out not only with Molotov cocktails and stones but also with poetry or novel to draw the attention of the world.

Former Ukraine President Victor Yanukovich was rejected for trying to lean toward Putin. *We lived happily during the war*, a poem published in Poetry International in 2013, read: "When they bombed other people's houses/ we protested/ but not enough, we op-

posed them but not/ enough."

Former US President George Bush's bombing of Baghdad is not much different from Putin's bombing of Kyiv. Both are invasions and both used false premises. Even the threat of nuclear weapons is so dastardly uttered each moment. Odessa is bombarded. But we all know that most of the Odessa people are Russian speakers. Putin is sending troops to bomb Russian speakers who have nothing more than Molotov cocktails and stones to throw at the Russians.

The Ukrainians knew how their grandfathers fought the German tanks on tractors. They are taking this war with Putin like a movie or a poem. But it is real and Ukraine this time is devastated.

The way in which Ukrainian poets have risen against Russian aggression is outstanding. On the first day of March when Russian planes were bombing fiercely from the sky over Ukraine, poets and writers organised a Zoom poetry reading on land.

People taking to poetry in a time

of crisis is nothing new. It is the poet who can inspire the nation. We saw such poetic endeavours during our freedom movement.

A journalist made this appeal in the newspaper: "The Putins come and go. If you want to help, send us some poems and essays. We are putting together a literary magazine." This togetherness is inspired by poetry. Poetry unites, war divides.

Ukrainian literature, which had developed under prolonged foreign domination over its soil — includ-

ing those of the Romanian and the Ottoman empires — was given a fillip by the Soviet dissidents during the post-Stalinist or post-totalitarian phase of Communism. In 1991, it broke free from the shackles of the censorship era and its tradition of social realism. The increased freedom and openness brought about a marked change in the landscape of Ukrainian literature; it moved away from the shadows of Soviet and classical periods and emerged into an era in which writers had the freedom to write about issues that were forbidden in Soviet Ukraine.

Ukraine is paying the highest price for democracy and poetry is needed for inspiring the people amid the full-scale Russian invasion.

What is more, poets have stepped up and now they are making important contributions to the war effort by volunteering or taking up arms. One such poet is Oleg Sentsov who was arrested on trumped-up terrorism charges for protesting the Russian annexation of his native Crimea.

He spent five years in a Russian penal colony and pushed himself to the brink of death during a hunger strike that lasted 145 days. Since his return to Ukraine in a prisoner exchange in 2019, he has been artistically thriving and his satirical alien invasion novel 'The Second One' is a thinly-veiled allegory of a Russia-Ukraine war published in 2020. His film 'Rhino' also was premiered before this latest escalation.

Stanislav Aseyev, a poet-journalist of Ukraine also wrote after his arrest: "I just don't have time to be afraid or cry and I see that thousands of Ukrainians feel that way too." Aseyev wrote about the ongoing war crimes in Donbas by Russia in his book *The Torture Camp on Paradise*. Explosions keep him waking at night in Kyiv. Artem Chapeye is another Ukrainian author who took up arms against Putin's forces. He is a four-time finalist of the BBC Ukraine Book of the Year Award, the most prestigious prize in the Ukrainian literary world. The self-proclaimed pacifist poet said, "There is so much human suffering. I know we'll win, but at what cost?"

(Ratan Bhattacharjee, a senior academician and trilingual poet and columnist)

Bridgerton: The real 18th-century writers who used pseudonyms to stoke controversy

In the hit Netflix series *Bridgerton*, London society is set alight thanks to a newsletter penned by an anonymous writer whose sharp pen captures all the pomp, circumstance and gossip of the season. Fans of *Bridgerton* will recognise this writer, Lady Whistledown, as an integral part of the show. For viewers, she serves as our narrator. For characters, she is known as the pseudonymous author of the salacious gossip newsletter, *Lady Whistledown's Society Papers* — making and breaking fortunes with each issue.

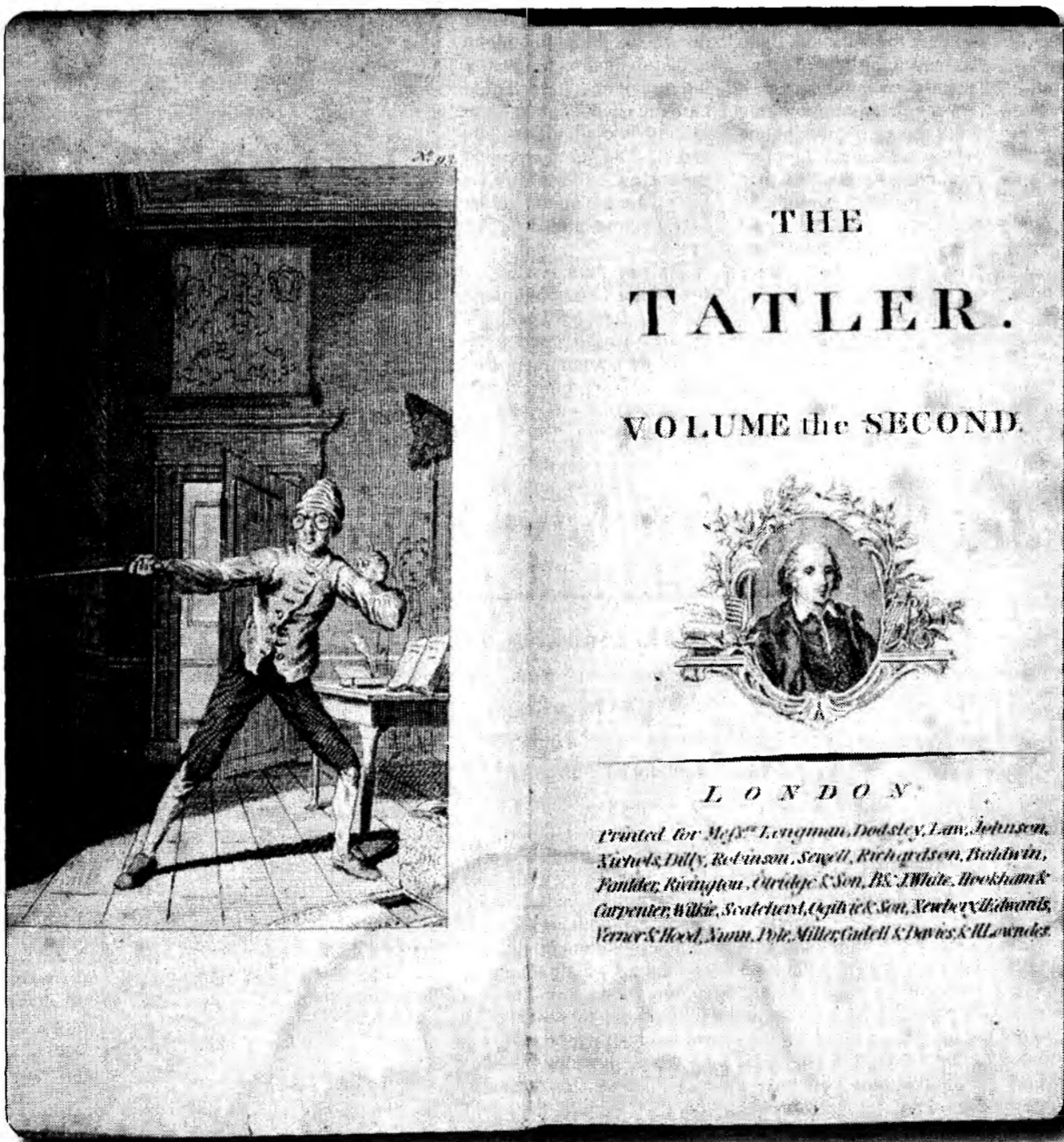
The invention of fictional "editors" to narrate similar publications was a tactic really used by 18th-century journalists and these editors could take any form, from a cantankerous Scotsman to a cosmopolitan green parrot.

Although the *Lady Whistledown* persona is designed to protect the papers' secret author, she clearly takes on a distinctive life of her own.

This is emphasised by the casting of Julie Andrews as the voice of the newsletter. This unique character is foregrounded further in the second season when, even after the true identity of the author has been revealed, Andrews continues to narrate the show and read the contents of the paper as *Lady Whistledown*. All of these dynamics are recognisable in the periodical press of the 1700s.

The Tatler

At the dawn of the 18th century, London society was flooded with cheap print. A highly popular form of cheap print was the literary periodical, which would usually contain a single essay and appear once or twice weekly. These essays typically contained opinions on whatever was the subject of



the periodical, and there were periodicals on everything, including politics, fashion, culture and more often than not, gossip. These periodicals were read in

coffee houses and private clubs, which also provided some of the 18th-century's best remembered periodicals with their subject matter.

In 1709, for example, Richard Steele launched *The Tatler*. It was a periodical that promised to "to expose the false arts of life, to pull the disguise of cunning, vanity and

affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse and our behaviour".

Like the secret author of *Lady Whistledown's Society Papers*, Steele was taking on a fashionable society he was himself very much a part of. His solution was to write not as himself, but as the fictional Scottish astrologer Issac Bickerstaff.

Bickerstaff was actually invented a year earlier by Jonathan Swift as part of a year-long hoax at the expense of quack astrologer John Partridge. Steele was able to incorporate Bickerstaff's characteristics into his own paper, while also signalling to readers the tone and approach he wished to take: one of playful, self-mocking irony and gentle satire.

Spectating society

The term coined by 18th-century scholars for this fictional editorial voice used in periodical writing is "eidolon". Eidolons acted as an equivalent of what we might now recognise as a publication's house style.

Readers would get to know these eidolons and in doing so come to recognise the tone and topics these periodicals would adopt. At the same time, it made it easier for other writers to contribute essays without compromising a periodical's consistency. For instance, Steele was soon joined on *The Tatler* by Joseph Addison, who would similarly write essays as Bickerstaff.

Addison and Steele also collaborated on the most famous periodical of the 18th-century, *The Spectator*, which ran between 1711 and 1712 (the current magazine of the same name was inspired by this periodical).

They wrote in this periodical as

Mr Spectator, an aloof observer of mankind whose ambition was to bring "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses".

Decades later, literary polymath Eliza Haywood pushed the boundaries of what an eidolon could be.

In 1747, Haywood launched *The Female Spectator*, a periodical loosely modelled on Addison and Steele's original, but addressed explicitly to women.

Haywood adopted not one but four eidolons: the chief editor, a beautiful and unmarried young woman, a happily married woman, and a "Widow of Quality".

In 1746, Haywood took her experimentation even further and launched *The Parrot*, a periodical voiced by a non-human eidolon: a green parrot from Java.

The parrot, who was taken from his home at a young age and shipped around the world by various owners before winding up in London, looked askance at behaviour he witnessed from his cage and openly championed the causes of the marginalised, be they women, supporters of the exiled Stuart king James II, or slaves.

The legacy of these literary periodicals and their curious eidolons goes far beyond the use of house styles in journalism today.

They also played a role in the development of more explicitly literary forms, such as the short story and the novel, as both authors and readers learnt to engage with the notion of psychologically complex fictional constructs.

And, of course, we also see their legacy in *Bridgerton*. And as in *Bridgerton*, it was not often that these authors protected their anonymity for long (in many instances, their identity was an open secret all along).

However, this rarely damaged readers' affections for their eidolons in the long-term. So, even if we all now know who she really is, long live *Lady Whistledown*. (*The Conversation*)

How shops use psychology to influence your buying decisions



You might think that you only buy what you need, when you need it. But whether you are shopping for food, clothes or gadgets, the retailers are using the power of psychological persuasion to influence your decisions – and help you part with your cash.

If you think back, I'll bet there's a good chance that you can remember walking into a grocery store only to find the layout of the shop has been changed. Perhaps the toilet paper was no longer where you expected it to be, or you struggled to find the tomato ketchup.

Why do shops like to move everything around? Well, it's actually a simple answer. Changing the location of items in a store means that we, the customers, are exposed to different items as we wander around searching for the things we need or want. This ploy can often significantly increase unplanned spending, as we add additional items to our baskets – often on impulse – while spending more time in the shop.

Buying on impulse

In fact, studies suggest that as much as 50% of all groceries are sold because of impulsiveness – and over 87% of shoppers make impulse buys.

While it is complicated and affected by many factors, such as a need for arousal and lack of self-control, it is known that external shopping cues – “buy one get one free” offers, discounts and in-store promotional displays, for example – play a key role.

An appealing offer can lead to a rush of temporary delight, and this

makes it harder to make a rational buying decision. We're overcome by the perceived value of the “saving” if we buy the item in the here and now – so we ignore other considerations such as whether we really need it. The need for instant gratification can be hard to ignore.

Bundling is another technique that retailers use to trigger impulse buying.

You've probably seen it quite often. Complementary products are packaged together as one product, with one price, which often provides a substantial discount. Game consoles, for example, are often sold together with two or three games, and grocery stores have “meal deal” bundles and even web pages dedicated to a whole range of bundle offers.

Shopping can be friend or foe. While these strategies can help to swell the profits of retailers, they can also contribute to problems for their customers.

Impulse buying can undoubtedly affect a consumer's mental

wellbeing. It increases feelings of shame and guilt, which in turn can lead to anxiety, stress and depression.

And it's potentially even more serious when buying on impulse leads to excessive buying, especially if people spend money they don't have.

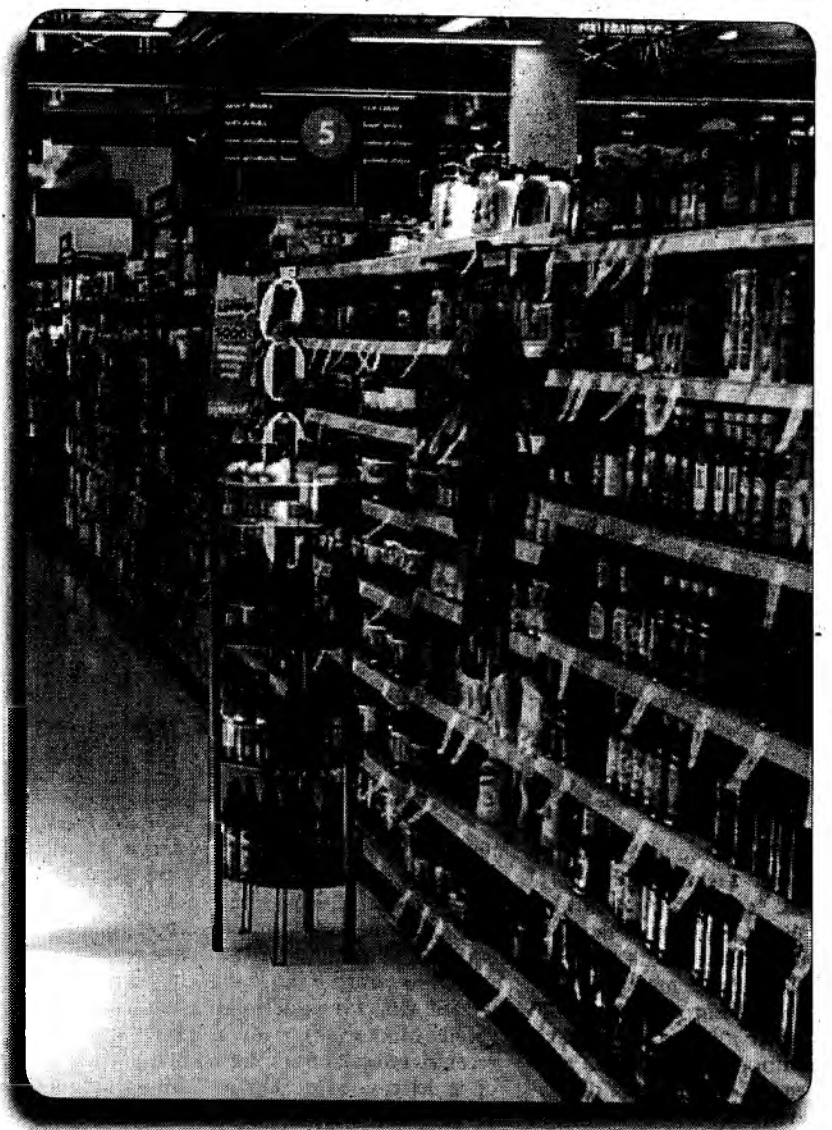
But there are some positives, too.

Online shopping has been found to give a dopamine boost, as it is released into our brains when we anticipate pleasure. So while we wait for our purchases to arrive, we tend to feel more excited than if we had bought things in store.

If this pleasurable feeling is well managed, then there's no harm in it. But, sadly, it doesn't always end there. That fleeting feeling of pleasure can sometimes lead to the onset of a shopping addiction. This can happen when a consumer wants to continuously experience the feel-good “hit of dopamine”, so they fall into a pattern of buying more and more items until it gets out of control.

On the flip side of the coin, shopping can help restore a person's sense of control.

When we're feeling unhappy or anxious, we tend to think that everything is out of our control. But as shopping allows us to make choices – which shop to go to or whether we like an item – it can bring back a feeling of personal control and reduce distress. So it can be a more meaningful activity than many think.



Retailers can help us too

While retailers might not be keen to reduce the amount of shopping we do, they could, if they wish, help to influence our buying decisions more positively.

There is a pressing need to combat obesity in most countries of the world. That's why the UK government has decided to restrict the promotions of unhealthy foods – those high in free sugars, salt and saturated fats – in prominent store locations from October 2022.

It's a strategy that could help. Removing tempting treats from the checkouts can help to reduce the amount of sugary foods that are bought – in some cases by as much as 76%.

And a recent study found that by increasing the availability and promotions of healthier food options (such as stocking low-fat chips next to regular chips) – and making them more visible through positioning and clever use of signage – shoppers can indeed be encouraged to make better choices.

Ultimately, the key to resisting goods we don't want, or need – and making healthy decisions – lies with us. It helps to be conscious of what we are doing while shopping. A good personal strategy is to try to browse less and use a shopping list instead – and try to only buy what's on it. But be kind to yourself, because it can be easier said than done. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 10, 2022

Moon square Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results for the whole year. You will quickly finish all the tasks that have been pending for a long time. Opportunities will bring peace and happiness in your life. New job offers will come to you. You will plan a major expansion in business. You will be able to achieve the targets you have set at your work. You will work on your potentials. Those who are single will plan to get married. The solution of the feuds between brothers will favor you. You will meet some important or influential person, whose benefits you will receive in the future. The opportunities for good news and monetary are high. Your bosses and colleagues will be satisfied with your work. You will take correct decisions in business. You will meet an old friend of yours. You will be busy in events, programs, seminar etc. You will make new contacts.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



You will remain very happy and positive this week. Important developments are taking place in your life. Time is excellent. You will get lot of credit and praise for your efforts. Income will be good. Though your boss's whimsical attitude will irritate and trouble you, yet you will be confident enough to take things to the next level. You may have to plan about a job change or changing your place of work. Your spouse's health may cause a tension or two. But nothing much to worry about. Conditions on your job front will improve. You will look for goodness in everyone. You will make more efforts to achieve success at your place of work. You will be admired and liked a lot. Your income will increase. You will acquire a high position in the society. You will demonstrate excellent skill.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



A positive news will lift your morale and confidence. You will be retrieving lost ground. Conditions will improve. You will succeed in getting back your lost prestige. You will look for goodness in everyone. You will make more and more friends who will help you a lot. You will get a promotion you also desired off. Your prestige among your family and friends will increase. You will decorate your house and bring lot of changes. You will buy some expensive items for house too. A change that is very positive will take place. Your prestige among your family and friends will increase. Time will pass happily. You will remain committed to your partner/spouse. Sources of income will increase. Your siblings will support you a lot. You will also get credit for work done by others. But you will be honest and very modest about it.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



It is a time full of excitement and fun. You will be feeling on top of the world. Things will be under your control. Something very positive will take place. You will feel elated and on top of the world. Some incident will occur during this period which will make you think about doing an impossible task. But it will be well with in your reach. Something from deep inside will make you feel you a lot more confident. You will be educative. You will get some tasks with education. Your financial position will get better. Sources of income will be better. It will be on a rise. Your spouse will be affectionate towards you. These are important days. A new member may arrive in the family. New contacts will prove influential in uplifting your fate. You will have new friends. You will complete all your chores with full dedication. Your health will be excellent. You will feel a lot better.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



You will be able to achieve victory in your pursuits. Financial condition will be strong. You will feel relaxed and at peace. These are good days. At this time you will enter into a partnership with someone to grow your business and this will give you good gains and your work area will also expand. In job you will be transferred to the place of your choice. In context to income and profession you will begin afresh with a bang. You will focus on your work, identify your weakness and will try to improve upon them. There may be some worries on domestic front but you will manage. You will be candid about your weakness and will be open to suggestions to improve yourself. Time is a lot better. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will work to improve relations all around also.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Although you are expecting a lot this week, events will take place naturally and in due course. You only need to remain peaceful and relaxed. Opportunities will come to you and you just have to remain alert. You will feel at ease and mentally peaceful. You will develop your contact network. You will earn lot of money. You will also buy some expensive stuff for your daily needs. You will multiply your work four times using the new resources. You will finish even the toughest of tasks with grit and determination. Your image will shine. You will be in a position to solve other's problems. This will boost your prestige. Health related problems may crop up remain careful. Time is educative and learning period. You will set yourself on the stage to progress. You will be filled with self-confidence. Time will pass splendidly.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



A good news you receive all of a sudden about your children's progress will make your days. You will feel lifted and on cloud nine. You will also keep working hard. You will be headed on the path of progress. Your constructive skills will remain on the fore which you will use for creativity.

Some discussion with youth and people young at heart will yield super results at the workplace. You will find solution to your old problems. You will be charged with self confidence and courage. Business/job offers will come to you. Your business will give good profits. You will be restless to show your talent at the workplaces, in order to prove your superiority. You will be bent on putting new projects into practice.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



Your financial position will improve. You will get momentum in your work/business. You will be putting your best efforts to get your work completed. You will also get much needed boost from your supporters. Health will remain excellent. Public relations will grow along with your prestige and fame. You will also be making lot of new contacts. You will desist from interfering in the affairs of others. Else you may have to suffer a bit and you will repent for it. Tension in the family with your siblings will get removed. Your love life is looking good. You will enjoy nice relations with your partner/spouse. You will work with full dedication and will also get the result. You will also look forward to helping others. Do a great job at every level of responsibility. You will have the leadership qualities. You will earn a lot of money. You will surprise everyone with your intelligence.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



You will earn a lot of money. You will also receive something from inheritance. You will impress one and all and will attract people towards yourself. You will also take care of your health. You may opt to go to gym and also do some exercise. You will also excel in your work. You will be devoted. People connected to research field will get new assignments. You need to remain alert in financial dealings. You need to be careful in doing on time transaction. You will also move forward in life. You will win in debates. You will be careful in family matters and will value your relations. The time will be normal. You will be self centered. You will feel confident and full of energy. There will be happiness and peace in family life.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



It is going to be a favorable time period. Luck is favoring you. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will organize your work properly and smoothly. You will get a promotion or a new job offer. Expansion plans in business will move in the right direction. You will be receptive and will welcome new ideas. You will also meet some influential people and also get support. Your work will be appreciated by one and all. A land dispute will be resolved. You will understand the aims and aspirations of your children. You will also fulfill desires of your family members. Love mates will come closer. You will get lot of mental satisfaction. You will not ignore the interests of your partner. Your business will improve. You will also cooperate in household work. You will get backing from your family elders.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



You will continue to add people to your network. Your work potential will also increase. Your efforts will be backed with the blessings of your bosses. You will perform well. You will continue to increase your knowledge and skills. You will be busy in your everyday activities. Give some time to the family from your busy schedules. The tension about the results of the examination will be overcome. You will get back your blocked money. Auspicious event will take place. The economic side will remain strong. The time is favorable for positive results in fund-related activities. Your work plans will be successful. Your focus towards work will increase and support will be gained. Peace will be there in the family and there will also be complete fulfillment of new work.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You will get suddenly a lot of money. You will return to work with vengeance. Tough work will solve matters and your family talent will emerge. House and property related matters will get resolved. You will continue the good work. Your enemies will conspire against you but will not get success. You will remain happy. Time is enlightening. All your attention will be on your family. There will be happiness all around. A small party will get organized at home. You will touch the heights in your work. Best results will be achieved. Whatever things you touch will turn gold. The stars will be in your favor. You will take special care of child's needs. Time will be peaceful. You will be generous towards others. Whether man or woman, you are a person who can easily win anyone's heart.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You will get a suspicious news. It will give you lot of mental peace. You will be busy in work related to children. There are chances of your children getting engaged. There is also the possibility of buying land and property. You will spend on the sources of comfort. You will earn money. The work that you have envisaged will get done on time. Those connected to business will get benefits. Money that was blocked somewhere will get recovered. There will not be able to pay attention to your health because of avenues. You will not be able to pay attention to your health because of other things. The entire time will be spent in resolving problems. You will make also come in contact with lot of influential persons.

Rediscovered drawing by Michelangelo offered on auction

Christie's announced the sale of a previously unseen drawing by Michelangelo, *A Naked Young Man* (after Masaccio) surrounded by two figures, completed early in his career. This extremely rare work, one of the very few drawings by Michelangelo still in private hands, will be auctioned on May 18 at the Old Masters and 19th Century Art: Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures.

The work, which came to the market from a private French collection, was designated a French National Treasure, which initially prohibited its export from the country for a period of thirty months. The French government recently removed this designation and granted an export licence, allowing the drawing to be sold to collectors worldwide without restriction. Michelangelo's drawing will be exhibited in Hong Kong and New York before being sold in Paris.

Furio Rinaldi, then a specialist in Christie's department of Old Master Drawings, identified the drawing as Michelangelo's in 2019. Paul Joannides, Emeritus Professor of Art History at Cambridge University and author of complete catalogues of drawings by Michelangelo and his school in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Musee du Louvre, later studied the original and supports the attribution. The drawing, which was sold in 1907 at the Hotel Drouot in Paris as a work of Michelangelo's school, escaped the attention of all scholars until its recent rediscovery.

This drawing, by the young Michelangelo in Florence at the end of the 15th century, is likely the artist's earliest surviving nude study.

The central figure of the work is a recreation of the shivering man depicted in Masaccio's Baptism of the Neophytes, one of the most famous frescoes from the Santa Maria del Carmine Church in Flor-



(1401-1428).

Michelangelo created several other studies after Masaccio, including a drawing at the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich and another at the Albertina in Vienna, as well as a drawing after a Giotto fresco at the Louvre.

Michelangelo transforms Masaccio's figure with two shades of brown ink, enhancing the man's musculature and creating a more powerful and robust figure that foreshadows his most famous representations of the human body, such as his monumental marble David at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence and his two Slaves at the Louvre.

Michelangelo later added two figures behind the shivering man in a completely different, more energetic style, unrelated to Ma-

saccio's original composition.

The sale of this large and well-preserved drawing joins the ranks of other major works on paper offered at Christie's auctions, including Raphael's Head of a Muse, which sold in London for more than £29 million (\$38 million) in December 2009; Leonardo da Vinci's exquisite Head of a Bear, which achieved nearly £9 million (\$11.8 million) in 2021; and a rare nude male study by Michelangelo, which sold in London on July.

Cecile Verdier, Chairman, Christie's France: "Everyone at Christie's involved in this sale is deeply honoured by the opportunity to present a work of this magnitude. A major discovery in the History of Art, the sale of this drawing is also a momentous event for the art market." (*LANSlife*)

"Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result."
—Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 239 SHILLONG, MONDAY, APRIL 11, 2022

Exit Imran, finally

THE weak system of democracy in Pakistan took a new hit when, Saturday night, an elected government was thrown out of power through a no confidence motion - for the first time in the nation's history, and at the behest of the judiciary. While cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan tried his best to hold on, situations conspired to see his exit. An alternative government is likely for a period, under which fresh elections to the National Assembly could be called. The passing of the no-confidence vote aborted Khan's plans to hold the next election under his watch. The Opposition - mainly led by the Bhutto and Sharif families - joined hands for now, but their interests are bound to clash sooner than later.

Khan, whose rise in the political horizon in 2011 is purely by virtue of his popularity as a cricketer and a promise to cleanse the corrupt systems, had raised people's expectations. His victory in the 2018 polls and assumption of power raised these expectations further. Several factors worked to his disadvantage even as he zealously carried forward his anti-corruption drive against political leaders. One, his majority in the National Assembly was narrow and at risk of being challenged. Two, he faced criticism of being a 'selected' PM with backing from the Pakistani military. Three, the judiciary in Pakistan was not dependable and exercised its clout at critical situations, as has happened even in the present instance. Its insistence that the no-trust motion be put to vote on Saturday night itself saw the end of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's government. Four, Pakistan's economy ended up in dire straits, due also to the Covid-19 impact, and inflation was to the order of about 10 per cent. In the gathering gloom, the military that gave him indirect support chose to ditch him - also as Khan's actions vis-à-vis the army reshuffling raised suspicion among the generals that he might target them. Five, Khan drew the ire of the US when he, against their counsel, headed for Moscow to seek support from Vladimir Putin at the precise time when Russia began an invasion of Ukraine. Put together, the situation in Pakistan was tailor-made for disaster to Imran Khan and his PTI.

Unlike India, Pakistan is seen by many as a failed state. Multiple forces within are pulling it in different directions, with the military having an overarching influence over the system such as to undercut the cause of democracy. Khan tried to perform a trapeze act and could hold on till now. How the future in Pakistan will shape up is difficult to foretell.

Functional ULB for towns and cities in Meghalaya

By H.H. Mohrmen

The main problem that the urban areas in the state are facing is not that there is no proper waste disposal system, but rather the absence of a democratically run Urban Local Body. It is rather sad that even after 50 years of its existence the state does not have a system in place to run its towns and cities. The world is on the move and naturally the towns and cities have outgrown the dorbar shnong, but not the way towns and city is administered in the state. The need of the hour is for the government to take a fresh look at the issue. The problem that we have in town and cities from waste disposal to traffic

holds back the interest of the first party.

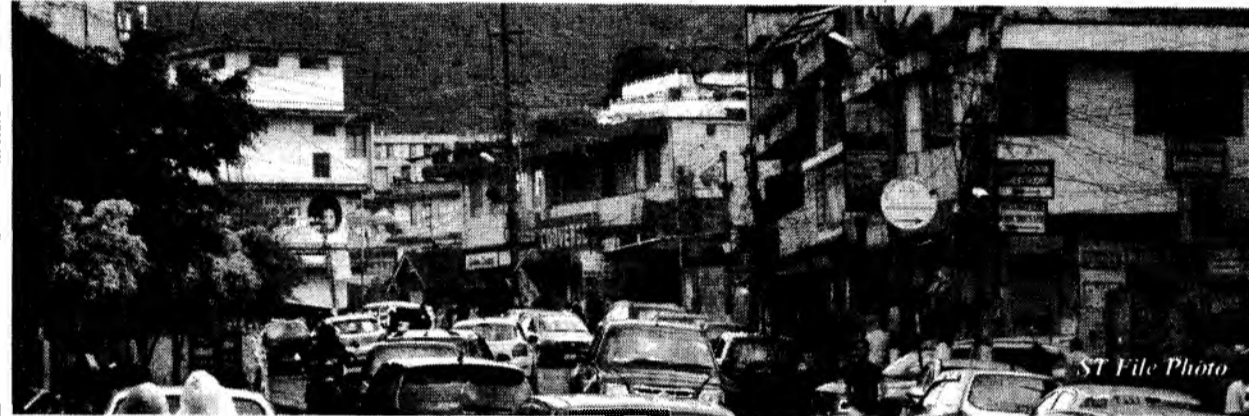
The question that one needs to ask is whether we can run our town and cities by many dorbar shnong the mandate of which is the interest of their respective dorbar shnong only? Can towns and the city in the state function without an institution which will look at the overall interest of and common issues of the entire town or city. Can we have an institution which looks beyond their respective dorbar shnong?

Municipal in name only
One may say that of course,

lesson of how to fail in urban management when there is no system in place to run these town and cities. As the state grows in shape and size, the urban issues will increase and it will add on to the existing problems if we do not have a proper system for urban management in place. Every successive government will create new districts and the headquarters of the new district will be upgraded to a town. Apart from that new townships have started coming up on their own in many nooks and corners of the state. The question

ous question is - can't the local people sell safety pins or groceries? In this case is the JHADC protecting the local traders by providing trading licenses to the mega markets in the town? Certainly these markets under one roof are not owned by local tribals of the state but companies which in turn affect the local businesses.

The JHADC has very clearly failed in its duty to protect the interests of the tribal population for which it is being mandated by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The pressure groups which are self-proclaimed protectors of the Jaibynriew are missing the trees for the



is also partly because of the absence of a functional urban local bodies in Meghalaya.

Town in the garb of the dorbar shnong

Every town and the city in the state is an urban area albeit with a rural mindset. The reason is because every town in the state is urban in its setup but run by many dorbar shnong. These dorbar shnong function on their own without any coordination or even cooperation with the adjacent dorbar in the same town. This is one main reason why we have failed miserably in urban management in the state. The current awkward situation that we have found ourselves in Meghalaya is because successive governments have failed to address this very important issue.

This leaves us in a situation where we have a town or a city in the garb of a dorbar shnong, where although the dorbar shnongs are within the town/city limits, but they function independent of each other. It is a town or city but run by many dorbar shnong within the town. There is no avenue, permanent platform or institution where the different dorbar shnongs of the town meet and cohesively discuss common issues faced by the people of the town. The classic case is that of Wah Umkhrah in Shillong which passes through many dorbar shnong and that is also precisely the reason why efforts to clean it has failed. When one community goes gung-ho in its efforts to clean the river, the adjacent dorbar are not interested and this

we already have Municipalities in places like Shillong, Tura and Jowai but the question that begs the answer is how do these municipalities function? Are they really functioning to their full potential? For many years now no election was conducted by the state government to elect ward commissioners to these municipalities. In fact in some municipalities no election was held since the very inception of that particular municipality. These municipalities are run by the department of urban affairs which is only collecting tax or building fees without any public representation. Hence in Meghalaya all the Municipal boards exist in name only. And even in places where the government had appointed a chairman of the Board, the chairman is akin to a prime minister without a cabinet. One wonders how the chairman functions. The appointment merely became an opportunity for the government to accommodate the party's supporters.

Government Neglecting Urban Development

Fifty years ago when the state was created out of the composite state of Assam, young Meghalaya had only three major towns which includes Shillong the state capital. In the absence of any urban local bodies, the two towns and even the capital city has grown on its own without any plans for the future. Shillong and Jowai have become a classic case study of how a town or a city should not be run. It is a clear

therefore is in the absence of a cohesive system or ULB in the town/city, how will the government manage these developments?

Municipalities a threat to tribal population

The main stumbling block to the function of the municipal board is the fear that the urban areas will be overwhelmed by non-local population. The anti municipal lobby used the only alternative that they have and that is to oppose the government plan to conduct elections to the different wards in these municipalities. This is why the function of the municipalities in the state is in an indeterminate state. And in the absence of a full Board, the municipality exists but with limited function only. With regards to the fear of municipal being a threat to the tribal population the classic case study is Jowai.

Even if Jowai is a municipal area, yet trade by non tribal in the town is controlled by the Jaitia Hills Autonomous District Council but has the Council really protected the interests of the tribals? In the last five year the town has seen the emergence of at least three mega-marts which sell everything from safety pins to what have you. One of the mandates of the Autonomous District Council is to protect the trade by tribal population. In order to so the District Council is expected to issue licenses only to those individuals or business entities that are engaged in businesses which the local population cannot undertake. The obvi-

ous question is - can't the local people sell safety pins or groceries? In this case is the JHADC protecting the local traders by providing trading licenses to the mega markets in the town? Certainly these markets under one roof are not owned by local tribals of the state but companies which in turn affect the local businesses.

The Alternative ULB

Things cannot go on like this forever as urban areas in the state have to be managed and governed in ways different from the way dorbar shnong is being run. If people are not comfortable with the municipal system then what is the alternative? It is therefore mandatory for the government to come up with an acceptable alternative because urban areas in the state have to be run by a different system altogether. The one alternative that exists is the town committees the system which Jowai town was before it was upgraded to municipality.

Town Committees under the ADCs

If the municipal system is not acceptable then can we go back to the Town Committees which will be under the control of the different Autonomous District Councils in the state? Of course Town Committees are also ULBs but can the state avail different central government projects, urban missions and financial support under the TC system? Or maybe the state government will come up with new type of ULB which will address the urban issues which will also be within the ambit of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The need of the hour for the State Government is to ensure that there is a functional ULB in every town and city of Meghalaya.

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'Naya Pakistan' with 10 million jobs end up as a mirage

Imran Khan's tenure: A bunch of lies and disappointments

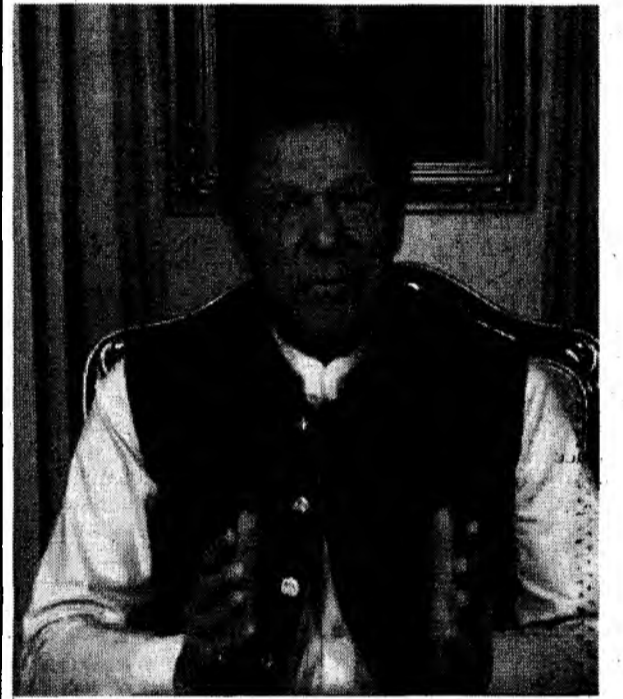
By Manish Rai

In 2018, Pakistan witnessed the rise of new celebrity Prime Minister Imran Khan, who vowed to halt dynastic politics, end corruption and boost the economy. Common Pakistanis, especially the youth, saw Khan as their only ray of hope. As before coming to power, Khan in his speeches pledged to root out corruption and lift people out of poverty. And he promised a new and prosperous Pakistan "Naya Pakistan" with the creation of 10 million jobs.

But nothing of this sort happened in his almost 4 years in power. Imran Khan just turned out to be the biggest disappointment for the masses. Pakistan was pushed into a constitutional crisis after Imran Khan avoided a no-confidence vote which was initiated jointly by various opposition parties. In response, Khan claimed that a "foreign conspiracy" was being hatched by the United States to overthrow his government over its "interdependent" foreign policy. This claim of Khan is been

repeated by the key Opposition leaders such as former PM Nawaz Sharif and former president Asif Ali Zardari. NAB cases against opposition figures were expected to destroy their reputation and political standing but the one-sided nature of accountability and lack of court convictions left the process in disrepute.

The PTI government damaged foreign relations of the country built over decades just for getting minor mileage in domestic politics. For example, Pakistan's relations with France and European Union soured to an all-time low. The government signed a deal with the hardline Islamist group Tehrik-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), agreeing to endorse a boycott of French products and making a move in parliament to expel the French ambassador. In addition to this, relations with the Arab world are believed to be at a historic low. Khan's new narrative is that there is a foreign conspiracy to oust him from power. His pointing the



finger at the US has irked Washington and damaged relations with the US. In a real sense, Imran Khan has made a mess of the foreign relations of Pakistan.

After an initial period of cordial ties, civil-military relations have touched a new low. But Civil-Military relations became really uneasy last year over the appointment of the new Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief and disagreements over governance and foreign policy issues. The rift between the government and the all-powerful army seems to be out in the open for quite some time now. The 'one page' is in tatters. Miranda Hussein a political analyst based in Lahore, said that the establishment and PM are not on the same page as it is illustrated by contradicting stand of the Army Chief and PM over the issue of the Ukraine war and relations with the US. It is quite evident that a tug of war is going on between the civilian government and its military beneficiaries.

Imran Khan continued to behave like a leader in opposition blaming all the mess on past regimes rather than a person in charge who can fix things. Imran's government believes in running away from challenges and creating distractions to divert the attention of the masses. Rather than fixing the problems faced by the country the prime minister spent more time delivering morality lectures and religious sermons like a Mullah. Certainly, Khan knows that there is no conspiracy against him and no western power wants to throw him out. But he is trying to build this narrative to fuel his support base into believing he has been the victim of a foreign plot so that he can get some sympathy from people and also can portray himself as a martyr. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

India's ambivalence vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine war

The actions of Mr. Putin and his armed forces in Ukraine are unconscionable. Russian armed forces have killed Ukrainian civilians, including children and the elderly. They have used Ukrainian children as human shields. Hopefully Mr. Putin will face the fullest prosecution for crimes against humanity.

As a superpower America has committed a lot more violence all over the world. China (PRC) has committed far worse human rights abuses in Tibet. Thus both America and PRC have long forfeited the moral authority to rebuke an invader like Mr. Putin.

But that said, Indian analyses of this tragedy are skewed too much towards Russia. Whatever the west's past sins may have been, to blame the west, especially NATO for inching too close to Russia is to exonerate Mr Putin of all blame. NATO's eastward expansion has been

democratic (not coercive). But more importantly, no matter what the provocations be, nothing -- absolutely nothing -- excuses the unspeakable violence of Mr. Putin and his armed forces against innocent Ukrainians. To be so provoked, just by NATO's democratic expansion, as to start a hi-tech war, reveals the paranoid state of Mr. Putin's mind. India has long been provoked by both Pakistan and China, who are always nibbling at her geographic territory. But India has not launched a hi-tech war against either nation. Nor has India threatened nuclear violence.

It is therefore all the more sad to see India on the wrong side of history in this instance. Human rights violations are a travesty of our shared humanity, no matter where this is happening -- whether in Ukraine, Syria (where Mr. Putin honed his butchering skills), or in Yemen. In this context, it is well worth remembering America's great generosity towards Ukraine, even though America and Europe have their hands tied by Mr. Putin's nuclear threats. To

sit on the fence at a time like this, as India has, is sad. Also sad are anti-colonial grudges so great that Europe's former colonies in Asia and Africa cannot bring themselves to condemn madman Putin's unspeakable violence.

Whatever the broad precipitating causes of this barbaric war be, if we are to acknowledge free-will, then the blood-stained hand that has pulled the trigger to this war is Mr. Putin's -- nobody else's. It does not help to sugar-coat this truth. Yes, Russia has long been a "friend" of India. But when a friend turns evil, a true friend either takes him to task, or leaves him -- regardless of consequences.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Kudos to Meghalaya High Court

The crackdown on senseless quarrying and mining is a bold step by the Meghalaya Mineral Development Cor-

poration and the administrative departments. The credit directly goes to the media and honourable High Court which has timely pressed the alarm bell. I also can't agree more with what senior journalist, Patricia Mukhim writes in her recent article suggesting that the present Chief Justice is a blessing to Meghalaya, "Meghalaya High Court to rescue of despairing citizens" (ST 8 April, 2022). Many other concerned citizens now pin their sincere hopes that the shadow of a righteous court will continue to keep other authorities on their toes.

Frankly speaking, the proactive role of the court was long overdue in the state. The past four years saw many tragedies due to hazardous coal mining and quarrying. Yes, we have already done irreparable harm to the environment in pursuit of our wrong ambitions. Development and material gain by hurting the ecology is sheer stupidity. Over-fascination for urbanization and consumerism will only turn mother earth pale. A constructive media

and the unflinching stand of the court is definitely a ray of hope to help heal mother earth.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

On meeting Azharuddin

Growing up in India in the late 1980's and early 1990's Azharuddin was one of my cricketing heroes. And like any other fan, my biggest dream was to meet my idol a dream that became a reality on April 9, 2022, when the former Indian cricket captain was in Shillong to attend the finals of Senior Men's Challenger Cricket Cup 2022. The famed writer Paulo Coelho was bang on when he wrote: "When you want something, the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it"

As I was waiting anxiously at the entrance of the stadium along with dozens of members of MCA and along with kids of the cricket academy to welcome him

and upon arrival Azharuddin with that popped collar, received a rousing welcome and sensing an opportunity, I cried out excited: "Azhar Bhai!". The Maestro spotted me in the crowd, smiled and I got a chance to shake hands with him. Wow! That left me delirious and excited. I must say he still wore that look confident enough to destroy the opposition bowling. He stood as one of the flickering architects in building up India as a stern cricketing nation. He made his entry to international cricket with a bang. He struck the record of scoring 3 back to back centuries in his first 3 test matches back in 1984-85, against England. No other player till date has been able to match his wrist-work while playing strokes. Hope to see the legend again someday.

Yours etc.,
Advocate M Haque,
Shillong -6

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.

"Propaganda is to a democracy what
the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state."

— Noam Chomsky

The Shillong Times

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BJP's obsession with Hindi

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah who is also the Chairman of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee, informed that 22,000 Hindi teachers had been recruited in the eight states of the Northeast and all the states have agreed to make Hindi compulsory up to Class X. It is not known if this includes Meghalaya too since the MDA Government had not yet reacted to the Union Home Minister's announcement. And since Education is on the concurrent list, the State's concurrence is imperative. Amit Shah's remarks go contrary to the National Education Policy 2020, introduced by the BJP-led government, which seeks to support primary education in the mother tongue. That the BJP has an aversion for English is a given. Now they seem to believe that Hindi is the only unifying factor for this country. They are averse to the idea of fellow-Indians conversing with each other in English instead of Hindi. That is why Shah has said that Hindi should be accepted as the alternative language to English and not to the mother tongue.

In Assam there have been reactions against this announcement of the Home Minister from several quarters, foremost among which is the Asom Sahitya Sabha which has categorically stated that Hindi cannot be made compulsory in Assam up to Class X. Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma meanwhile has contested the claims that Hindi would be made a compulsory subject up to Class X. He says there has been no such instructions from the Centre. Biswa Sarma stated that in Assam, Assamese is the mother tongue and that the Assam government in consultation with Asom Sahitya Sabha and Tribal Sahitya Sabha had prepared a language policy where a student will learn Assamese and a tribal language besides English and Hindi. However, since the Bodo Sahitya Sabha has some objections that policy has been kept in abeyance.

In Meghalaya, other than the Congress Party chief, Vincent Pala and former Congress MLA, Ampareen Lyngdoh no one has raised a stink on the imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject up to Class X. The MDA Government has not taken a view on this and neither have individual political parties. This is strange considering that the State is trying to promote Khasi and to ensure its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Interestingly the Meghalaya BJP too has up to the time of writing this editorial not said anything on the issue of making Hindi compulsory up to Class X. Nor have the other tribal states made an issue of this. To buttress his point, Amit Shah said that 70% of the agenda of the Union Cabinet is prepared in Hindi now. He even stated that nine tribal communities have converted their dialects' scripts into Devanagiri. The question arising now is whether India is still a federation of states or if the Centre can take decisions even on subjects on the concurrent list without consulting the states.

Shillong Woes

By Toki Blah.

What ails this once beautiful Hill Station that had at one time earned for itself the sobriquet "Scotland of the East"? By 1972 I had just crossed my 24th birthday and had lived my entire life in this, then capital of undivided Assam. In recalling those days, images of a simple unadorned life flashes by. If one wanted to go anywhere one simply boarded a Shillong Syndicate bus and it charged 25 paise from Lew Mawlong to Happy valley. If one was in a hurry and had to go via a route uncovered by the city buses, one walked or caught a taxi from their stand at Motphran. We paid Rs 6 from Motphran

to what is happening today except for one thing, which after 50 years remains the same, and that is the city continues to grow and expand devoid of any sense of direction. Unplanned growth is the rule and every type of governance system that Shillong enjoys, be it MUDA, the Municipality, the Dorbar shnongs or the KHADC, everyone one of them claims ownership over this disorganized and chaotic urban expansion, each suspicious of the other, unwilling to work together, resulting in the ordinary citizen groaning under his increasing everyday urban woes. Take for example

Marten, the landfill meant to handle only the decomposition of organic waste produced by 10,000 households has now become more of a problem than a solution for solving the management of inorganic waste from more than 1,50,000 households. The problem has been aggravated as pointed above by the absence of a functioning Municipality. The Government instead has opted to deal with the problem of waste management through its concerned departments, but frankly speaking that will be simply asking the Department to take care of

is Robert's Hospital; that's it! The main route for these areas to any part of the town, either for education or healthcare purposes or even shopping still depends on the GS Road but the perpetual and increasing traffic congestion on that road makes it harder and harder for the citizens of this area to access the civic and social benefits enjoyed by other citizens of the city. Most experts hold the view that the lack of education and health infrastructure in the areas of northern Shillong is because of the fear that non-tribals have for venturing into these areas. They are identified for their Khasi centric ethnicity which quite usually



to Umlyngka. It was that simple. Lewduh was a market, decent and clean that lived up to its name by being busy only on Sngi Lewduh. Lachumiere, Risa Colony, Moti Nagar and even Laitumkhrah were considered to be posh localities but even the older localities such as Raitsamthiah, Mawkhrah and Jaiv had typical Assam type houses with large gardens or compounds. If first caught anyone anywhere, one simply had to find a Municipal water tap and drink straight from it. Septic tanks were for the rich with large compounds. For the ordinary citizen an outhouse at the end of the garden served the call of nature and these were serviced by a functioning Municipality. The town was clean; civic sense prevailed; rains could last for more than 9 days at a stretch but a flooded road or locality were unheard of; the Wah Umkhrah and the Umshyri were gurgling clear streams where people still bathed or fished in. Best was that people lived and enjoyed a happy, leisurely lifestyle where stress or lifestyle illnesses were still unheard of. Elected representatives lived on the same plane as the common man; social pretensions were frowned upon rather than being openly adulated as of today. Only the Governor was entitled the appendage VIP and there were no officious self styled VIPs with flashing red lights and sirens and uncouth road sense to disturb the serenity of travelling along Shillong roads.

All that happened yesterday, in direct incomparability

the distress and hardship one faces while moving from one part of the city to another. The traffic snarls are growing and it is obvious that if not addressed, the way it should, five years from now Shillong roads will simply become impediments and obstructions rather than the urban arteries meant for smooth and healthy movement of traffic that its citizens rely on. Our stupid solution to the problem - The Shillong Traffic Police!

Let's face facts. Traffic police are simply meant to regulate the flow of traffic. It is not their job to identify nor plan for urban infrastructure such as parking lots, road widening or alternate ancillary city roads. Planning for such urban infrastructure which is sorely needed is the mandate of a Municipality and there are hundreds of Urban infrastructure development schemes which Shillong has been forced to forego simply because it does not have an elected Municipality, the main criteria for the release of such funding from the Centre. Shillong Municipal Elections however continue to be considered disagreeable, unsuitable and traditionally defiling to the touch. Why so? No one has cared to ask and none have been able to give a satisfactory answer and so we continue to welter and wallow in the traffic muck of our own creation.

Our next urban woe is the increasing difficulty in disposing off the waste we produce be it solid waste or liquid. The arrival of plastic together with its inorganic properties has simply multiplied a hundred fold our problems in waste management.

a job that it is not equipped to deal with. At the risk of being called boring I once again emphasise the urgent need of an elected Municipal Board which will have the wherewithal to bring in relevant technology, funding and expertise to deal with our problem of waste management. We can no longer leave the problem to be solved by Dorbars or by concerned civil society groups and individuals. We have to accept the reality that is happening around us and that reality is that our waste management infrastructure is collapsing. Soon the whole city will be neck deep in garbage. We need a more effective way on how to segregate waste; how to collect it and finally how to dispose it off economically. The Meghalaya High Court has also made an observation on this issue. We can no longer depend on the efficacy of Marten for the job as Marten today in no uncertain manner illustrates the utter failure of our governance system which focuses more on distribution of free goodies rather than delivering services that aim at uplifting the welfare and wellbeing of the citizen!

The next urban woe that citizens of the city experience, especially those living in North Shillong, West Shillong and Mawlawi constituencies is the lopsided development as far as education and healthcare facilities are concerned. Most and nearly all the reputed educational institutions and health care centers are to be found in East Shillong Constituency, i.e. Laitumkhrah area. The only healthcare center on the northern side of the town

spells trouble for other communities and so advanced technology through skilled manpower which usually is the domain of non-tribals and the mainstay of reputable educational institutions, has been denied the area. How far this is true is yet to be confirmed but it still does not explain the reluctance of the Government to invest and create this required infrastructure in North Shillong areas which not only houses the biggest constituency in Shillong but also serves as the main entry point to Shillong.

In the end one is forced to come to the conclusion that the misery of Shillong, once renowned as The Queen of all Hill Stations is man-made and is the direct result of a non-visionary political dispensation that has governed the State and the City for the last 50 years. Adding to this wretchedness is the presence of myriad pressure groups who have one foot in the glory of the past and one in the depressing state of governance the state suffers from. No one is willing to think of the future nor to plan for the future. Everyone talks and speaks of a bright future of the forthcoming generations but all seem bent to leave that to providence rather than being actively involved in bringing about the promised bright future for future generations.

Meghalayan tribals, especially those of Shillong city, seem to carry a very distinct hatred and detestation for any sort of planning for the future. I have no hesitation in saying it is the main reason for the urban woes we find ourselves in.

Does Meghalaya need a State Economic Survey?

By Dr Sridhar Kundu

For a progressive government at present in Meghalaya, it is necessary to think of working on a state economic survey. As per information available in the public domain, Meghalaya government does not publish an economic survey and stands different from many other states including its neighbours such as Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram. For the readers, it is necessary to note that publication of an economic survey for a state government is not a constitutional requirement.

In a federal structure, both the union and state governments publish and present their own economic surveys. For the union government, it is an annual exercise but, for the state governments, this custom is not followed strictly. However, some of the state governments have recently started publishing their economic surveys annually.

Economic Survey and its objective

The economic survey presents the report card of the state economy. A detailed picture of the status of the macro economy and individual performances of its various sectors is presented in the survey in a lucid manner. Besides the macroeconomic indicators, performances in some of the social sectors such as education, health, water, and sanitation and others, are presented in the survey in a way understandable for both a layman and subject experts. Again, the financial status of the state government and its various policy and program interventions are elaborately discussed in an economic survey.

A responsible government brings out surveys annually to make the citizens well informed about the status of the state economy. Through a detailed analysis of various aspects of the economy with facts and research, the survey tries to provide a direction which the government uses in its policy making. The government also uses this survey report to get a political mileage by patronising its own performances through the economic performances of the state.

Union Government and Economic Survey

For the union government, economic surveys have been prepared annually since 1950-51. In the beginning, it was part of the union budget document but since 1964 the economic survey was published as a separate document.

The economic survey is prepared by the Ministry of Finance and the office of the Chief Economic Advisor holds the sole responsibility for its preparation. It is presented and tabled in parliament by the finance minister, one day before the budget presentation. The simultaneous presentation of both the documents is done with the purpose of showing the policy link between the two.

A detailed analysis of various aspects of the Indian economy and various policy prescriptions presented in the survey provide the government immense support in its strategies of budgetary allocation. The government also refers to the economic survey in addressing and defending various questions asked in the parliament during the budget session.

State Economic Surveys

For the state governments, the department of planning is usually the responsible authority to prepare the state economic surveys. As per the information available in the public domain some of the state governments started preparing their economic survey reports in the year 2000. Kerala stands as an exception as surveys for this state have been available since 1959. However, it is also possible that some of the states have their surveys before 2000 but these are not available in their departments' websites for the use of public purposes. Among the north-eastern

states, as per the information available in public domain, only two states i.e., Meghalaya and Sikkim do not have their economic surveys. The government of Arunachal Pradesh started doing this exercise in 2018. The government of Assam started publishing this report in 2010-11. The government of Manipur started publishing this report from 2018-19. Economic survey of Mizoram and Nagaland is available in the public domain since 2012-13 and 2010-11 respectively.

It is also important to note that at the state level, the nomenclature of the survey differs from state to state. In Kerala and Rajasthan, West Bengal and few others, the survey is published as Economic Review. In Gujarat, the survey is published as Socio-Economic Review whereas in Telangana, it is published as Socio-Economic Outlook.

Existing reports on Meghalaya state economy

In the absence of an economic survey, some of the reports published by the state government of Meghalaya available in public domain, provide information on state economy. However, they are not regularly updated. In 2008, the Department of Planning published the State Development Report. It provides information on various sectors such as agriculture, industry, tourism, and other services. However, all this information is not updated as no State Development Reports were published since 2008 and if published, they are not available in the public domain. Similarly, the last state Human Development Report published and available in public domain was for the year 2008-09.

The statistical handbooks of the state which used to be an annual and regular publication from the Directorate of Economics and Statistics since 1976-77 was last updated in 2019. It provides basic information about agriculture, industry, food, and public distribution etc. However, provisioning with all this information, the document misses out the basic policy prescriptions which the government needs in its application in budget preparation.

Usefulness of the survey

The infrequent publication of various reports by the state government provides scattered information about the state economy and performances in its various social indicators. Because of the nature of irregularity, information from these reports are also less updated and reliable. There is also the possibility that information from different publications do not match with each other and add to the complexities. The economic survey can be a replacement for many of these published reports.

For a state government it is necessary to look at the priorities while allocating public resources. Optimal allocation of resources is possible with a better selection of priorities backed by resource constraints. The economic survey with its detailed information and some of the research findings would help the government in segregating its priorities among many.

The survey also analyses various schematic interventions and their functioning and pattern of state finance. This analysis would help the government in bringing changes in its spending and borrowing pattern.

Last not the least, the economic survey can help the state government to improve its image of being transparent and honest to the people. It also helps the other state governments and union government to better understand its functioning and thus, help in strengthening its bilateral and multi-lateral relationship.

(The author is Senior Economist Bharti Institute of Public Policy Indian School of Business.)

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Letters to the Editor

State border imbroglio

Editor,
The news that appears daily in various news outlets, leaves ordinary people like us in a dilemma as to what is factually correct. Are they strategically truth or lies, or are they political truths or alternative fact? Words like principles, etc., leaves people non-plussed. In perspective, it was in the year 1976, when the Congress party was in power in Assam and in the federal Government. The party in power in Meghalaya was still the then APHLC. Then the Assam Congress decided to host all India Congress Committee in Guwahati where the conference would be attended by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. At that point in time, the seat of the Assam Government like Meghalaya was still in the nascent stage of settling down after the state's bifurcation, and the Assam Government found itself bereft of a proper place to host its honoured guest namely the Prime Minister of the country. The Assam Government approached the Meghalaya Government

to kindly allow it to build a guest house in the land on a hill where the present guest house known as Guest House no 2, later on used as the Governor's residence for some time, and the quarter of the Chief Minister during Tarun Gogoi's tenure.

As such in 1976, various correspondence were shot forth between the two Governments and multiple meetings between bureaucrats of the two Governments were held. If my memory serves me right, the Assam Government even offered an alternative place in the city for Meghalaya to build its house for the convenience of government officials when they travel on duty. After a long deliberation, as Assam acknowledged the ownership of Meghalaya on the issue, an understanding was made allowing the Guest House to be constructed for the purpose with an understanding that the area falls under Meghalaya. Those correspondences should still be in the archives of Meghalaya Government. It therefore is mind boggling to non-government people like us to understand the utterances today while trying to establish who is the rightful owner of the

said area that is now under dispute. Boundary disputes happen all the time, between neighbours, tenants or you name them. We can humbly suggest to those in power to look into the past records also when they try to settle present issue.

When I was young people from as far as Palasbari area were still paying their land revenue to the Khasi syiems for that matter, not that they can now go and claim ownership. We fought for statehood without knowing where our boundary is as we became too busy looking for our bowl of soup rather than the boundary pillars we should have. Even God cannot help us as I believe he does not get involved in trivial matters.

With due respect to one and all.

Yours etc.,
D Kitbok Rynthiang,
Via email

Anti-covid booster shots

Editor,
The Central government's policy on Coronavirus booster shots will leave a large

section of the population unvaccinated with the booster dose. The booster shots will be available only at private vaccination centres and they will not be free for most adults except healthcare workers, frontline staff and those above 60.

In fact, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had announced that all eligible adults would be able to receive booster for Covid-19 from April 10. However, Prime Minister Modi had announced that those above 60, frontline and healthcare workers would be able to avail booster doses from January 10. The official in charge of India's Covid-19 vaccination drive had said that the country would focus first on vaccinating all eligible adults before introducing booster doses. In fact, this kind of inconsistencies and lack of understanding between officials and the PM has badly affected the Union Health Ministry's decision to vaccinate India's entire population with the booster dose.

While some experts say that booster doses are not required for entire population, some others say that booster doses are required

in the context of reinfection. Further, no clear consensus exists over which vaccine should be used for booster shots. Also, intensive studies have not been conducted about boosters. With regard to affordability, boosters are available at private vaccination centres and a large section of the population has to pay for it. High cost of the vaccine and the government's policy will have an impact on poorer people. Boosters must be made available in government centres and the entire population must be vaccinated with it for free.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

India living in a fantasy world

Editor,
Apropos of "Indian Ambivalence Vis-Sa-Vis the Russian Ukraine War," by Deepa Majumdar, (ST April 11, 2022), I fully agree with the writer. Let India acknowledge herself as the fence sitter. Even if fence sitters needs to advise, it

should know two English words Active and Passive not voices but in terms of what all see on satellite imagery. Let us charge that all war journalists are siding with Ukrainians. But satellites don't lie. They had saved many from cyclones, tsunamis, floods etc with pin-pointed accuracy be it place or time. Time is executed by atomic clock. So those bodies strewn around in Kiev or Mariupol etc., are real before the Russians left the place.

With satellite imagery we now know who the aggressor and the aggressed are; who the subject is and who the object. Hence for the fence-sitter to say "India tells both sides to de-escalate" goes to prove that the satellite imagery has been blatantly ignored. For fence sitters the best option would be to remain silent.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Shillong 14

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

The only man who never makes a mistake
is the man who never does anything.

—Theodore Roosevelt

The Shillong Times

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Vaccine shylocks

The Covid19 saga, lasting two full years, is hopefully behind us. A fourth wave cannot be ruled out and big cities in China where the global spread started are back in lockdown mode in the face of a fresh spread. India and the rest of the world will have to keep their fingers crossed even as there is palpable relief about a positive turn for now. However, several matters relating to the pandemic that killed and shattered the lives of millions of families in this country are still in the realm of conjecture. We know too little as to how and where this pandemic originated and WHO itself is unclear yet about Covid and its many variants.

What we know for sure is that these past two years were also a season of virtual extortion of the hapless people by multiple agencies. It might sound curious that the two principal Covid vaccine suppliers under the Covishield and Covaxin brands have come up with a statement that they have slashed the prices of the vaccine jabs from over Rs 600 a dose to around Rs 250 after consultations with the Union Government. They stated this at the start of a new round of precautionary dose distribution. This simply means that what could be sold at Rs 250 was attempted to be sold at nearly three times this rate. Taking undue advantage of the scare in the initial phases of the Covid spread, manufacturers in India and abroad had been quoting high rates for their vaccines. This was also because governments directly intervened, took the full supplies and distributed them across the country. Even granted that these firms had given their vaccines at so-called subsidized rates to the government, there still was no justification for the high price quoted for each jab.

The Government spent money from the exchequer and got the vaccinations done partly free and partly via payment as in the case of private hospitals. Some 96 per cent of all those above the age of 15 among the 1.3 billion population have been administered one dose of the vaccine, while 83 per cent of the population received the second dose too. When more than two billion vaccine doses were thus sold by these two companies to a captive market, without any exertion by way of marketing or cash collections, a question remains as to why this high rate for each dose. The central government, which negotiated with the vaccine companies, should have handled the matter in a way that exploitation of the people, either directly or through the exchequer, was not allowed.

Have we to fight to stay alive?

By Albert Thyrianiang

In three days we celebrate Good Friday. The crucifixion and death of the most influential person is commemorated annually by world's Christians a day before Easter. How is the tragic event called 'Good Friday'? Why is the day of sorrow, penance, and fasting 'good'? In what sense is the day that might have originated from 'God's Friday' and is also known as 'the Holy and Great Friday' good? Is it not difficult to see 'good' when a person was flogged, ordered to carry his own cross, crucified on it and put to death? Well, Christians strongly believe Christ died for their sins, offered his life to save humankind. He died that we may live. Everything was done for the 'good' of humanity.

Good Friday reminds us of one striking fact. Jesus died young. He died at the age of 33. Apparently he did accomplish much. He spent more than 90.9 per cent of his life in the obscurity of Nazareth. He appeared in the public scene at the age of 30, the age of maturity for the Jews. He worked only for three years. He died a shameful death. His life was a failure.

"(Everyone should) plant a tree, have a child, and write a book" is a famous quote that is wrongly attributed to Jose Marti, the Cuban revolutionary and poet. The phrase is actually an adaptation from the lines of a chapter of the early 1840s book entitled, *The Ingoldsby Legends, or Mirth and Marvels*. Speaking of three social duties the author, Thomas Ingoldsby (real name - Richard Harris Barham) says, "The first of the three is planting a tree, the next producing a book, then a baby!" The exhortation is because we are here on this planet only for a short time and therefore, the above ensures that we live long after we are gone.

Probably Jesus planted no tree. Neither did he father a child nor authored a book. But after two millennia he is the most remembered person. He is the most invoked name. He is believed to be the author of life, the 'Word' through whom human and living beings and the whole universe were created. He had no book in His name but volumes are written on Him. The Bible is the most printed, most sold and most read book primarily because of Jesus. Four Gospels (four editions of Jesus's life) were written after His death. Saint

Paul, the earliest New Testament writer despatched 13 epistles because of his 'Lord'. The other books that complete the 27 books of the New Testament were brought out because of 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Every person can certainly plant a tree, but not all can have a child and write a book yet one can still create history.

The Jewish leaders could not accommodate his ideals into their world view. They could not tolerate Him with a large following. Though his group was very much a minority it was seen as a threat. Therefore, the religious elites killed him. They thought with his death his 'revolution' would cease. It was not to be. His 'successors' were more energised. His disciples were more fervent. His followers were bolder after his death. Many were ready to die for their master. Kings and empires began to persecute Christians right from the first century. It did not work. Out of Palestine, from the 12 Apostles and 72 disciples (plus some more believers) Christianity spread world-wide numbering about 2.38 billion today.

In India, minorities have faced persecution ever since the right wing took over this country. In Karnataka Muslim traders were barred from doing business near temples. In Delhi meat shops were forced to shut down during the nine-day Navratri festival. Religious leaders openly called for genocide against Muslims. These are but the latest forms of harassment by Hindu bigots. Last December, in many places, Christians were stopped from celebrating Christmas. Know that persecution won't be successful. We appreciate that India is a Hindu majority country, but a Hindu Rashtra is unacceptable. We value Hinduism but Hindu supremacy is rejected. We learn Hindu philosophy and theology but 'ghar wapsi' is out of the way.

Hindu supremacy is a reframe of Nazism. It is a 'genocidal' hatred for Muslims. Hindu nationalists are akin to Hitler who hated the Jews. Hindu nationalists are similar to white supremacists. The common roots of *white supremacy and Hindu nationalism go back to the 'superiority of the Aryan race' in the 19th century*. This dangerous thought is rampant in the Hindu nationalist

camp and is now very much mainstream. Unless we resist and fight we will lose our religious freedom enshrined in the Constitution. This is a secular country and no religion is superior to others.

Hand in hand goes Hindi supremacy. There is a deliberate attempt to impose Hindi on others. There is a conscious effort to favour Hindi over other languages. And this is done very systematically. This is apparent in parliament. In February Piyush Goyal answered in Hindi to DMK MP's question in English though the minister speaks English fluently. Tamil Nadu is one of the Hindi resistant states. Knowing this background Goyal's action was an act of disdain.

Presiding over the 37th meeting of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee in Delhi, Amit Shah invoked Prime Minister Narendra to state that the medium of running the government is Hindi thus increasing the importance of the official language. Concretely this means policies, letters, notifications and even legislation will be written only in Hindi. All communications will be in Hindi. What will those who don't know Hindi do? What will the Southern states do? Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, MK Stalin's assessment that the move is a threat to the integrity and pluralism of the country is spot on. If implemented, the decision will cause widespread protests in states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and even Karnataka. It will widen the gap between the North and the South. It will create division and fragmentation.

The home minister also recommends that Hindi should be compulsory till class X. How will that work? What are the implications? Will students have to give up either English or the local language? If English gives way to Hindi opportunities will be lost. It is English that will make a person fly. Not Hindi. If local languages are sacrificed then roots are forgotten? This is what the Hindi chauvinists expect. Kill indigenous language with the heavy hand of Hindi.

The North East is an easy prey. Shah has already informed that all the eight North Eastern states have agreed to make Hindi compulsory till class X. The announcement means that all the chief ministers are

in favour of this Hindi imposition. It is no secret that students of the region struggle with Hindi. If students are presented with the pressure of passing one more language it will compound the problem. It will be a nightmare for the majority. Failures will surge and dropout rates increase. The North political leaders usually go with the ruling party at the centre just for the sake of the flow of funds. They have no ideology. Without giving a thought to the interests of students and their states (communities) the dikat of centre is blindly accepted. In Meghalaya, only Amparen Lyngdoh and Vincent Pala have opposed Amit Shah's designs.

The chairman of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee also informed that nine tribal communities of the Northeast have converted the scripts of their dialects to Devanagari. This is another agenda of the RSS and others - to have all the languages changed to Devanagari. This is a sinister plan to keep the people backward. There is an ulterior motive to show down their progress. All the literature in Roman script has to be rewritten. It has to be started all over again. It will take generations to master the new script. One suspects that the delay in including Khasi and Garo in the eighth schedule of the constitution is because the two languages are not in Devanagari script. Sooner or later the reason will be plain to see.

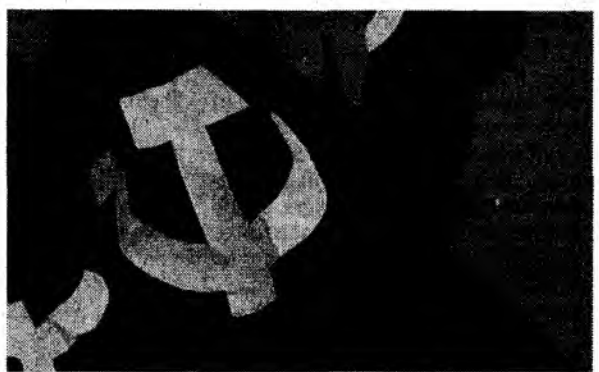
Hindi is not the national language of India. However, the importance of the language is already in place. Why give undue favour to it at the expense of other languages? The reason for this Hindi imperialism is because in general Hindi speakers don't follow other languages. This is the case with the present political leadership at the centre. They expect all others to speak their language while they make no effort to learn other languages. Let them also learn Tamil, *Kannadiga*, *Telegu*, Malayalam, Bengali and the North Eastern languages.

The Jewish leaders killed Jesus young. Homicide is not only physical. Striking down ideas, denying rights, negating liberty, imposing thoughts on others, despising lesser beings is also killing. This is the state in India today. India is a land of Ram, Hanuman, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and all others. It is a home of multiple cultures and languages. It must remain so. Do not kill any of them.

The future of Left politics in India

Dr Nsungbemo Ezung

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had elected Sitaram Yechury as the party's General Secretary for an unprecedented third successive term during its recently held 23rd Party Congress at Kannur, Kerala. The Kannur Congress of the CPI (M) came at the time when its most powerful fraternal ideological partner i.e. Communist Party of China (CPC) is preparing to hold its 20th Party Congress towards the end of this year where its paramount leader Xi Jinping too will be seeking during the Congress an unprecedented third term to remain at the top of the CPC's power echelon, which would mean breaking the CPC's tradition of two-terms limit for the party officials and leaders. While the CPC will hold its 20th Party Congress at the time the party keeps on consolidating its grip on power over China and the party and its ideology remain the only political force in the country, the CPI (M)'s Kannur Congress happened as India continues to witness a terminal decline of the Left-wing politics and its influence in the country. The Kannur Congress was thus more of a show of strength by the party leaders and remnant of its followers to prove to the country that the Left party



and the Left politics are still a force to reckon with, and that the Left still has lots to offer to the country.

A significant political resolution adopted during the Congress, as part of its strategy to revive the party, include a call for "no alliance with the Indian National Congress (INC) at the national level". This call for maintaining distance from the INC in the national politics is perhaps a course correction exercise from some of the historical electoral blunders committed by the party, which appears to be too little too late at this stage. It was indeed the mis-handling of its relation with the INC in the recent past that had contributed significantly to its decline.

It was in 1996 after the fall of the first BJP government at the center led by Atal Behari Vajpayee, which lasted for only 13 days, the Left was given a historic opportunity to form a government under the banner of the United Front which included the INC. The Left then under the veteran communist stalwarts however decided to choose ideological commitment over political power in New Delhi, and refused the offer of power by the INC. Tragically in 2004, when the CPI (M) and its Left conglomerate secured the highest number of seats in Lok Sabha in the history of independent India, the new generation party leaders scripted the party's decline by compromising its ideology by extending support to the INC-led UPA government just to keep BJP out of power, thereby failing the test of maintaining equidistance from both BJP and INC.

The 2004 UPA-Left misadventure, the alliance which too did not last full five years term, marked the beginning of the end of the influence of left-wing politics in the country. The party, which has a proud history of providing the first political alternative to the nation during the heydays of INC, is today reduces itself to an insignificant political party. The Left-wing political phenomenon occupied a unique place in the history of post-independent India and India's electoral politics as its polity represents the conscience of the nation without hitherto being part of

the INC did not make the Left stronger electorally nor does it prevent the inevitable rise of the BJP in India's electoral politics. Any hope of revival of the Left party in India lies not only in its ability to fight against the saffron forces, ideologically and electorally but also in staying away from the politics of its historical and ideological rival - the INC.

If there is one reason why the Left politics, despite its decline in electoral politics, is still needed in India today, it is because the Left can still represent the conscience of the nation at this time when the politics of the country is torn apart by a bi-polar political force of BJP and INC. If the Left can no longer represent the mandate of the people it can still represent the conscience of the people and nation. Left can still represent a unique political narrative, independent from the ruling dispensation and major opposition forces.

It is also under the Left platform that the secular credentials of India can be defended and promoted in the country. Of course, Secularism, which is one of the founding principles of India, can mean two things: hostility by the government towards religion and neutrality on the part of the government towards all religions. The people of the country definitely will want the Left forces to promote the latter, and take the lead in defending the right of all the citizens of the country to practice a religion of their choice without fear and coercion.

The Left politics in India's electoral politics may have already lost its relevance today, but it will continue to occupy a prominent place in Indian political discourse. When India's two principal national political parties, BJP and INC, never look at politics beyond winning an election, and are permanently engaged in a relentless and dirty pursuit of power, the Left can provide a platform for its citizens to debate and discuss secularism, pluralism and diversity towards securing India and the need for giving good governance to the people of the country which is the real meaning of politics in a democracy.

Letters to the Editor

On Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

Editor,
The article by HH Mohrmen "Functional ULB for towns and cities in Meghalaya" (ST April 11, 2022) should serve as a severe reprimand to all those so called "upholders of tradition and protection of tribal interests," who have for the last 50 years held hostage the effective functioning of the Municipality in their respective areas, be it Shillong or Jowai. Yes there is strong opposition to holding of Municipal elections in Shillong and this is based primarily on the assumption that (1) elections to these local urban bodies, if held, will result in non-tribals outnumbering indigenous members in the Board and thereby tilt the balance of the Municipality in favour of the non tribal (2) that the present Municipal Act is just a copy-paste version of the Assam Municipal Act. We need a Municipal Act of our own (Ka Municipal Act la ka jong) that will ensure the continued existence of our local durbars. (3) Municipal elections will introduce party politics in the neutral Traditional Durbars.

This letter today is basically due to the concerns most of us have over the

crumbling ancient civic infrastructure that is the main cause for most of our urban misery be it traffic jams, choked footpaths, collapsing drinking water system, blocked drains, recent flooding of our localities during the monsoons or the alarming rise of slums in formerly pristine residential areas. Citizens blame the Government and look towards the Durbars for relief. Fact is, neither is actually mandated to deal with the problem which in other developed urban areas is looked after by an elected Municipal Board. So we need to really look at the opposition to Municipal elections and see if they are actually valid; are realistic or just the result of an obstinate mindset that is incapable of handling change. Opposition to any Government proposal has always been the forte of the pressure groups, the District Councils and the Durbars. No issues, but the problem arises when we know only how to oppose without coming out with any alternative suggestions. Let's see if we can make some positive criticism to opposition on Shillong Municipal Elections.

First lets deal with the fear of non-tribal dominance. Shillong Municipality has 27 seats to its Board. 22 of these seats are reserved seats, meaning only local tribals are eligible to contest civic elections to these seats. That leaves the non-tribals with 5

seats only. So the fear on this score is nonsensical and illogical. It is fake news. Next, lets deal with the demand for a Municipal Act of our own. The mandate of any Municipality be it that of Moscow, New York or Mumbai is the same - to provide effective urban governance and civic service to the citizens. This mandate remains the same for Shillong or Dispur so the demand for a Municipal Act of our own makes no sense. But yes we need a revised Municipal Act. We need an elected representative of the people at the Municipal Board level who will not equate himself as another MLA or MDC without any qualms to squash and diminish the Traditional Durbars. We need such a representative who is empathetic to the sentiments of the local traditions while at the same time providing urban service which we at present lack. This can easily be done with simple tweaking of the existing Act. I have such a plan and will be most willing to present it to those so interested.

Last but not least is the fear of party politics compromising the traditional character of the Local Durbar. I believe that Government through the Urban Affairs Dept has already dealt with this through a notification that Municipal Elections will be non-political in nature. So this threat has already been eliminated. Frankly I see no

hindrance to holding civic polls for Shillong where the Durbars entity and articles of faith are not disturbed. I fully agree with Mr Mohrmen that the need of the hour is for a functional ULB for every town and city especially our capital Shillong. So let's do it as there is really no factual danger in doing so.

Yours etc.,
Tokl Blah,
Via email

Neglected Jowai Town

Editor,
Jowai Town the Headquarters of the erstwhile Jaintia Hills District which at present is the Headquarters of the West Jaintia Hills District, at the beginning of our State Meghalaya in 1972 was a very small town with only few problems. As time passed the town has expanded and the number of houses and big buildings constructed by the original residents of Jowai as well as by the people from other parts of the state has only grown. The population has also increased by leaps and bounds due to the migration of people from the rural areas. With the extension of the town, the problems have also piled up. When we see this problem which remains unsolved, we as the residents of Jowai feel very neglected.

The major problem now is

water scarcity. There is water shortage and insufficient supply of water to the houses and buildings of Jowai. The residents of Jowai who can afford to buy water do so while those who cannot, suffer and have to bring water from faraway places. As a citizen, I have observed that the people of Jowai have no water to wash their clothes and they go down to the river Myntdu. This practice of washing clothes in the river on a large scale pollutes the river Myntdu which supplies drinking water to Jowai. We cannot blame the people as they have no other alternative. The supply of water to the residents of Jowai by the PHE department is lopsided. Some houses receive water 24 hours daily while some only 20 minutes per day. How and why does this happen? The slogan 'save water' has no meaning in Jowai. Moreover, there is leakage of water from water pipes in all localities of the town. We as citizens request the PHE Department in Jowai to inspect and confirm whether our observation and remarks are genuine.

The people of Jaintia Hills having their businesses at Jowai have no place to sell their goods and materials. They use the footpath at lawmsiang as their selling place. The old lawmsiang market building which has been dismantled so that a new one is constructed in its place

has not been completed after so many years. The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council has lost crores of rupees as revenue. What is this? We depend on the market for our economy but there is no help whatsoever. We feel very much neglected as citizens.

During my childhood Jowai was a clean town. Now the town is littered with piles of garbage. The problem of waste disposal and garbage management remains unsolved. When we will see a clean Jowai only time will tell.

The proposal for establishing a mini secretariat at the old PWD building at Ladhlaboh, Jowai is still a distant dream. The promise is like building castles in the air.

As a citizen of Jowai we have borne our problems with much patience but there is limit. It is time for us to voice our problems collectively and unitedly otherwise we are accountable to the next generation if we do nothing.

Yours etc.,
Treiowell W. Blah
Senior Citizen of Jowai
Former Director Education, Government of Meghalaya.

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.

"Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact."

—William James

The Shillong Times

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Ad-hoc & SSA teachers face a raw deal

EDUCATION is one Department that no minister would fancy because of the legacy of woes that have to be dealt with. Firstly, Meghalaya is the only state where teachers are grouped into several categories, ranging from those working in government-run institutions and who are therefore paid their salaries regularly, followed by the Deficit Schools which are partly autonomous but whose teachers are paid by government and the ad-hoc school teachers who get a fixed salary and lastly the teachers employed under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The Ad-hoc and SSA teachers get a fixed amount — a paltry sum but that too is not paid regularly thereby putting the teachers in dire straits especially in these times when inflation has hit the roof. There are over 12,541 teachers working in the SSA schools across the state. The number of students receiving education under them can well be imagined. While the central government has initiated the SSA to provide better access to students especially in rural areas, the teachers are not treated with the respect they deserve. More often than not teachers have had to come out to the streets to demand regular payment of salaries. How can they be expected to carry out their mission with a passion?

Of late the teachers under the banner of Federation of All School Teachers of Meghalaya (FASTOM) have been demanding that the Government should merge the 5814 lower primary school teachers and the 6727 upper primary teachers and to take them away from the State Implementation Society and bring them under the State Education Department as per the provision of RTE Act 2009 and SSA-RTE norms. FASTOM threatened to file a petition in the Meghalaya High Court if the government fails to do so. Meanwhile in March this year the Government released Rs 60 crore to pay two months salaries for ad-hoc teachers out of the six months pending salaries. The Central Government is expected to release Rs 68 crore, which will help in clearing the four months salary of SSA teachers.

The salary structure leaves much to be desired. At present a lower primary school teacher is paid Rs 12,000 per month, upper primary level Rs 16,000, secondary level Rs 20,000 and higher secondary teachers Rs 24,000 without any additional allowances. There are over 7,090 teachers in 860 ad hoc schools including lower primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary level. FASTOM had proposed that if government cannot upgrade the ad-hoc teachers to the Deficit system then the teachers should at least be given increment of 5% every year and enhancement by Rs 18,000 into each and every category. The Government has not responded to this proposal. These teachers received their last increment in 2016. The Education Minister has also ruled out any possibility of paying ad-hoc teachers what government teachers are paid as the financial involvement would be Rs 251 crore annually. At the present the annual salary bill of ad-hoc school teachers amounts to Rs 181 crore approximately. It is time the Government has a long term plan to deal with teachers' just demands.

FASTOM and the struggle for 'dignity'

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

We must not make the mistake of thinking that any teachers' agitation is one that can be viewed in isolation. Teachers are the most important elements in society building. This is truer in the case of school teachers. They teach the very foundation of life and ethos of good citizenship right from the elementary levels. As such, a teachers' agitation can be construed as a society's agitation. While keeping in mind the poor state and treatment of teachers in Meghalaya; in particular, this column is focussed on the recent struggles of FASTOM (Federation of All School Teachers of Meghalaya). It was quite an effort to find an appropriate

term to signify the struggles of FASTOM. Is it about pay only thereby making it a struggle for monetary security? Is it about job security thereby making it a struggle for personal well-being? Well, it is not! In fact, it is a struggle for 'dignity'. It is about telling the society and the state government that the teachers are worthy partners in development and as such are deserving of honour and respect.

A number of studies have established a positive relationship between teachers' dignity and performance outcomes. In particular, a research by Miller et al (2010) titled 'what teachers want in their leaders: voices from the field' states that 'teachers' professional dignity implies that the school community dutifully knows the teachers both professionally and personally and this fosters a sense of caring and a behaviour that builds a relationship of mutual trust'. Such studies have shown two things. Firstly, it is the duty of the leadership like the state government including the school governing bodies to care for the teachers' dignity. This in turn has beneficial returns such as better teacher and stu-

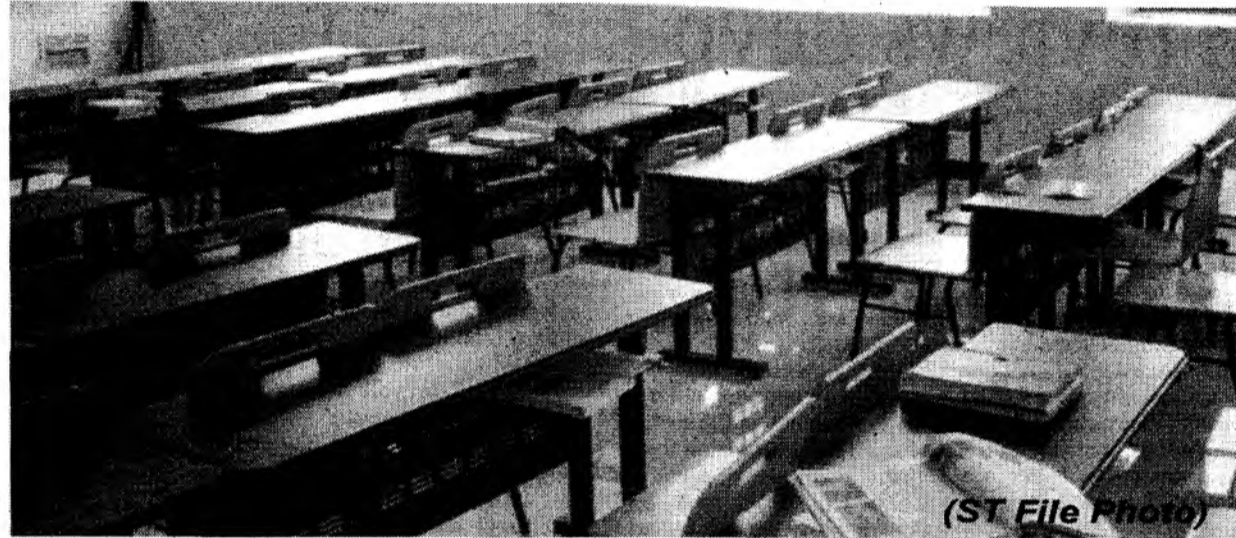
dent performance outcomes. Secondly, the teacher is in the spotlight. The dignity of teacher means that he/she religiously fulfils the duties as required, he/she is a coach and a mentor to the students and in particular to those who need extra and special attention, he/she is someone that the society looks up to for change and progress.

In addition, the teacher enjoys going to the classroom and interacts with a sense of respect and belongingness with the students. But, the real question is this. In a situation where the state government (leader and regu-

boyfriends and girlfriends sound funny. Indeed, many cannot do without a smile/laugh while processing the news in their minds. But in reality, it is not funny at all; rather, a depiction of the fact that we all are in one way or the other related to the teachers. Plus, the good of the teaching community is for the good of the society at large.

If we look at how the Meghalaya government has been dealing with the issue of teachers' demands over the years, its behaviour can be equated to that of an ostrich that buries its head in the sand

One thing that we can see in this agitation is the inherent nature of teachers. The personality of a teacher prevails. When they came to know that the government would not consider a deficit system for them, they narrowed down to a more realistically achievable demand of Rs. 18,000 per month with a yearly increment of 5%. But there is an area of concern here. How can all ad-hoc teachers across lower primary, upper primary, secondary school, etc be subjected to the same pay structure. This will create problems in future. Maybe, it will cause discontent amongst the ranks. The government may take advantage of this lacuna and break-up the en-



(ST File Photo)

lator) does not care for the dignity of teachers, how are the teachers supposed to have a sense of dignity about themselves and be motivated towards their duties? This is the crux of the matter!

Now, let us look at some numbers. Say, the number of ad hoc teachers in Meghalaya is 1000. We can still consider this to be small and hence, may be ignored. However, the actual number is a strong 8000 plus as of today. Just take a minute and picture the number of students who are taught by ad-hoc teachers. Yes, it is a lot. If on average we take that every ad-hoc teacher teaches 100 students, the total number of students taught by such teachers is 8,00,000. Are we willing to let such a huge pool of human resources amongst a disgruntled lot of teachers? Should we not be concerned that the very teachers who are supposed to shape and mould the life of the young minds are themselves looking and fighting for dignity from the state government? Similarly, the call of FASTOM to a public agitation on 22nd April, 2022 will see a huge gathering. On first thought, the call to bring along parents, children, students and even

when a storm brews. It is also referred to as the ostrich effect or ostrich problem. It indicates behaviour where a government ignores or refuses to solve the problems at hand despite the many calls and requests of the affected. The complainants knock on the doors at regular intervals, but the government is oblivious to them. In many cases, the complainants plead with respect for authority, yet the government continues to lie still. Why is there no reciprocity? At least on humanitarian grounds, talk and interact with them. In the process of adopting the ostrich mentality, the problems accumulate and snowball into issues of gigantic proportions. The struggle of FASTOM is a very good example of this. If the complaints and grievances are not tackled early and the teachers accorded their dignity, things may get out of hand. As far as the experience of this writer goes, FASTOM as an association is a pretty determined and stubborn lot. It looks like they are here for a prolonged fight till their demands are met. The government would do well to not take their gentle behaviour as a sign of weakness.

tire struggle. Hence, it is best for FASTOM to revisit this area and come up with a more realistic and logical pay structure demand as per the levels of school education. For the government, it would be good to initiate the negotiation process by stating clearly what it offers to give and how it intends to meet the struggle for dignity. It should be seen that teaching-learning has a domino effect. Resolving the issues raised by FASTOM will lead to a better people, workforce, citizens and society as a whole.

In the end, the teachers are not asking for anything unrealistic. After all, they are involved in a very noble and difficult profession. Over their lifetime, they shape the lives and livelihoods of thousands. As such, they deserve their due and their dignity. Will they get it? Let us see. But, one thing is clear. FASTOM has cast the die and are ready to struggle into the long-term with hope. Now, the only thing that remains to be seen is when and how far the state government is willing to reciprocate/negotiate? (Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

growing Muslim dissatisfaction against the TMC. In the last Assembly poll, the Left party for the first time failed to open its account in the State. Since 2009 Lok Sabha polls, CPM-led Left Front has been declining and went down further after the debacle it faced in the 2016 Assembly polls, where the Left Front suffered due to CPM's wrong decision to ally with the Congress.

Significantly, the Left in recent times has been showing some improvements. In the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the Left polled more votes than the BJP despite contesting a lesser number of seats than the saffron party. The Left also polled 14% votes, more than BJP's 13%, in the recent elections to 107 civic bodies, where there were countless allegations of rigging and attacks on Opposition candidates and leaders by TMC workers and supporters. Importantly, the combined share of Left's votes in the last Assembly polls was only 6%!

West Bengal Politics

Churning in Opposition camps

By Sagarneel Sinha

It is going to be a year this May since Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress returned to power in West Bengal with a brute majority and reduced the resurgent Bharatiya Janata Party to only double digits. After the Assembly elections, the ruling TMC has only consolidated its strength across the State, as seen in the by-elections and civic polls held later. On the other hand, the BJP has been only steadily losing the momentum gained earlier.

In the last civic polls held in February, the TMC rebels contesting elections as independents and emerging as the second largest political bloc in terms of seats, is a confirmation that the Opposition is weak and the party itself is the Opposition on the ground. The TMC, unlike the previous ruling party CPM, doesn't have a proper organisational hierarchy and is led on the ground by different leaders leading to many factions — and all these are uniting under the banner of Mamata Banerjee, who is the first and last word in all party affairs. The recent violent massacre in Rampurhat of Birbhum district, where eight people, according to official figures, were burnt to death, is a result of this factional rivalry within the party.

With the absence of an active Opposition, particularly more in the last one year, the TMC workers and local leaders have gained additional strength and are more interested in building their own empires in their areas. Their dominance is challenged mainly by their own party leaders belonging to other factions. To be fair, internal violent factional rivalry within the TMC isn't new, but the barbaric Rampurhat massacre shows what's going very wrong in the State.

Now, there is a case similar to Hathras of Uttar Pradesh, in Hanskhali of Nadia district where a minor is allegedly gangraped at the residence of the son of a local TMC leader and her body was forcefully cremated, as alleged by the family, even before the death certificate was issued. More shocking is Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's insensitive question whether this was a "love-affair".

Prior to Hanskhali and Rampurhat, a Muslim student leader named Anis Khan belonging to Abhass Siddiqui's Indian Secular Front was allegedly murdered by men in police uniform. This incident has also put Mamata's government on the backfoot. The family of the deceased student leader, who earlier was also associated with Left politics, has been demanding a CBI inquiry, clearly indicating that they don't have faith in the ruling dispensation. This case brought the Left students and youth unions on to the roads demanding justice for Anis leading to crackdown on youth Left leaders such as Minakshi Mukherjee by the TMC government.

Amid all these horrible incidents and the complete dominance of TMC, there is a churning going on which can't be ignored. There has been a growing dissatisfaction among Muslims, the core-vote bank of TMC, against the party and the administration. The nomination of Babul Supriyo, former Union Minister in Narendra Modi government, for the Ballygunj Assembly seat by-poll, hasn't gone well with a section of Muslim voters. That they are unhappy can be confirmed from statements of TMC General Secretary and Mamata's nephew Abhishek Banerjee saying that the candidate is Mamata Banerjee, not Babul! Notably, in the Rampurhat massacre both the victims and perpetrators belonged to the Muslim community.

On the other hand, the CPM, the party which once ruled the State for 35 years consecutively, is trying to revive by cashing in on the

growing Muslim dissatisfaction against the TMC. In the last Assembly poll, the Left party for the first time failed to open its account in the State. Since 2009 Lok Sabha polls, CPM-led Left Front has been declining and went down further after the debacle it faced in the 2016 Assembly polls, where the Left Front suffered due to CPM's wrong decision to ally with the Congress.

Significantly, the Left in recent times has been showing some improvements. In the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the Left polled more votes than the BJP despite contesting a lesser number of seats than the saffron party. The Left also polled 14% votes, more than BJP's 13%, in the recent elections to 107 civic bodies, where there were countless allegations of rigging and attacks on Opposition candidates and leaders by TMC workers and supporters. Importantly, the combined share of Left's votes in the last Assembly polls was only 6%!

Notably, what adds to the new calculations being made is that the CPM has made its Muslim face Mohammad Salim the new party State secretary. This is the first time that a Muslim has been given this post by the West Bengal unit of the party. It comes at a time when there have been murmurs of growing Muslim dissatisfaction against the ruling TMC. Plus, Salim has been known for his anti-TMC stand. The Muslims were once the core-voters of the Left Front. But later dissatisfaction grew as was seen in the late 1990s, but a large section of the community kept voting for it. The community started to move towards TMC in 2008 rural body polls after their dissatisfaction against the then Left Front government increased.

True, that there is a growing dissatisfaction but to assume that Muslims will abandon Mamata quickly is naïve. One of the main reasons for TMC's massive victory in last year's Assembly polls is the massive consolidation of the Muslim vote, which accounts around 28% of the State's population, behind the party.

In the recently-concluded CPM Party Congress at Kanpur, the Left party inducted Ram Chandra Dom, the State's former Lok Sabha MP from Birbhum district (winning six consecutive terms) and a Dalit face of the party, into the Politburo, the highest decision-making body. This is the first time that the party has inducted a Dalit into the Politburo. Apart from this, the Left party has inducted tribal leader Debalina Hembrom of Bankura District and Sumit De of Nadia into the Central Committee. Importantly, the BJP was leading in both Bankura and Nadia districts in the last Assembly polls.

It can be seen that the CPM is trying to wean back the votes of Muslims, tribals, Dalits and other sections which it lost to the TMC and BJP. That's why the Left party at its worst time finally has been quite serious in bringing new faces into the party leadership. However, the BJP is still the main Opposition in the State, although it now faces a threat from the Left. Obviously, the TMC can have some relief as the political fight is now between BJP and Left to become the main Opposition in the State.

There is a churning in the Opposition camps to emerge as the credible alternative against Mamata-led TMC and it remains to be seen who is the victor. For now, the TMC has no big political threat but overconfidence is giving birth to many troubles, which may cost the party heavily, as witnessed in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. — INFA

Letters to the Editor

Woes of ad-hoc school teachers in Meghalaya

Editor,

We talk about quality education in Meghalaya? Are we serious or is it just a slip of the tongue? Such kind of ambitions could be just a dream and seems light years away from reality. Governments come and go but nothing changes. In our state, quality education is jinxed! Yet, it is the most favourite game played by almost every government, without having any intention on how to win it? The MDA Government, in particular, has mastered the art of playing by casting a spell in 2019 at Malki Ground in which we, as Adhoc School Teachers were being lured by a very well-equipped Wharton graduate who has orchestrated things in such a way that we now bear the brunt. He has cajoled us in front of Ramdas Athawale, Union Minister, Government of India without any hesitation by assuring that our demand for upgrading all Adhoc Schools in the state into a Deficit System will be discussed by November, 2019 itself and the matter would be solved by then. Alas! he actually made a fool out of us and has misled us

all into a desert instead of green lush meadows. We, are being pushed and pressed down against the ground by this present government. We are all left lying on our backs and being denied the right to live to our full potential. Nevertheless, the MDA government might have had their own mischievous plans with regards to education itself. It seems like the subject of education in Meghalaya is no better than a bone, hard to swallow.

People from every walk of life are aware of this renowned maxim, "Teachers as Nation Builders". Well, this maxim may apply in every state of our country, except in Meghalaya. In our State, this honour is conferred only to government school teachers and deficit school teachers, whereas, we get that tag once in a year, that is on every 5th September! Hence, the basic truth is that in our State, classism exists. The two classes (government school teachers & deficit school teachers) are being treated like the government's privileged citizens while the lowly class (ad-hoc school teachers) are no better than rags, usually used to wipe out all the dirt on the government's floor. The ill-treatment which we have borne ever since has not only affected our livelihoods, but the future of thousands and

thousands of students in the State. This has a negative impact not only on us teachers or students, but it is the root cause of backwardness in all spheres of life. This is one of the main reasons for our State lagging behind in all fields. It seems the future of a quality education in Meghalaya is bleak, and I fear that education could be at the brink of destruction if the present government does not understand the functions of education and change its mindset at the earliest. The truth is, the government and deficit schools alone cannot, and will definitely not be able to cater to the demands of high quality education in this modern era. There is a big gap in between the starting line and the goal to achieve. It is here that Adhoc Schools play a pivotal role in filling up the gap and to become the "Lifelines of Education" in the whole State. The fact is if there are no Ad-hoc Schools to raise the standard of education and to ignite the spirit of competition among students in a positive way it will be a task too much to ask for. So, our demand from the MDA government is to stop building castles in the air and fulfil the promises at an earliest possible time if it really wants to see the true meaning of quality education.

To achieve its goal, the

government must not only dream but also act. Commitment is the line it must cross because that really shows the difference between dreaming and doing. It is up to the MDA government to decide whether it wants to close its windows and darken its room or open it and let the light in.

Yours etc.,
Overjoy Lyngdoh Mars
Balang Mawlangwir
Girls' Secondary School,
Via email

MPSC needs comprehensive reforms

Editor,
The Hon'ble Meghalaya High Court recently ordered a stay on all fresh recruitments until the State Government puts a roster system in place. This is surely a step in the right direction but will only be a piecemeal reform in the way MPSC is functioning. More needs to be done to comprehensively reform MPSC. In this regard, two suggestions are given below:—

1. The recruitment exercises by MPSC have always been long drawn-out affairs. For instance, MPSC conducted exams in December 2020 for posts advertised in April 2016 and results for a

few categories of posts are yet to be declared. Further, exams for 328 posts advertised on December 14, 2020 are yet to be held. I know that this time the MPSC has the pandemic as a scapegoat to blame for this delay. However, Central government recruitment agencies like the Staff Selection Commission, State Bank of India Recruitment Board and Institute of Bank Personnel Selection (IBPS) found ways to continue with their respective recruitment processes during those months when Covid cases were sliding down. In any case, MPSC has no valid excuse to offer when even during normal times 3-4 years have to elapse from the date of its advertisement of posts till appointment of personnel. Contrast this with the SSC which rarely takes more than a year in its entire recruitment process while SBI Recruitment Board and Institute of Bank Personnel Selection take 5-6 months and 7-8 months respectively. The above mentioned three central government recruitment agencies always publish their exam calendars and stick to such calendars while MPSC never mentions any such calendars in its advertisements.

2. MPSC is the only government recruitment agency that still continues with oral

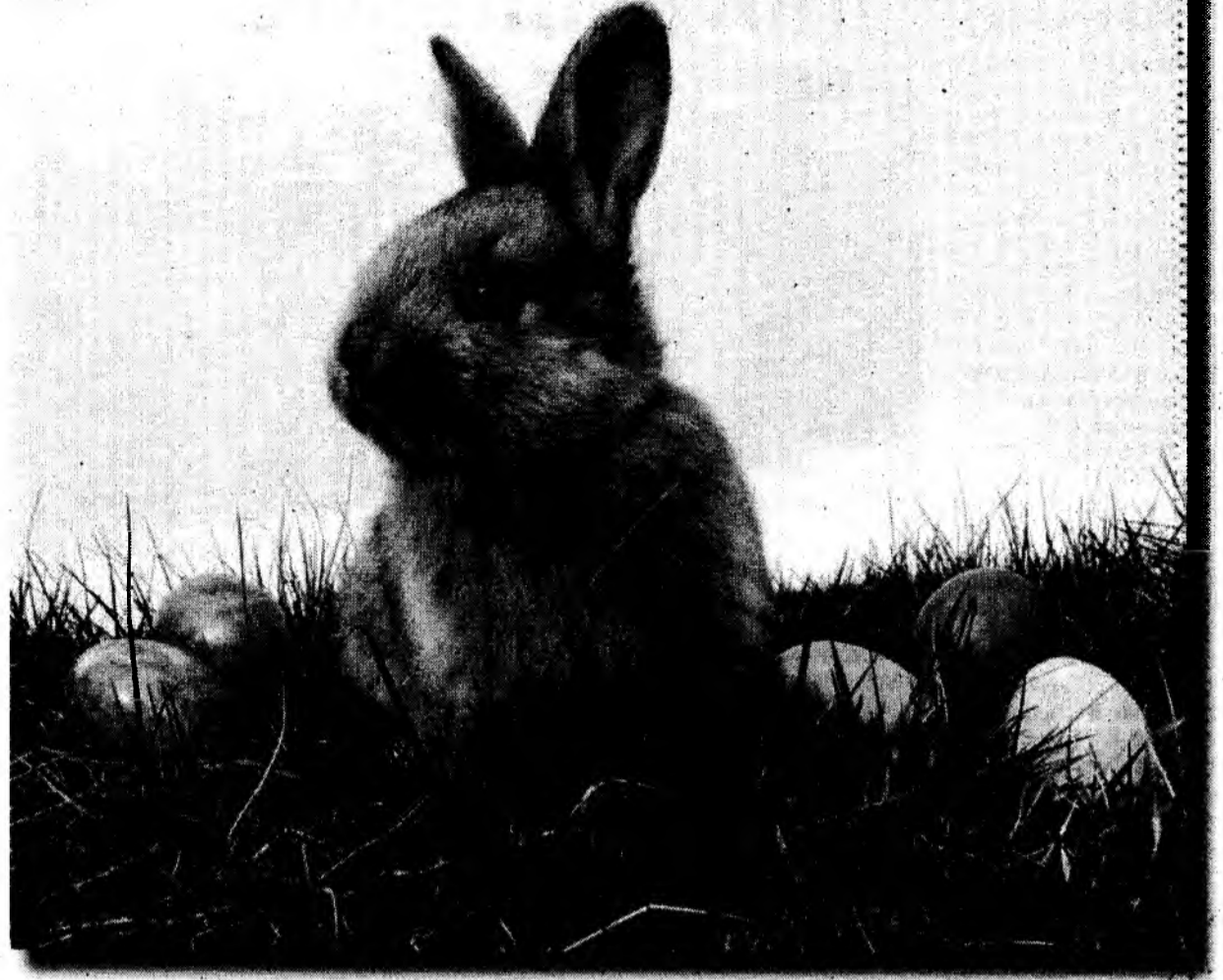
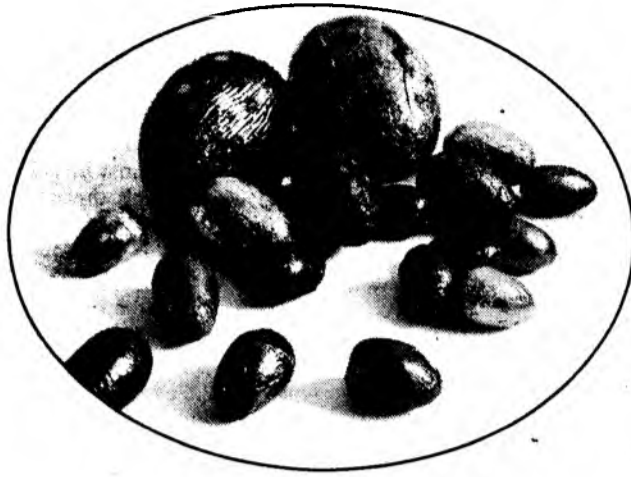
interviews for Group B (non-gazetted) and Group C and D categories of posts. All other states have abandoned this practice following central government directives in this regard so as to minimize favouritism and nepotism in government job recruitment. It may also be mentioned here that the central government had done away with oral interviews for the above categories of posts since January 1, 2016 to ensure fairness, transparency and a level playing field to job aspirants. A letter available on the website of the Government of India's Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (No.39020/09-2015 Esst.(B) dated 28th January 2016 circulated to all States and UTs to abolish job interviews to the above categories of posts has surely been grossly disregarded by our government for obvious reasons.

Under the above circumstances, the public can only pin its hopes on the judiciary to intervene and set things right.

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett,
Shillong -2

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 History of Easter



Easter commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, although the word 'Easter' actually has nothing to do with Christianity. Jesus had been crucified on a Friday and rose from the dead on the following Sunday. For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is a foundation of their faith. The Bible book, Acts, records the words of Peter, one of Jesus' closest followers and an eyewitness to his resurrection. He tells a crowd, 'You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate.... You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.'

Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection and the new life or fresh start that people receive when they become Christians.

How Easter got its name

In most countries, the name for Easter is derived from the word Passover. In French it is Paques; in Spanish, Pascua, and in Italian, Pasqua. The word 'Easter' comes from the name for an Anglo-Saxon pagan goddess, Eostre, who was celebrated in Spring. In Germany, the festival is called Ostern because there the goddess is named Ostara. The association of eggs with Easter is very ancient and the origins are not clear. But eggs – and rabbits – are thought to be symbols of new life at springtime and Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection and the new life or fresh start that people receive when they become Christians.

The History of Easter Eggs

The origin of Easter eggs in history is just as clear. The ancient Druids bore an egg, as the sacred emblem of their order. In the mysteries of Bacchus, as celebrated in Athens, one part of the nocturnal ceremony consisted in the consecration of an egg. The Hindu fables celebrate their mundane egg as of a golden colour. The people of Japan make their sacred egg to have been brazen. In China, dyed or painted eggs are used on sacred festivals. In ancient times, eggs were used in the religious rites of the Egyptians and the Greeks, and were hung up for mystic purposes in their temples.

From Egypt, these sacred eggs can be distinctly traced to the banks of the Euphrates. The classic poets are full of the fable of the mystic egg of the Babylonians. A tale is told by Hyginus, the Egyptian, the learned keeper of the Palatine library at Rome, in the time of Augustus, who was skilled in all the wisdom of his native country, who wrote the following.

"An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess (Astarte)"

The egg became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter; and accordingly, in Cyprus, one of the chosen seats of the worship of Venus, or Astarte, the egg of wondrous size was represented on a grand scale.

The occult meaning of this mystic egg of Astarte, in one of its aspects, had reference to the ark during the time of the flood, in which the whole human race were shut up, as the chick is enclosed in the egg before it is hatched.

The sacred egg of paganism, as already indicated, is well known as the "mundane egg", that is, the egg in which the world was shut up. Now the "world" has two distinct meanings. It means either the material earth, or the inhabitants of the earth. The latter meaning of the term is seen in Genesis 11:1, "And the whole earth was of one language and one speech" where the meaning is that the whole people of the world were so.

If then the world is seen shut up in an egg that floats on water, it may not be difficult to believe that the egg thus floating on the wide universal sea might be Noah's family that contained the whole world in its bosom.

The coming of the egg from heaven evidently refers to the preparation of the ark by express appointment of God; and the same thing seems clearly implied in the Egyptian story of the mundane egg which was said to have come out of the mouth of the great god. The doves resting on the egg need no explanation. This, then, was the meaning of the mystic egg in one aspect.

As, however, everything that was good or beneficial to mankind was represented in the Chaldean mysteries, as in some way connected with the Babylonian goddess, so the greatest blessing to the human race, which the ark contained in its bosom, was held to be Astarte, who was the great civilizer and benefactor of the world.

The deified queen of heaven, whom Astarte represented, had no actual existence until some centuries after the flood. However, through the doctrine of metempsychosis, which was firmly established in Babylon, it was easy for her worshippers to be made to believe that, in a previous incarnation, she had lived in the Antediluvian world, and passed in safety through the waters of the flood. Now the Romish (Catholic) Church adopted this mystic egg of Astarte, and consecrated it as a symbol of Christ's resurrection.

The real history!

The 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia, in its article on Easter, openly admits that symbols like eggs and rabbits (bunnies represent fertility), used to celebrate the holiday, are NOT based on the Bible! They were "borrowed" from ancient customs pagans used to worship their false deities and adapted by the church for its own purposes.

"The symbolic meaning of a new creation of mankind by Jesus risen from the dead was probably an invention of later times. The custom may have its origin in paganism, for a great many Pagan customs, celebrating the return of spring, gravitated to Easter... "The Easter Rabbit lays the eggs, for which reason they are hidden in a nest or in the garden. The rabbit is a Pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility."

As Rome cherishes the same feelings as paganism did, so it has adopted the very same symbols, so far as it has the opportunity. (Source: www.biblestudy.org)

Oh my hurting knee!



By Dr Biren Nadkarni

My knees have been hurting a lot over the last two months. They can be agonising at times. Is this a normal part of the ageing process? Reduced mobility, different job habits, and altered lifestyles all had a negative impact on people's bone and joint health in the last two years of the pandemic. Working from home for about 10 hours a day, sitting all the time, being able to eat whatever they want, not having an exercise regimen, going for walks, smoking, and alcohol consumption, among other factors, have an impact on the joints of the majority of people in the country.

You think this pain is caused by arthritis. Arthritis is not always present; it may come and go. Ar-

thritis is the inflammation of the joints in a nutshell.

What causes Arthritis?

Understanding how joints operate can help to determine what causes arthritis. To support our weight and provide functional structure, our bones are thick and robust. Bones, on the other hand, contain nerves. Movement would irritate those nerves if there was nothing in between the connecting bones. On the ends of our bones, our bodies basically have a cap.

The shock-absorbing and load-bearing cartilage on the ends of bones is known as Articular cartilage. Joint fluid bathes healthy cartilage. Joint fluid is quite thick like engine oil and very cushioning at moderate speeds. It distributes the strain over the

joint and protects it when you're doing heavy tasks. When you run at high speeds, however, it thins down and becomes considerably less thick, providing less resistance and allowing the joint to move very swiftly.

Dr. Biren Nadkarni, Sr. Consultant Orthopedic and Joint Replacement Surgeon at Sitaram Bhartia Institute and Holy Family Hospital, New Delhi explained that "people became inactive as a result of the pandemic and have been away from their fitness regimen and activities for the past two years. Now that the pandemic limitations have been lifted, individuals should be cautious when returning to their pre-Covid lifestyle and exercise regimen," he added, adding that "people should test themselves for any bone-related issues that

may have gone unnoticed because of the lockdown".

He further explains that "as we age, the cartilage in our joints can break down into little fragments, resulting in arthritis. These particles may float to the surface of the joint and become trapped there. This creates inflammation, which leads to the production of additional fluid. This causes swelling, irritation, and discomfort in the joints."

Early in the day, everyone has more substantial pain and stiffness. The fluid offers joints a more frictionless glide as the body moves. Pressure and stress, on the other hand, might cause the pain to reappear. As the cartilage wears down even further, the pain becomes much severe.

How can you know if you have arthritis and how to cure it?

An x-ray is the initial step in diagnosing arthritis. This can indicate the presence of arthritis, but not the severity of joint discomfort.

"Because arthritis is caused by inflammation, anti-inflammatory drugs that are available over-the-counter can help. When anti-inflammatory medication fails to relieve pain, an injection into the painful location is usually the next step," said Dr. Biren Nadkarni

Seeing an orthopaedic consultant is a good start. There are several excellent conservative-approach alternatives. Bracing can also be used to help support the joint and improve mobility. Physical treatment can also be beneficial. When everything else fails, joint replacement may be the best option. (The author is a Senior Orthopedic Consultant)

The Himalayan Dash: 9 days through Sikkim

The Himalayan Dash 2022 set to be held from May 6 to May 14, will allow its participants a rare opportunity to drive across all four districts of Sikkim over a period of nine days.

The route for the Dash Sikkim will cover Pelling, Lachen, Gurudongmar Lake, Lachung,

In the past, The Himalayan Dash was organised in Ladakh and it brought together like-minded business owners, senior executives, high ranking professionals and other owners of premium cars and SUVs, who share a common passion for driving.

The Sikkim Chapter was launched this year after approach-



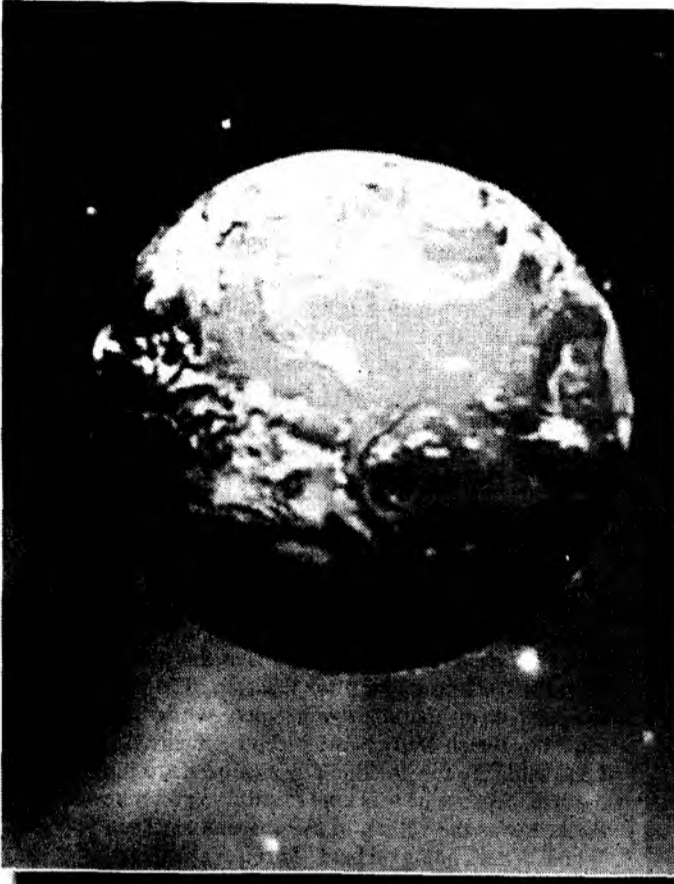
Yumthang Valley, Gangtok, Nathu La & Zuluk, and will allow participants to enjoy ancient monasteries, stunning mountain ranges and spectacular landscapes dotted with waterfalls, lakes and meadows.

Cougar Motorsport, one of India's pioneering luxury self-drive experience provider has announced this inaugural edition.

ing the Tourism & Civil Aviation Department of the Government of Sikkim and in consultation with Sikkim Tourism.

The participation charges on twin/double occupancy basis for The Himalayan Dash Sikkim 2022 are INR 125,000 plus GST @5 per cent per person. Bookings are open for a maximum of 10 vehicles and 20 guests. (ANSLife)

Of Parallel Universes and Other Earths



In fiction and in films such as *Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse*, parallel universes – also called the multiverse – exist alongside our own, with anything from small differences in events to entirely different rules of physics.

This is really an exciting and fascinating scientific idea.

Physicists have given the question of whether parallel universes could exist a lot of thought – and have come up with quite a few theories.

INFINITE EXPANSE

One popular theory relies on something physicists already know about. The universe is expanding. This means galaxies far from Earth are moving away from us. This process is called cosmic inflation.

What's more, the further away from Earth you get, the faster the universe is expanding. At some point the universe is expanding too fast for light to ever reach us from some very far away galaxies. This means there is a point in the universe that we cannot see past.

That doesn't mean there is nothing there, though. There are still more galaxies beyond this edge – but we will never be able to see them. Some physicists

describe the parts of the universe beyond this edge as a separate, parallel universe. This theory is popular, as it doesn't require any special physics or changes in our current understanding of the universe.

UNIVERSE BUBBLES

Another theory about parallel universes relies on cosmic inflation happening more than once.

The idea goes that when inflation occurred immediately after the Big Bang, it happened in multiple places. This caused separate universe bubbles to inflate, and in some cases certain types of matter ended up in one bubble rather than another.

This means in some universe bubbles the physical rules which affect how things work might be different.

Each bubble is still infinite in size, yet separate from our universe. Physicists find this theory interesting, as it could explain why we haven't found certain things that, scientifically, we would expect to see in our universe. This includes magnetic monopoles – one-sided magnetic fields which only have a negative or positive side.

They might exist in another universe bubble instead.

MANY WORLDS

The last theory requires us to think about a type of science called quantum mechanics. Quantum mechanics is all about the probability of tiny particles doing something. If a tiny particle is fired at a wall, it might bounce off it – or travel right through it. Quantum mechanics tells us which event is more likely.

However, there is nothing in the maths that says that only one of the events must occur. Both of these things might happen at once.

But we would only see one of these things happen. So, if saw the particle bounce off the wall, it might have also, at the same time, tunneled through the wall – just in another universe, not our one.

In this parallel universe, everything would be exactly the same as in our universe, except for one tiny change. In that universe, the particle travelled through the wall, instead of bouncing off it.

The many worlds theory suggests that this happens every time a quantum mechanical reaction occurs, creating a separate parallel universe each time.

Once the parallel universe is created, however, we have no way of interacting with it. So while this theory is exciting, we have no way to test it.

SO IS THERE ANOTHER EARTH?

In the many worlds theory, there is plenty of room for another Earth. Each quantum reaction on our planet would create another parallel universe with another Earth. Things get trickier in the other theories – of the universe bubbles and the infinite expanse. If there are infinite universe bubbles and infinite space, that means there is a chance that exactly the same kinds of events repeated themselves in another bubble or elsewhere in the expanse of space to create another Earth.

When you do the maths, though, it quickly becomes unlikely. For just 1,000 particles to interact in exactly the same way twice, the chance would be 1 in 102477. The number 102477 is a 10 followed by 2477 zeros, which is an incredibly big number. There are far more particles in the universe than 1,000, so the chances for another Earth are not in our favour.

Unfortunately, we don't know if these parallel universes exist. Or at least, we don't at the moment. Physicists are trying to find ways to test these theories, but it is very difficult. For now, they remain just theories. But who knows – perhaps scientists in another universe have already figured it out. *(The Conversation)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 17, 2022

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart and will give wonderful results. Your time will be wonderfully spent with family. Your financial position will be stabilising and you will adopt a positive approach towards life. Your personality will bloom with the success that you get. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will do well in your business. Your income will rise. Your associates/colleagues will give you full support. You will also be able to win trust and confidence of your bosses. There are chances of promotion in your job. You will get benefit from professional ties. You will be full of self confidence and enthusiasm and will make maximum use of contacts. Conversation and contact will be of importance to you. Relationships, people and places will also hold an important place in your life. Be careful in matters of the heart. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week your dignity, respect and fame will grow by leaps and bounds. You will be the focus of attraction and talking point of discussion. Your bosses will be highly impressed with you. Your colleagues will also perform every task in office after consulting you. You will also guide them well. There will be stability in your job/business. Your efforts for acquiring money will be successful. The whole time period during this week will be successful achieving. Your government related matter will gain momentum. All pensioners will get their dues. You will be victorious in court cases. Your self confidence will be high. You may receive the rewards in the form of monetary benefits or gifts. You will also get benefits due to the changes in your life. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your family members.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It will be an appropriate time for you to prove yourself before others. You will be expected to take bull by the horns. You will also not disappoint none. You will face fierce competition in your business but you will manage the show well. You will also alone bear the brunt of your office problems and house hold problems. You will not lack tolerance. You will also not be interested in performing any extra tasks. There will be arguments in your house but you will avoid having any heated discussion. Your talent will be reflected in front of everyone. You will also join some enlightening tasks. Working women will also handle domestic affairs to perfection. You will also manage to impress people by your potentials. This time is very good for people linked with media, writers, students and professors. You will feel worthy due to the respect of your loved ones.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This week will bring mixed results for you. You will have some tricky issues to deal with at your workplace. Your family problems will take time to get resolved. It is now for you to decide what is best for you. You could be asked to assume leadership role at your work and there will be no dearth of supporters too. Your health may be a cause of worry but you will manage the things well. Your financial angle will get stronger. In your office the atmosphere will remain congenial. In love matters don't take any decision by being emotional. Your superiors will appreciate you for great achievement. You will move ahead with a positive outlook. Visitors will drop in and you will remain busy in welcoming them. A property dispute between brothers will get resolved. You will also develop a liking for a person working at your workplace. It will result in a serious relationship.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The time period is very favorable. Results of examinations/interview will be in your favor. You will earn well. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will also teach good manners to your children. You will also try and make the best facilities available to them. You will adopt a disciplined approach and also teach your children the same. They will prosper in their lives. You will walk on the path to prosperity. Matters related to finance, business property and family will be important for you. You will bear risks in your business. You will also make some investments. The days will be spent peacefully with family members. You will be relaxed. The presence of your mate/spouse will fill your life with colors. You will enjoy writing, reading, long walks, gardening and other simple pleasures in life. The time is favorable.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Things are again appearing bright. The planetary situation will once again become favorable. You will be busy in prayers and meditation. You will also receive the blessings of your elders. You will take some concrete decisions in your business. You might get inspired with new ideas. There are chances of success in business. Your social circle will expand. You will make new plans for making money. Whatever work you will think of, will get done with ease. You will discharge all your responsibilities well and your financial side will be strong. A lot of time will be spent in reading some enlightening and interesting subjects. You will also plan to buy a property or vehicle. You will do your work with lot of dedication and sincerity. You will take some work to completion with a planned approach.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The time will be spent wonderfully. Your good nature and qualities will come to the fore. You will believe in making others happy. You will be very clear in your ideas. The problems you were facing in your married life will come to an end. You will have gains in your business. Some incidents will happen that you had not even imagined about. You will be busy with your

work and will not give time to anything else. You will try to fulfill your dreams with full loyalty and responsibility. You will also obtain a victory in every task. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. There will be a happy atmosphere at home. There is possibility of having a discussion with your family members. New doors of opportunity will open for you. You will be miles ahead of people in terms of achievements and thoughts.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

You will go on a business trip. Money gains are indicated. Your work will also pick up. You will also perform well at your work and win the support of your colleagues. You will be in two minds about a business/job proposal. You will be a little doubtful about the whole thing. Just apply your common sense and take a decision best suited for you. Your health will improve. You will have no money problems. You will also contact with people with similar ideologies and find lot of support. You will consult an expert and hold discussions with him/her on financial matters. You will make new investments after lot of deliberation. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. Students will perform well in studies.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be a peaceful time. You will get love and blessings of your elders/parents. You will also get an opportunity to meet your relatives and friends. Time is very good. You need to be careful in business matters. You will also have to work very hard in your job. Income will be okay. You will devote lot of time for your official work. Work nearing completion may hit a roadblock. You may need support of your colleagues. You will not deviate from your goal. Your opponents will be active. It will be official victory days. Financial condition will be better than before. Relations between the couples will be cordial. You will be honored. You will also attend a wedding function. You will take career/business related decision. You may fall in love with a person known to you leading to a rocking affair.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

Time is gold and we need to value it. You will be applauded all around. You will consider yourself fortunate and will get the backing of your bosses. You will get happiness and bliss in family ties. You will also bring positive changes in your habits and behavior. Arrival of guests is on the cards. Health of family members need to be taken care off. Property division matters will get resolved with someone's intervention. Love birds will enjoy perfect bonding. A family get together or party will take place. You will work more harder during the second half of week, the more rewards and benefits you will get for it. Joy will come in the family. Time will be favorable for you. There is possibility of your getting a new work. You will derive strength from your partner. Your plans will be successful. Your dedication towards work will be high.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There will be an increase in your name and fame. New friends and well wishers may enter your life. You will be never left alone and will enjoy the company of your near and dear ones. Support of family members will ease your future plans. Misunderstandings with your colleagues will get removed with tactful handling of the situation. Your position in financial field will be excellent. You will be applauded and praised all around. You will also take major and serious decisions in business which will have long lasting results. You will get new business and investments offer. You need to take your job seriously. Some pleasant news regarding your progress in job will lift your morale. Love mates will come closer to each other. Life will appear to come back on track.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The graph of your career will go up. You will reach the peak of your career. You will use your potentials to its best. Your contacts with big people will start giving you lot of benefits. All potential jobs will be completed smoothly and the graph of your financial status will also be stable. You will fulfill all of your responsibilities and duties. You will enjoy good understanding with your spouse. You will also make good money and your income will rise. People will observe your capabilities and potential. Your money which had been stuck for a while in the past will return to you. You will also clinch financial/business deals. You will receive a pleasant news from somewhere. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. You will be the center of attention at some session. Your simplicity will attract people towards you.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your financial position will improve. You will get momentum in your work. You will also put your best efforts to fulfill wishes of your children. Your health will remain perfect. You will meet lot of people and will use your communication skills to get your work done. Your public relations will grow and also your prestige and fame. You need not interfere in the matters of others. You will have money gains. You will also be busy in shopping, dining and watching movies. You will also plan to go on a travel trip with your family. You will also cooperate in household work. You will also get support from your partner. The speed of your work will increase. You will move forward due to your intellect. You will make new friends.

Five ways Gen Z is changing the listening habits in India's music



The Indian music industry is undergoing a revolution, and Gen Z is driving the change. Gone are the days when people had to listen to a record, turn on the radio, or rely entirely on MTV to hear their favourite songs. Today, a slew of self-made superstars have risen to prominence with their own independent labels - written, produced, and streamed from the privacy of their own bedrooms.

The Impact of the Internet: Without a doubt, the Internet has had the greatest impact on the creation, distribution, and consumption of music content in India and around the world. In the last decade, terms like YouTuber, Tiktokker, and Social Media Influencer have become commonplace, as more and more people embrace the streaming era. As more songs become available online, more people are turning to platforms such as Apple Music, Spotify, and others to listen to what is now known as "bedroom pop."

Unconventional Genre: People were surprised that such a sound existed when I performed my first flashup in 2017. To be honest, I wouldn't have been able to find those songs from all over the world if it hadn't been for the shifting narratives in the global music space. I knew most people, especially the young, go to YouTube for music, so I had to launch the release there. I just released

my second flashup, #MagicMomentsFlashup, and the response has been incredible, with 3.5 million views in just a week.

New ways of getting heard (and seen): Gone are the days when you had to wait in line with a slew of other aspiring artists for your big break. Today, there are many independent music producers who have risen to prominence simply by creating amazing covers of songs performed by well-known artists and posting them online. In the name of Gen Z, these singers do this because there is a ready audience online.

More Playlists, less albums: Playlists are made by combining a list of one's favourite songs into a folder on a digital device, rather than having a CD with 10 or more songs by the same artist.

This limitless list is created and then best enjoyed with headphones using music apps and platforms.

Diversity is now the name of the game: This is due to the fact that you have unrestricted access to a wide range of sounds. According to Forbes' 2018 Music Consumption Study, more than 90 per cent of Gen Z listen to more than five musical genres on a regular basis. And it doesn't really matter where the song comes from; as long as it's trendy, recommended in an online community, or shared by a "online" friend, it's fine. *(IANSlife)*

"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

—Vincent Van Gogh

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 245 SHILLONG, MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2022

Left in the lurch

THE Left across the world was once hailed as the conscience-keeper of the poor but their clout is progressively reducing. In India too, they had represented the causes of the poor in the past — a reason why they got elected repeatedly in states like West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. Today, the only green pasture for them is the tiny southern state of Kerala. It thus was in the fitness of things that the CPI-M, which leads the Left, held its national conclave or the 'party congress' there this time.

The party congress turned out to be nothing more than a show. If a serious discussion was expected on the reasons for the fall of the left from people's perception, it did not happen. The two Communist parties, which had ruled Bengal for 34 years at a stretch up until 2011, have no representation in the state assembly today. The 2021 assembly poll was a total washout for them and, more shamefully, their candidates lost deposits in almost all the constituencies. The two Communist parties won just five seats in the 2019 LS polls and both have lost their national party status. The recent five-state assembly polls too showed the Left failed to get even one per cent of the votes polled and their candidates invariably ran behind NOTA. A serious rethinking on their policy failures and leadership flaws was the minimum that should have happened at the party congress. The leadership failed to do even that and instead resorted to the usual bluff and bluster.

There is merit in the view, raised by the media at a press meet with general secretary Sitaram Yechury, that the failure of the Left in India stemmed principally from its failure to adapt a Europe-born ideology to India's specific conditions. A view was also that the Indian Left lacked a leader of high stature, someone like Chairman Mao in China. Worse, the resolutions passed at the congress were run-of-the-mill stuff, as was always the case when the reds' meets. This led to criticism that the Left in India, with its weak leadership, is faced with a poverty of ideas. The CPI-M gave Yechury a third term at the helm as general secretary, which also led to murmurs that the party is facing a poverty of credible leaders. For, it was under Yechury that the CPI-M went further downhill in Bengal and even lost its national party status. Big talks alone cannot take the Left forward; more so, when action-packed leaders like Mamata Banerjee are around.

Referendum call by KHADC on voting Rights of Khasi Women

By Toki Blah

This is with reference to the news item "Referendum on women's entry into durbar likely," that appeared on the front page of the Shillong Times of April 14, 2022. The report goes to say that 'the KHADC has submitted before the High Court of Meghalaya that the matter pertaining to the right of women to seek election and also participate in the election process for choosing Rangbah Shnong is under the active consideration of the Council and it is likely a ref-

erendum may be called on the issue'. Now this stand of the KHADC is highly intriguing and one would like to go deeper into the ramifications it would have or not have.



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Dorbar Shnong, in the 21st Century need an inclusive and democratic participatory governance system to make it relevant to the requirements of the day.

Seeing the sense of vision the Constitution has on this score, it would be tragic if the KHADC were to revert back to regressive regulations whose sole aim is to curtail the advancement of our women in both the political and social spheres. Please don't fall into the trap set by some misguided men with a patriarchal mindset, who propagate the

ST File Photo

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Waiting In vain for miracles to happen

By Wandell Passah

The Sunday ST heading "Too early to call Lukha river's revival a success" (ST April 17, 2022, has come to a conclusive piece of news. The politicians, ministers and bureaucrats had thrown all the rules and acts diligently framed by those with concern for the environment, to the bin and given clearance to Star Cement to start production by 2001. Across the world people know that cement plants are the most notorious polluters.

Cement manufacturing pollutes the environment in three ways. (1) It uses coal for the kiln and though the chimney is an electrostatics precipitator device, one ton of coal dust a day would be disposed of and there's no denying that it finally gets into the water outlet. And I do doubt if such chimneys are being used as no judicious inspection has ever been carried out. (2) Coal is needed in huge quantities if plants are honest enough to use captive power plants of their own so as not to tax domestic electricity grids, especially with India being power starved. (3) One MT of cement needs 2 lakhs litres of water. Please look at drinking water problems in Meghalaya especially in coal belts. (4) Gypsum is the main component of cement. And it is a great worry for the National Industrial Occupational Safety Hazards.

With all these well known facts which IAS officers could not have been unaware of Star Cement was awarded the license to operate. The Environment Protection Act (EPA) has been in place since 1986. But even after 2001 license after license was granted to nine more cement companies with 4

once and for all as to why the Lukha turns blue." So in 2017, the Board invited a senior scientist of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) New Delhi, Mr Mukul Chatopadhyay to investigate the matter. A preliminary investigation proved elusive. But with long experience in investigations, the scientist proceeded right to the source of the Lukha, entailing a travel of around 25 Km into Saipung village. A downward survey revealed that all the tributaries from areas where rat hole mining were and are being carried out had clear water flowing through them. The water turns blue when the Lukha meets the Lunar River that carries all the human and industrial wastes of cement factories.

This finding nullified the claims of Star Cement. But the Company has with time appeared to be acting aggressively and to have become more influential with the passage of time. It looked as if the Company controlled everyone in government. Thus from 2017 till 2022 April, the findings of Dr Chatopadhyay were also shelved to protect those in government who have conspired with Star Cement.

Sadder is the fact that Environment Minister, James Sangma landed early in 2021 at the banks of the Lukha. In the huge gathering of people of Narpuh region, he promised (of course in English) that sooner or later, he would bring Israeli and German scientists to treat the acidity or blue with what he called 'algae' treatment. Algae treats the ammonia, phosphates and nitrates and not the acidity or blue of water.



being clubbed to Star Cement. By then the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was already in place and conscience should have prompted those in charge of ensuring environmental clearances to go slow and reduce the production capacity of the 5 other plants gradually so as not to be too harsh to the companies and then let them pack up and leave. That way the environment would have been rejuvenated.

But contrary to all these clear writings on the wall, when the Lukha turned blue in 2007 after 6 years of cement production, Star Cement blamed the rat hole mining and our enlightened concerned agencies also endorsed it. At the time a team from the Zoology and Chemistry department of St Edmunds College rushed to Lukha to find the pH content of the Lukha River at 3.5 and the PPM (particles per million) at 3 too little for aquatic life to survive. The report was forwarded to Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) whose director then was a past pupil of St Edmund's College. Well, we understood the problem of why the report was not accepted. Firstly, the team from St Edmund's College was non-governmental by nature and the report was damning to say the least. Officers have to walk on thin red lines, hence to persuade the MSPCB to have our report tabled would put the officer in jeopardy.

Hence Star Cement was cleared of all controversy. By 2015-16, the Lukha was not only incapable of sustaining aquatic life but it also turns abrasive (probably because of calcium sulphate from gypsum which in water turns blue).

At long last the MSPCB took the trouble to find out

So these are my questions: - (1) Why did MSPCB shelve the report of CPCB's Scientist, and failed to make it public, (2) Let's suppose we believe the Minister, then when are the German and Israeli scientists coming to treat the Lukha with 'algae'? (3) The slight improvement of the Lukha in recent times might be due to the huge downpour in recent months. And this will improve with the coming monsoon. The question is, will Lukha ever be cleansed to eternity come the dry winter months?

The fact is that our environment was and is completely devastated. And our philanthropist Bill Gates had donated to COP 26.5 billion dollars, so that part of that money would go towards getting rid of traditional cement plants, to be replaced with Green Cement factories. Yes, the green premium will hike the cement price to 70% per bag. But human life is worth more than the 70% increase in cement price, for, of what use are the cheap apartments and buildings when the occupants are dead?

People of Lumshnong, to be followed by Brichymot will need to find alternate dwelling places. The axiom, "You cannot have the cake and eat it too" was perhaps never understood. We live today in a world where all values and ethics are trampled under our feet. The EPA, EIA and MoEFCC are deceptive abbreviations. They have killed the Lukha River. And if the MDA Government comprising the NPP, UDP, HSPDP, BJP is given another chance then we will continue to slide down into a bottomless pit and we will regret the day we fought for stashed.

(The writer is former teacher, St Edmund's College)

Letters to the Editor

Is Meghalaya ready for CUET?

Editor,
With Common University Entrance Test (CUET) in place, NEHU being a Central University has agreed to admit students to various Under Graduate Courses through various Colleges affiliated to it in the State based on CUET scores to be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) before the new Academic Session of 2022-23. The CUET no doubt will bring a level playing field for students seeking admission in any of the Indian Central Universities as different State Boards have different styles of setting question papers and evaluation of scripts thereby lacking uniformity in giving grades to students.

As far as Meghalaya is concerned there is one loophole which I would like to point out so that the concerned authority (Meghalaya Government, DTE and NEHU), and Students Unions can take immediate steps to remove the confusion of the students who will be appearing for the CUET. The problem is with Section IA and IB of the Test which most students in Meghalaya will face. Section IA consists of 13 Languages: (Medium of the Test) i.e. Tamil, Telegu, Kanada, Malayalam, Marathi, Gujarati, Odiya, Bengali,

Assamese, Punjabi, English, Urdu and Hindi. Section IB consists of 20 languages: i.e. French, Spanish, German, Nepali, Persian, Italian, Arabic, Sindhi, Sanskrit, Kashmiri, Kankani, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Santhali, Tibetan, Japanese, Russian and Chinese. The maximum paper that a student can choose is from any three languages and the minimum paper is from any two languages from section IA and IB. Looking at the options available, most of native students of the state who have not studied Hindi will be left only with one paper, English, thus not meeting the minimum criteria needed.

The process of online submission of application for CUET is on and ends on May 6, 2022 (up to 11:50 PM). It would also be necessary for the State Education Board to study the subject combination as given in the Domain Specific Subjects of CUET to make our students well equipped to appear for the entrance test in the future. Last but not the least why not have our own State University? It has been 50 Years of Statehood and yet we have not been able to have one State University, or a medical or engineering college!

Yours etc.,
A.M. Rynjah,
Shillong-14

Rape: A crime most foul

Editor,
Apropos the letter by Salil

Gewali, 'Increasing rape cases in West Bengal' (ST April 15, 2022) I too would like to raise my voice against such atrocities upon women, particularly the minor girls who fall victims to the cruel game of dirty politics in West Bengal. Mr. Sugata Roy, TMC MP aptly said that not even a single incident of violence should occur in state helmed by a woman Chief Minister and it is a matter of shame if even a single crime against women is reported here where the state is headed by a woman!

Alas! To the contrary, the Chief Minister herself supported the heinous act of barbarism of the miscreants by treating it like a joke and attributing it to an act of meriments of the youngsters. She even took the side of the men on the issue of forced pregnancy on minors by the miscreants! What can be more shameful and idiotic on the part of a Chief Minister who herself is a woman! As a woman myself I can only express my anguish against such an irresponsible woman ruler of a state like West Bengal.

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha
Shillong - 4

Envisioning threats

Editor
Spiralling world events from Ukraine to Sri Lanka, whether territorial conflicts or economic warfare affects all and Meghalaya is not

immune to the events of a globalized world. Recently a group Lawai ba Phyrnai surfaced threatening to create havoc across Shillong. This is because of the frustration of a certain populace which has a grouse against the government. Education in the state is at its lowest ebb with lack of depth and critical thinking and the reliance on textbooks which do not prepare them for the real world. Coming to the north eastern region the lack of cross-cultural engagements between student communities is another factor. This is because of the hype created by different pressure groups against the "other" and of course our beloved political masters who themselves have become blind to the issues afflicting people but have turned themselves into swashbuckling magnates that would put those named in the Panama Papers to shame.

The lack of imagination in strategy and thinking will push the state backwards and new threats from cyber warfare, bioterrorism, drug trafficking to name a few will increase with COVID acting as the catalyst. Michael A. Sheehan, author of the book, 'Crush the Cell' (How to Defeat Terrorism Without Terrorizing Ourselves) hits the nail hard on the head by differentiating actual threats from hype using offensive operational intelligence. This is the key rather than wasting resources on wrong measures on the plea of protecting us citizens. This all starts with rewiring our mindset to a

new level, particularly the sleepwalking government machinery.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathphoh,
Shillong-10

NEP's dual undergraduate courses

Editor,
The University Grants Commission's (UGC's) decision to allow students to pursue two undergraduate or postgraduate degrees/diplomas simultaneously in the physical, online or combination modes is in line with the National Education Policy's principle of eliminating silos in education. The decision widens opportunities for students in higher education. On the other hand, it poses several challenges. How students, teachers and those involved in education respond to this move is very important.

There is no denying the fact that courses must give students scope for employability. The Indian education system has always been criticised for its limited scope for employability. In contrast to traditional courses, vocational courses provide more job opportunities. However, traditional courses have their own importance. The UGC's move gives equal importance to traditional and vocational courses. As students are allowed to pursue degree/diploma courses from two different universities or the

same university, they will gain greater exposure. It also enables students to compare the courses of different universities. Besides, teaching and learning will become more student-oriented. Since physical and online modes of learning are allowed, students are free to join courses of their choice.

Given that there are many drawbacks in the present higher education system, radical changes are needed to meet the challenges of the present time. While the UGC's move is commendable, the challenges it poses need to be dealt with. To begin with, doing two courses simultaneously is strenuous. Secondly, when dual degrees become a prescribed qualification for jobs, those who fail to pursue dual degrees will not get opportunities. Thirdly, when students pursue two courses, the issue of attendance may arise. Fourthly, there are concerns about the certainty of acquiring deep knowledge in two different subjects. Despite the challenges the UGC's move poses, the dual degree system has a lot of positives too. There must be proper planning in its implementation so that it does not affect students' future.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS.,
Kollam

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.

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

— Andy Warhol

The Shillong Times

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From Congress Party to ULFA (I)

NEWS that a Youth Congress leader from Assam, Janardhan Gogoi who used to look after the social media cell of the Party in Tinsukia district has joined the ULFA (Independent) led by Paresh Baruah is a matter of concern. Gogoi, the Vice President of the Tinsukia District Youth Congress says he has chosen the path of armed rebellion because he felt that politicians and regional political parties are all self-serving and not concerned at the fact that the Assamese society is at the crossroads. Gogoi's contention is that successive governments in Assam have failed to listen to protests raised by the Assamese people from time to time. He says that the Assamese people are today destitutes in their own homeland and that he could not remain a mere spectator to the efforts to 'eradicate' Assamese society. Gogoi alleges that the BJP-led Himanta Biswa Sarma Government has failed to listen to democratic protests hence the need to take up arms to save the Assamese society.

Like all youth today, Gogoi expressed his personal feelings even to his wife over Facebook. He was influenced by ULFA(I) through social media. This is the modus operandi of most militant outfits in the North Eastern states. With police failing to track their accounts, the outfits actively engage over social media with young people who are without jobs and therefore a frustrated lot. Underground outfits and individuals like Paresh Baruah, holed up in China's Yunnan Province regularly converses with media houses in Assam and communicates to the media over email, threatening to take action on a host of issues. Closer home, a group calling itself, 'Lawei Ba Phymnai' (Bright future) has been sending email after email to newspaper offices threatening to blow up schools and other institutions by a definite date. In the age of social media it is possible for any tech-savvy individual to send emails with URLs that are tougher to track than most others but the publicity secretary of the HNLC, Sainkumar Nongtraw has for several years been using a Gmail account without being tracked down. From the tone and tenor of the mails sent, Nongtraw appears to be an educated person and the recent confession made by a certain youth group that they are the overground wing of the underground outfit seems to add up to the emails.

Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma had recently expressed concern over the recruitment of at least 47 new young members to ULFA-I, even while senior members are leaving the outfit. It is obvious that a large section of young people are losing faith in the present political leadership and governance. They need a platform to voice their angst and for elders to listen to them with respect.

A Requiem for Aryabhata — India's first artificial satellite

By Maitphang Syiem

"That's one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind," as stated by Neil Armstrong when he first stepped on the lunar surface on July 20, 1969 and becoming the first man to have landed on the moon is epic. It will always stay in the minds of many of us. Ever since, the age for space exploration has progressed by leaps and bounds. The US and the Soviets were the two nations that were in the race for space and they are even more aggressive now. Their space programmes have become role models and inspirations for other developing nations in the quest for space technology. Our own Indian space programme had a humble beginning, starting off with (INCOSPAR) Indian National Committee for Space Research which was set up by the versatile industrialist, scientist, educator and a visionary late Dr. Vikram Sarabhai and later superseded what is known today as Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on August 15, 1969.

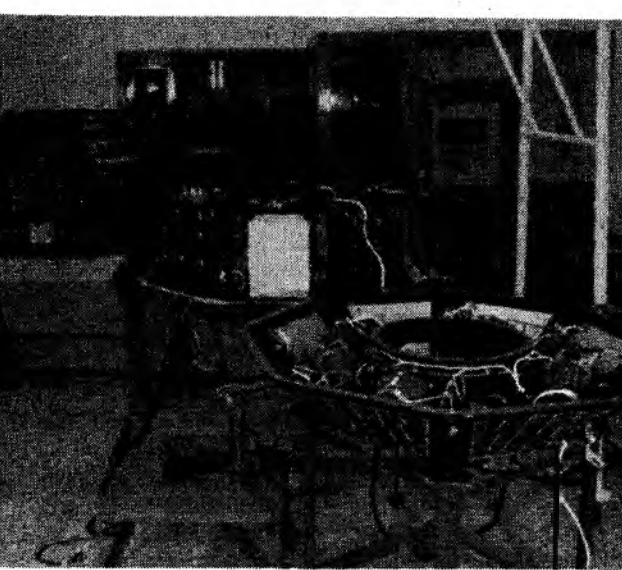
The space journey for Indian scientists and engineers was not a cakewalk. There were many unimaginable hurdles back then when it took off, however, there is something that Indians believe in. It's called, "Lage Raho." They stayed tuned and persisted with consistency and perseverance and that made Indians leapfrog, surpassing many hurdles to becoming a leading nation in space technology. Back in the early 1960's and in the years that followed during the erstwhile ISRO (INCOSPAR) as it appears the major focus was on developing sounding rockets and launching pads for rockets it is fascinating to know that many best Indian brains were involved in the programme and many of them graduates from various prestigious Indian and American Institutes back then. The experiments with the sounding rockets from time to time laid the foundation for the development of satellite launch vehicles such as SLV, ASLV and furthermore to this day we have PSLV and GSLV which are capable of putting a satellite payload into the polar orbit and geo-stationary orbit of the Earth.

The Father of Indian Space Research the late Dr Vikram Sarabhai had a different approach towards using space technology. All his ideas were aimed at national development in terms of space technology for the benefit of many Indians. One such project was SITE in 1966 (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) for educational programmes us-

ing NASA's Satellite ATS-6. This project was a successful stint between NASA and ISRO, which later culminated into development of communication and broadcasting satellites (INSAT) Indian National Satellite System.

The Indian space programme in the later years after attaining the expertise of developing Launch Vehicles went on to the development of Satellite payload which are capable of transmitting information from space and back to earth. This was a shift

from rockets to satellites. The genesis of satellite payloads development started in 1969 at Space Science and Technology Center which was a division under Vikram Sarabhai Space Center, Thiruvananthapuram. The responsibility for this monumental work was given to a well-known personality, space scientist Prof. U. R. Rao. He took charge and carried forward the vision laid by Dr. Vikram Sarabhai. The Space Science and Technology Center then transitioned into the Satellite Systems



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division in 1971. In the initial years the center became the hub for various satellite development projects. However, in 1971 the sudden demise of the ISRO founder Dr Sarabhai at the age of 53 was a huge setback for the Indian Space programme. However, the work continued under the new chairman of ISRO Prof. M. G. M. Menon back then and thereafter by Prof. Satish Dhawan. The Satellite Systems Division was shifted to an industrial area in Peenya, Karnataka and it was there that the birth of the

first Indian artificial satellite Aryabhata named after the great Indian mathematician and astronomer took place in 1971 and off the record there were many suggested names for the satellite such as Mitra, Jawahar et al but Aryabhata was adopted and was named by the first lady Prime Minister of India, late Indira Gandhi.

Those years noticed cordial relations between many space faring nations and for that matter, much credit goes to the kind of diplomacy and diplomatic ties that India had made during those initial stages of development. The US, the French, the Soviets, Japanese and many others had supported India in her quest for space technology. It was very clear that the Indian political and scientific leadership really wanted to develop space technology for the benefit of Indians and that garnered support from many nations. Till date India continues to leap-frog in her quest for space technology. In particular Aryabhata was a joint venture project

Prof U.R Rao's incredible approach to start with small satellites in experimental mode was a success as that led to the understanding and building of the knowhow for building bigger and more sophisticated artificial satellites. Prof U.R. Rao had the best men in his team and had successfully assembled and built the spacecraft in India. Aryabhata was an experimental satellite weighing about 360 Kg with scientific instruments to measure the cosmic rays and neutrons from the sun. The estimated cost of building Aryabhata was Rs 3 crores back then and Prof U.R Rao and his team built it in just 31 months.

Today April 19 is remembered as the day when the first Indian artificial satellite Aryabhata was put into orbit in 1975 and was launched from Kasputin yar in Russia using Kosmos 3M rocket and. Forty seven years have passed since the successful launch of Aryabhata which heralded India to the space age at par with other space faring nations. As someone narrated, India entered into the space age at a time when there were more bullock carts than cars; there were more open sheds than buildings but despite the hurdles, the Indian space scientists made it and this has boosted the capability to build more satellites for national development. This feat was not a "Jugaad" but it was fully scientific and calculated.

Ever since Aryabhata, ISRO has launched many operational communication satellites, Earth Observation Satellites, Meteorological Satellites. As stated earlier the entire process for the Indians was not a cakewalk but they "leapfrogged" and the spirit of "Lage Raho" continues till date. We can see that they have been successful in many attempts and India is today a leading nation in space technology.

To conclude, let us ponder upon the quotes of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai "There are some who question the relevance of space activities in a developing nation. To us, there is no ambiguity of purpose. We do not have the fantasy of competing with the economically advanced nations in the exploration of the moon or the planets or manned space-flights. But we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally, and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society."

(The writer is a Geospatial Technology Expert and can be reached at maitphangsyiem@gmail.com)

Will Meghalaya's polity ever change for good?

By Dr Lakhon Kma

In Meghalaya, the more we yearn for change, the more it remains the same and we get frustrated election after election. Come 2023, we are back to Meghalaya's eternal fight between hope of change for good and frustration; will the former ever be triumphant, only time will tell. Our seemingly everlasting problems of lack of Medical College and Engineering College, traffic congestion, plight of school teachers and health workers, unemployment, corruption, nepotism, rampant destruction of fragile ecosystems, particularly along the highways, and water bodies, etc. does not appear to leave us anytime soon. I do believe that the root cause of all the above problems stems from lack of focused plan for growth for decades and the more dangerous one-the medieval mindset of people at large. In spite of all tall claims of growth and progress by people at the helm of affairs, it is quite worrisome to see the ever-growing gaps between haves and have-nots.

The problem with Meghalaya is that there is hardly any alternative idea on the path of progress offered by any party simply because people and their ideas are the same, only their symbol keep changing over elections depending upon where the wind blows; loyalty to a party and its ideology almost does not exist among Meghalaya's politicians. It's only the chair and power that matters and therefore, faith reposed by the people on elected representatives is toasted in the air. Resultantly, progress is reset at zero. After all, old wine tastes the same even in new bottles."

It is sad that the Congress party in Meghalaya is in complete disarray with hardly any MLA under its control. It is trying hard to recover from self-inflicted wounds. Although the President of MPCC may not necessarily be the cause of abandonment, his appointment did act as a catalyst to accelerate the MLAs' decision to dump the Congress party. Whatever remains are just namesakes and are aligning with the ruling dispensation for maximum benefit and waiting to jump ship with minimum loss as the election draws closer. In that sense, perhaps Dr. Mukul Sangma and Co. could take the high moral ground on the terms of separation from the Congress party having seen its abysmal performances in the last two General elections and several State elections.

It is equally sad that BJP, which is as good or bad as any other party, is yet to obtain public acceptance across Meghalaya, thanks mainly to the failure of its leaders in the State to showcase, in right earnest, the good work of the BJP-led Government in the Centre. Schemes such as Jal Jeevan Mission, Annapurna Scheme of free ration, old age pension scheme, Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhayan, Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas, Digital India, Skill India, etc. under different Ministries, Government of India, no doubt, are immensely beneficial, particularly to the poor and needy in the State. The State

leadership of BJP could not capitalize on these social security schemes of the Central government packed with its strong nationalist identity that values local ethos, cultures and traditions. On the other hand, other North-Eastern States like Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland were smarter in convincing their people to accept BJP as a party and has immensely benefitted for the larger interest of the development of their respective States with generous blessings from the Centre amalgamated with a sense of accountability to its people and the Centre. Meghalayans need not be 'the last of the Mohicans' in terms of overall development and therefore, we have to make a choice to decide our own destiny. Are we ready?

As an alternative choice, there could also be an alliance of fresh ideas among like-minded parties or organizations to replicate what happened in the recent election in Punjab where Congress party was routed out due to public's frustration with the incumbent government and a strong desire for change. Perhaps, time has come for smaller parties to bury their hatchets and form a formidable pre-poll alliance with a new clear-cut roadmap for the overall development of the State. Notwithstanding anything, alliance works on the principle of gain and sacrifices for the larger common interest of development of the State for everyone, particularly the downtrodden.

Meghalaya is also facing a serious dilemma that can have a tremendous impact on the entire process of development and that is the business people joining politics. There is nothing wrong in businessmen and women joining politics provided they do it with a strong urge and commitment to serve the people rather than only easing their way of doing business through the route of politics. However, more often than not, it has been found that their entering politics does more harm than good. After winning, while their businesses get expanded with impunity, there is hardly any time dedicated to frame public welfare policies for the good of the general public. While they gain, the State loses its rightful growth. Hence, educated and well-meaning people with full dedication and fresh outlook on the growth of the State is what Meghalaya needs. Such will not rely on their Chief Minister to rescue them every now and then on serious matters concerning the development of the State through various Ministries.

Elections 2023 will be a fight largely between rich candidates who are concerned only with furthering their business causes and are least bothered about the concern and plight of the poor and needy versus fresh, smart, young, educated candidates with newer ideas. In democracy, it is in the hands of, 'we the people,' as to what kind of government we want. Whether we will back undeserving candidates for a few hundred or thousand rupees or household items or candidates who will show us clear-cut paths to development for a better future albeit with no money or articles to distribute. The choice will be ours. Let's hope that new and fresh ideas reach people in every nook and corner of the State through truly concerning voices and mediums.

In this 50th year of our Statehood and beyond, let's hope that we are not left helpless and frustrated once again after the State Assembly Election in 2023.

(The writer teaches at NEHU.)

Letters to the Editor

We demand strict action against errant truckers

Editor,
The shattering news that an 18-year-old national-level Table Tennis player, Deenadayalan Vishwa lost his life in a road accident while on his way from Guwahati Airport to Shillong to participate in the 83rd Senior National Table Tennis championships beginning in Shillong on Monday, has cast a pall of gloom amongst participants. Along with Vishwa, the driver Dipal Das also died due to the impact. How is it possible for a truck to jump the divider and hit a car on the other side unless the driver was driving at break-neck speed.

Let's face facts, there are no traffic or highway police visible except for those policemen posted at Umiam at the turn-off to UCC-Mawlyndep who stop trucks to check if they're carrying coal. Isn't it funny that despite the policemen posted

at that junction the coal truck drivers still manage to pass through? That is one point. The second point is why the Table Tennis players have been asked to board a tourist taxi instead of being picked up by vehicles organized by the State Table Tennis Association? Would a Cricket team have had to come in a taxi too if it was playing a tournament in Shillong? Why are some sports treated differently from others? For the parents of the deceased table tennis player this is a shock they will find hard to recover from. We can only hope that the truck driver faces jail sentence for killing a bright young sportsperson who had come to Meghalaya with many hopes and dreams.

We urge the Meghalaya Police to investigate this case judiciously so that the driver who caused this accident receives due punishment befitting the crime. There are far too many accidents on the Shillong-Guwahati highway, many of them unreported. Coal trucks turn turtle all the time and no one really cares about investigating the cause of these accidents. It is high

time for Meghalaya Police to take their duties more seriously.

Yours etc.,
John S Kharkongor,
Via email

Journalism at its zenith

Editor,
Kudos to NDTV for that Easter Sunday coverage of the St Nicholas Church in Kyiv Ukraine. Vishnu Som, the veteran journalist who with Ajai Shukla, the former Defense Analyst for India had covered the Afghan war should be congratulated, not to forget the camera crew as well. It takes a lot of courage to be doing journalism in a war zone but Vishnu Som and his team from NDTV have been at it, even entering the building abandoned by the Russians after they had devastated it.

The beauty of the mix of war and peace was demonstrated when the faithful were in St Nicholas church praying and singing during Easter. Amidst the land mines, the live shells of the

Russians who had to flee and the graves where thousands of the dead lay buried with a good number of children, to hear the translated Ukrainian language to English as "Yes Easter brings Peace and Victory," fills every heart with hope. We pray that the Ukrainians will rise up in victory, reclaim their land and henceforth be more secure, more peaceful, stronger and more resolute than ever before.

Oh! If only journalism could win hearts in the political battlefield too then our wretched State of Meghalaya would one day rise like the Phoenix of the ancient Greeks; the eagle reduced to ash but out of the ashes will spring up hope and a change for the better.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Shillong 14

Covid returns, masks on

Editor,
National television is full of news about the rise in Covid cases and this time

the virus seems to have affected school children. Cases have gone up in UP, Delhi, Maharashtra and Kerala. Here in Meghalaya, more specifically Shillong we see people abandoning their masks and walking around carefree. Our tourism has opened up in a big way and all hotels are full. Tourist spots are crowded and all this is good for our sunken economy. The tourism sector was particularly badly hit. So it's only fair that the State opens up all sectors of the economy. However, that does not mean throwing caution to the winds. As a state we have to be alert and not let our guards down.

Covid spreads through travel and that is the challenge. Now with the Umling testing facility having virtually wended up how do we know which traveller is Covid free and which ones have received their double doses of vaccination etc. To be alert is to be smart and not to be caught unawares if the cases do spike. Personally, I feel that visitors from abroad and from states that have registered a spike in Covid cases need to be

screened and quarantined so that Meghalaya is on the safe side.

The State Health Department should also be stricter and insist that everyone stepping out of their homes should wear masks because it does look funny to see one person wearing a mask and another walking around unmasked in crowded areas like Police Bazar and other market places. Also it is seen that taxi drivers have started taking more passengers than they are allowed to and they are wearing their masks below their chins. And by Jove they have started to charge passengers a bomb! Here is one state where taxi drivers charge what they please. They are probably trying to make up for the loss during Covid but why at the poor passenger's cost?

Yours etc.,
Rosemary Lyngkhoh,
Via email

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

"Strength lies in differences,
not in similarities."
— Stephen Covey

The Shillong Times

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Indulgences in streets

THE communal situation in the northern states including capital Delhi showed a marked deterioration in recent days, forcing governments to review the overall security scenario in the context also of the upcoming Eid and several Hindu festivals. Uttar Pradesh's chief minister Yogi Adityanath has announced a set of steps including the tightening of curbs on religious processions and use of microphones in public places. Other sensitive states too have ordered or hinted at effecting such curbs. Peace is of prime importance and any step in this direction should be accepted and appreciated by one and all – with a caveat that no kind of discrimination should be attempted at between communities while implementing such rules.

Fact of the matter is everyone is keen on stretching the limits when it comes to organising processions, use of loud speakers etc., through main thoroughfares or at public grounds or from religious centres; more so the majority community for the reason that it has one or other festival coming up every now and then. For Christianity and Islam, there are limited occasions when they spread out to the streets or cause traffic blockades. A church-induced discipline is inherent when Christians get on to the streets. The same thing cannot be said of Hindu or Muslim celebrations in the streets, which invariably hold up traffic for hours. The sounds from both Hindu and Muslim religious centres are often beyond acceptable levels. The organisers are unmindful of the trouble it causes to others. The tendency on all our part is to "indulge" when it comes to celebrations; which is not a bad idea, as long as it does not affect the peace of others.

Political parties are one up when it comes to creating chaotic situations in the streets and no rule is applicable to them, whether they are on the ruling side or in the Opposition. Their sound decibels are of the highest order and no one dares question them. When it comes to religious events, our prejudices will have the better of us and the intolerance at what others do is all too palpable. This leads to communal tensions and riots. When the army of the unemployed youths keeps swelling due to low-paced economic development, it is natural that religion and politics becomes a heady potion. It will be in the fitness of things that society should keep changing for the better with the passage of time. Freedom to study, freedom to be at peace with oneself and freedom to sleep are also part of our fundamental rights. But Indians are increasingly being deprived of these freedoms.

Letters to the Editor

Reasons for not finding garbage processing site

Editor,
The ST front page news report on 'Need people's support for waste management' (ST April 19, 2022) makes an amusing read. Apparently Mr Prestone Tynsong Dy CM had observed that a permanent sanitary land fill site for Shillong and Jowai will not materialize without people's cooperation. Let us give Tynsong the benefit of the doubt and accept that he really meant what he said. The problem is if we continue to speak of 'landfill sites for garbage' and the only example of such is Marten, then forget about people's cooperation. No one in their right minds will be willing to take a chance on a garbage land-fill anywhere near their habitations.
My advice to the Government is to start using the term 'Waste processing unit'. I believe one such unit is being set up in Tura with Korean help. The technology used is to turn plastic and organic waste into fuel to be used in cement plants. That is what is needed for this Shillong and Jowai – a processing plant to turn garbage (approximately 200 tonnes a day from both places) into an economically marketable product. It's the only viable solution to our garbage problems
I believe the Meghalaya

High Court too had expressed its concern over the matter, which is most welcome. Now let us be more realistic about willingness of the public to part with land for the disposal of Shillong garbage. Sometime ago the Urban Affairs Department had issued a clarification that acquisition of land for such a purpose was well under way. Then complete silence! Now the Department has come up with the same lame excuse that non-availability of land due to public resistance is the cause for delay on the matter. A little bird says that this is only partly true. Alternate sites 25 to 30 km away from Shillong were available and Urban Affairs negotiations for the same were under way. Then suddenly the public refused to cooperate. It is learnt that this was mainly due to the minister concerned starting to negotiate with the land owners and demanding a hefty cut from the amount decided for compensation. No wonder there was no cooperation from the people since the purpose of the whole exercise was changed. Instead of land acquisition for the benefit of the people the whole negotiations revolved on how much the concerned minister could make out of the deal. Shameful and disgraceful are the only words that come to mind!
Now, I personally know for sure that land for the processing of garbage is still available in areas around Shillong. They might be

History of English education in India:

The ancient education system of India is a greatly glorified tradition. But this traditional education system of India has been the most exclusionary mode of pedagogy which hardly has any parallel in other civilisations of human history. In ancient India only the 'twice born', the dwijas or the Brahmins had the absolute right over education while some limited access was granted to the wards of the rulers. Manusmriti had given a long list of people who must be barred from education which included the traders, farmers, keepers of animals, widows, and of course the Sudras who were prevented not only from learning the Sanskrit texts, but were also not allowed to read or even hear the recitations of those texts. Severe punishments were specifically coded for the violators of these rules. However, these excluded classes of people could have some access to education during the Muslim rule in the Mediaeval period. One of the highly learned modern men of India Raja Ramomhun Ray got his education in this system who became a scholar of Persian and the continental philosophy which he read mostly in Persian translations. Later, he also became a scholar of Sanskrit as well as a major champion of English education in India.

Hindu College (which later became Presidency College and now Presidency University) was established in Calcutta in 1817 following the demand of the Hindu community who wanted to have an English education. Raja Ramomhun Ray was one of its most eminent patrons. However, it was meant only for the 'the sons of the respectable Hindoos' to learn 'English and Indian languages and literature and science of Europe and Asia.' By 1836 about six thousand students (primarily the Hindu boys) were getting English education in Bengal.

Significantly, the Muslim leaders had opposed the introduction of English education in India replacing Persian. So, they demanded the establishment of a Madrasa for the Muslim students, to which the British government had readily agreed. But soon the Muslim leaders realized that armed with English education, the Hindus marched far ahead of the Muslims in the new era. It took years for the Muslims to be at par with their Hindu counterparts in terms

some distance away but under the circumstances they would be a big relief and one should not look too closely at a gift horse in the mouth. The problem is, based on experience, we cannot afford to leave the process of land acquisition to the Urban Affairs Department alone as our bureaucrats are incapable of resisting the voracious appetite of their unscrupulous and corrupt political bosses. Acquisition of such land should, ideally be under the supervision of the court. Only then can we the citizens have relief. Politicians and the Government should not take offence at such suggestions. Accept the truth; your inability to curb the insatiable appetite of some ministers for money and therefore your helplessness in the matter.

Yours etc.,
Ailadmiki Syngkli,
Via email

An unpardonable act

Editor,
John S Kharkongor's letter, "We demand strict action against errant truckers," (ST April 19, 2022) has appeared at the most critical hour. While expressing our deepest condolences to the family of Deenadayalan Vishwa, and family of Dipal Das, with prayers that the departed souls find eternal peace. To read of such accidents makes one's blood boil. This accident in which the truck

of advancement in modern education and gaining social, economic as well as political power associated with it. In fact, they are yet to fully recover from that setback. Syed Ahmad Khan was a visionary and to provide modern education and English learning to the Muslim learners, he had established the Muhammed-an Anglo Oriental College in 1875 which later came to be known as the Aligarh Muslim University.

However, in October 1817, when the Hindu College was established, a new era of education began in India. Subsequently, education in India no longer remained a caste privilege; rather the students from the unrepresented categories of society, including women, found education an accessible pedagogic experience. In the last 200 years or so, in empowering as well as emancipating the masses, modern and secular education had played a very crucial role where English was the key facilitator both as a language and as a means of providing access to the finest texts in science, philosophy, literature and other branches of knowledge. Therefore, the Dalit intellectuals observe 5 October as the Indian English Day to celebrate education in India as an instrument of social empowerment. Following the greater access to modern education, mainly the Dalits and tribal, the table is slowly turning, posing the greatest challenge to the pedagogic supremacy of the Brahmins and the high castes who have been the biggest beneficiaries of education in India across regimes. Dalit intellectual, Kancha Ilaiah, in one of his recent articles has argued that the benefits that the high castes had gained through English education, now they want to deny it to the Dalits and the Adivasis.

The reality of the growing competence in English of the Dalits, the tribals, and other subalterns has given the biggest anxiety to the privileged castes in India. Therefore, the attempts to replace English as part of the state policy to neutralise the advantage of the non-castes and the lower castes by confiscating their capacity to control English language which is a global means to access knowledge and gaining epistemic power. It may be noted that the Dalits have gained unprecedented social visibility through the Dalit discourse which is made available in English for the readers of the world. In the case of Northeast India, it

has emerged as the region with the highest density of empowered tribes with strong competence in the English language.

English in the Northeast:

In the Northeast, English education has a completely different social history than in Bengal or in the other parts of India as here the caste dimension of English education was completely absent. Caste, in fact, is an alien concept in the Northeast, especially among the ethnic communities. Missionaries were the primary catalysts to start modern education in the region in the mid-19th century which did not essentially begin with the introduction of English alone, but rather with the process of institutionalizing the vernaculars that led to the development of several indigenous oral languages of the region. Contributions of Miles Bronson to the development of Assamese language are legendary. The Welsh Missionary, Thomas Jones is known for developing the Khasi language, Nathan Brown for writing the first book on the Garo vocabulary, Dr. Edwin W. Clark and his wife Mary Mead for developing the Ao language, Dr. Rivenburge for developing the Angami language, and J.H. Lorrain, and F.W. Savidge of Arthington Mission for developing the Lushai or the Mizo language in the late 19th century. However, the list can go on.

So, the history of English education in the Northeast is associated with the rise of the vernacular. Despite the plurality of languages in the region, (with about 225 of the 450 tribal communities of India and about 220 different languages) it is English that has brought the communities closer to each other with a distinct collective identity. Contrary to what the NEP 2020 has defined, in the Northeast, English is not the language of the 'elites', rather it is the language of the masses, the commoners. It is even the state language of three of the tribal states of the Northeast. English is a means of ordinary communication, which of course surprises the mainlanders, putting them in a rather embarrassing situation following the sudden reversal of power equation between an elite mainlander and a common Northeasterner. After all, English in the Indian context has evolved as the language of the educated. English education is also instrumental

deliver justice to the dead or injured, and worst no judicial follow up, these tragic incidents will continue to take more lives.

The driver in this ghastly incident has no right to be pardoned. At the same time, truckers should have the moral responsibility to behave more humanly so that our morning news will not be sour in future. Let us hope that this case would not wither away, as happened to all such tragic cases from the beginning of 2021 and those before it. Only stern punishment will serve as a deterrent to murder.

Yours etc
W. Passah
Nongkrem.

Religions must build, not destroy

Editor
I am writing this letter to protest the recent anti-Muslim riots in Jahangirpuri, Delhi, on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, when a local mosque was desecrated by Hindu extremists. According to one report: "A Hindu mob smashed beer bottles inside the mosque, put up saffron flags there and chanted Jai Shri Ram [Hail Lord Ram]." I protest, as well, other communal riots between Hindus and Muslims during Hanuman Jayanti and Ram Navami in various states of India.

While all this has to be painful, frightening, and

in making Mizoram into one of the most literate states in India. English, in fact, has become a local language of the Northeast where one of the consequences of colonialism has been turned into one of its biggest advantages. English, in fact, is one of the local languages of Northeast now.

Significantly, 'Northeast literature' has become a major literary canon worldwide only through the English language. More importantly, the most eminent authors of this literature are the tribal and women authors. Unlike the authors of the IWE (Indian Writing in English) literature, none of them are from any metropolis, rather most of them are from interior tribal villages of the hill states.

Noted African author, Chinua Achebe had argued that it was English that could give Nigeria its national literature. Writings in the ethnic languages could produce only the local literature of the respective communities. English has a similar status in Northeast India. Adoption of Hindi would destroy one of the greatest cultural gains the region could achieve by mastering and postcolonising the language. It took almost a hundred and fifty years for the region to come this far, to be much closer to the world despite being on the periphery. In this respect, no other tribal region of India could achieve what the Northeast could.

Hindi as a language carries the 'memory of caste' whereas English has no such memory. (Neerav Patel). Therefore, the Dalit scholars from Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Periyar to Kancha Ilaiah, Chandramohan S. and others have categorically emphasized the importance of English as a means of emancipation for the socially repressed in India. However, the imposition of Hindi, as an apparatus of hegemony, has an apparent goal of trapping the tribe and the natives of the Northeast in the pernicious fold of caste, whose existence could only be justified by being eternally subservient and inferior to the mainland.

An epistemic battle is at hand for the Northeast now, which is far more complicated than political and physical confrontations. The existence of the Northeast as a distinctive cultural territory with its values and vision now depends on how the region responds to this new challenge posed against one of its biggest social capitals – the English language.

(The author teaches in NEHU)

unjust for Muslims, who are every bit as Indian as are Hindus, and while the lives lost needlessly through these riots, point to the main tragedy of post-independent India, which is communalism – such Hindu extremist actions betray the heart and essence of Hinduism itself. This essence preaches the greatest catholicity ever, both through ancient texts, like the Rig Veda, and through the rarefied experiences of great Hindu mystics – like Sri Ramakrishna. These texts and mystics have the same message – that while Truth [i.e. God] is but one, many are the paths to it. Moreover, Hindu bigots desecrate the symbolism and dignity of the saffron color, which stands for the main virtue of the Indian civilization, which is renunciation. Traditionally, saffron has stood for the most radical renunciation of hearth and home, all for the love of God – a renunciation that stands as the surest antidote to capitalism. But today, saffron signifies Hindu violence, communalism, and bigotry. Like all bigots, these extremists, therefore, are enemies (not votaries) of Hinduism. Religions destroy themselves when they destroy other religions.

Yours, etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

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

Prashant Kishor, a ray of light at the end of tunnel for the opposition

By Nitya Chakraborty

Things are heating up in Indian politics as the BJP and the Sangh Parivar prepare for the next phase of assembly elections in the states within this year end as also in 2023, and, eventually, to be followed by the Lok Sabha polls in March-April 2024. After the last round of assembly elections resulting in BJP's retaining power in four states, apprehensions were there that the Modi juggernaut had become invincible. However, the loss of the BJP in all the by-polls announced on April 16 indicates that still there is some hope for the opposition, provided there is proper strategy and the killer instinct of the leadership to take on the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Reports abound that the Shiv Sena will be shortly convening a meeting of the non-BJP chief ministers in Mumbai to discuss the issues concerning the use of the central agencies against the opposition leaders. This meeting will naturally go into the issue of broad-basing the unity of the non-BJP parties to fight the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections two years later. The time is short and the opposition parties will have to tread carefully, so that there is maximum possible areas of understanding among the parties who are honest in fighting the BJP model of Hindu Rashtra undermining the very basics



of Indian constitution.

It is good that the Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has taken the initiative in response to the letter sent by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to the opposition leaders. Uddhav has been emerging as a mature leader of the anti-BJP alliance and it will be a productive exercise as the Shiv Sena supreme is respected now by both Mamata and Sonia Gandhi. Uddhav can invite all the opposition CMs including those belonging to the Congress. NCP supreme Sharad Pawar is there to guide the upcoming conclave so that the alliance consists of the Congress as well as the other non-Congress, non-BJP parties.

Right now, the issue is how prepared is the Congress, the main national party challenging the BJP in the elections, and to what extent will it be in a position to rejuvenate itself to take on effectively the electoral challenge to the BJP in the states where it is the main party against the saffrons. The poll strategist Prashant Kishor is busy undertaking detailed talks with the Congress leaders led by Sonia Gandhi on a joint strategy to ensure the BJP's defeat in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. PK's strategy has not got the green signal yet, but if it happens, that will be positive for the Congress Party.

There are some important elements in PK's concept which minimise the areas of differences between the Congress and the regional parties and underline the importance for the Congress

to focus on the seats where it is the number one or number two party of the opposition against the BJP. PK's note advises the Congress leadership not to spread the resources of the GOP to the areas where there is little chance of success. The party is already cash-starved and it has to use its financial resources judiciously so that optimum results are obtained.

Let us take a look at the Congress's present strength in the Lok Sabha. Out of its 53 members, 28 are from South India. There are 15 from Kerala, eight from Tamil Nadu, three from Telangana and one each from Karnataka and Puducherry. In Punjab, Congress has got eight members from Punjab, three from Assam and two each from Chhattisgarh and West Bengal.

In several states, the Congress has just one member. These include Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal, Goa and Meghalaya. This grim position has to be changed drastically in favour of Congress if the party has to cross 100 seats in 2024 polls. PK has to perform this job which is only possible by adopting an innovative strategy which will facilitate the polling of maximum number of anti-BJP votes in favour of the Congress Party. This requires drastic reorganisation of the party units at

grassroots level, massive collection of resources and ensuring the minimum division of non-BJP votes on the polling day. This is a Herculean task but it is possible with the right strategy.

The Congress leadership may take into account some key factors. The Congress will lose in Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal in the coming Lok Sabha polls. In Kerala, it can lose even 7 to 8 seats out of the present 15 and in Punjab, it will lose a few seats as the AAP spell will continue till the Lok Sabha elections. In Bengal, the Congress will lose both seats; similarly, the BJP too will lose. Trinamool is expected to go back to its old figure of 34. So all these possible losses in the present seats, will have to be compensated by a big win in the Hindi-speaking states as also in Gujarat which PK must be planning.

Congress is most vulnerable where it fights the BJP as a major challenger. In the northern states as also Gujarat, the Congress did very badly despite its initial success in the assembly elections. The party has got potential in increasing its Lok Sabha tally in MP, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Jharkhand, Haryana and Uttarakhand. In these states, the Congress did badly in the 2019 elections compared to its effective strength. These are the states from where the GOP should plan to get a maximum number of seats. How PK organises his poll strategy for the Congress to take on the BJP in the 2024 polls, will be known soon. (IPA Service)

"Manpower without unity is not a strength unless it is harmonized and united properly, then it becomes a spiritual power."

-- Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

The Shillong Times

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Civil Services Day

APRIL 21 is a day dedicated to the nation's civil servants or the humongous bureaucracy that is tasked with running the government of this country. The bureaucracy anywhere in the world runs like a well-oiled machine irrespective of whichever political party runs the government. Civil servants are expected to be non-partisan and objective in their decision-making and not be unduly influenced or come under the pressure of their political masters. But that is easier said than done. When a civil servant is placed at the disposal of a particular minister, a sort of relationship develops after which it is difficult for the bureaucrat to put his foot down and refuse to sign on the dotted lines even when he (gender neutral) knows that what is being asked to be executed is wrong. The flip side is that politicians are vengeful when they don't have their way and the bureaucrat will then be sent on punishment posting. After that the bureaucrat is marked and his reputation for not collaborating in venality precedes him. That's a long-term penalty that the civil servant has to endure. Now who would want to live such a life? After all the IAS/IPS/IFS are an elite service where only the best brains are selected and part of the package of being in this elite service is that for 30 years or more the civil servant lives the good life of perks and privileges.

It is in this context that Civil Services Day ought to be a day of reflection rather than a day of facile celebrations and awards. For those outside the system - the common man - it is frustrating to be caught in the much-touted bureaucratic red tape and to have to run around from one table to the next to get work done. But worse is when a person is also expected to pay bribes simply for getting a signature on a file. It is this greed which has eroded the 'steel frame' and brought infamy to the service. However, it would be wrong to taint all civil servants with the same brush. Some bureaucrats in the State of Meghalaya have been exemplary in the discharge of their duties and are known to be proactive in responding to public complaints. Such officers are however too few and far between.

The Indian governance system does not look for daily outcomes unlike the corporate sector which measures the daily output of an employee and counts the person's cost to the company. In the corporate world its 'perform or perish.' It sounds cruel but it's the only way that companies can survive. Alas! That's asking too much from a staid government system where people are paid for non-performance.

Honouring honest Civil Servants

By Amar Krishna Paul

The Government of India has fixed "April 21" as National Civil Service Day. On this day, India's first Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the newly appointed Administrative Services Officers in 1947. The historic occasion took place at the Metcalf House in Delhi. Patel referred to civil servants as the "steel frame of India" in his inspiring speech. This is, indeed, an occasion for the civil servants to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizens and renew their commitment to public service and excellence in work. The first such function was held in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on April

21, 2006. Satyendranath Tagore, Rabinranath Tagore's elder brother, was the first Indian to qualify the Civil Services Examination in 1864. In 1862, Satyendranath Tagore travelled from India to England to study for the exam. In 1863, he was chosen for the civil service, and after finishing his education in England, he returned to India in 1864. On this day civil servants that have been found to perform their duties with exemplary passion and integrity are awarded so as to inspire others also to discharge their duties with dedication. Awards and honours inspire professionals like civil servants. If a civil servant gets due recognition from competent authority for specific work in the form of award and honour during his/her lifetime then it may be counted as the highest reward for the person. Bureaucrats are being awarded or honoured along in all states of India by different organisations serving at the national and State level from time to time. This can be better understood with a few examples.

21, 2006.

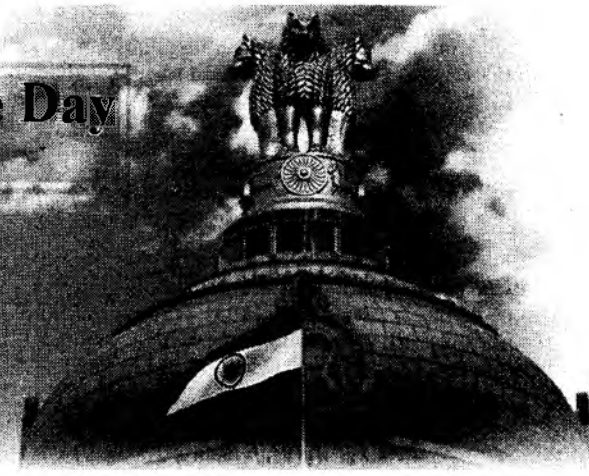
Ministry of Jal Shakti and Jal Jeevan Mission, Government of India, on March 30, 2022 conferred the prestigious Jal Prahari Samman (2022) on Smt. Varnali Deka, DC, Kokrajhar, for working on water conservation. Deka was also presented with the national best electoral practice award while she was the DC of Goalpara, Assam. Importantly, the Central Government has instituted a scheme in 2006 namely, "The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration". It has been kick-started to acknowledge, recognise and reward the extraordinary and innovative work done by districts or organizations of the Central and State governments. The scheme was restructured in 2014 for recognising the performance of district collectors in priority programmes, innovations and aspirational districts. The scheme was restructured again in 2020 to recognise the performance of district collectors towards economic development of different districts. Again, it was revamped with a new approach in 2021 with the objective to encourage "Constructive Competition, Innovation, Replication and Institutionalisation of Best Practices". Under this

to achieve desired outcomes. Therefore, the new approach would be towards assessing performance in a scheme holistically and driven by good governance practices steered by technology. Award categories include the following - a) Scheme for Promoting "Jan Bhagidari" or People's Participation in Poshan Abhiyan; b) Scheme for Promoting Excellence in Sports and Wellness through Khelo India Initiative; c) Scheme for Digital Payments and Good Governance in PM Sva Nidhi Yojana; d) Scheme for Holistic Development through "One District One Product" Initiative; and e) Scheme for Seamless End to End Delivery of Service without Human Intervention; In addition to the above, there are as many as eight awards in 'innovation category'. Two awards each for Central level and State level initiatives while four awards are being given to district level initiatives respectively for its demonstration of innovation, which is sustainable and can be replicated. In early January this year, the Central Government re-

vised the prize money for PM's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. It was doubled from Rs10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh in 2021. The PM Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2021-22 consists of a (i) trophy, (ii) scroll and (iii) an incentive of Rs. 20 lakh to the awarded district or organization to be utilised for implementation of project or programme or bridging resource gaps in any area of public welfare. Frankly speaking, India's governance model has become a 'mass movement' with people responding to the Prime Minister's call for 'people's participation' in major schemes. Civil servants

must become enablers and facilitators to bring about "Ease of Life" for the common man. The way forward: India is a vibrant democracy, a gifted technological power and an emerging global player. The competence of its civil service systems and the robustness of its institutions will be important factors in determining India's future. Civil servants may think about their good health and enquire about the health of common people, whether they have been exercising, controlling their weight and getting their medical check-ups done regularly. They may emphasise on this because physical fitness is not just about their impressive appearance in decent clothes, but their official work demands it. To conclude, I would say that civil servants are the torchbearers of the subcontinent. They are considered as good examples in society. Honest and sincere bureaucrats are serving the nation and the global community and leading from the front to build India into a Vishva Guru by 2047 when the nation will be celebrating 100 years of Independence. (The writer is Principal, Creative Academy, GS Road, Lachit Nagar, Guwahati)

National Civil Service Day



Why should I pay tax?

By Kamal Baruah

With the beginning of the Fiscal Year from 1st April, the Tax Clock starts ticking afresh and citizens voiced their displeasure over TDS (Tax Deduction at Source) from annuity, salary and interest while banks deduct Tax on behalf of Government of India. The concept of TDS is to collect tax from the very source of income and remit the same into the account of ITD (Income Tax Department). But many people raise the question 'why should I pay tax?' as they're paying for their food, house, travel, medical treatment, road tax and what not. Even on National Highways one has to pay toll tax.

The conflict in Ukraine imposes further economic stress around the world on a system stretched by Covid-19. Inflation eats away the buying power of money. People wait in anticipation expecting additional tax relief from the Union Budget as they feel that the tax rates are quite high, but even the government tries to juggle many hats and get the balancing act right to meet the expectations of the common man, inflation and fiscal deficit. The counter question would be that if the government maintains nil inflation, there is no need for DA hikes. Government justified DA hike based on the inflation number for Government employees and pensioners but this is not the case with the rest of India. The common man struggles to manage household spending due to an alarming rise in prices.

India's personal taxation has been liberalized after the recommendation of the Tax Reform Committee 1991. The maximum marginal rate has come down from a mind boggling 97.5% during the 70s to a much more manageable 30.9% now. Yet it has just over 6.25%

should also meet long term

TAX

corporations. Though rates are lowered now, the country lacks the desired tax culture. Americans and British contributed their earnings to Income Tax for getting social security and medical facilities virtually without any cost but India doesn't offer such facilities. Healthcare ought to be provided for by the government to all citizens. However taxes are used by the government for carrying out various welfare schemes.

There are many reasons for India's huge rural and underground economies. People don't earn enough to even qualify for income tax slab. Half of India's assets belong to the richest 10% of its people while 95% have earned below 8L per annum that resulted in so many people not filing ITR (Income Tax Return). It's also a human tendency to avoid tax or at least minimize the tax liability. There are growing protests from senior citizens that the tax burden is rising. They blame the tax system which is complicated, while there are exemptions in many sections. Pension received from ex MPs and MLAs are not treated as salaries but as other income hence no TDS. But fellow Indians pay at 5%, 20%, or 30% for slabs between 2.5L-5L, 5L-10L, 10L-12.5L, 12.5L-15L and 15L above respectively. There is a tax rebate of up to Rs. 12,500 in case of earning up to 5L. The Finance Act, 2020 has introduced a new optional tax regime at 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30% for between 2.5L-5L, 5L-7.5L, 7.5L-10L, 10L-12.5L, 12.5L-15L and 15L above respectively.

Direct Tax makes up a significant portion of India's tax generated revenue, where every rupee comes from Income Tax (15p),

Corporation Tax (15p), GST (16p) and Customs (5p). Citizens point out that the Taxation department treats them harshly with punitive provisions in the tax laws. There are various penalties too such as failure to comply with notice, computation of under-reporting and misreporting of income, income from undisclosed sources and receipt of an amount of Rs. 2L or more in cash. Tax filers get into a panic situation for failing to furnish ITR within the due date or else to pay a fine of Rs. 10,000.

But not to worry - maybe one will be able to overcome this. Apart from designing penalty provisions, the Income-Tax Act contains provisions for granting relief from penalty in genuine / deserving cases under the Principal Commissioner or Commissioner of Income-tax. One needs to be very careful while declaring income for paying tax and furnishing ITR within prescribed time. The default or delay in fulfilling one's obligation may result in levy of interest and penalty. ITD bifurcates income as salary, house property, business/profession, capital gain & other sources. Interest from FDs, savings bank, securities, IT refund, gift, winning lotteries, dividend and family pension are some examples of income from other sources.

It's now time to do investment with sensible tax planning from paying unnecessary taxes. Tax outgo could be minimized by estimating Annual Income and considering all the available avenues judiciously. Tax-saving investments are generally long term in nature with certain lock-in periods. One should pick up the instruments carefully, so that, apart from saving tax, such instruments should also meet long term financial goals. PPF, FDs, NPS, SCSS, Life Insurance, Health Insurance and ELSS are most popular investments under Section 80C to get the most out of them.

An individual can continue with the existing tax regime and avail common deductions from section 80C, 80D etc. Else, she/he can opt for the new, concessional tax regime without any commonly availed deductions and tax exemptions. The government has not offered any tax relief to individuals in the last budget because it wants to encourage more people to move to the new tax regime. In fact the new tax regime may be beneficial for those who are using only 80C for tax saving under the old regime. Tax payers end up paying a penalty in self-assessment tax before filing the ITR returns for not paying advance tax liability every quarterly.

Income-tax Act, 1961 came into existence w.e.f. April 1, 1962. India's direct taxation as it is known today has been in force in one form or another even from ancient times. There are references both in Manu-Smriti and Arthashastra to a variety of tax measures. It's only for the good of people that a government collects taxes from them, just as the sun draws moisture from the earth to give it back a thousand fold. So take your mark on July 31, usually the due date to file ITR for individuals and non-audit cases and get set to collect TDS certificate Form No. 16/16A from deductors such as Bank/Treasury and 26-AS from TRACES for happy e-filing/e-verifying this time. And don't forget to link Aadhaar with PAN by sending SMS or else you face another penalty.

Letters to the Editor

Good governance is not about freebies

Editor, Leaders of political parties that are in power in states, especially leaders of parties that have recently come to power, are eager to please voters. They do not want to cause displeasure to voters. The freebie culture followed by some leaders is a strategy to cling on to power. The Punjab government's recent announcement that 300 units of free electricity will be given to every household indicates that the freebie culture is spreading to different parts of the country. It is estimated that free power will cost the State Exchequer Rs. 5000 crores every year. Another promise by the AAP government is that every woman, will get a monthly cash of Rs.1000. This will cost the Exchequer Rs.12,000 crores every year. It is ironic that in spite of Punjab being a revenue-deficit state, the AAP government is not worried about how it will find the money to fulfil the promises. In its frantic efforts to expand to other states, the AAP wants to prove that it is keeping its election promises.

In fact, offering such freebies is not a responsible and right way of govern-

nance. What is the logic of wasting such a substantial amount of money, that too, in a debt-ridden state like Punjab? Instead of spending money for giving freebies, the government could utilise the money for infrastructure development and developments in health and education sectors. Such thoughtless action will further weaken the already flagging economy. Politicians who are short-sighted in their approach to development are not worried about the future. The freebie culture has spread to others states like Himachal Pradesh. There the government has promised 125 units of free power to all households. In addition to this, rural households will get free water.

Such governments must realise that what people really need is not freebies but good governance and a responsible government. Governments must use money wisely and work towards the welfare of people.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

How not to repeat the Umthing tragedy

Editor, The Umthing tragedy informs us that the central

divider on highways is no longer safe when the trucks can carry out such athletic maneuvers as to jump over the central divider, stay mid-air to smash a tourist taxi killing two persons on the spot. It's a pity that in this modern world of science and technology, we do not have odometers with memory as in advanced countries that would have offered a strong case against the trucker. To emulate the west like having the speed radar with powerful camera, to link the registration number plates to the agency in a split second, to show on mobile phones the crimes with fine and penalties left, before the driving license seized, is not possible in India in the immediate future. And if the traffic police are least bothered about taking action on those with concealed registration plates or folded up as done in hit and run cases, or in shady coal transportation, the idea would melt down to nothing. We only have to rely on the judiciary.

Let's not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with truck owners that are influential persons in the government and society. How I wish the accident tribunal of erstwhile Assam is revived. That would fine the culprit and compensate the victim or his/her family. That golden era of humanity is gone forever. Such heavy penalties would deter the driver from reckless driving. One

weakness of our community is that we are reconciled too soon without a thought for the future. We attribute even deaths by accident to the will of God.

I have repeatedly written to the Transport Minister, the DTO East Khasi Hills, and last March 2021, to the Secretary Transport (GOM), with no reply. Only one reply pertained to the unlawful plying of JCBs on public roads. The letter to the Under Secretary Transport, copied to me and written by PM Sangma Commissioner of Transport, was to allow plying of JCBs only before sunrise and after sunset, which was not what I had asked for. Leaving that aside, other vital points, enclosed in my letter were as follows.

Bumper :-Legally bumper is a horizontal bar at rear and front of automobiles. JCBs are not automobiles but earth movers with material soft and yielding to cushion impact on collision, to minimize death and injury. MV acts 2019, ordered all extra reinforcements of steel angles or pipes be removed from bumpers. Those driving such vehicles are stopped by traffic police and the reinforcements dismantled. But these trucks with over a tonne of reinforcements are still seen on highways.

Windshield:-as the name implies is to shield drivers on whom our safety lies. But in India the windshield, is a platform to paste poster

of celebrities and scenery. What does the MV Act say about this?

Elephant's legs on a horse. Traffic police witness this every day. The truck's tyres have one foot on public property. And the offences go on and on. Most of us don't know that those vehicles dare not cross Meghalaya jurisdiction, as Assam police would not spare them.

Airhorn:-Nowhere in the civilised world are airhorns allowed. The Supreme Court once banned it. But corporates who make trumpets and air devices managed to circumvent the laws. Air tank are never tampered with in civilised countries. The airhorn sounds are deafening and hurt babies with delicate eardrums; some even to become deaf permanently.

Passengers and roadworthiness. When the night bus to Silchar overturned at Brishymot, from pictures appearing in the newspapers, the tyres seemed not to have rubber for grip. And lives were lost because the owner toys with the lives of passengers. Worse there is no insurance cover.

Passenger worthiness: In Meghalaya a tall person cannot sit properly and there is no leg space. You have to be athlete of renown to climb the footboard of Shillong buses. And the most dangerous is that buses are used as trucks as they are allowed to load heavy materials on the roof. The bus that overturned

at 3rd mile Upper Shillong, a few years ago, and killed a pedestrian was because of heavy, loading on the rooftop.

Seat belt: Seat belt works on principles of inertia, same as in an aeroplane. In Shillong within 10 Km radii, the seat belt is meaningless as vehicles cannot pick up speed. However, the law says that a co-passenger without seat belt is committing a crime. The driver is aware of impending accidents in case co-passenger is deep in slumber and in case of an accident his/her head would smash the wind shield.

That's all one can share to enlighten the public. The judiciary should from now on pursue accident cases to their logical end. And if the Umthing tragedy could make the truckers feel the real teeth of the law then we can hopefully witness fewer tragedies. Lastly, pointing out these do's and don'ts too frequently, makes me feel like a teacher repeating stories to Kindergarten children. The institution of DTO needs a complete overhaul. We need a judicious person with a degree in automobile engineering and technology to head the Department.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

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

"Once you lose your credibility, you can never restore it."

— Reinhold Messner

The Shillong Times

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Truth and Mewani

THE arrest of young Dalit leader and Independent MLA Jignesh Mewani in Gujarat by the Assam Police and his airlifting to Guwahati showed how the dirty tricks department of the political establishment worked overtime to achieve its hidden aims. A team of the Assam Police flew in post haste to Gujarat and headed for a circuit house where the MLA was staying to effect the arrest. All these happened within a matter of a day after an Assam BJP activist filed a police complaint in Kokrajhar, saying Mewani had, through a social media post, attempted to disturb communal peace. The allegation is far-fetched and the speed with which the police acted on it obviously meant there was pressure and even a plot at the highest level to immobilize the young Gujarat politician.

What Mewani stated in his post was that Prime Minister Modi seemed to look at Godse — killer of Mahatma Gandhi — as God; and that the PM should instead try restoring religious and communal amity. Considering the manner in which netizens make free-wheeling observations on social media, this was no provocation. For the common eye, the plot to jail Mewani was not the brainwork of the BJP activist in Assam but he might have acted as a pawn in the hands of someone at the highest level. The context is important. Gujarat will have assembly polls in the next few months; and anti-BJP forces are already making serious attempts at dislodging the BJP from power there. The Congress is hoping to have Mewani on its side while the AAP of Arvind Kejriwal is entering the poll fray there. New alliances are attempted against the BJP. This is making the saffron party jittery. Keeping the influential Dalit leader with a large fan following away from the state for the coming months should help the BJP. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has said, rightly, that truth cannot be jailed. Truth, though, can be covered for some time -- as the Gujarat government did on Thursday when it erected large curtains to hide the slums in Ahmedabad before British PM Boris Johnson passed by.

Several human rights activists who spoke up for truth in Gujarat are having a hard time, facing a series of cases and threats to their lives after PM Modi took power in Delhi. Their passports have been impounded and there have been complaints of mental harassment. It is advisable that the BJP as the main political establishment and its governments stand on a moral high ground and avoid indulging in excesses and rights violations.

Elections 2023: Issues? Which Issues? We don't recall any...

By Patricia Mukhim

The number of aspiring politicians has grown by the day. Sitting MLAs and the wannabe variety are all geared up to join this or that party. The churning is akin to blending something in a mixer. Soon we will lose count of who has joined which party; who could not get tickets from which party and the new party that he/she has joined. It's a confusing scenario. Naturally voters too cannot be blamed for being totally confused as to which button to press on, inside that sacred booth where only they and their emotions talk with each other and argue about who to vote for. It's pretty much like watching a movie where an actor faces the mirror and sees another vision of himself there who's accusing him of many character flaws he was unaware of. I guess that's conscience speaking. Alas! During elections, the conscience goes on a holiday and emotions take over our being... all of us, including the so-called intellectuals and the rationalists who believe they think and vote with their minds and reason.

The book, "The Political Brain" by clinical psychologist and political strategist (a deadly combination by any standards), Drew Westen, speaks of the futility of appealing to voters on the basis of issues. Westen concludes that the vision of mind that has captured the imagination of philosophers, cognitive scientists, economists and political scientists since the 18th century — a dispassionate mind that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusion — bears no relation to how the mind and brain actually work. When campaign strategists start from this vision of their mind, their candidates typically lose. In short, Westen concludes that politicians by and large have no long-term vision. They focus on the immediate because that's what people remember and they don't have to wrack their brains too much to imagine a future they don't know or a past they want to leave behind. What matters to voters therefore is the here and now. So why blame politicians for not having a vision when that envisioning is not going to win them votes.

In recent times we have been reading a lot about the garbage strewn all over Jowai for want of a dumping ground (respectfully referred to as a landfill). By all counts if people were to use their rational minds, then the present MLA of the area Wailadmiki Shylla will not win the 2023 elections. But ask anyone privately and they will say, "But what can the MLA do when people are not ready to give land for a

landfill?" People forget that the Urban Affairs Minister, Sniawbhalang Dhar whose remit it is to find the landfill is from the same party as Shylla — the NPP and the two are related. Hence the MLA has not been heard to be aggressively tackling the garbage issue because he would otherwise embarrass his boss and the man behind his winning the last election. For now, the Jowai garbage problem seems to have a quick-fix solution — bury it in an abandoned mine. But at what cost to the environment? Sure the garbage will be filled and then what happens to the water bodies surrounding that place thereafter? The decom-



posed garbage is sure to leach into water bodies. That said, let's gird our loins and check out what are the sexy issues before the rational and thinking people of Meghalaya.

Issue 1: Corruption in high places. Does it matter? Of course, it does but who cares? If corruption was an issue then how come political aspirants want to join the NPP which is driving the MDA Government which has been responsible for illegal transportation of coal and which is ongoing even today. People who visited Garo Hills recently said they saw trucks being loaded with coal at Rongjeng. They were too scared to take pictures though.

Issue 2: Health - maternal and infant deaths, women's anemia, lack of health facilities in the rural, unreachable areas. No properly equipped cancer treatment centre in Government hospitals. Do these issues matter? They may do so for academicians who read the stark statistics provided by NITI Aayog or National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and for the thinking, rational class but not for the large majority of voters. Not even women themselves. At the end they vote for the person who diverts their mind away from these issues because they are too grim to cogitate on.

Issue 3: Education: Teachers' salaries unpaid for several months. Their other demands such as integrating them into a single deficit system remains unmet. Teachers have to hit the streets to demand

their rights. Quality of education in rural areas is questionable. Quality of textbooks prescribed by MBOSE are decrepit. But are these issues going to influence voters at the polling booth? The only people who care for the above issues are the teachers themselves. The rest of the voting population will vote the way their hearts dictate.

Issue 4: Roads and bridges: Most parts of rural Meghalaya are without motorable roads. Farmers carting products to the market have to grin and bear. Most of their products rot for want of connectivity. Pregnant women deliver inside ambulances or taxis. The sick are half dead

by the time they reach hospitals. Does this issue matter? Yes, it does to the people living in those godforsaken areas but when they go to vote they don't do it en-bloc. They vote based on their closeness to the candidate; its payback time because the candidate helped them during a bereavement or helped them buy school books and uniforms for their kids or paid their hospital bills. Emotions will overflow and that will decide which way the election cookie crumbles.

Issue 4: Agriculture: Farmers are largely the affected constituents. What they should be demanding are processing units, cold storages, marketing facilities initiated by the government, crop insurance in view of freak weather conditions. Livestock rearing is still a risky zone because of the lack of insurance and also the technical know-how to deal with immediate problems such as animal flu/bird flu etc. This issue matters a lot to rural Meghalaya but here too farmers don't vote as a constituency. They vote as individuals because farmers don't sit to discuss issues before elections. Even the Farmers' Union is unable to make the farmer's issues important enough during elections. Result? Farmers vote as individuals; to each his own. And then after a Government is formed, farmers will realise they defeated their own purpose.

Issue 5: Environment: Does anyone care enough about the Lukha and Lunar Rivers even in Jaintia Hills?

Who cares about the Wah Umkhrah or Wah Umshyri in Shillong? Have these rivers ever become election issues? Has garbage collection and management ever been an issue in the Greater Shillong constituencies? Does tree felling in the Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills, East and West Khasi Hills become a matter of concern for anyone? No, we see trucks carrying logs that are a few inches in girth. We only gasp in horror, gossip about it, put it up on social media, get comments galore and that's the end of the story. Illegal coal mining with its hazardous consequences has never been a serious enough issue. Hence the likes of Sniawbhalang Dhar who continually plead that rat hole, coal mining is an age-old tradition in Meghalaya will continue to be re-elected because no one really cares enough to want to stop illegal coal mining. Do people living beyond East Jaintia Hills empathise with the residents of Sutnga Elaka who breathe polluted air due to coke units? No, in the end we all vote for selfish reasons.

Issue we are likely to vote for en-masse: Since as Drew Westen says, people vote with their hearts and not with their heads so the issues that trigger our emotions are those that make up the lyrics of election songs and phawar (chants). Those will be about "Jaitbynriew ha tmier riat" (the people perched on a cliff — cliff-hanger literally. But they have been on that cliff for 50 years now without the fear of falling or the hope of rising). Emotions will be kindled around the issue of the "jaitbynriew" which is under threat of being subsumed by the non-tribals who have taken away everything that belongs to us — our land (How with the Land Transfer Act in place?) Oh yes, they do it by marrying tribal/Khasi women. So let's pass a law to disenfranchise all Khasi women marrying non-tribals and their children too. Yes, that makes a perfect emotional election appeal. And this will win votes. This is also what's happening in the country at the moment. The majority Hindu community is feeling acutely threatened by the minority Muslims and Christians.

This is how politicians in Meghalaya have won elections and will continue to win the 2023 elections. This is how the people of Meghalaya have been defeated for 50 years and stuck in a rut. We sign our own death sentence. After all, no one puts a gun on our heads while we vote. Its free will and we sign up for being where we are today.

As for voting for a 'Change,' forget it, we love the status quo. Tye more things change the more they remain the same. Long Live the Jaitbynriew!

Congress facing a major credibility crisis in Assam

By Sagarneel Sinha

The main Opposition party in the north-eastern state of Assam, the Congress, is going through a crisis. Many party leaders see no hope in the grand old party, which was once the dominant party in the state. They are now looking for greener pastures in other parties. The exit of Ripun Bora, the former state Congress president, from the Congress to join the Trinamool Congress, almost a non-existential player in the state, is just an outcome of the churning going on inside the grand old party.

Ripun Bora isn't the first senior Congress leader to quit the party. Last year, Sushmita Dev, who was the prominent woman face of the party, also left the grand old party to join Mamata Banerjee's TMC. Apart from them, Rupjyoti Kurmi from the Upper Assam region left the party to join the ruling BJP. Last month in the Rajya Sabha Polls, the Congress lost the seat it had contested. The combined Opposition had the numbers and the Congress had expected to win the seat. But the party failed due to internal infighting and also its growing distance from former allies, Badruddin Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front and

AIUDF, a party viewed by the Assamese people as a communal party, that cost it heavily. The party almost got wiped out in the Upper Assam region. In other Assamese dominated areas also, the party performed badly.

No doubt that Sushmita is a young leader but she left the Congress when she was no longer a member of the Silchar Lok Sabha seat, her family bastion. The seat falls in the Barak Valley region, a region divided between Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims. A large section of the Bengali Hindus are currently the supporters of the saffron party while Bengali Muslims are divided between Congress and AIUDF. Although in recent times there has been an increase in support for the grand old party among the Bengali Muslims, TMC hasn't yet made any significant gains in the region, despite Sushmita becoming the face of the party. So what Ripun Bora brings to the table of TMC is a big question. For now, at least one can say that TMC is trying to get the vote bank of the Congress and by inducting Bora, the party is trying to get a foothold among the Assamese community. How things unfold in the future



Bodoland People's Front, which now extends support to the state government of BJP led NDA. Interestingly, Ripun Bora was the party's candidate for the Upper House. Due to this defeat, the grand old party no longer has any representative in the Rajya Sabha.

Ripun Bora's exit is likely to harm the party's image, but the most potential damage the party got was the exit of Rupjyoti Kurmi, who was the party's face among the tea tribes. Last year, when senior leaders like Ripun lost their seats, Kurmi won from the Mariani assembly seat for the fourth consecutive time. Although Kurmi's exit wasn't discussed much outside Assam like the exits

for TMC in the state remains to be seen in this northeastern state.

Coming back to the situation of the Congress, it is a fact that the grand old party failed to reorient itself and present itself as an alternative against the BJP. For the party, the defeat of the BJP was the utmost priority. Blinded by the idea to anyhow defeat the BJP, Congress allied with a party like AIUDF only to consolidate the Muslims of the state. In doing so, the grand old party didn't bother to understand the sentiments of the Hindu Assamese community and also the tribals, mostly Hindus.

Even now the Congress is confused about its re-

"A large section of the Bengali Hindus are currently the supporters of the saffron party while Bengali Muslims are divided between Congress and AIUDF. Although in recent times there has been an increase in support for the grand old party among the Bengali Muslims. TMC hasn't yet made any significant gains in the region, despite Sushmita becoming the face of the party."

of Sushmita or Ripun, his exit was one of the most important losses the grand old party suffered — and it was the BJP that gained from this.

True that Ripun Bora was a senior leader of the Congress. At the same time, it is also a fact that he lost the Gohpur assembly seat of the Sonitpur district to BJP's Utpal Borah in the last year's assembly polls. He was then the president of the state unit and was also one of the main brains for forging the Grand Alliance, which included AIUDF, BPF and the three Communist parties — CPI, CPI(M) and CPI(ML)(L) — and some small community-based parties. And it was this decision of the Congress to ally with

lition with AIUDF. Last year, the party severed ties with Ajmal's party only to come into an understanding with the latter for the Rajya Sabha polls. But here too, the Congress lost because its candidate Ripun Bora failed to get not only the votes of all Congress MLAs but also the votes of all the AIUDF MLAs. Now, again Congress is busy attacking Ajmal and his party.

The Congress is in a declining state in its former bastion — and for this crisis, the grand old party has to only blame itself. However, it seems that the party isn't bothered about this and is still busy attacking the BJP only, instead of putting its own house in order. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Pliant to BJP's dictum!

Editor,
The recent announcement of our Union Home Minister Amit Shah to make Hindi a compulsory subject up to Class X has stirred up a hornet's nest in many parts of India. A vehement reaction has emanated from the South, especially from Tamil Nadu, and from several states of the North-East. However it's no less amusing to see that our Chief minister and his Deputy P. Tynsong have, on the flip side not stood up to oppose such controversial and contentious proposal of Amit Shah. Rather they have stated that they are in favour of Hindi being taught as a compulsory subject in Meghalaya.

It beats me how the NPP, being a uniquely separate party purportedly different from the Hindutva oriented party like the BJP, could champion or espouse such an identical parochial programme? Viewed from this standpoint it unerringly indicates that our present ruling party and its associated

alliances like UDP et al are literally pliant to the dictates of BJP in not raising even a whimper of protest over this issue which is fraught with far reaching consequences. In this context, our political leaders should take a leaf out of what the BJP President of Tamil Nadu, Annamalai, himself said when he took a potshot at Amit Shah regarding the enforcement of Hindi. His statement goes, "No need to learn Hindi to prove we are Indians". In fine, Meghalaya is per se unfortunate that at this critical juncture when the country is currently under the throes of communal tension we have a set of leadership that possess feet of clay and who are lacking the quantitative spirit and the moral fibre and reasonableness at large!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh
Via email

The writings on the wall

Editor,
Deepa Majumdar's letter "Religion must build not

destroy" (ST April 20, 2022) is very thought provoking. And looking at the silence of Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the top leaders who could quench the flames of communalism, we are at a loss for words. The country called India is in great jeopardy with our Muslim friends not getting sufficient attention of the judiciary. Unless the judiciary acts quickly and effectively, the Muslims would never feel safe and secure in their own country — a country where the Constitution guarantees right to freedom of religion and a country that is built on the sweat and tears or people of all religions and faiths who stood as one during the freedom struggle.

What's more dangerous is the attempt of the BJP-RSS to rewrite history where the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi is now a national patriot as if India got its Independence only in 2014. And most devastating of all, which only few know is the constant interaction of Israelis and Hindus to achieve their goals, Palestine for Jews and India for Hindus.

We can only pray and hope.
Yours etc
M. Khyriem
Shillong 14

Covid cases on the rise

Editor,
The alarm signal has been sounded as the number of Covid-19 cases are on the rise daily in some parts of the country. Shillong is bustling with tourists who come here to enjoy themselves but who knows whether they are coming from the Covid 19 hit areas or not. It is observed that no one follows the masking protocols. People have also forgotten social distancing etc. It is even noticed that our own people are hardly following the protocols. You will hardly find even 10% who follow the protocols. It is high time that the State Health Department awakens to the dangers ahead before the situation gets out of control so that they don't repent thereafter. It has also been noticed that the booster doses for those beyond 18

years are not available as there is no stock of the dose vaccine. Whatever is available is only for those beyond 60 years and above. Therefore the Health department should take note of this and make available the vaccines for all who are eligible for the same.

Yours etc.,
SL Singhania,
Via email

National Civil Service Day

Editor,
On the occasion of National Civil Service Day today which is observed on April 21 every year, I extend my heartiest greetings to all IAS and MCS cadres serving in Meghalaya. May they be blessed with good health and wisdom to persevere in re-dedication to public service. let them not be driven by self-aggrandisement which seems to have been the trend for quite a number of years when they seemed to contest/connive with political masters of the state to own the wealth of the state.

We hope that these cadres should prove themselves before all government employees and the public in general that they are role models in public service, driven by justice, honesty and fair play in everything they do and above all to be exemplary in punctuality and discipline which are unashamedly lacking or disappearing in public service today. We, once again, expect the IAS and MCS here not to fail us by reforming themselves and not be slaves of the system, by performing, delivering and transforming the public delivery system as they are one of the most highly paid categories of government employees and that from the public exchequer. Happy National Civil Service Day to all civil servants once again.

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

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

"The universe is not required to be in perfect harmony with human ambition."

— Carl Sagan

The Shillong Times

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Blatant denial by State Govt

AN internet news portal showed coal trucks passing unchecked after 10 pm until the wee hours of morning. People who visit Garo Hills vouch that coal trucks by the dozens are parked near coal depots loading coal. Recently the State Government told the Meghalaya High Court that coal mining has stopped. Residents of Upper Shillong certify to the fact that hundreds of coal trucks ply through that route daily. They all come from West Khasi Hills. Hence the State Government appears to be lying through its teeth. It is therefore in the fitness of things that the Meghalaya High Court should appoint retired Justice BP Katakey of Gauhati High Court to ensure compliance of its orders to stop rat hole mining sans a policy that follows the MMDR Act 1957. Justice Katakey was formerly head of the NGT eastern zone and had done his best within the constraints faced by the Tribunal with its wings being clipped. Hopefully, Justice Katakey will now be able to play a more assertive role to check state illegality.

The state is supposed to maintain the rule of law at all times. That is its prime duty and those elected take a pledge to serve the Constitution. But as witnessed over the years since 1950 the state has itself become the biggest violator of principles laid down by the Constitution hence the judiciary has had to open its doors to the public to file their grievances through the public interest litigation (PIL) route. While there have been a few cases of misuse of this route, by and large the public is able to bring to the doors of the judiciary such blatant acts of violation of the laws by the state or its agents.

What pushes interested parties to continue with illegal coal mining activities is because politics is heavily reliant on the coal economy. The state has a sacred duty to protect the environment but this has turned into a sordid joke because it is the state which is now the biggest violator of environmental norms be it in granting mining leases even within forest areas or clearing off forests for exploiting coal and limestone. The state has made pious noises about dredging the Umiam Lake which is heavily silted with garbage and soil from anthropogenic activities around the Lake and also because the Umiam has become the sole repository of all effluents from the rivers draining into it. But without the High Court's intervention all those pious declarations would have been just lip service. Without the judiciary, governance has come unstuck in Meghalaya.

Healing with herbs & chants Knowledge of traditional healthcare and the need to preserve it

By Omarlin Kyndiah

Indigenous knowledge has no single definition; however, it may be defined as knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society that provides the infrastructure for agriculture, healthcare, food preparation, environmental conservation, and other life processes at the local level. It is part of the identity of indigenous tribes. It has been regarded as an important commodity in global health development.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its recommendations on Health for All Declaration (1978) highlighted the need to include local people, their traditions, and practices in primary healthcare.

WHO defines traditional medicine as 'the health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques, and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being.

Herbal medicine in traditional medical practice is an important resource that can be mobilised for the attainment of the common goal of health for all. These herbal medicines have contributed significantly to man's struggle against diseases. In recent years, interest in the use of herbal medicines has increased. Herbal medicines are used in most countries within the state healthcare system or in communities and private practices outside the state system.

Traditional knowledge is unique to a given culture or society and the Jaintias who adhere to the traditional beliefs are no exception to this knowledge, particularly in healthcare.

The Jaintias have a rich variety of traditional healing systems. One common practice is known as Prem. For instance, Prem ya ka Tiar is where an elderly with extraordinary folk knowledge uses ginger and chants a spiritual song or mantra. The chanting goes like this, "Ko Syiem Synchar Biskorom Blai, ko jaid ko Thakur ko chanbnein ko chankhyndaw, lurmiet lurchai soodong i pyrthai..." This practice is used to cure intestinal gas, belching, bloating, and flatulence. There are different types of Prem for different ailments.

Back in the old days, when one would travel by train outside the state, parents would give Syin Prem (ginger) to be used during our journey for healing different ailments like diarrhoea, fever, toothache, etc.

Let me narrate a story. When I was a child, I would often have ringworm all over my neck and the infection worsened during winter. No matter how frequently I visited a dermatologist and applied the prescribed antifungal cream, there was no sign of a cure.

In the winter of 1986, my maternal uncle, Khroo Kyndiah, took me to my home town Jowai where we went to a traditional healer by the name of Waheh Kento Sumer, who is no more. Early in the morning, he took

(6 km from 8th Mile in Jaintia Hills) came to heal him. He pressed the palm with his fingernails. Within a week the swelling and the rashes disappeared.

Snakebite is a major public health problem in many developing countries. Farmers are particularly vulnerable to snakes. There are more than 3,000 known species of snakes of which around 300 are poisonous. In India, out of 216 species, approximately 53 are poisonous. Traditional healers of snakebite are a vanishing breed. In Jowai, Late Tingboi Thma of Loomkyrwiang is a famous healer who has saved many lives over the years. Unlike traditional healing methods, such as

local incision, herb ingestion, application of snake stones, and tattooing, Thma's healing processes involved some rites and rituals. Since

ritual, and cultural changes on a global scale. Traditional knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, often in oral form or by way of examples, whereas written sources may not exist at all or only in local languages. Thus, it is imperative to preserve the knowledge held by our forefathers. It is in this context that traditional knowledge should be afforded effective protection.

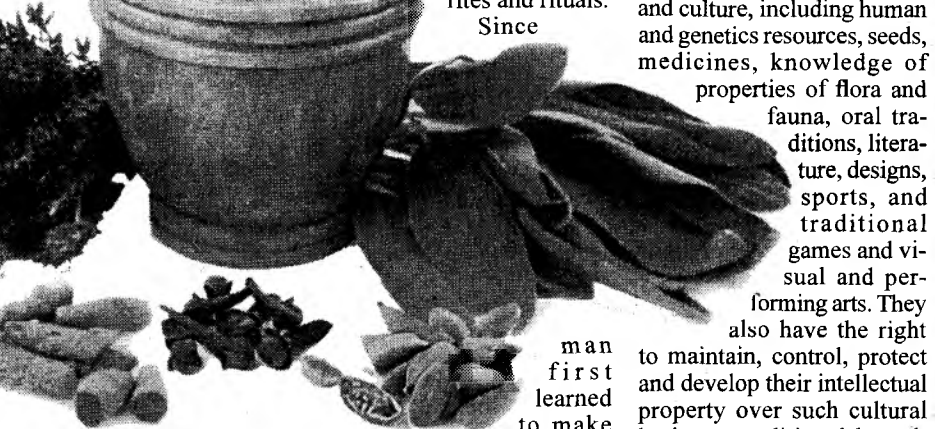
Throughout the world, indigenous people and local communities have developed a wealth of traditional knowledge that they wish to protect and promote. Yet, few have used the intellectual property system to do so. Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007) is an important reference in this regard: "Indigenous people have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their science, technologies, and culture, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of

properties of flora and fauna, oral traditions, literature, designs, sports, and traditional games and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expression. It's further declared that "In conjunction with the indigenous people, states shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of their rights."

In recognition of the value and preservation and promotion of the traditional knowledge system, Sein Raj Niamtre Shillong had instituted the Jaintia Indigenous Knowledge Centre (A Centre of Herbal Health Care & Other Traditional Knowledge and Spiritual Healing).

The Centre has been proposed with the objective to promote, preserve and document the indigenous and traditional knowledge, to meet the primary healthcare requirement of the communities, and promote other indigenous systems of health knowledge and spiritual healing practices.

(The writer is Associate Professor & Head Department of Biochemistry St. Edmund's College)



man first learned to make fire 1.7-2 million years ago, burns and scalds have been one of the most common injuries. Folk medicine is their only remedy. A remedy for burn wound healing is practiced to date by the Pnar. One of the prominent traditional healers of burn injuries and boils was Late Litis Kyndiah.

The process of healing is called Slu in diñ, where the healer would use mustard oil and chant on it, which will be used as an ointment and applied to the burn wound. In Shillong, this practice is still in operation by Waheh Duhai Rangad and Ka Durka Passah. This traditional healing is a complex issue involving rituals and is prevalent among members of the Niamtre community.

However, the advent of western culture has had a great impact on the traditional healing system. Today, the survival of indigenous/traditional knowledge is at stake because of rapidly changing natural environments and fast-pacing economic, po-

not have any major impact. So, it is necessary to increase the utility of the language, especially in business areas, government and non-government areas, knowledge, science, court, school and college, which will expand usage of the language."

English language has translated into big economic gains. Knowing English propelled China to become a top goods and services exporter. China's foreign exchange reserves (useful to insulate a country from global economic shocks and managing domestic inflation) is almost \$4 trillion against India's \$570 billion. China is now a \$15 trillion economy against India's \$3 trillion and its exports are more than 6 times of India's. Why only Hindi? We can also learn other diverse language of India as multi-linguality confers many advantages to those who know diverse languages of the country.

Yours etc
V.K. Lyngdoh
Via email

A new level of attacks on Muslims during Navaratri festival Left has to lead the fight against Hindutva forces in the country

By Prakash Karat

The month of April has seen a sharp escalation in the attacks on Muslims by the Hindutva forces. Using the nine-day Navaratri festival beginning on April 2 and culminating on Ram Navami day on April 10, the RSS outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal have in a planned and organised manner utilised the Hindu new year day on April 2 and the Ram Navami processions on April 10 to target the Muslim community.

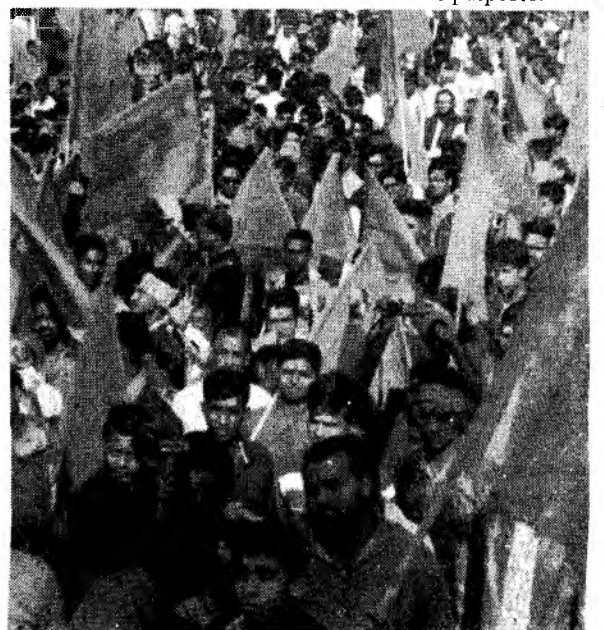
The modus operandi has been the same in various parts of the country – processions with arms are taken out and as they pass through Muslim localities, provocative slogans are raised outside the mosque and skirmishes engineered. This becomes the signal to attack Muslim shops and houses and resort to arson.

That these were not spontaneous communal riots

Jahangirpuri in Delhi, where the police is under the central government. In spite of the Supreme Court ordering that the status quo be maintained, the demolition of shops and houses continued for two hours.

What these country-wide incidents in the past three weeks signify must be properly understood. These are not sporadic communal riots or conventional clashes which occur when some religious activities or groups collide. This is a pre-planned move to take the anti-Muslim campaign to a new level. There is every danger of local level pogroms being launched.

Having spawned a huge army of unemployed youth and with economic distress affecting large sections of society, the hordes mobilised by the Hindutva outfits are being unleashed for divisive and nihilistic purposes.



or clashes became clear when such incidents occurred on April 10 in six states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Goa – where Ram Navami processions led to violence in nearly a dozen places in these states. Earlier, on April 2, the first attack in a Muslim locality took place in Karauli, Rajasthan as a result of a bike rally on Hindu new year day.

The victims in all these places are mainly poor Muslims whose houses and shops were looted or destroyed. In all the BJP-ruled states, the police which did not intervene to stop such attacks later arrested the Muslims who were victims and those who tried to resist the attackers.

Another round of attacks on Muslims occurred in four

The brandishing of arms and vituperative slogans against Muslims by mobs in the garb of religious processions, the provocations outside mosques and the threats to desecrate them and the violent abuse are all designed to cow down and humiliate Muslims. It is a display of Hindu aggressiveness and domination. Any form of opposition, or, counter to the provocations brings the police and State machinery into action. Arrests under the National Security Act and bulldozing the houses and shops of Muslims with no legal sanction whatsoever, are a signal to the minority community that the State can act with impunity against them.

According to the RSS, it is Muslim extremists who are responsible for the violence. The RSS weekly,

"The victims in all these places are mainly poor Muslims whose houses and shops were looted or destroyed. In all the BJP-ruled states, the police which did not intervene to stop such attacks later arrested the Muslims who were victims and those who tried to resist the attackers."

states, a week later, when Hanuman Jayanti processions were taken out on April 16. The same pattern of incidents occurred in Holagunda village in Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, Bhagwanpur in Roorkee in Uttarakhand and Jahangirpuri in Delhi.

That these incidents happened with State patronage became evident when dozens of shops and houses belonging to Muslims in Khargone in Madhya Pradesh were bulldozed directly on the orders of the state home minister. The notorious bulldozer policy of the Adityanath government is now being brought into play in other BJP-ruled states. A bulldozer was stationed in Bhagwanpur in Uttarakhand and a threat was issued that the houses of those Muslims who were wanted by the police would be demolished, if they did not surrender. The bulldozers were sent into

Organiser, claims that "Islamists in Bharat went on a rampage to attack the auspicious occasion of Varsha Pratipada (Hindu New Year) and Ram Navami (the birth anniversary of Lord Rama) celebrations". It goes on to claim that it is a "synchronised jihad". Thus, the aggressor poses as the victim in typical fascist talk.

The nature of the beast confronting us is clear. It is a Hindutva juggernaut which employs vile tactics to establish its hegemony over society and its total domination over the minorities. This menace has to be squarely and determinedly fought by all those who do not want India to become a playground for the fascist ideology of the RSS. The Left, which is uncompromising in its fight against Hindutva authoritarianism, must take the lead. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Crime and punishment

Editor,
It is a matter of serious concern that recently the Supreme Court has commuted the death sentence of a child rapist to a jail term of twenty years. The accused had murdered a 4-year-old girl in 2013 after committing the heinous crime. This, in fact, quite goes against the popular scream for the sternest punishment for the heartless criminal. Contrastingly, one of three judges in the case was a female Justice Bela M Trivedi.

Of course, we all are human beings, and compassion and forgiveness are indeed the highest virtues. Becoming compassionate and forgiving never fails us since they contribute to cleansing our inner selves. But here the question is -- will our sympathy and forgiveness turn the heinous "child rapist" into a saint? Will "all such" criminals sincerely repent and atone for their dastardly acts? One hopes the apex would not be blamed for travesty of justice.

Very interestingly, the Court found it worthwhile to quote a celebrated writer Oscar Wilde while pronouncing the judgment: "Every saint has a past, and every sinner

has a future."

Yours etc.,
Satil Gewali,
Shillong

Why this blatant contempt for law?

Editor,
Over and over again readers and common citizens have expressed their distaste at the VIP culture which rides roughshod over public rights, in various newspapers. The abuse of newsprint and the red beacons by bureaucrats and politicians and even by private individuals using the clout of their VVIP relatives is disgusting to say the least. The Supreme Court of India had come out with a directive to the Union Government to make rules in respect of its observations and also directed the state governments to come up with a set of guidelines. The awful misuse of the siren actually shows the deep sense of insecurity if not an inferiority complex by those who occupy the seats of power and who forget they are actually public servants. The State Home Department as usual is caught napping on this issue as it has failed

to take proactive steps to curb the VIP menace. The Supreme Court too should follow up and monitor how its own orders are being implemented in letter and spirit. Such misuse of the VIP culture shows that the rulers have no respect for the common citizens who are the real masters in a democracy.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,
Via email

English is North East India's stock in trade

Editor,
The editorial "Indulgences in streets" and the special article "English as a social capital of Northeast India" by Jyotirmoy Prodhani, (ST April 20, 2022) were both incisive. To restore our freedoms all types of indulgences in the streets in India should be banned except if they have the permission of the Home Department to ensure that it is peaceful and democratic keeping at bay the communal genie. Prodhani in his article has rightly concluded that "the existence of the Northeast as a distinctive cultural territory

with its value and vision now depends on how the region responds to this new challenge posed against one of its biggest social capitals – the English language." In a country where 56% are none Hindi speaking, let people learn Hindi on their own volition and it should not be imposed. Learning of Hindi should be voluntary; you cannot foist Hindi on any section of people given the diversity of India's mother tongues. Foisting Hindi as a compulsory language is a recipe for disaster. Rapid exchange of knowledge is more easily accessible with knowledge of English – the mother of all languages and the world's most important lingua franca. Times of India has correctly put it "Historical circumstances have given India a natural advantage by equipping a sizeable number of people with knowledge of English". Ashok Agarwal, Academician and member Executive Council, Delhi University rationally put it, "We all speak Hindi, know Hindi but it cannot be used everywhere. In our country, English is still the ruling language. For a better job and five-star culture, English is given priority. In such circumstances, the importance of Hindi gets reduced". He goes on to say, "If Hindi is imposed on people, it will

not have any major impact. So, it is necessary to increase the utility of the language, especially in business areas, government and non-government areas, knowledge, science, court, school and college, which will expand usage of the language."

English language has translated into big economic gains. Knowing English propelled China to become a top goods and services exporter. China's foreign exchange reserves (useful to insulate a country from global economic shocks and managing domestic inflation) is almost \$4 trillion against India's \$570 billion. China is now a \$15 trillion economy against India's \$3 trillion and its exports are more than 6 times of India's. Why only Hindi? We can also learn other diverse language of India as multi-linguality confers many advantages to those who know diverse languages of the country.

Yours etc
V.K. Lyngdoh
Via email

National Civil Service Day – A bygone era

Editor,
Apropos of Phillip Marwein's, "National Service

Day "ST April 22, 2022, of course it is the National Civil Service Day but gone are those civil servants (IAS officers) like TN Seshan or JM Lyngdoh, remembered till today for their handling of elections in tumultuous times of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and for pushing electoral reforms. And JM Lyngdoh was CEC during Atal Behari Vajpayee's prime ministership in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat riots. Back in Assam, we saw two IAS officers who refused to obey orders and preferred to resign. There are still a few more who refused enticements. Today on the contrary it is sad to see civil servants seeking enhanced pensions and looking for benefits for themselves (Greater Shillong township episode). And why is the cabinet never questioned by the bureaucrats on SSA, on illegality of coal, or the downfall of our education system.

If these dare to perform against all odds, then let's hope that next year we will see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Yours etc
F. Lyngdoh
Via email

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

Chrysanthemum's Colourful Petals

By Vikas Datta

Any country or culture's traits would presumably find reflection in its literature. The Japanese, as per foreign perceptions or stereotypes, if you like, are homogenous, exhibit a social and hierarchical sense of identity, value traditions, order and obedience, are polite and reserved, and are known for aesthetic, intricate and dependable craftsmanship.

Does their literature meet this yardstick?

Among the oldest and richest literary traditions, and holding a number of singular achievements, ranging from the world's first-ever novel to making comic books acceptable for reading across various ages — by the famous *manga* — Japanese literature does not correspond to most of these perceived traits.

Take up works, spanning over the last 10 centuries till the present, and you will not find much homogeneity, or subsuming of individual identity, while there will be both overt and covert subversion of order and tradition, breaking of taboos, and a lot of disorder — both personal and social, and even dystopia. But, yes, the well-developed aesthetic sense and craftsmanship predominate.

And women, who have been the flag-bearers of the literary tradition, right from its inception, are still at the forefront.

However, whenever Japanese literature is mentioned, the two names that generally come to mind are Haruki Murakami and Kazuo Ishiguro. This is despite the fact that the latter has grown up in the UK and though his first two books — *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) — have a Japanese setting, it is an "imaginary Japan", as he himself admitted once.

There is also another Murakami — Ryu Murakami, best known for *Audition* (1997, movie 1999) and *From the Fatherland, With Love* (2005) — and about them, it is safest to say that all those who are squeamish should keep away.

Then, those of a certain age may remember Yukio Mishima, particularly for the manner of his passing in 1970.

But like any other vibrant literary tradition, Japanese literature is also a broad expanse cover-

JAPAN AND ITS UNIQUE LITERARY GEMS



ing all genres, from horror to romance, from fantasy to crime, from history to social commentary, and having enough to interest readers.

Aficionados have their own favourites, but for those beginning the journey, let's try to pick up a representative selection of the known and the less-known.

As mentioned, the female courtier Lady Murasaki's 11th-century *The Tale of Genji*, the rollicking tale of a royal prince made a commoner and his turbulent romantic life, is deemed the first-ever novel as well as an invaluable depiction of Heian-era Japan. But Lady Murasaki had competition in her time too, from nearly contemporary women authors.

Though they did not dip into fiction, both these two authors, a noblewoman only known as Takasue's Daughter or Lady Sarashina, after a province where her husband was stationed, and courtier Shonagon Sei have left equally compelling descriptions of their life and musings.

The Sarashina Nikki or *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams: Recollections of a Woman in Eleventh-Century Japan* (trans-

lated Ivan Morris, 1975) can also lay claim to being the first travelogue. Recounting her life from her pre-teen years to well into her 50s, including her travels and pilgrimages, in limpid and evocative prose, it also dwells upon her dreams — with at least 10 figuring in it.

Shonagon's *Makura no Soshi* or *The Pillow Book* (1967) comprises personal contemplations, her take on court events and her contemporaries, and a number of lists, like *Things That Arouse a Fond Memory of the Past* (eg. a night with a clear moon) or *Things That Give a Clean Feeling* (eg. the play of light on water as one pours it into a vessel).

A period of strife marked the next three centuries and its literature was accordingly marked by descriptions of war, and themes of honour and sacrifice.

It was at the end of the seventeenth century, however, that we come upon a masterpiece, which is celebrated poet Matsuo Basho's *Oku no Hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*).

Known as the progenitor of the haiku verse form, though he himself expressed a preference for the *renku* form of collabora-

tive poetry, the poetic account of his travels to the north of Japan — "Every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home" — is enlivened by his poetic oeuvre — eg. *The summer grasses/Of brave soldiers' dreams/The aftermath*.

For the rest, we need to come to the 20th century, as the country's opening up to the world, the resumption of powers by the Emperor, and widespread modernisation began to show their effects.

Natsume Soseki is considered the first modern novelist, and his debut novel *I Am a Cat* (1905, English 1972) is a biting satire on a society torn between tradition and modernity told from the viewpoint of an anthropomorphised domestic cat who uses the grandiloquent pronoun of *wagahai* to describe itself.

Soseki's other works include *Botchan* (1906), another humorously satirical tale about the travails of a teacher posted to a regional school — drawing on his own experiences, the coming-of-age *Sanshiro*, and more.

Authors such as Ryunosuke "Rashomon" Akutagawa, Junichiro Tanizaki (*A Cat, A Man, And Two Women* or *The Makioka*

Sisters) and Yasunari Kawabata (*Snow Country*), Japan's first Nobel Literature laureate, flourished before World War II, known for their masterly language and explorations of love and sensuality in the militarised milieu.

Kenji Miyazawa's classic fantasy *Night on the Galactic Railroad/Night On The Milky Way Train* (1927, English 2014) also dates from this period and has a powerful message of hope and purpose of life.

Japanese literature, however, came into its own with the sweeping post-war changes. Listing even a representative section is no easy task, but let's try with some, now that they are available in English due to the efforts of publishers like Pushkin Press.

Let's begin with crime. While intricate and locked-room crimes such as *The Decagon House Murders* (1987, English 2015) by Yukito Ayatsuji, *The Honjin Murders* by Seishi Yokomizo (1946, English 2019), *Murder in the Crooked House* (1982, English 2019) by Soji Shimada, and Keigo Higashino's *The Devotion of Suspect X* (2012) are known, the pioneer was Seicho Matsumo. His *Inspector Imanshi Investi-*

gates (1961, English 1989) is an atmospheric police procedural, traversing around various areas and demographics, as the police struggle to first identify a badly mutilated body found at a Tokyo railway station, and then, the reason for the murder.

As Japan combined its continuing modernisation with technological innovation to become one of the world's leading economies, the individual and social strains of its work culture also became key plot devices. And again, women led the charge — along with the attack on gender roles and stratification in some unique styles, ranging from the surrealistic to the Kafkaesque.

Hiroko Oyamada's *The Factory Store Woman* (2016, English 2018) is another cautionary tale of how work regimen can overtake lives.

Sayaka's Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* (2016, English 2018) is another cautionary tale of how work regimen can overtake lives. Also relevant for our times of shifting memories and contested narratives is Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* (1994, English 2020), which takes George Orwell's *1984* to a more frightening level, while giving a startling insight into human attachment for objects.

Life, love, and relationships, no matter how strange, never go out of fashion anywhere and for this, Natsuko Imamura's *The Woman in the Purple Skirt* (2019, English 2021) or Hiroki Kawakami's *Strange Weather in Tokyo* (2001, English 2017), or *The Ten Loves of Mr Nishino* (2003, English 2019) or Banana Yoshimoto's *Kitchen* (1988, English 1993) are key picks.

Then, last but not the least is Mieko Kawakami, who created a sensation with *Breasts and Eggs* (2008, English 2020), an absorbing look into women's relationship with their bodies. However, it is her novella *Ms. Ice Sandwich* (2018), about a young boy's introduction to love and the pains of growing up, that should be read first.

There are plenty more but start with these. (*The author can be contacted at vikas.d@ians.in*)

Climate, Community and Choice for the Indian Traveller

Ninety-one per cent of Indian travellers want to travel more sustainably over the coming 12 months, with 94 per cent of Indian travellers confirming that sustainable travel is important to them, reveals Booking.com's 2022 Sustainable Travel Research Report.

The insights gathered from more than 30,000 travellers across 32 countries and territories, highlighted the impact of their trips remains top of mind, with 68 per cent stating that the recent news about climate change has influenced them to make more sustainable travel choices.

To that end, 64 per cent of Indian travellers say that the sustainability efforts of accommodations and transport providers play a strong role in their property and transport decisions respectively. In fact, 88 per cent of Indian travellers say they would be more likely to choose a sustainable accommodation - whether they were looking specifically for one or not.

In search of more sustainable stays

Awareness and visibility of more sustainable stays continues, with 68 per cent of Indian travellers confirming they have seen a sustainable accommodation on an online travel site over the past year and 69 per cent indicating that they actively look for information on the sustainability efforts of a property before they book. Even more encouraging are the 80 per cent of Indian travellers who say they have actually stayed in a sustainable accommodation over the past year.

While 97 per cent of Indian travellers intend to stay in a sustainable property at least once in the coming year, there is still more to do to make more sustainable stay options easier to find for everyone. Of those who didn't stay in a sustainable accommodation over the past year, 29 per cent said they didn't know they existed. Twenty-eight per cent admit that they don't actively look for the sustainability efforts of a property before they book, but if easily accessible, they say they will review it, which further underlines the importance of making this sustainability information transparent and understandable for a broad audience of travellers.

Alternative destinations and timing

There is consensus amongst travellers on wanting to avoid busy and over-visited destinations. When thinking about future trips, 42 per cent of Indian travellers said they'd be willing to exclusively travel outside of peak season to avoid overcrowding, and 64 per cent revealed that they would avoid popular



tourist destinations and attractions to ensure a more even dispersal of the impact and benefits of their visit. Forty-percent per cent would even be willing to choose an alternative to their preferred destination to help avoid overcrowding.

On the flip side, 55 per cent of Indian travellers struggle to find appealing destinations that are less crowded and 44 per cent feel like it's not possible to find sustainable travel options in cities or other popular tourist destinations. This indicates an opportunity for travel platforms to work with accommodation providers in these destinations to help them progress on their sustainability journeys and in turn to highlight more sustainable options, as well as to help consumers discover alternate times and places to take their trips, without sacrificing on experience.

Connection to culture and local communities

A regenerative philosophy is influencing decision-making, with 56 per cent of Indian travellers saying

they want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived and 69 per cent Indian travellers wanting to have experiences that are representative of the local culture. In fact, 35 per cent say they have actively familiarised themselves with the local cultural values and traditions at their travel destination in advance of their trips and 39 per cent would be willing to pay more for travel activities to ensure they are giving back to local communities.

Tipping point for transportation

Indian travellers are mindful of how far they travel, how they get there, and how they get around once they're there. Thirty-one per cent Indian travellers say they chose to travel to a destination closer to home to reduce their carbon footprint and 31 per cent indicated that they researched public transport and/or options to rent a bicycle in their chosen destination. Thirty-nine per cent also chose to travel by train instead of the car for longer distances and 43 per cent say they feel

ashamed to fly because of its impact on the environment. When it comes to booking transportation for their trips, 73 per cent actively look for sustainability information.

"With increased pressure on our natural resources and the undeniable impact our way of life is having on the environment, we are 100 per cent committed to leading the industry in charting a more mindful and responsible course for the future of travel," said Glenn Fogel, CEO of Booking.com.

"We have ambitious goals for what we want to achieve, but together with our partners across the industry and the passion of our innovative employees, we can continue to make it easier for everyone to experience the world in a more mindful and responsible way. We believe that travel is and should remain a powerful force for good, bringing enhanced cultural understanding, socio-economic opportunities for countless communities and the potential to help rejuvenate and protect our planet for the long term." (*IANSLife*)

Do you suffer from obsessive health consciousness?

By Dr. G Prakash

To protect themselves from serious health issues, people are forming new habits or adopting healthier lifestyle choices such as going vegan, cutting sugar, or eating organic. This has received a lot more attention since the COVID-19 pandemic, which made people realise how important it is to live a healthy lifestyle and eat well.

Obsession with good lifestyle choices or healthy eating, on the other hand, can have serious physical and emotional consequences. Eating healthy, nutritious food is beneficial to the body, but for those suffering from orthorexia, the harm outweighs the benefit (a term used to define an unhealthy obsession with healthy eating).

It's like pushing healthy eating to the point where it causes problems in everyday life, and the situation spirals out of control. One of the most important aspects of recovering from an eating disorder is learning to better manage one's overall health, which is where alternative therapies can help.

Obsession with Healthy Eating

Smart food choices can obviously benefit the body in a variety of ways, but problems arise when someone becomes overly obsessed with restrictions. When a person's behaviour becomes too disruptive as a result of such constraints, it can interfere with personal and professional relationships, eventually leading to psychological disorders.

Furthermore, people with orthorexia frequently avoid social invitations and interactions, fearing that they will have to compromise their healthy eating habits. Even if they engage in social interactions, they will refuse to eat, even if they are hungry. Some people may also spend hours shopping for specific groceries or conceal their habits from friends and family.

How Alternative or Complementary Therapies Help with Obsessive Health Consciousness

Alternative and complementary medicine's basic philosophy includes a holistic approach to care that focuses on a person's health as a whole rather than focusing on one organ or bodily system. These systems are based on the belief that the human body is capable of self-healing. Healing frequently entails a combination of techniques involving the mind, body, and spirit. The goal is to achieve balance, as imbalance frequently leads to disease. Here are some complementary therapies to help you cope with a healthy or good eating obsession.

Yoga

Yoga is about developing inner awareness and focusing on the present moment, not just physical poses to increase strength and flexibility. According to surveys and studies, regular yoga practitioners are less critical of their bodies and more



satisfied with them. That is also why yoga is an essential component of eating disorder treatment and programmes that promote body positivity and self-esteem.

Additionally, because yoga cultivates mindfulness in a person, yoga practitioners are more mindful eaters. Yoga practise makes one more aware of how their body feels. This increased awareness can be carried over to mealtime by savouring each bite and paying attention to how food tastes, smells, and feels in the mouth.

Meditation

The perception of one's own body can elicit a variety of feelings and thoughts that can occupy one's mind. However, for the majority of people, the critical lens through which they view themselves is not an exact reflection of how everyone else sees them. Meditation is the way to open the mind and navigate negative, judgmental thoughts about body

image while remaining comfortable.

Feelings and thoughts, especially negative ones, are the most difficult obstacles to overcome in life. Meditation practitioners are able to see beyond the nature of thought entirely. It is a natural human tendency to become engrossed in negative conversation. People give weight and meaning to their thoughts, and meditation teaches how to let thoughts come and go without becoming entangled in self-created storylines. Meditation teaches people to be kind to themselves rather than judge them.

Acupuncture

When their eating habits are disrupted, people with orthorexia may experience intense anxiety or frustration. Furthermore, any disruption in their self-imposed dietary habits is likely to result in self-loathing or guilt. Such issues, if left untreated, can cause irreversible damage to a person's health.

Acupuncture, depending on the placement of the needles, can produce painkilling chemicals and jump-start the body's natural ability to heal itself, or it can stimulate the part of the brain that controls emotions, including anxiety. All of these can help people maintain a healthy balance and treat various illnesses. The therapy can significantly reduce worries about things over which a person has no control.

A health-conscious person is concerned about his or her body, whereas a health-obsessed person is obsessed with it. It is critical to ensure that the diet does not cause anxiety. While some foods are healthier than others, no food can kill you if you eat it once or twice.

Living a healthy life does not mean rejecting people and experiences, but rather embracing life as a whole while constantly working to maintain physical and mental health.

(The author is Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Jindal Naturecure Institute, Bengaluru)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, APRIL 24, 2022

Moon parallel Mercury on your solar return chart and will give good results. You will be highly creative and imaginative. And will be acclaimed for your work. You will also get recognition for your efforts. Those in film industry, media, entertainment and fashion industry etc. will get success. Lovebirds too will have a good year. They will see their dreams coming true. And could enter into a wedlock. Students will particularly have a very good year. They will do well in studies. And also get admission in courses/institutions of their choice. Monetary position will remain excellent and there would be manifold increase in sources of income. You could also plan to visit some travel destination with your family. You would enjoy perfect equation with your partner. And relations with loved ones too will remain good. Auspicious functions like marriage or birthday will take place at your home. Overall a very good year
Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will be a self-assured person and will try out new things in life. You will be a little dominating in your personal and professional matters. Your admirers won't win you may admire hence you need to change your behavior for good. You will get cooperation from all and you will take work to its logical conclusion. You will be ambitious and assertive in your goals and will make things happen. Whatever field you enter, you will try to gain the number one position. You will also command respect from others. You will be able to start new projects and complete them as well. You will achieve big laurels. Most of your held up work will get completed. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will relish the company of your loved ones. Financially you may scale new heights.
Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This will be a favorable time period for you. You will have monetary benefits. You will be humble, imaginative and emotional. Your targets will get completed. You will be an innovator and will implement new ideas and thoughts. You will make a mental blueprint of work that needs to be done and will focus on it. You need to avoid mental tension in your work and cooperate with your colleagues. You will come up to the expectations of your bosses. You will be having monetary gains. The lady luck will smile on you. Love mates will enjoy wonderful bonding and understand feelings of each other. Your domestic life will be stable. You will get support of your family members. You will get a series of continuous successes. The long held up business plans will be implemented successfully.
Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

There is a need to re-look at a few of the things in your official work, although it will turn out to be a fruitful week. You need to be careful about your business/financial transactions. You should take the aid and advice of an expert before taking a final decision. Also don't sign any paper without fully reading the contents. Relations with your bosses and colleagues will improve. You will have financial gains. The husband and wife will understand feeling of each other. The married life will be all joyous and peaceful. Your brothers will give you full support and even your elders will bless you. The time is favorable from all perspectives. You will be successful in whatever you do. Your list of contacts will increase. Your job conditions will favor you greatly. You will also make new investments. In the field of politics you will establish good contacts.
Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Some thoughts will be going in your mind to make things better. You will surely be ambitious. You will not accept any subordinate position. Your intent will be high and you will establish your supremacy over others. You will be a hard task master and will not tolerate any indiscipline. You could get a promotion in your job or a new job offer. Your business too will flourish whatever field you are in, you will aim at the top. You will be a very self-respecting person and will resist being obliged by others. You will love your independent nature and desire working under any one. You need to keep your expenses under control. The trouble between the spouse will be solved. You will enjoy a wonderful bonding. You will enjoy every moment of your life.
Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your area of influence will widen. You will look at things in a very positive way. You will struggle to achieve your targets but it will not deter you from achieving your goals. You will try to reverse the ongoing trend which is going against you. The stakes are high. Your name and prestige will be involved. You will have lot of enemies and opponents to face but you will meet your foes with confidence and guts. You will also get support from your well-wishers. You will obey your own rules which in any way are for benefit of everyone. You will resist from being friendly with strangers in worldly matters. You will be successful in your work and will not be averse to assessing wealth. You will start new works/projects/ventures. You will take easily to hear other people's comments. But life is such only. You need to be practical and wise.
Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

In service, the pressure will be for achieving the assigned targets. Your bosses will have lot of expectations from you. You will not rely on your subordinates and will try to finish your work single handedly. If you work in a methodical and planned way, you may achieve the desired suc-

cess. Your fortunes will be on the rise. Your business too will flourish. You will make new investments but with lot of caution. Be very careful about giving your money as you may never get it back. Health of an elderly family member will be a cause of worry. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. You will also start work on your new plans and projects. Students will continue doing well. You will also be inclined to achieve something novel and unique. You will meet an influential person who will help you a lot. Business related trips will keep you busy.
Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

There will be lot of fun and laughter this week. You will easily complete your pending tasks. Your children will shine in studies. Most of your time will be spent in the company of your family members. You will re-focus and again you will get down to work with enthusiasm and vigour. You will also get the blessings and guidance of your elders. The health related problems that had been there for a long time will come to an end. The situations regarding court cases will be in your favor. A meeting with an influential person will open the doors of success for you. At work, you will make plans and work accordingly success will definitely be yours. You will get over all problems with your intelligence and discretion. Success is awaiting you in the financial sphere.
Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will complete your work with sincerity. You will also achieve name and fame and will have direct conversation with the people. You will have much more authority than before. You will also have a favorable time. Financially you will be a lot stronger. You will get a property from your family elders. At home, the auspicious functions will continue. You will have a swell time. You will also spare time to sit with your parents, guardians or seniors. Your some noble deed may fetch an award or gift for you. Dispute with brothers will get resolved. Your terms with bosses will remain perfect. You will enjoy a very progressive phase in your life. If in service you could be transferred to your chosen place. You will enter into an exchange business for gains.
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It will be a great week. You will be kept busy in your work. You need also to be cautious in your dealing with your associates. You could get cheated in a financial matter. You might have to face problems and delays in order to do any work. You will have health related issues. You might also go to a hospital. With the blessings of God you will tide over your difficulties. You will spend freely and will be ready to help others. You will also enjoy the company of your friends. It is of no use having any expectations from relatives. You will also come into contact with people having the same ideology. You will show love towards your in-laws and will establish good relations with them.
Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will remain popular amongst your colleagues. Your attractive personality will inspire one and all. You will be able to influence them too. People will have reverence for you in their heart. You will fulfill your commitments and promises. Held up money will be realized. You will enter an excellent phase in your life. Prayers, meditation and exercise schedule will keep you mentally and physically both strong. Income will be good. Your investment in some venture may give you a fabulous return to strengthen your financial position. You will enjoy perfect bonding with your partner/spouse. Love birds will enjoy perfect relationship. You will have your work duty stabilized. All endeavours to earn money will be successful. But be wary as a little carelessness may trap your money.
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It will turn out to be an amazing week. Students will get positive results. Your bosses will have high expectations from you. Hence those in service must adopt an adjustable attitude with their seniors and colleagues to get maximum output in their work field. You will earn well in work/profession. Husband and wife will have good understanding. Family members affectionate nature will make you quite courageous. Keep an eye on your partners. You will also enjoy a peaceful time at your home. You will go out on a tour with your family. Your planned projects may be completed in due course. There might be monetary gains from somewhere and you might be given a new responsibility at work. You will reach new heights of success on the basis of your creativity.
Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It will prove to be a mixed week. A worry that was nagging you since a long time will come to an end. You will not compromise with your self respect at any cost. Your income will increase. People will respect your views. You will have to travel regarding your work. You might be a victim of conspiracy. In matters of money use your intelligence and logic. If you have given a loan to someone, there are little chances of recovery. You need to be prepared to search for solutions. You need to read some knowledge enhancing literature or books. Guests will arrive at your home. There will be worries regarding your children or other family members. But you will manage it well. Your boss will be satisfied with your work and you will get a promotion. There will be an inflow of money. You will be energetic at work.

HarperCollins to publish The Magicians of Mazda

Notching up a major success, HarperCollins on Thursday announced the acquisition of *The Magicians of Mazda*, the keenly anticipated new book by bestselling author, Ashwin Sanghi - India's master storyteller with more than a million copies of his books sold in print in English and other Indian languages — that will be published in May.

The book is the seventh in the author's chart-topping *Bharat Series*.

The Magicians of Mazda, an epic saga in the author's signature style of merging fact with fiction, promises to be a roller-coaster read for fans of the author and mythological thrillers. It is a testament to the author's unending spool of imagination deftly woven with deep insights and research into a fast-paced plot that travels through time and history, taking the reader along on a thrilling ride.

A fleet of boats dock at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat in 720 CE. They carry eighteen thousand frightened souls fleeing the cruelty of Iran's Umayyad Caliphate. Chanting Sanskrit-like prayers, the high priest consecrates a sacred fire to thank their god, Ahura Mazda, leading them to a new home and hope. He uses a mysterious substance to spark the flame, but few know of its miraculous properties or provenance.

Centuries later, Parsi scientist Jim Dastoor is abducted from his Seattle laboratory and whisked away to Tehran. The Ayatollah believes Dastoor is the key to uncovering the ancient relic known as the Athravan Star and his men will do anything to possess it, even murder.

From the ancient ruins of Persepolis to the Taliban camps of Afghanistan, from the womb of an Udvada fire temple to the icy mountains of Kashmir, from the dreadful coffin cells of Tehran to the deathly calm of Diu's Tower of Silence, Dastoor and his historian wife, Linda, are sucked into a terrifying chase across vividly changing landscapes.

Defly navigating between time and geography, *The Magicians of Mazda* travels backwards, through the epochs of Islamic jihad, Macedonian revenge, Achaemenid glory, messianic birth, Aryan schism to the Vedic fount from where it began.

This is Ashwin Sanghi's most gripping and provocative novel yet.

"I am delighted that my *Bharat Series* - including the previous six titles as well as my latest,

The Magicians of Mazda' has found a new home at HarperCollins India. Ananth Padmanabhan, Udayan Mitra and Swati Daftuar are fantastic people to work with and I am grateful to them for having pulled out all the stops to get this book out to my readers in record time," Ashwin Sanghi said.

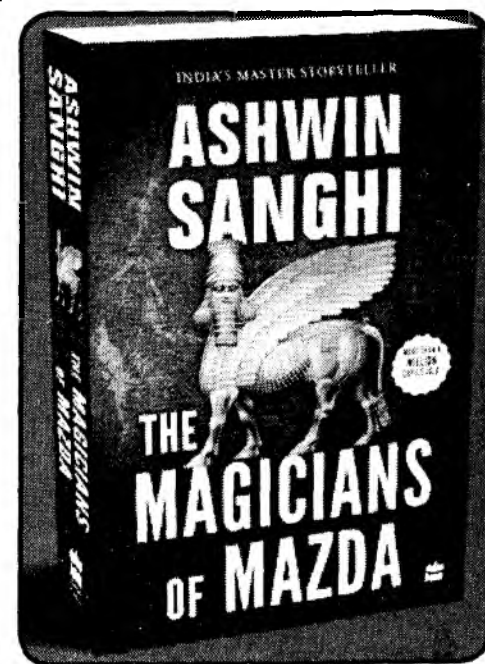
Ananth Padmanabhan, CEO, HarperCollins India, said: "I am a big fan of Ashwin's writing, and we are very delighted that HarperCollins will now be the home for Ashwin's stupendous *Bharat Series*. Ashwin is India's foremost writer of adventure and has entertained millions of readers with his incredible storytelling and imagination, spanning time and geography. *The Magicians of Mazda* is a roller coaster that yet again sets the bar very high."

Swati Daftuar, Executive Editor, HarperCollins India, said: "We are so very pleased to welcome Ashwin to HarperCollins India. With every book in the *Bharat Series*, he brings us something quite fantastic, and his latest, *The Magicians of Mazda*, is really his best yet. The careful research behind every book, the thrill and pace of a taut, beautifully crafted adventure — all of it proves without doubt that he truly is a master storyteller."

Ashwin Sanghi's six previous books in the *Bharat Series*, that blend the ancient with the modern, myth with history, spirituality with science, philosophy with theology and politics with anthropology, are *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant*, *The Krishna Key*, *The Sialkot Saga*, *Keepers of the Kalachakra* and *The Vault of Vishnu*.

In addition, he has authored two New York Times bestselling crime thrillers with James Patterson, *Private India* (sold in the US as *City on Fire*) and *Private Delhi* (sold in the US as *Count to Ten*). He has also co-authored several non-fiction titles in the *13 Steps Series* on Luck, Wealth, Marks, Health and Parenting.

He was educated at Cathedral and John Connon School, Mumbai, and St Xavier's College, Mumbai. He holds an MBA from Yale University. Sanghi has been included by *Forbes India* in their *Celebrity 100* and by *The New Indian Express* in their *Culture Power List*. He is also a winner of several awards including the *Crossword Popular Choice Award 2012*, *Atta Galatta Popular Choice Award 2018*, *WBR Iconic Achievers Award 2018*, *Lit-O-Fest Literature Legend Award 2018*, *Kalinga Popular Choice Award 2021*. (IANS)



*"Nothing is so strong as gentleness,
nothing so gentle as real strength."*

—Saint Francis de Sales

The Shillong Times

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J&K's chance for peace

WITH a steady improvement in the overall security scenario in Jammu and Kashmir, post the abrogation of Article 370 by the Modi government three years ago, it is in the fitness of things that development took the upper hand in the sensitive region -- harried as it was by terrorism and militancy for about three decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's largely attended public meeting in Jammu on Sunday saw the unveiling and launch of several infrastructure projects costing thousands of crores. This included the inauguration of the ambitious Banihal Qazigund Road Tunnel that would reduce travel distance between the two principal urban centres -- Jammu and Srinagar -- by about two hours. Communication infra is central to economic growth and it also plays a major role in military strategies.

Significantly, the PM chose Jammu and Kashmir region as the venue to address the nation on the anniversary of the 1992 Panchayat Raj Act that had aimed at strengthening rural governance and promoting grassroots democracy. The meeting saw a huge congregation of sarpanches. The message that the Centre sought to spread was also an assertion that "democracy is gaining fresh ground" in JK after the abrogation of Article 370, ending the special status for the region and bifurcation of the state into three centrally administered provinces. Those who had predicted disaster after these steps were initiated by the Centre in 2019 were proven wrong, but militancy and Pakistani-inspired acts of terror continue -- with less intensity, of course. The presence of two terrorists with suicide vests in an area close to the PM's meeting venue in Jammu showed the situation requires constant alert and security attention.

Notably, the Centre is taking several initiatives to help JK grow. For one, the PM carried with him groups of potential investors, including teams of business honchos from the UAE, an Islamic nation. An underlying premise is that investments from the Gulf could win mass confidence also to the extent that terrorist agencies from Pakistan might not target them. More investment will mean more jobs and a chance to wean the youths away from negative thoughts. The Prime Minister has stated as much when he said the youths in the region would not have to live the kind of difficult life their parents and kindred in the past, which was one of hopelessness since the 1990s. When peace returns to Kashmir, its once-thriving tourism sector can regain its luster. All these mean jobs for millions. Fact is, it's not easy to neutralize state power. Militants must know as much.

Is the Common Entrance Test the Solution?

By H. Srikanth

In the recent consultative meeting organized in NEHU, the state government and the Principals of the UG colleges have agreed to go for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET, 2020). The state government seems to be aware of time and infrastructural constraints in undertaking the gigantic exercise of holding the Test. From news reports, we learn that the state government had talks with Centre and learnt that CUET is compulsory for all colleges affiliated to central universities. The state minister for Education expressed the hope that CUET would benefit the students of Meghalaya in the long run. As the common entrance becomes a fait accompli, it makes sense to understand the rationale for adopting the decision and examine its implications on education and the future of the students of Meghalaya.

First, let us look at the government's rationale for the Common Entrance Test. The demand for it is an offshoot of the admission problems that a city like Delhi face. Every year, thousands of students from different states flock to the capital city, seeking admission into the colleges in Delhi. It is alleged that some state education boards award high percentage of marks so that their students have an advantage over others coming from boards which are conservative in allotting marks. In the leading colleges in Delhi, the cut off marks for admission stop around 95 percent. The students who cannot secure admission have to apply for and appear in different entrance tests. To address all these problems, a Common University Entrance Test (CUET) was conceived initially in some select universities. But recently all central universities in the country have decided to go for CUET. National Testing Agency (NTA) has been entrusted with the responsibility of conducting the online exams. The Entrance Test, which includes Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQ), will test the competency of the students in language, subject domain, and General Aptitude. The questions for assessing the domain knowledge are sourced from the NCERT syllabus. Col-

lege admission will now be based on the entrance score. The percentage of marks one earns in the board exams now becomes immaterial for securing admission.

If CUET becomes a reality, it will simplify the admission process in the colleges to some extent. The students have to appear only for one test and with the score they have secured, they can apply for the college admission under any central university. It may discourage the irrational and dubious practices of awarding high marks in the board examinations. The universities and colleges will be relieved of the burden of conducting separate entrance exams. To some extent, it could eliminate malpractices and external interference in the admission process. Probably the CUET is likely to address some of the dilemmas of the admission process in premier city based universities. However, it is still not clear whether such an exercise is needed for central universities located in small towns and peripheral states.

Educational scenario in states like Meghalaya differs from states like Delhi. Most students seeking admission in UG colleges in Meghalaya come from within the state, or from neighboring states. The number of applicants from the rest of the country is insignificant. Meghalaya government has its own Reservation Policy which differs from that of the government of India. The government colleges attempt to implement the state reservation policy to some extent, but private UG colleges adopt their own rules while admitting the students. Some, being the minority colleges, give preference for the students from their communities. There was no monitoring of the number of seats in the UG colleges, and the number used to vary depending on the demand and local pressure. This ad hoc policy of admission was never seriously contested, as there are enough colleges to accommodate almost of the students seeking admission. There has been competition for seats in some premier colleges. But there are also colleges where even the existing seats are not filled up. Unlike

in Delhi, there is hardly any public demand for a Common Entrance Test in Meghalaya.

It appears the colleges and the state government have discussed the practical difficulties of holding the Test, but it is not clear whether they have also addressed other issues like the Reservation Policy. CUET application form specifies that the seats will be filled as per All India Reservation Policy. It is not clear whether the college principals and the state government have lent support to this reservation policy, or sought exemption from the central government, as Meghalaya comes under the Sixth Schedule. There should be clarity on whether the state reservation policy is to be applied universally, and whether the minority educational institutions continue to have autonomy in deciding whom they could give admission.

Apart from the infrastructural problems, the local students may find the entrance test difficult because of the syllabus and the format prescribed for CUET. In Meghalaya, most Higher Secondary schools follow the MBOSE syllabus. There are only a handful of CBSE schools in the state. As the NCERT syllabus is going to be the basis for the Entrance Test for different subjects, the students studying in non-CBSE schools may find it difficult to perform well in the Test. Further, since none of the students in Meghalaya are conversant with the General Aptitude Test, they are likely to perform badly. Apart from studying the NCERT syllabus, they will also be compelled to go for additional coaching to do well in the General Aptitude test. All this will add a lot of pressure on the minds of the students. They can hardly afford to enjoy any vacation after the board exams, as they have to prepare for the CUET. Our Prime Minister advises the students to relax and not take the exams seriously. But the students aspiring for admission in the colleges will be left with no option but to burn midnight oil to make it to colleges and universities. When students have just managed to emerge unscathed from the

2019 Covid trauma, the government could have waited for at least one more year for CUET.

As Education comes under the Concurrent List, every state government creates a separate department with directorates and boards to improve the access and quality of education in their state. Interventions like CUET may have adverse effect on the functioning of the state education departments. When the NCERT syllabus becomes the basis for CUET, the state syllabus becomes redundant. The state board exams lose sanctity, as they will not have any bearing on the students' future. The students will rely on the books and coaching centres that promise easy methods to crack the entrance exams. They will not bother about attending schools and doing well in the board exams. Under pressure, all state governments will be forced to adopt the NCERT syllabus and give up emphasis on descriptive and analytical skills, and emphasize on MCQs and the General Aptitude Test. Commercial colleges and coaching centres, which give a damn for holistic education, are likely to mushroom everywhere affecting the quality of education. Commercialization of education will widen the inequalities in the access to higher education.

While acknowledging the common problems affecting all educational institutions across the country, we should not lose sight of the regional specificities and its ramifications in the concerned regions. The problems of higher education in the north-eastern states are different in some respects from the universities in mainland India. What suits JNU and Delhi University may not always be compatible with educational concerns in NEHU or Nagaland University. Education affects all aspects of our lives. Hasty decisions will have an adverse effect on the quality of education in the region in the long run. An open and informed public debate involving all stakeholders--teachers, students, parent bodies and communities--is necessary before one goes for any major reforms in the education sector.

(The author teaches Political Science in NEHU; Email: hskant@gmail.com)

Eliminating malaria: Is it within the reach of Meghalaya?

By Jane M. Carlton and Sandra Albert

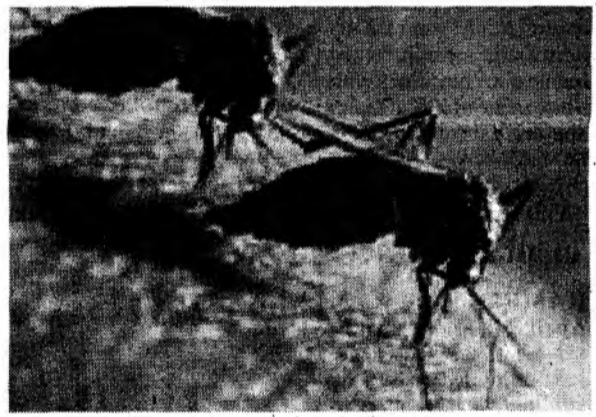
April 25 marks World Malaria Day 2022, a time when researchers, clinicians, and health workers around the world come together to highlight the burden of this ancient disease, and mark the ways in which communities unite around the common goal of malaria elimination. Malaria is a disease that affects men, women and children of all ages in India, and has caused untold deaths and suffering. Caused by species of the Plasmodium parasite that are transmitted by the bite of a female Anopheles mosquito, the disease can cause debilitating fever and paroxysms, anaemia and multi-organ failure that can result in cerebral malaria and eventually death.

According to the World Malaria Report 2021: Globally, there were an estimated 241 million malaria cases in 2020 in 85 malaria endemic countries, increasing from 227 million in 2019. The highest burden continues to be in countries in the WHO African Region. The WHO South-East Asia Region accounted for about 2% of the burden of malaria cases globally. Malaria cases reduced by 78%, from 23 million in 2000 to about 5 million in 2020. Malaria case incidence in this region reduced by 83%, from about 18 cases per 1000 population at risk in 2000 to about three cases in 2020. India accounted for 83% of cases in the South-East Asian region. But overall, India continues to show remarkable progress in the control of malaria, and there was no

laboration called the "Center for the Study of Complex Malaria in India" have also shown a significant reduction in malaria in several districts of Meghalaya and confirm that the malaria parasite has gone "underground" and infections are mostly asymptomatic with low parasite levels.

In 2019-2020 a second round of LLIN distribution took place in Meghalaya. An independent evaluation of the control programme in Meghalaya by our research team demonstrated high bed-net distribution (99.5%) was achieved as per plan of the NVBDCP. It was observed that bed nets have been widely accepted by our rural communities, but the second control measure of indoor residual spraying with DDT is less popular. Only about 18% of the households observed accepted spraying.

From 2010-2020, international sources led by the USA provided 69% of the total funding for malaria control and elimination. Within the public sector and among all malaria R&D funders, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) was the largest contributor in 2020, contributing over half of its US\$ 1.9 billion investment into basic research. The need for R&D continues as one cannot stop evolution and adaptation of parasites against human endeavors to eliminate them. The Rapid diagnostic tests (RDT) deployed by front line workers have been a key strategy that has aided early detection and treatment



rebound or increase during the pandemic. India launched a National Framework of Malaria Elimination in 2016 with the goal of achieving zero indigenous cases in the country by 2030.

Unlike countries in Africa where one or two species of malaria parasite cause infections and are transmitted by only one or two major mosquito species, malaria in India is "complex" caused by at least four different parasite species and transmitted by at least half a dozen mosquito species. Thus, contributing to complexity in manifestation and management.

Over the past decade, the prevalence of malaria has been decreasing in many countries worldwide, although the precise reasons why are not clear. Some say that the widespread distribution of long-lasting insecticide treated bed nets (LLIN) combined with new antimalarial drugs such as artemisinin combination therapies (ACT) has tipped the balance against the deadly parasite/mosquito duo. But in several countries the reduction in malaria occurred prior to the introduction of such new methods of control. In 2020 the first W.H.O. approved malaria vaccine R.T.S.S was approved for use in children in mid-high endemic areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Malaria vaccines although long in the making have a disappointingly low effectiveness in the range of 35-65%.

In Meghalaya, the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP) has made remarkable progress in its effort to control malaria. The state reported a notable decline in malaria cases and deaths since 2016 to now historically low levels, with only 483 cases reported in the whole of the state in 2021. Our epidemiology studies too as part of an international col-

of malaria. Deletions in the parasite's pfrpr2/3 genes render parasites undetectable by RDTs that are based on histidine-rich protein 2 (HRP2). Slow but increasing drug resistance to ATS compounds is a cause for concern and globally resistance to pyrethroids, the primary insecticides currently used in LLIN, is also rising.

This year's World Malaria Day theme is "Harness innovation to reduce the malaria disease burden and save lives". The research in our Center has taken this catchphrase to heart since operations started in 2017. For example, we have been using new technologies such as high-throughput immunology assays to identify antibodies in individuals that indicate a recent infection, even in the absence of malaria parasites. We are using next generation genomics to look at the genes of the 'disappearing' malaria parasites. And we are using molecular identification of Anopheles species to enhance accuracy compared to the morphological identification tools that are usually used. This has helped identify new anopheles vector species in Meghalaya e.g. An xui that was not previously reported in India.

In 2021, the WHO certified China and El Salvador as malaria-free, and a further 25 countries including India are reported to be on track to end malaria transmission within the decade. Malaria elimination, the dream of public health practitioners, clinicians, and scientists, may now finally be within sight in Meghalaya.

Jane M. Carlton, Silver Professor of Biology and Genomics Director, Center for the Study of Complex Malaria in India New York University, USA. Sandra Albert, Director, Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong

Letters to the Editor

Horror of horrors!

Editor
I write to express my absolute horror that little girls are being raped and killed in India today -- the most recent case being that of Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, where an adult male raped a three-year old girl, then strangled and killed her, finally throwing her little body into a well. Where is the national uproar that is appropriate for crimes of this order? The whole nation should shut down for a day or two, to mourn the victim and protest such heinous crimes. The death penalty cannot resolve such crimes. Instead, culprits should be imprisoned for life and forced to serve women for the rest of their lives. Where is the hue and cry (nationwide) for raising boys differently? This cry should come from men, more than women. Men should be horrified at what members of their gender have degenerated to -- something worse than animals. What kind of an adult male is so devoid of paternal feelings that he rapes a three-year old girl? Yes, we are speaking of a toddler here -- a three-year old! This is no ordinary lust. I am flummoxed for an answer. How are Indian mothers raising their sons these days? Are they still pampering them, as they did generations ago? What about fathers?

I also write to express my support for Salil Grewal's protest of a recent Supreme Court decision to commute the death sentence of a rapist who raped and murdered

another little girl in 2013. While I am, in principle, against the death penalty, commuting this penalty sporadically makes no sense. Either remove it altogether, or apply it with justice. If excessive punishment destroys justice, so does inadequate punishment.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Playing with students' lives

Editor,
The Higher Secondary School result is the most valuable milestone in a student's life. It opens up opportunities to the world of Humanities and Science and Technology. Everything was fine until Covid 19 created havoc in education. But had we stuck to old methods of examination, the descriptive format, it would have not reached this sorry unperceivable, unacceptable 100% cut off marks for undergraduate aspirants. Descriptive format has a paper setter of long experience, board of moderators of much more experience, with one requirement -- to be tight-lipped after the questions are set. Our poorly paid evaluators spend sleepless nights, meticulously going through each line to deliver justice as far as possible, also fully conscious of the fact that one might lose face should the examinee appeal for re-evaluation.

With multiple choice questions (MCQs) we have only a paper setter who would throw the correct ticks to evaluators who never bother to cross

check but they are heavily paid. So the outcome is many got 720/720 as in NEET. Hope they would get 100% in the final MBBS too. After 2025, these MBBS would be put to the real test.

This 100% cut-off had pushed the UGC to frame the Common Universities Entrance Test (CUET). Immediately after three experts - Dr Sudha Acharya Chairperson of National Progressive Schools Conference, Dr Abhi Dev Habib, and Dr Rajesh Thapa both Professors of Delhi University expressed their concern about CUET as students passing out of the ICSE Board would be disadvantaged. More so the students of rural areas. Indeed, no one really ever bothers about students in rural areas that cannot afford coaching and most are computer illiterate. Hence such students are deprived of many of the benefits enjoyed by their urban peers.

Dr Thapa was shocked at the hurry with which CUET was to be implemented. The National Testing Agency (NTA) immediately jumped in to offer coaching to school students who could afford to pay capitation fees that are slightly less than that of NEET coaching, the minimum of which is around Rs 6 lakhs per year. Is this fair to all?

And since NEET was imposed since 2019, our toppers could no longer become doctors. They are reconciled to the other sciences while many switched to Arts. The affluent proceeded to Delhi or Rajasthan and managed to qualify this year. Let me predict that CUET is no different from NEET.

To understand the predicament of the NEET, IIT and JEE aspirants, Dr Habib slammed NTA for its MCQs which are trick MCQs discovered only in those made easy guide books. In 2020, 2021 NEET, in Physics, out of 44 MCQs only one in each year were from Class 11 CBSE. The rest are memorisation of conversion tables and formulae with lengthy arithmetic that consume time so much so that students had no time to clean the glasses that had gone foggy due to their masks. Dr Habib did mention that education is in concurrent list of the Constitution by which Education vests on both the Centre and states. In other words the Centre has no right to bulldoze the states.

Dr Dinesh Singh ex VC of DU lamented at the toppers of IIT and NEET, who miserably fail in International examinations. This means that the way MCQs are set in India lacks creativity and conceptual clarity.

I was deeply shocked when a few days after the UGC floated CUET to all states to study if they were going to implement it, NEHU had already decided to go ahead with it. How can a policy on which rests the future of our students be so hurriedly executed? This proves that NEHU does not care about the fate of our students.

The Director of Public Relations, NEHU, David Pyngrope, claimed that there was consensus over the decision, but the fact that two principals expressed grave concern proves that it was not so. Two principals, namely RM Manih of UCC and RK

Lyngdoh of Synod College, expressed dissent fearing that rural students would be the most disadvantaged.

Already the CBSE students of Class 12 are confused with examinations just a few weeks away. They rue that the most valuable exam is no longer considered necessary to get admission to undergraduate colleges with the imposition of CUET. It also means all their efforts from KG to Class 12 have gone in vain. So why should they put their best foot forward to pass their Class 12 exams? There is a commotion of filling up 4 forms which is a nightmare for those that are technologically challenged.

One problem we Indians have is that we dare not challenge what the UGC decides for us. UGC is not error free. In the past there was enticement to acquire a doctorate to enjoy a 3 year increment. This has devastated our students because selected teachers of colleges were given leave to pursue their M. Phil and doctorate. They only needed to find a local substitute. Naturally students bunked classes. After 5 years, the teacher would reappear with a doctorate but the students learnt nothing. In 1978, this was pointed out to UGC but it never bothered. It was only in 2000, that the National Eligibility Test (NET) became compulsory and teaching improved by leaps and bounds.

In a recent TV discussion, the UGC Chairman had nothing to say in defence of CUET except to say the UK and USA follow the same entrance procedure. In those countries there is universality of curriculum and textbooks

are latest and strictly prescribed. And look at the syllabus omissions today in CBSE of topics on Mughals, the Cold War and poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Subjects of current importance such as climate change, electronics, and vocational subjects that help get employment are missing. And except linguistics, the medium of instruction is English but this seems to have lost momentum after Hindi is given pride of place.

In Meghalaya, for example, Physics is taught only in one college since 1982 hence only students of that college have an advantage. Till 2022, NEHU is yet to have Physics at the Post Graduate level. Many students shift to Jadavpur and Calcutta University. Our state has no vision for education. We just copy others without proper weightage of our capacity.

What's worse is that Education Minister, L. Rymbui first stated that CUET would disadvantage our students and then did a 180 degree turnaround. Look at the number of advertisements on television all selling education. Some sage has rightly stated, "A time will come, when life and education are the stuff money can buy; the rich will become over-educated and prosper, and the poor drown in the sea of unemployment"

Yours etc
W. Passah
Ex HOD Electronics,
St Edmunds College
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.

"Let your mind alone, and see what happens."

— Virgil Thomson

The Shillong Times

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Women as unwitting supporters of patriarchy

WHOEVER said matriline equals women's empowerment has strayed from the truth. The bitter truth is that women in Meghalaya's matrilineal society have been shown their places by citing tradition. Indeed, tradition is the subterfuge to keep women within the confined spaces that society decides. And universally society follows a gender construct outlined by its male members. This gender construct that women are only fit for so much and not more is something that societies across the world have internalised for hundreds of years until the Feminist movement came along followed by a more nuanced understanding that gender is a social construct and therefore the norms it defines and sets can be broken because those norms keep women in eternal bondage in the name of tradition.

The Rajiv Gandhi led Congress Government did great disservice to the nation when it exempted Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram from the ambit of the 73 & 74th Amendment Acts which gave birth to the Panchayati Raj institutions in the rural areas and the elected urban local bodies in the urban areas. The Government's contention then was that the above three tribal states already have functioning traditional institutions which are democratic by nature. The short-sightedness of those heading the Ministry of Panchayati Raj at the time has kept tribal women out of grassroots governance. The Government then never did its homework and did not understand that tradition is what holds women under societal siege. This was amply demonstrated when women in Nagaland wanted to contest elections to the urban local bodies in 2017, there was so much violence that most of them were forced to withdraw from the race.

In Meghalaya the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) has been asked by the High Court why women are not allowed to participate in the running of traditional institutions or to contest for the post of the headman. The KHADC in its response has said that a referendum would be held to ascertain if women wanted to be involved in running traditional institutions. This is problematic on several counts. Women in every society internalise the gender norms handed down to them. Hence women themselves are conditioned to think that the Headman's post is beyond their ken and that men are naturally cut out for that job. This is patriarchy speaking and was evident from the responses that women themselves gave to this newspaper when asked if they were keen to contest for the post of the headman. This mental, psychological and sociological conditioning that women are not equal to men in leadership roles can only be unlearned through gender awareness campaigns. Otherwise, women can themselves be their own worst enemies and will continue to be subservient to men because tradition says so. If women can hold ministerial positions in the state cabinet why can they not head a small village? This question demands answers.

Letters to the Editor

Aam Aadmi Party and Meghalaya 2023 elections

Editor,
The forth coming 2023 Assembly elections of Meghalaya seems to have drawn the attention of some really big players. The latest is the arrival of Aam Aadmi Party Head hunters in Shillong to study the feasibility of setting up suitable candidates who adhere to AAP standards for legislators. If one were to go by past performance then AAP has done wonders for their constituency, Delhi. Education standards have gone up, Healthcare is of quality standards, Roads are good, Water supply up to expectations of the people, city waste managed quite well and the welfare of the people looked after. Their governance is free from scandals and scams. Actually these are issues that impinge upon the governance of Meghalaya, which all successive Govts of the state, including the present MDA, have miserably failed to address. If AAP were actually to come to power in our state (please note the big IF denoting a remote possibility anywhere in the near future) they would come with impressive workable blue prints for the above sectors with perhaps a bit of concentration and emphasis

on the issue of employment and a Policy on Agriculture, on which 80% of our population depend on for their livelihood.
Many of us in Meghalaya are not at all satisfied with the type of governance we are enjoying today. People are eager for a change but a quick look at what the many established Political Parties have to offer is not encouraging. There is hardly any talk on how to improve our education system; improvement in the healthcare system; only words but no action on employment; how to establish the Rule of Law in the state; how to improve governance and of agriculture for the least said the better. It is the most neglected sector! All of these are simply not on the radar of Meghalaya politicians. Political parties, both national and regional simply dream of coming back into power. Both parties and candidates concentrate only on the Winnability factor. What happens next is left entirely to the mercy of fate and providence. Meghalaya politicians are people who either have no confidence in planning or road-mapping the destiny of the state or they simply lack the ability to do so. The State Planning Board is a big joke. The above are the areas of change that the state desperately needs but unfortunately our home grown political parties (that go by the fanciful epithet of 'Regional') and

When Jowaites were left to fend for themselves

By H H Mohrmen

A staff of our organization - SURE - who has to cross lawmusing daily to reach our office reported that he saw non-local people taking selfies of the accumulated garbage with the DC's office, Jowai right behind as the backdrop. My response to him was, "Don't worry, Jowai is famous now and the heap of garbage collected is becoming our new tourist attraction."

The most embarrassing situation

Jokes apart, it is also true that many of the town's folks were embarrassed by the fact that the Jowai Municipal Board which does not seem to have a solution to the problem went to dump their waste almost everywhere. They were embarrassed because there were (and rightly so) protests from the neighbouring communities every time the waste is dumped in their areas. The town's waste has literally become a proverbial ping-pong ball which is being kicked from one place to another. For the Jowaites it is not a pleasant situation to be in when you wake up in the morning and the first thing that people discuss is about the garbage that has accumulated in different locations of the town. Much to the embarrassment of the locals, the garbage has been a much talked about issue in the entire state.

From the floor of the house to the judiciary

It is also true that the issue of garbage disposal has become a matter of grave concern which has troubled the people of the town for more than a year now. The matter was even debated in the Meghalaya Assembly but to no avail. When even the government of the day has failed them, the people of the town have no other option but to approach the Meghalaya High Court to decide on the matter. People have only the court to look up to for the much needed relief over the issue which has troubled them for so long. Hopefully the issue which has been kicked around will be finally resolved.

When the town is left orphaned even by its own government

Fifty years ago Jowai was one of the major towns of the state because it was one of the headquarters of the three original districts when the state was created. But sadly the town was neglected by the government of the day and those before it. It is ap-

parent from the order of the Meghalaya High Court dated April 20, 2022 in the case of Synjuk ki Waheh Chnong versus the State of Meghalaya that the Government of Meghalaya has, like the biblical Pilate washed its hands over the issue. Taking a leaf out of the Court's order, it says "the state of Meghalaya as in most cases washes its hands off and says that it has no role to play in the civic affairs." It saddened the people of the town that their very own government has abandoned the town. When the government washes its hand over the issue, it means that the MLA and the entire state machinery have abandoned the town and its citizens.

History of Jowai Municipal Board in a Nutshell

Can the state government



really wash its hands over the issue and abandon the people of Jowai? It may be mentioned that the process of upgrading Jowai Municipal Board from Jowai Town Committee under the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council to Jowai Municipal Board started in 1991 vide notification of the Council dated No. JHAD/TCA/EL/7/91/37 dt 21.12.1991. No objection of the upgradation of the town from the Town Committee to the Municipal Board was conveyed to the Government vide District's Council letter No. JHAD/TCA/PT/1/94/2 dated 29.4.1994. The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in its session held on April 6, 1995 passed a resolution and resolved to hand over the Jowai Town Committee to the State Government for constitution of the Municipal Board. Later on the government, vide its notification No. UAM.188/92/58

dt March 20, 1995 constituted the Jowai Municipal Board with its own boundaries.

Later on a memorandum of agreement was signed between the state government and the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and the Jowai Municipal Board was established with effect from November 4, 1995 under government notification No. UAM.103/95/7 'A' dt 27 October 1995. The question therefore is how can the Government wash its hands over the matter when Jowai Municipal Board is its own baby and was established by the state government?

With elections only few months away from now, the question that begs the answer is how will the political parties which are part of the coalition government justify the MDA stand on the is-

would have been a learning opportunity for the MDA government if it would have taken the bull by its horn and also learn how to solve this very important problem.

Abandoned coal pits a viable alternative for dumping of waste

They say necessity is the mother of invention and the idea of making use of the un-used coal pits as an alternative place to dump the garbage was explored. This scribe has taken the initiative to dump waste in the abandoned coal mines. But on a further consultation with experts like Prof B.K. Tiwari and Rathindra Roy via social media it was found that it is not prudent to do so. The idea of using coal pits as an alternative place to dump garbage should be put into practice only after proper study is being conducted. It was learned that dumping garbage can have many adverse effects on the water bodies both surface and underground water. The pit excavated horizontally at the bottom end of the vertical cutting can lead to other river bodies as the case of Ksan mishap has demonstrated. It may be reminded that even after trying to pump out the water from the pit for many months, the navy was not able to empty the mine.

From the dirtiest to the cleanest town

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step says the Chinese adage. The people of Jowai ought to wake up and think anew. With the state government leaving the people on their own, they need to find out ways and means to make their town clean and maintain its cleanliness. Can Jowai change from the dirtiest to the cleanest town in the state? Can Jowai become a zero waste town? Only the people of Jowai can answer the question.

The challenges that Jowaites face with the waste they generate and particularly the opposition to the dumping of the same, must also be a lesson for other towns and cities in the state. Even villages should start coming up with ideas of how to manage the waste they produce. The only way to manage waste generated from household or commercial establishments is by segregation. Segregation is the crux of the effort to manage waste.

(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

A consultant can't fix the Congress

By Jagdish Rattanani

Prashant Kishor is the focus of political attention again as he talks to join or at least work with the Indian National Congress, while at the same time signing to work for KCR in Telangana. For the Congress and a host of political forces, he appears to come across as a saviour, offering the hope of reviving the political fortunes of those being weighed down by the BJP's mix of ugly communal politics and superior management of perceptions. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot asked for Kishor to be embraced by the Grand Old Party saying he has become a "brand" while some others still hesitate to work with a new star recruit who wants to call the shots.

This one-man obsession, the desperate hunt for a performer to rescue sinking political fortunes and bring back lost friends, signals the extreme frustration of the Opposition, and in particular the Congress, at not being able to make much headway in upping their political game. The focus on what Kishor will or will not do as he prepares his plans for the Congress mirrors the party's pain and the dilemma that flows from lack of clarity on the path and boldness in resolve as it seeks to revive itself. Should the Congress go all out against the communalism being stoked, or should it play a "soft" Hindutva card or jump positions as issue after issue is stoked up? Should it, can it really, jettison one-family control of the party machinery? The answers should be obvious but they are not at all obvious to the party and its leadership.

On one hand, the party is willing and open to change - there appears to be no other option. This necessity is making it talk to someone who called for an end of the culture of sycophancy to the first family that is in the fabric of the party. Worse, those who have spoken against the "high command" are the very ones who, minus any political base, have occupied political positions because they, too, paid obeisance at the durbar - these internal voices of change carry no credibility. On the other hand, the idea that one outside star, however savvy or smart, can deliver the Congress form all its ills, is also a mirror to the political emptiness that has enveloped the party, much battered and emptied of inner energy in the surcharged climate of today. That emptiness leads to reliance on one hero who is after all a back-room manager. He can at best strategize the campaign, draw up the messaging and help plan the execution. It may work (ex: TMC in West Bengal) or not (ex: TMC in Goa). In many senses, this is a consulting solution to a bread and butter problem for the Congress.

The Kishor-led rescue project then looks like an abdication of sorts by the party, akin to outsourcing to a third-party vendor to deliver a low-cost solution to a burning problem that it does not know how to handle. But if the political reservoir has gone empty, how much can one Prashant Kishor pump in to revive and rejuvenate such a party? In fact, how can any one person bring to bear on a 137-year-old, historic party, unless all it had was gone, and the party remains only in name, looking for brands, and saviours and whatever other straws it may find.

What makes it more difficult is that Kishor is in politics but he is not a political leader of the kind, say, Kanhaiya Kumar, is - in the thick of the hurly-burly of politics, been to jail, taken aim straight and sharp at Narendra Modi. Kanhaiya Kumar joined the Congress last year but has gone surprisingly mute since then. His stinging attacks on the BJP and Hindutva politics,

which managed to force the BJP on the backfoot like few other leaders could, are gone. In effect, the Congress has silenced a powerful anti-BJP voice by taking him in and putting some constraints on him, it might appear, or at least not letting him thrive.

Yet, the Kishor option may look tempting from the point of view of a diminished Congress. He is credited with having brought electoral rewards for parties of various hues. And he himself is grounded and will likely agree that his role need not be overstated in the larger and complex game of playing politics and winning elections. It is also true that an outside analyst who can bring some sense of objectivity will be helpful to a party that is known to brook no dissent. The Congress can benefit from some ruffling of the feathers and from some plain speaking that an outsider can do.

But beyond that, the party needs something else to revive its fortunes. That something is not stratagems but some simple commitment to a clean government, a strong stand against corruption and communalism, and young faces who can work with energy and promise. It needs to learn that one family rule, a party headed by a fifth-generation dynast, as Ramchandra Guha once put it, is no longer feasible. It needs to recognise that it has to stand on principles and fight for the common person.

In this, the Congress faces an uphill task given that corruption charges still tend to stick to the party, running right up to its leadership. The latest example is the charge that the party allegedly sold the nation's highest civilian honour to a criminal banker. The charge by the now-jailed Rana Kapoor, the former CEO of Yes Bank who of course carries zero credibility, has been refuted by the party but this is the kind of mud that the Congress will find coming at it again and again.

Messages are difficult to stick but those that stick are not easy to unstuck.

In 2010, some 18 months after Barack Obama became President, more people thought he was Muslim (18%) than those who thought so in the previous three years (11%-12%), according to Pew. This is in the face of ugly propaganda by his opponents, and even after Obama, an extraordinary communicator, had the national stage as President. The late Colin Powell, a military general and a respected Republican, had risen in Obama's support to say this: "Well, the correct answer is, he is not a Muslim; he's a Christian. He's always been a Christian. But the really right answer is, 'What if he is?' Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer's no, that's not America. Is there something wrong with some seven-year-old Muslim American kid believing that he or she could be President? (On NBC 'Meet the Press', 2008). The Pew numbers showed all this to be of no help in the face of what people wanted to believe.

The only option is to stick to the message and to live by it - consistently, creatively, and by showing commitment. It has to be a hard grind and the people who run this marathon need to be made of a different mettle. That is precisely the change that the Congress runs away from, because it has lost what the historian Lewis Mumford called "an inner go"; what we see now is "a mere holding on" - not the sort of problem that lends itself to a consulting solution.

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

From archery ground to the Casino

Editor,

There was a quiz which goes, "How many years would a Government repeat itself?" It was a tough quiz until, 2022 came. In 1978, archery (Teer) was legalised to help fatten the exchequer. It was pure game where players only guessed what numbers to bet on based on their dreams. The result each day depended on the 100 arrows that landed on the target. But the sheer size of the target as big as a 200 litre petrol drum from a range of hardly 25 metres also meant that the random number could be

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

pre-decided by the agency running numbers game. It was called "Making."

Fourth furlong that overlooks the once crystal clear waters of the erstwhile Wah Umkhrah, now has tents from which smoke curls to the sky. These tents prepare tea for the archers and the gamblers eagerly awaiting the number of their professional day dreamers. A coffin is translated to number 99, a lady to number 6, a man as 7 and so on. While some have turned millionaires from the game, an equal number have debts chasing them to their graves.

After the fantastic stories of Ksan Tragedy, Krem lule and lately Shallang and the High Court finally having to study illegalities of coal mining and transport, we now jump to another story. The Government of India invited CM Conrad Sangma to Delhi somewhere in May last year to finally grant the scientific mining license. Two coal barons from East Jaintia Hills jumped at the challenge. It's nearly a year now but no progress has been made. The reason? No one can execute scientific mining on a mine that's already a rat hole. A square peg never fits into a round hole. Thus the illegalities on coal multiplied each day and is executed on a threatening scale.

Now teachers are out on the streets, with broad sarcastic smiles from someone. Cess on diesel goes towards

maintenance of roads, as these 12 and 16 wheelers have destroyed roads and Dwar U Ksuid bridge on the Shillong Bypass is now undergoing a quick-fix.

There are many more issues but the last one before the gambling decision was taken was to f the boundary issue with Assam getting the upper hand. Interestingly the HSPDP had effected this when it blamed the Khasis of plundering Assam whereas the intent then was to bring men from Assam to marry our ladies (ring kongor).

The earth is round so finally Teer in Polo Ground, is not the only gamble. Real casino style gambling of international standards will soon arrive in Meghalaya. The witty, far-sighted Conrad Sangma, had in 2021 passed the Meghalaya Regulation of Games Ordinance to prepare for this. And we are told that the Casino will be housed in a hotel taken over by our PWD minister in that disputed area with Assam, now settled. In Meghalaya all religions abhor gambling. If people get trapped in this Meghalaya will be doomed forever. But why should Conrad Sangma care?

Yours etc
J. Kharmih
Via email

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

"We cannot be mere consumers of good governance, we must be participants; we must be co-creators."

— Rohini Nilekani

The Shillong Times

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Spineless leaders

IF anything, the infatuation of political establishments to seek and take the "help" of election strategist Prashant Kishor exposes the spinelessness of those that lead these entities. Having been in politics for decades, what they are proving in so many words is that they have not grasped the fundamentals of political games and would, like children, require to be spoon-fed. The Congress party was having brainstorming sessions at its top leadership levels to decide how to "make use of" Kishor to win future elections, the main target being a return to power in the 2024 parliamentary polls. The way forward for a party is to strengthen its organizational structure and take on the ruling party and its government at multiple levels to earn the trust of the people, which should in normal course translate into votes. The grand old party's leaders are not in a mood to do the legwork or hard work to achieve this aim. Instead, the party is sending an SOS to a strategist to come and enable it taste power again. At the same time, the Congress leadership is keen on making sure that Kishor would not take the party away or put it in his pocket. In the event, he would as well decimate the first family and the whole lot of dead-wood that surround it. This possibility is for real.

Admittedly, it is not the Congress party alone that was after Kishor to achieve electoral success or retain power. Nitish Kumar did it, made Kishor the JDU vice president and then threw him out, just as Prime Minister Modi used the budding strategist to help him achieve his PM ambition in 2014 and then asked him out. Kishor went on to side with Mamata Banerjee, but her victory in the 2021 assembly polls was achieved mostly by her own grit and determination. So was the case with Stalin in Tamil Nadu or Jaganmohan Reddy in AP. Last heard was that Kishor was supping with Telangana's chief minister Chandrashekar Rao to help him win the next assembly polls and use it as the launch-pad for Rao's ambitions at the national level. Clearly, all those who engage Kishor are unsure of themselves and have loads of money to be given on a platter to ensure they win power. Fact, though, is that all these regional entities were fighting fit already. Not so the Congress today. Down in the dumps, it has to start from scratch. The deadwood around the family has done the greatest disservice to the party.

Ruling partners up against Govt: Whither Democracy and Governance?

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

This has a reference to the unresolved border imbroglio between Meghalaya and Assam. The deal made by the current NPP led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) Government with Assam has generated noise as well as fanfare. The two Chief Ministers helicoptered themselves into Langpih (one of the most contentious sectors) and villagers were in awe as they looked upwards to the sky which perhaps impelled them to believe that the solutions to the century old miseries had finally descended like manna from heaven. But to their utter dismay, many of the villages inside Meghalaya will be transferred to Assam as per the deal. There is anger, resentments and protests against the deal as it was nothing but a sell-out.

Not just this Government, but in the past different governments led by national parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) had been fooling around that the border disputes with Assam could be resolved if Governments in both the States and Centre belonged to the same party. Today, this "false belief" is again being propagated by the NPP- led Government on the plea that its sister or friendlier party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is at the helm in Assam and the Centre. It has also made the current MDA Government become over ambitious to resolve the century old border conflict once and for all within a short span thereby disregarding history and people. Save for regional parties, all national parties which had been in power in the last 50 years and till date are capitalising on this "false belief" for their own narrow political and vested interests.

This writer did not intend to undermine the efforts made by the different governments and reiterates that every effort made by individuals, civil society groups, traditional institutions like the Hima, Dorbar Shnong and Autonomous District Councils should be appreciated. It is vital to point out that the solution to the vexed border problems lies not in the question of which party is running the Government in the state and the Centre, however the Inter-State boundary issue is a Constitutional and Legislative (Central) matters. The solution rests solely with Parliament and at

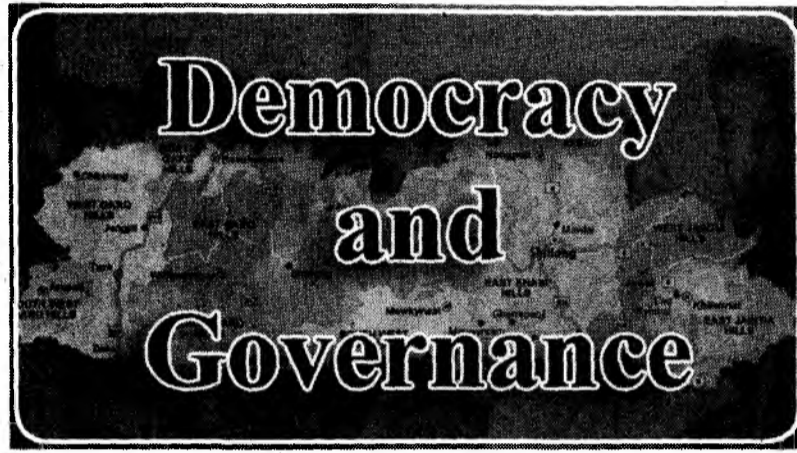
the same time the sentiments and concerns expressed by the primary inhabitants or residents of the border areas and the grassroots institutions have to be taken into account.

The MDA Government is a conglomerate of regional parties, Independents and lately the five suspended MLAs of the INC had also joined the band wagon in order to improve governance and delivery as they claimed. But what improvement can they contribute is yet to be seen. It is accepted that running a coalition government is as difficult and risky as walking the single tight rope

and without which no solutions will work on the ground and they are also empowered by the Constitution to manage and govern the Scheduled areas. Excepting the Dorbar Shnongs and Himas, the ADCs are an elected body whereby the members are elected along party lines and there seems to be a conflict which undermines the principle of collective responsibility. The situation is such that the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) is not happy with the decision of the MDA government on the boundary resolution with Assam and it is highly probable that the KHADC will oppose it. However, the Executive Council of the KHADC is being headed by the elected member of United Democracy Party, a major partner in the MDA, and is supported by the Nationalist People's Party. Both the parties constitute the current State Cabinet and they had collectively taken the decision to sign the MOU which effects the transfer of villages from Meghalaya to Assam. Thus, the conflict is glaring

and it is certainly going to undermine the principle of collective responsibility. Nonetheless, the KHADC being a Constitutional body can within its power protect and preserve the territorial integrity of the Scheduled areas. On the contrary, in the party system the call of the Executive Council of KHADC, headed by the UDP, to oppose the Government's deal on the boundary is totally constrained, unless it is firm in its resolve to go against the position of the State Cabinet which their respective ministers had agreed upon. It is interesting to see how the elected NPP members in the KHADC behave and act on this pertinent matter. In fact, the UDP or any coalition partner should have replaced its own ministers and sought for a review of the deal or withdraw support from MDA.

Democracy is diminishing as the principle or ideology is taking a back seat; rather democracy has gone into political oblivion. At present, what matters in politics and governance is to gain more power, wealth and position sans accountability and probity. We should prevent the State from falling into the abyss and slipping to preposterousness. This is the Kairos or the moment to act and challenge the follies of the existing political parties and the ruling class.



from one end of the canyon to the other as no one can guarantee a safe walk. There are pulls and pushes from all sides and implementations of vital decisions become difficult if not impossible. Among the regional parties, the United Democratic Party (UDP) is the major player in the MDA Government and is holding the most important home portfolio. But in these four years the UDP as a major player, with immense bargaining power, had miserably failed to hold the Head of Government (CM) accountable on all fronts, from the illegal transportation of coal to corruption and criminality.

The border issue is making headlines every alternate day since the signing of the MOU vis a vis the negative reactions of several Himas, Dorbar Shnongs, the expressed anger of residents, civil society groups and political parties, including the coalition partner(s), against the new deal is clear indication that all is not well with the current approach to settle the centuries old border problems between the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills and Assam.

There are various reasons which have been attributed to the inter-state boundary disputes between Assam and Meghalaya, ranging from the negligence of the political class to ensure that

sustain their myopic vision and parochial politics.

One does not need to be adept with political theories to understand the meaning of collective responsibility of the Cabinet in a parliamentary democracy. It only requires common sense that the elected representatives who constitute the Cabinet are governed by an uncompromising principle of collective responsibility. The Institute of Government clearly defines, "... the collective responsibility is a convention that has existed since the 18th century and is considered as the cornerstone of cabinet government... Collective responsibility has two main components. First, the principle that ministers are entitled to have free and frank debates prior to coming to a collective decision... Second, that once a position has been agreed in cabinet, all ministers are expected to abide by that position and vote with the government, or else resign from office".

In the case of Meghalaya and with reference to the Inter-State boundary settlement there are other major stakeholders which have a major say and the State Government cannot afford to ignore them. These are the traditional institutions, namely, Dorbar Shnongs, Himas and the Autonomous District Councils. They are crucial

The state is punishing lives, not just deviant behaviour of the accused

By Murali Karnam and Udit Singh

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court commuted the death sentence of a convict to an imprisonment sentence of 30 years without remission. The court observed that the convict was denied fair opportunity to defend himself during the trial. While justifying the commutation, it observed that there is no evidence to suggest that the prisoner is beyond reformation.

As of the end of last year, the fate of 488 prisoners, sentenced for capital punishment, was awaiting to be decided by various high courts and the Supreme Court. Through a legal amendment, the sentence of imprisonment for life, in 1956, replaced the colonial punishment of transportation, in the Indian Penal Code, 1860 [IPC]. Since the IPC does not specify the duration of sentence under imprisonment for life, the Supreme Court in *Gopal Vinayak Godse vs. State of Maharashtra* (1961) interpreted it as imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's life. However, under Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution, governments have been releasing prisoners after they complete seven to fourteen years of imprisonment, depending upon the gravity of the offences. But since 2008, the Supreme Court has been imposing extremely long sentences without remission, which imply practically that the offenders are to die in the prison. The direction of penal narratives points towards the continuation of this trend in the future.

In 2008, for the first time, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Swamy Shraddhananda vs. State of Karnataka*, effectively created this special sentence, while commuting the convict's death sentence, and held that this shall lead to the use of death sentences only in the rarest of rare cases. This new sentence was further justified by a Constitutional bench of the court in 2015 in *Union of India vs. V. Sriharan*. In the latter judgment, the court observed that higher courts could impose this new sentence for a pre-determined period.

However, sentencing a person for 35 years of imprisonment is hardly definitive in nature and evokes no sense of hope and free life for prisoners. Gone are the days when the Indian judiciary expressed moral outrage about a specimen of human beings languishing in prisons for more than two decades. Following the judiciary's cue, the Parliament subsequently also adopted the sentence till a person's natural life by amending the IPC in 2013 and 2018 for several offences. Consequently, governments have already started refusing to release even those prisoners sentenced for life in early 1990s.

With these developments in sentencing, there emerges an ironical situation: the courts and governments expect this category of prisoners to die in the prisons and yet justify the commutation of death sentences in the name of reformation. The presumption here seems to be that this sentence is not harsher than capital punishment. But what is its nature?

This sentence reflects pure vengeance of the worst order. It establishes just desserts of the prisoners' act. This is giving up on them and writing them off once and for all from society. It makes the ideas of reformation and reintegration of prisoners vacuous and meaningless.

In the 1980s, Justice Anand Narayan Mulla of the All India Jail Reforms Committee used to remind governments of the quote from Oscar Wilde that every sinner has a past and every sinner has a future. Stressing the importance of reformation, the judiciary used to remind the State and society of the importance of a humanitarian approach towards the underclass. But how did we reach a stage where the State and the judiciary are

brazenly vengeful, despite couching the sentences in legalese? This is not possible without gradual but generalized disregard for lives of the prisoners in public perception.

In these cases of the longest incarceration, the Supreme Court automatically forecloses the chance for the prisoners to demonstrate their capacity to reflect and reform themselves. It removes the motivation for life among such prisoners. The possibility of release can only create among them an interest to rebuild their lives.

In various states, though paroles and remissions are granted very unsystematically, yet prisoners enthusiastically grab the opportunities and make every effort to re-erect their fallen lives. They work hard and support their families through meagre prison earnings and try to build their legally battered lives. They even deeply repent on their offences when cathartic psychological spaces are created, like in Telangana. Under such circumstances, their reintegration into society still remains a prospect. If doors are kept open for them, it can demonstrate that the society is seriously interested in justice and social security but not in vengeance. But life sentences pre-empt such a positive image of the society and the State.

This indefinite sentence is the result of a foundational belief that convicts in grave cases are permanently dangerous and not amenable to transformation. After all, it is not as if there were no grave offences earlier.

The legalization of such a rationale legalized has serious implications for social sensibilities. This has far reaching consequences on the shrinking reformative activities of the penal system. The criminal justice system, already on a slippery slope, seems to be descending more towards retribution rather reformation. It indicates our abysmal track record in the management of prisons as humane institutions and their unworthiness for the task of reformation.

As the public loses faith in criminal justice system, the managers of the system are behaving as social 'anxiety barometers' and trying to 'act tough' against crimes. These sentences of vengeance further deteriorate the credence of the criminal justice system, and do not help the cause of deterring crimes.

This indefinite sentence is hardly imaginative as it has equally, if not more, important other consequences: it costs a lot to society. Given the fact that social anxieties about crimes are carefully orchestrated as the media realizes that crime sells, these irrevocable punishments might become a routine strategy of governance in future. Governments have been increasing the number of disqualifiers for releasing prisoners, and only a smaller number of them are released every year. While arrests and convictions of citizens are a constant and routine activity, their releases are not. Consequently, the decades of their maintenance costs substantially from public exchequer. If not altruistic, for the reasons of burden on public exchequer, the society has to rethink about the possibility of prisoners returning to normal life early.

The experience of prison management in the U.S.A. tells us that a large section of entrenched interests like prison guards associations and prison labour dependent industries develop around the "incarceration boom" that drains the public exchequer of billions of dollars. India surely cannot afford such an approach. As the consensus has been mounting against the death penalty, the 'indefinite turn' in sentencing is alarming as India might go the way of U.S.A., where the number of indefinite life sentences increased by 59 per cent from 2003 to 2016. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

Letters to the Editor

How to enhance business by becoming a Minister

Editor, Now before saying anything further on the subject let me hastily assure everyone that this is a topic/question on everybody's mind, a sort of ever current topic of sitting room conversation, especially about ministers and MLAs that make up the MDA Govt. Everyone believes it to be true, but how it is carried out still remains a mystery to the common man. A certain research scholar who has made it a mission to find out why certain Departments within the Government are in such high demand from money laundering Ministers, is of the view that these are departments with huge budgets that are ready to be milked dry. They are attractive to politicians who (1) come with a criminal, shameless business mindset ready to use public office as a safe platform to siphon off Government money to expand their personal or business interests (2) these

departments are manned by a subservient bureaucracy/technocracy that is willing to turn a blind eye while such looting of public money takes place. These are guys who have no stake in the welfare of Meghalaya (3) belong to a political party that turns a blind eye to corruption of this kind as long as it remains in power. So this is happening in Meghalaya big time and unless we wake up and do something to stop such crooks from donning the mantle of a public servant, we as a state and a community are doomed.

Now hold it! Don't jump to the conclusion that I am a sensation seeking alarmist crying wolf. Let me try and justify the above accusations by giving the example of what is happening in just one Government Department i.e. the Urban Affairs Department of Meghalaya. Allow me to take the readers mind's back to a certain Urban Affairs scheme to beautify Shillong by creating an iconic park / green urban lung concept at the place where the present PWD complex at Barik Pt stands. Rs 100 crore was earmarked for the above project. Immediately after the news report on the project mentioned above happened, a reshuf-

fling of the Cabinet suddenly took place without rhyme or reason, with Sniawbhalang Dhar taking over as the Minister i/c Urban Affairs from Hamlet Dohling the then inert, incumbent minister of that department. There was wide public speculation that Sniawbhalang Dhar, actively involved as member of the Dhar Construction Co, a shrewd and ruthless business man to boot, had jerked the carpet from under Hamlet's feet so as to ensure his own firm gets the contract for the Urban Affairs project mentioned above. This was bad enough but apparently the family is keenly looking forward to establishing a casino in the place.

It has now also turned out that the elder brother of the Minister, who was once a politician himself, had quietly on the sly acquired large tracts of land somewhere in New Shillong Township area of Mawdiang diang. Hundreds of acres was acquired by the elder brother in speculation of making a kill over such investments in the near future. Well he did not have to wait long. The younger brother's Urban Affairs Department has now obligingly stepped in to purchase the above mentioned land from the elder

brother, at a highly inflated cost of course. According to inside sources in the know the "profit alone" from this deal is likely to cross Rs 160 crore or more. The story goes that there was this intention of Urban Affairs to expand the New Shillong township but this information was kept secret; the younger brother then passed this inside information to the other; the other making heavy investments in real estate based on this insider information; resulting in the younger brother's Department purchasing property from the other brother. Payment of course was from the public exchequer. Typical mafia style!

Now as far as I know this is a crime known as Insider Trading. Insider trading is the practice of trading in a company's securities (in our case the Meghalaya Public Exchequer) using confidential knowledge (unpublished price-sensitive information) and making huge financial profits from such unethical practices. There is a Law against this. Rest assured the present MDA Government will do nothing to unearth the truth. Will the Judiciary therefore, the Meghalaya High Court to be specific, take suo-moto cognizance

on the allegations made, order a CBI inquiry into the crime and bring the culprits to book for unethical looting of the State?

Yours etc.,
Kitbok Thongni,
Via email

Uniform Civil Code necessary

Editor, As some states are proceeding forward to formulate a draft for Uniform Civil Code (UCC), intense debate is going on about its merits and demerits. The UP and Uttarakhand governments are thinking seriously about implementing it in the states.

The UCC requires the formulation of one law for India that would be applicable to all religious communities in matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption. Article 44 of the Constitution lays emphasis on the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code. This issue has been at the centre of debate for a long time. Once it is implemented personal laws of religious communities would be replaced with common laws that are applicable to all citizens irrespective of their faith.

In spite of the fact a great deal of time has elapsed since our country became independent, nothing has been done to implement the UCC. It must be understood that most of the laws that we have enacted have drawbacks. For example, POCSO Act has resulted in imprisonment of many who are not aware of the details of the law. The same complications may arise when the laws related to the UCC are enacted and implemented. Given that different religious communities have different customs and religious practices, there must be utmost care and planning in the formulation and implementation of laws. On the other hand, a progressive society needs to implement common laws so that the citizens do not have to depend on different laws. It would be irrational if each state formulates its own UCC. What a country with diverse culture requires is laws that are applicable to all and sundry in the country.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

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"Sincerity makes the very least person to be of more value than the most talented hypocrite."

—Charles Spurgeon

The Shillong Times

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CUET: A distressing prospect

THE Common University Entrance Test (CUET) has caused great distress among parents. Apart from having to help their wards fill up the convoluted forms online they also find that all colleges don't have the subjects that are listed in the form such as Psychology. The students themselves feel they have had to go through so much due to Covid which has unsettled their lives and now in a short while they will also have to writing the CUET in order to be admitted to the undergraduate courses. While parents in the city of Shillong are tearing their hair apart because they fear their kids might not make it through CUET, those from the rural areas seem to have given up the idea of ever seeing their children entering the portals of a college. If the Government of Meghalaya remains a spineless onlooker to this injustice done to our youth, the general enrolment ratio (GER) in the undergraduate level which is already very low will further slide and bring with it unintended consequences.

Any reform in the education or admission system has to be done after having created sufficient awareness so that students and parents can clarify matters by seeking clarification. But in this case there was too little time between the announcement of CUET and its implementation. Ironically the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) convened a meeting of principals and heads of institutions when that should have been the brief of the state government. The NEHU meeting was not a consultation meeting since the dissenting voices of a few heads of institutions were not recorded or paid heed to. It appears that the NEHU Vice Chancellor has been told by Delhi that he should bulldoze the decision to implement CUET and the concerns of citizens across the board have not merited any consideration.

A closer look will show that the market forces have played a critical role here. India is a thriving space for coaching in order to crack the various entrance exams to IITs, IIMs, the NEET for studying medicine and now CUET to enter university. In this ecosystem the poor will be most disadvantaged as they cannot afford to pay for the coaching classes and will simply fade away into the vast unknown where their futures are uncertain. Already the ed-tech space is swarming with offers of coaching classes and mock question papers and year-long packages to help students pass the CUET with higher scores. Most of the coaching institutes are offering crash courses for this year to help students crack the Language and General Aptitude part of the CUET at a reduced cost ranging between Rs 10,000 to Rs 30,000. This is what education is reduced to.

Letters to the Editor

The State Government must oppose CUET

Editor, NEHU and its affiliated colleges have apparently decided to go ahead with CUET 2022. So the gavel has come down and with it the inevitability of the fate of Meghalaya's students. Most of the seats will be filled by students from elsewhere, definitely so in the disciplines which are in demand for prestige and in the job market. The second rung of admitted students will be locals from the creamy layer of tribal families from Shillong and Tura. Last and mostly left out will be poor tribals from rural areas. It is well-known that the number of aspirants for a college education in the state far exceeds the available seats. In the news item on the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) in the Shillong Times, April 27, 2022, various political leaders have opposed CUET citing lack of connectivity and transportation at exam centres, and affordability of exam fees. But these reasons are not why we should oppose CUET. These so-called merit entrance tests are only good at one thing: preserving privilege. It is the main reason

why India's education system is derided as an "examination system", unsuitable for true learning for the vast majority of India's students, serving in the end to only further demarcate the elite from the masses. Research shows that these exams only measure aptitude in exams. Justice Krishna Iyer in a 1981 Supreme Court judgement said, "Our examination system makes memory the master of merit". In 1985, Justice Chinnappa Reddy, another Supreme Court justice asked, "How can a child, brought up in an atmosphere of penury, illiteracy and deprivation, who scores 40 per cent in a competitive exam, could be considered inferior to a child brought up in the lap of luxury, who studied in the most exclusive schools and colleges and got 70 or even 90 per cent?" After millennia of accessing the best education, jobs and wealth at the expense of the poor, the upper classes are in a dominant place, to ensure that their children end up being the most meritorious, thus embedding vast social inequalities between different classes. On what basis is the Tamil Nadu government opposed to NEET? The Justice Rajan Committee Report shows how NEET discriminates against the poor as well as Tamil medium students. All the opposition parties support the government, except

the BJP. It is not our children who fail, it is the system that fails our children. In a backward tribal state like ours, a plentitude of factors are responsible. Poverty, malnutrition, abysmal facilities, unpaid teachers, poor quality state education board, all conspire to cognitive deprivation. No amount of hard work or high motivation can overcome these impossible hurdles. We then expect them to compete with the best and brightest in the country. Yours etc., Glenn C. Kharkongor, Via email

A recipe for disaster

Editor, The recent decision of urban Affairs Department, Government of Meghalaya to increase the height of commercial buildings to 27 meters (7 floors) from the existing 15 metres (4 floors) in plots of 7500 square feet by adopting a surreptitious route of declaring some localities of Shillong as City Centre Zones appears to have been taken more due to extraneous factors than on any rational consideration. Or else how does one explain localities such as Bishnupur, Laban, Polo, Malki Market, Oakland, Barapathar (Mawbah), Dhankheti amongst many other localities being notified as City Centres on grounds

that these localities have so much potential for commercial development that commercial buildings rising to 7-8 stories high have become a necessity. It's ridiculous to say the least. This decision must have been taken under duress as it defies logic. When congestion and overcrowding is killing Shillong and precious little is being done to decongest the city apart from lip service, the decision to increase the permissible height of commercial buildings and consequently the population density and traffic in these localities, appears to be just adding fuel to the fire. Just imagine additional floors now being added to the existing commercial buildings in Police Bazar, Laitumkhrah, Polo and other localities and the resultant congestion. The city has already reached a point of saturation. Lack of enforcement has led to buildings coming up at handshaking distance from each other, on steep slopes, on areas prone to disaster, on river courses, by encroaching into public spaces, by violating the bye-laws. Each and every day one hears people complaining about the living condition in the city. When there is a burning need to decongest, Government in its wisdom (?) has felt it prudent to increase the height of buildings. With the level of infrastructure which exists in the city and firefighters in

most cases failing to negotiate the existing terrain and narrow roads, decision to increase building heights is only a new disaster in the making. It is unfortunate that the present government is taking decisions which involve public safety and welfare without actually consulting the people, even while issues raised by the public are blatantly ignored. No wonder therefore that public is left with no other options but to knock on the doors of the Judiciary on the rails. Government should be a little more responsive to the public who have elected them to power. Yours etc., B. Dutta, Shillong-1

is not different from drug addiction. More importantly, besides monetary loss, it destroys one's reasoning power, sensitivity, and creativity. A gambler obsessed with gambling cannot have a higher vision. He can hardly think of future ambitions and consequently, he becomes a liability to his state. But strangely, the Government is resolutely determined to legalize the casino, and maybe much more, in the state. This is very unfortunate. We can hardly keep our people from playing online. They are far smarter; they are techno-savvy! One hopes that the Government would rather put its sincere efforts to create an environment for other kinds of employment or set up other facilities and amenities that will help our youngsters blossom into vibrant talents. Those who fall prey to bad habits will see their potentialities just wither. One talented citizen with a good character is a bigger asset to the state/nation than a thousand gamblers with no vision. So, let's not gamble with the future of our youths - be they from within the state or outside. Yours etc., Salil Gewali, Shillong

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

Landlessness: A ticking time bomb

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Agrobiodiversity Society) in a village in East Khasi Hills, it was revealed that no one in the particular village owned the land on which they have built their houses and where they practice their farming. The entire land is actually owned by a particular clan which has leased it to the residents of the village for a period of 15 years. The *durbar shnong* then leased the land to certain households in the village who would further lease it to the other households for a period of 4 years. In effect, there are three layers of land ownership in the village. In such a situation it is the ones at the bottom who ends up paying the most for using the land. This happens because

The team from NESFAS also gave individual presentations, one of which was on how Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems can act as a bulwark against biodiversity loss. During the Q&A session, both Charlotte and the NESFAS team were asked questions, one of which was related to the issue of growing landlessness in Meghalaya.

from community to private property regime mode) is the 2019 'Citizen's Report on the Unregulated Coal Mining in Meghalaya'. This document can be accessed from <https://raiot.in/download-citizens-report-on-the-unregulated-coal-mining-in-meghalaya/>. The author of the present article was a member of the drafting committee which submitted the report to the Supreme Court. The Court cited the report in its final judgment on coal mining. There might be some who will argue that the present arrangement is not really a big problem. Since it is happening between members of the same indigenous community, i.e., between *para doh para snam*, there won't be any exploitation. The experience of the village mentioned in this article however proves otherwise. Few years ago, the land owning clan proposed that every household in the village would have to pay a kind of house tax. This was rejected by the village *durbar shnong* citing that it goes against age-old traditions and culture of the Khasi community. There is in fact a precedent to this which comes from the Jaintia Hills. In pre-colonial times, the Jaintia Kingdom was one

of the strongest kingdoms to have emerged from the hills of Meghalaya. It in fact had spread its dominion to the plains of Sylhet where Jaintiapur was established as the capital of the kingdom. Expectedly, the arrival of the British in the region brought the Jaintia Kingdom into conflict with them. Finally, on March 15, 1835, the ancient kingdom lost its independence and was conquered by the British. This however did not mean the complete subjugation of the Jaintia people to the will of the foreigners. In 1860, a House Tax was imposed in Jaintia Hills. The public pronouncement of this imposition was made by Manik Pakyntein in a *Dorbar* held at Minkoi Pirdi in 1859. In the same year, many more taxes were imposed which included Income Tax and duties on trade and other commodities. The Jaintia people however resented this move to tax them. The final straw which sparked the rebellion was the decision of the British Government to stop a local festival. This uprising was led by U Kiang Nangbah. Born to Ka Rimai Nangbah at Tpeppale in Jowai, he was a farmer whose maternal uncle had also fought against the British. When Kiang Nangbah heard about the imposition of the tax, he declared that, "Natives do not pay taxes to the foreigners". The uprising only ended when Kiang Nangbah was captured by the British after being betrayed by one of his comrades. He was tried and hanged at Iawmusiang in 1862.

What the clan proposed to the village was akin to the house tax imposed by the British. The fact that it was done by members of the indigenous community who rose up against outsiders who wanted to do the same, points to a very sad development. It represents the dilution of the ethos and the value systems which has held the community together for thousands of generations. But most of all, it represents the precarious situation of the landless population in the State. It's very possible that in the future the situation might deteriorate to the extent that a new Kiang Nangbah will have to emerge; this time not to fight against outsiders but against enemies from within (like his comrade who betrayed him) to save the indigenous community.

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Chinese govt has failed to learn from India's 'freeze order' disaster

Two lockdowns in Asia's two biggest countries offer many lessons

By K Raveendran

The 'freeze' ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a response to the outbreak of Covid pandemic had gone terribly wrong in terms of its timing. Millions of lives and livelihoods were lost as everything ground to a halt, a mistake for which the nation continues to pay a heavy price. Now it seems to be the turn of the Chinese to share the 'honour'. Despite their best technology, innovation and spirit of inquiry, the Chinese apparently failed to learn from whatever happened on the other side of their border.

prices met with an embarrassing no from the Saudi authorities, which has even further strained the relations between the two countries.

According to media reports emerging from the Middle Kingdom, a complete lockdown of Shanghai, the icon of China's industrial and

In fact, the response of the Gulf oil producers to Russia's Ukraine invasion has been moderated by the oil cartel's common cause with Moscow, which is one of the biggest players in the oil economy. Ukraine developments, including the western sanctions as well as retaliatory strikes by Putin, have been responsible for the recent price crisis in petroleum products. In this respect, the Chinese lockdowns have come as a counter-balance, bringing relief to oil importing countries as well as to the major



technology muscle, is producing exactly similar results as 25 million residents of this sprawling metropolis have been forced into their homes or workplaces as part of the fight against a wave of the Omicron variant of Covid.

stakeholders such as the US in their bid to keep prices under check. The downward pull in crude is also having a bearish influence in the rest of the energy mix.

Reports say whole communities have been hauled out to give the authorities the opportunity to sanitise the city, with a terrible food shortage consistently claiming mounting death tolls. Apparently, modern white soldiers, enforcing Covid protocol with an iron hand, are evoking memories of the Red Soldiers of the Cultural Revolution era.

The mobility restrictions in China are already putting severe bottlenecks on the supply chains of multiple industries. Since the lockdown was enforced, the efficiency of Shanghai port has been greatly impacted, leading to disruptions of shipments along various supply chains. Global battery supply disruptions arising from lockdowns in China have jeopardised ambitious EV goals, and are chipping away China's dominance in the battery market, according to analysts with Rystad Energy. The impact of current lockdown and restrictions in nearby manufacturing hubs has been deemed even more severe than the initial lockdown in early 2020.

Lockdowns, whether on this side of the border or the other, are horrible. But ironically, the Chinese lockdowns have brought some respite to India in arresting the relentless rise in the price of petroleum products. The Shanghai lockdown has even affected the outlook for oil as demand has dropped sharply. World crude oil prices have already slipped up to 6 percent on fears of lower demand and the current price forecast is in the vicinity of \$90 per barrel, as against \$120 and upwards only weeks ago.

The tight supply situation has prompted the Canadian and US governments to provide financial support for domestic battery processing to meet ambitious EV sales goals. Indonesia with globally significant mineral reserves is also getting in on the action with plans to set up a battery supply chain worth \$6 billion.

The Chinese deterrent has come at a time when the world was struggling to hold the price of oil to reasonable levels so as not to jeopardise the slow recovery in the global economy after the serious fallout of the pandemic. Releases from the strategic reserve by the US and other countries with a major say in determining petroleum prices were of no avail as the crude prices refused to be tamed.

China also faces the threat of increased competition as many battery materials are used in industrial processes not related to energy. Although China's dominance in the processing sector remains dominant, demand looks sluggish post lockdown with macro financial concerns weighing on demand. According to current estimates, the lockdown and related issues could end up negatively affecting China's economic activities, and increase the likelihood of further reductions in GDP growth forecasts in the coming months. (IPA Service)

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

— Fidel Castro

The Shillong Times

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Churning in Congress

THE principal opposition, the Congress party, is set to hold a Nav Sankalp Chintan Shivir in Udaipur for three days from May 13. The so-called brainstorming session comes precisely two years before the next Parliamentary polls and a few assembly elections set in between. The roadmap for the 2024 polls will be laid out and work started in right earnest. The series of developments within the party in recent days are worth a close look as they will have serious bearings on the future course of the party. First and foremost, the leadership has put at rest the issue of rank outsider Prashant Kishor being given a role in re-energizing the party. All things considered, it has said the political strategist cannot be given any top position or role in the party; something that he had obviously aspired for. It is well-established now that the media hype over Kishor's "Congress entry" was without any strong basis. The party would continue to be led by and identified with the family. It is generally understood that the leadership of the Congress cannot be handed over on a platter to someone who hobnobs with several political establishments in quick succession.

At another level, Congress working committee member of three decades, AK Antony, has exited from the top policy making body and left Delhi for good. He was a source of strength to Sonia Gandhi. She had lost another principal aide, Ahmed Patel, who passed away by the end of 2020. As political secretary, Patil had remained her eyes and ears for several years. In the absence of these two stalwarts, who stood on the right and left of Sonia Gandhi for years, she may find the task of leading the party difficult. She has health problems and cannot travel. Put together, the need to find a new president for the party is more urgent now. Perceptions are that she would either install Rahul Gandhi or find a working president from among the Congress leaders for now. Time is running out for the party.

Another significant development is the acceptance of resignation of Kamal Nath as Leader of Opposition in Madhya Pradesh. As PCC chief, he was ignoring the party norm of 'one-man, one post' for a long time. The state is set for assembly polls by end-2023 and it should be time for the Congress to put its house in order in MP. It is even likely that Nath could be drawn in for more support to the party at the central level. A process of churning is inevitable within the Congress leadership.

Will the Government of Meghalaya Grow a Spine

By Patricia Mukhim

Several issues make one feel that India is fast losing its federal structure. The Centre is taking unilateral decisions and literally coercing the states to abide by those. Recently Home Minister Amit Shah announced that Hindi would be compulsory up to Class 10 in the eight north eastern states. He went on to say that 22, 000 Hindi teachers have been recruited for the eight states. Amit Shah was speaking as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee. This implies that Making Hindi compulsory up to Class 10 is a done deal and the Home Minister has got the consent of the states. Education is on the concurrent list so how can the Centre take decisions that are unilateral and tantamount to coercion. What has happened to the BJP today is that it is living in a make-believe world of smug insularity. It believes that it is the sole repository of wisdom and that India's journey thus far is not credit-worthy so everything has to change and change fast. But at what cost? India is too diverse a country to even consider a national curriculum framework as the only viable one.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has defended the decision of the Union Home Minister and advocated that learning an array of languages enhances one's job opportunities. That point is well taken but why make Hindi compulsory? If the sky's the limit and the youth need to move to South India which is the destination of many, how does knowing Hindi help? Isn't English a more universal language and the common currency that makes it easier for those knowing it to fit quicker into a technologically advanced world. The world of Information Technology is an English driven world. If Hindi must be learnt then let it be a third language after English and Khasi/Garo.

The stand of the Government of Meghalaya on the Hindi issue is still ambivalent. The so-called avant-garde of student's welfare in the state that are otherwise hyper-active about political issues don't seem to take this issue of imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject, to be important enough so they don't wish to quibble about it. Only the North East Students' Organisation (NESO) expressed its dissent on the matter. There is a huge constituency of parents in the state but they choose to speak in whispers and tend to take everything lying down as if they are non-citizens and

have no right to open their mouths. In any case, in Meghalaya, there is a conspiratorial silence on issues of public concern. Let's put it this way - students actually have no advocates. They have been reduced to guinea pigs on whom all manner of experiments are conducted. In Meghalaya we are silent on critical issues but glib on topics such as the insider-outsider conundrum, the Inner Line Permit the Sweeper Lane issue as if these are the only issues of concern.

The latest coercion from the Centre comes in the form of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) which is pronounced in much the same way as CUTE but is an ugly piece of instrument yet again coming like a sledgehammer on the states and for which quick compliance is expected by the Central

exception of a few voices of dissent. Should CUET have been discussed only by principals of colleges and higher secondary institutions and the NEHU faculty? What about the main stakeholders - the parents and the students? Don't the students have the right to make their voices heard simply because they have not reached the voting age? And what about the parents? Aren't they the ones that are currently the most agitated lot?

The State Government has failed miserably in guiding this agenda. It has lost an opportunity to show the Centre that it has a spine and a mind of its own when it comes to certain issues. Unfortunately, Meghalaya has now come to a point of such subservience before the Central Government that if they are told to jump they will ask, "How high?" This

requires that people challenge each other so that the truth can emerge. If Universities lose intellectual diversity and create zones of safety that cannot be trespassed and that trump the idea of challenge they will become the dangerous echo chambers where ideas will be killed and slaughtered because any new thinking will be considered dangerous to the political dispensation of the day which is hell bent on ensuring conformity and conformity is the death knell of a University.

The next question is - what about the views of political parties on the CUET dilemma. Have they studied the problem or are they busy with the game of one-upmanship preparing for the 2023 elections? The UDP has a doctorate as its leader. What are his and the UDP's views on the CUET? And what about the Congress Party? Or the TMC for that matter? The rightful and appropriate role of the Opposition in a democracy is to put the government on the mat but also to come up with viable alternatives. After all, the Opposition is what we call a shadow cabinet that may well be in the seat of power tomorrow. These parties have remained silent on the issue of CUET almost as if they don't care for the fate of the thousands of students who will be faltering in their entrance test and might miss the bus to the undergraduate colleges.

Those in politics claim to be our leaders but where is that leadership today? The Education Minister has proved to be absolutely unreliable and unwilling to take a definite stand on the CUET issue. He has faltered in the Home Department too. Leaders are not born; they are made out of the crucible of real life experience and they learn to show their spine when that is called for. Alas! The CUET has exposed how leaderless Meghalaya is and how acquiescent the political executives have become and how ready they are to dance to the tune of Delhi.

Many of those who are desperate to get through CUET by hook or crook will of course take crash courses from the coaching bazaars because their parents are able to shell out the money. The poor will always lose out in this game. But why should the Government care? The children of all politicians and bureaucrats are in the best institutions outside the state and country. Let the poor wallow in their poverty and drop out of the university system. That seems to be the verdict of the MDA Government as far as CUET is concerned.

"The stand of the Government of Meghalaya on the Hindi issue is still ambivalent. The so-called avant-garde of student's welfare in the state that are otherwise hyper-active about political issues don't seem to take this issue of imposition of Hindi as a compulsory subject, to be important enough so they don't wish to quibble about it. Only the North East Students' Organisation (NESO) expressed its dissent on the matter."

Government and the University Grants Commission. The students of Class 12 are writing their exams right now and the announcement regarding CUET has caught them in a bind. They are a worried lot since they don't have the faintest idea as to how to approach the entrance test. Their parents are a harried lot but also a disparate constituency that have never come together to speak on behalf of the student community. Many parents who are technologically disabled find it a monumental task to download the CUET forms and fill them online. But who cares? Does the State Government care about the fate of the student community, especially those from the rural hinterland?

And then there was this meeting at NEHU to discuss CUET. In the first place NEHU should not have been the venue for this meeting. By attending it the principals and heads of institutions have allowed NEHU to hijack this agenda and to convey to the Centre that they have got full compliance with the

is where we discern a deep leadership crisis. A leader is one who rises to the occasion and takes the right decision in the larger public interest and not just for short term political gains. A meeting called by the State Government on the issue of CUET would have captured the diversity of thoughts which is arguably the most important aspect of diversity. When perspectives are unrepresented in a discussion; when some kind of thinkers are absent from the discussion table, the meeting becomes an echo chamber rather than a sounding board. In the end everyone loses. I am not sure what the NEHU faculty present at the meeting spoke about and if they supported CUET simply because they believe the Vice Chancellor wants to steamroll that decision.

University is unlike other institutions, and more especially unlike the politics of the day which is promoting homogeneity of thought as if to differ means to be in conflict. It is in the University that we expect the free flow of ideas. A University

Time of final reckoning has come for sedition law

Supreme Court under a historical responsibility

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

The time of reckoning has finally come. The Supreme Court of India is to begin final hearing of petitions challenging sedition law on May 5, 2022, as the Apex Court has said on April 27, and would not entertain any request for any further adjournment of the matter. The three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court headed by the Chief Justice NV Ramana, which includes Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, has directed the Centre to file its response by the end of this week after hearing a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of sedition law in Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Since CJI N V Ramana will be retiring on August 26, 2022, the final outcome of the case is expected before his retirement.

The constitutional validity of Section 124-A is not the only issue, though it is an important issue. Justice Ramana has himself said, "This court's main concern is the misuse of the law, leading to a rise in number of cases. We need to hear on this point and that too in a detailed manner." That is why people of the country have great hopes on the outcome; some even hoping that the bench would do a great service to Indian democracy if this British era law is thrown out of the Indian statute book. This hope will be realized only if the bench would find the law unconstitutional, or inevitability of misuse of the law if allowed to exist.

In an earlier judgment in Kedar Nath case, 1962, a constitutional bench had upheld the validity of the sedition law under IPC. Since then the law has been misused to charge dissenters and critics of the government with sedition though the actions infringe on basic human rights. Petitioners now allege that the law infringes on the basic human rights and violates Article 14 (right to equality before law) and 19(1)(a) (right to freedom of speech and expression) of the Indian Constitution.

The first amendment of the Constitution of India brought in 1951 has limited the freedom under Article 19(1)(a) and enacted Article 19(2) to empower the state to put curbs in the form of "reasonable restrictions" on right to free speech. This amendment along with the SC ruling in Kedar Nath case has made it possible for the governments to misuse the sedition law to suppress critics of misrule by booking them under section 124-A and putting them behind bars which is punishable even with imprisonment for life.

Section 124-A of the IPC says whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government... shall be punished... with three exceptions.

1. The expression "disaffection" includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
2. Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.
3. Comments expressing disapprobation of the administrative or other action of the Government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.

Had Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP's state governments not made a grave mistake in misreading this law, they would not have misused it as a weapon to suppress the critics. People are intimidated, and they are now wary of expressing dissent even on the wrongs committed by the government authorities.

used in this section does not mean a "ruling political party", "public servant" or any "decision" of the government? The government is a system and does not mean the ruling party, Prime Minister or any other public servant, or any of their decisions. So how can criticism against them amount to disaffection against the "government of India" or "governments of any state of the country"? Government is a ruling body in continuation, while parties and persons come and go. Therefore, anything said against parties and persons in power and their decisions and misrule cannot be sedition.

The real challenge in the Supreme Court will be providing clear view not only who and what is a "government" with special reference to sedition, so that the cases may not linger on in the courts of India, at a time when government servants and rulers seem to assert that "they are the government", while in reality, government is an institution, not any individual or a group of individuals who have somehow come to believe that they are the government.

Therefore any offence against a public servant, an individual or a group of officers or rulers, or their decisions clearly pertains to other sections of the criminal laws or IPC, but not to the law of sedition under section 124-A. And if there are some "reasonable restrictions" on the freedom of speech, these can be dealt with according to the other provisions of the law such as 'simple breach of a rule', 'offence against an authority in power', 'offence against a ruling establishment', 'offence against state machinery', 'offence against the state' or even distinguished under IPC, but not sedition.

Section 124-A - 1860 of the IPC is a British legacy which was originally inserted by Act 27 of 1870, and was further amended in 1898, 1937, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1955, and 1956. When it was applied in India, the country then was under British rule and not an independent democratic republic. During British rule, any dissent by an Indian citizen, was considered 'sedition', but now we are a free, democratic country and we are vested with the fundamental right to expression, which cannot, and should not be suppressed in the name of 'sedition' for it would be anti-democracy. A citizen must have right to criticize and to warn about the errors and pitfalls of the decisions taken by ruling establishments, political parties and persons in power, especially when those tend to jeopardize the national interest. It is what democracy means.

During the hearing on July 15, 2021, the Apex Court itself had noted the "enormous power of misuse" of the sedition law in India and had asked the Centre as to why it should not scrap a colonial law that was once used by the British government to oppress the freedom movements and leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The court also emphasized that it was concerned about "misuse of the law and lack of accountability of executive and the investigating agencies. The court was informed that a 2019 data shows, sedition cases rose by 25 per cent (93 in number) and arrests by 41 per cent over the previous year. However, only 3 per cent of cases led to conviction of only two accused. It suggested that people were made to suffer by the state without reasonable grounds. Why does the judiciary then not put a brake on such blatant misuse of sedition law? Perhaps, there is no clarity even in the minds of the judges about what constitutes sedition. Therefore, the SC bench hearing the batch of petitions has a historical responsibility to put a brake on the misuse of the sedition law or throw the law out altogether. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

MTC- Eviction orders served

Editor,
It is learnt from reliable sources that eviction notices have been served to tenants and occupants in the MTC (Meghalaya Transport Corporation) premises in Police Bazar, Shillong, to make way for a Rs 200 Crore plus megaproject. These tenants have been running a range of businesses like tea shops, restaurants, hotels, pharmacies and healthcare products etc. Some of the tenants have been doing business from the premises since the time when Shillong was the capital of Assam. As per the tenants the MD of MTC, in one of their meetings, had earlier assured the tenants of re-allocation once the megaproject stands completed but such assurances were only verbal. Also in such meetings the tenants have always made it a point to mention that taking into account the great economic distress common people that include the tenants and their employees, are suffering due to the Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, the megaproject may be made in a phased manner making sure that business was not

disrupted, much the same way the Polo Market in Polo and the MUDA Complex in Khyndailad were conceptualised and constructed by the Government of Meghalaya. A similar venture is taking shape in the Laitumkhrak Market premises without disrupting the occupants there. However, the Government of Meghalaya seems to have different yardsticks for different citizens and the tenants of MTC, Police Bazar are at the end of that stick. Having been slapped with eviction notices by the District Administration the tenants have now approached the Judiciary for redress. I have not come across any of this being reported in news channels and newspapers of the State.

Now I come to a more pertinent point. Police Bazar is bursting at its seams. It is a huge cauldron of blaring cars, hooting motorcycles and scooters, police personnel chasing around with clamps in their hands, pedestrians trying to push through, hawkers shouting their wares, beggars begging alms, food stalls from where FSSAI authorities will never order food for themselves, open fire tandoors beckoning accidents to happen. Police Bazar is a tinderbox wait-

ing to explode. Thousands of vehicles enter and exit Police Bazar every day. The MUDA parking lot refuses more cars than it can take at any given day. The streets leading to and exiting from this commercial hub witness standstill traffic jams for hours every working day.

In this scenario at Police Bazar the MDA government is hell bent on dumping here a Rs. 200 crore plus behemoth housing massive commercial projects, etc., that probably was earlier earmarked for Barik area which was rightly condemned by the far-sighted populace of the city and its hinterland. Let us face it; Police Bazar cannot take any more load. The Minister of Urban Affairs seems hell bent to fast track this project at MTC come what may. What is his benefit in this matter is anybody's guess in the context that he is now probably richer than our MPM Vincent H Pala as per the observations of our Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong (The Shillong Times, April 27, 2022). For any project of this magnitude the right place is The New Shillong Township. The MTC Property in Police Bazar can be beautifully developed into a Green tree covered Park, like the

lungs of Police Bazar where citizens can breathe fresh air whenever they please and for housing the legal hawkers (who otherwise encroach upon the public roads), in aesthetic kiosks, while also accommodating the present tenants in the premises. Walking lanes for the elderly, children parks, outdoor gyms, etc., can also be conceptualised as the area is huge. But please let us not add to the concrete jungle that Police Bazar already is. The financial institutions funding this MDA megaproject at the MTC premises in Police Bazar may please do a detailed environmental and social audit before embarking to disburse the Rs 200 crore plus funds.

We Meghalayans are known for our apathy and therefore easily manipulated by the powers that be. Time and again the Judiciary and the NGOs have come to our rescue. I personally have penned many letters sharing my opinion through this column to mobilise public opinion. Once again, I request our NGOs and the civil society at large to delve deeply as to what impact this behemoth project being thrust down the gullet of Khyndailad will have. Let us ask the questions: Will

it solve traffic congestion in the Shillong Sadar Thana area? Will it reduce pollution and carbon footprints? Will it prevent the hawkers from usurping public space? Will it allow free movement of pedestrians in the area? Before embarking into such a project the Government of the day is requested to discuss and interact with all the stake holders in the public forum.

Yours etc.,
Rupert Lyngdoh
Via email

Kudos to the Tympang Club

Editor,
The Tympang Club Jowai deserves commendation for the excellent job done on clearing the footpaths in Jawmustang, which the vegetable vendors were occupying. The Jowai Municipal Board from time to time announced that vendors should vacate the pavement yet they failed to obey the orders. Fortunately, now we see a spacious Jawmustang, which is a good sight to look at. This commendable job done by the Tympang Club needs to be appreciated. I am sure this will not have a

temporary effect. The question now arises about the supposed market which had been constructed and which is not even half done. I call it "Ka Lano law". The foundation stone had been laid a long time ago but it remains incomplete till date. People of Jowai are being fooled by the JHADC. This reminds us that before every election, politicians promise that this market located at the old market would be completed. Instead, all we can see are bushes growing inside the supposed market. Where is the money allotted for the purpose? The vendors too are complacent enough to sell their goods adjacent to these bushes.

Meanwhile, it may be mentioned that the excellent job of clearing the footpath was done following the successful bandh called by the Tympang Club in clearing the garbage dumps at Jowai town amidst the inability of our Administration to clear the garbage.

Yours etc.,
Omarka Laloo,
Mynthong, Jowai

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"Take care to get what you like or you will be forced to like what you get."

-- George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

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Religion for harmony, not noise

IN June 2005 the Supreme Court had banned the use of loudspeakers and music systems in public places between 10 pm and 6 am (except in cases of public emergencies), citing the serious effects of noise pollution on the health of residents living in such areas. Court orders are to be implemented by respective state administrations but mostly these are enforced in the breach. Now after 17 years, the Uttar Pradesh State Government has decided to remove or reduce the noise level of loudspeakers from temples, mosques and other religious places. The fact that UP Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath wants the loudspeakers removed by April 30 is not lost on political observers.

Eid -Ul -Fitr which brings to an end the fasting period of Ramzan among Muslims is being observed on May 3. The Uttar Pradesh Government has therefore launched a drive to remove loudspeakers from eight zones of the state. As per the data released by the UP Government, a total of 10,923 loudspeakers were uninstalled from various religious sites in the state and the volume of 35,221 loudspeakers was lowered as per the parameters till 4 pm on Wednesday. The Home Department asked the police to remove the loudspeakers and those flouting the noise limit standards. The order for this came on April 24 and a compliance report for this has been sought by April 30. Yogi Adityanath says these loudspeakers are removed to prevent any kind of backlash as had happened in Delhi's Jehangirpuri during Ram Navami. He also said that the noise emanating from these loudspeakers disturb the peace and harmony of the people living nearby. To that extent the Yogi is right. Noise pollution can create disharmony and disturb the peace of babies, the sick, the elderly and students.

Noise pollution has been medically proven to cause health hazards for humans. Doctors say hypertension is a direct result of noise pollution which is caused due to elevated blood levels for a longer duration. Noise can also cause hearing loss, sleep disorders and cardiovascular issues or heart-related problems. In the light of all these it is distressing to note that in India religious places continue to flout the norms on the plea that the call to prayer is a compulsory part of Islam. This is where religious reformation is needed with the advent of modernity. Perhaps the need for a call to prayer was at a time when people did not have watches. Now every person wears a watch or has a mobile phone to show the time. They can well pray at a designated time without needing to be reminded. In any case no religion is supposed to create disharmony because the purpose of religion is to bring peace and harmony.

The good, the bad and the ugly of CUET

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The requirement of Common University Entrance Test (CUET), 2022 for admissions into under graduate programmes has come as a major challenge for all stakeholders in education. There is a need to deliberate on them. At the same time there is a need to be pragmatic about the whole issue. To put things into perspective, today the requirement is only for under graduate courses; but, it is just a matter of time when it shall be required for post graduate courses too including PhD. As such, it is better to look into it futuristically and adapt at the earliest particularly in terms of physical infrastructure such as information and communication technologies (ICT) and testing centres. Further, keeping in mind the long-term interest of education in Meghalaya it would be better to take these entrance requirements as a compulsory entry condition across central, state and private universities. There is no point of deliberating on it only as a central educational issue. CUET is just a gust of wind. There is a whole storm coming. Be wise and prepare; else, be ready to struggle and suffer. Logically, CUET has its fair share of the good, the bad and the ugly. It is just a question of whether the positives outweigh the negatives or vice versa.

The good:

Conceptually, it would be wrong to take CUET as something which is totally new. Entrance examinations for under-graduate courses have always been there. Engineering studies is a good example. The only reason for CUET being in the news is the scale of students it would encompass. Students trying for arts, commerce and science under graduate admission will need to sit for entrance. To this, there are many doubters. But, if we really look into it from a developmental standpoint; it is good. This is the kind of situation that the students need in order to develop a competitive spirit. The word 'entrance' can be taken as being synonymous with 'competitive'. It will change the approach of the students to their classes XI and XII experience. Apart from learning the normal syllabus, in the back of their minds will be the awareness to simultaneously prepare for

entrance examination. What is needed in this progression is for schools to adapt to the change.

In due course of time some coaching may be imparted to the outgoing students at the school level itself. This also has a cascading effect. Through CUET the students may just get the much-needed motivation to look into and start preparing for MPSC and other central competitive employment examinations such as UPSC and SSC. Yes, this external impact is possible. In addition, CUET also provides a level playing field for the

district headquarters will find it very difficult to set up test centres in such a short span of time. It can be expected that this year there will be many problems in the execution of the entrance test. There are 79 colleges affiliated to NEHU and around 23,000 students appeared in the recently concluded HSSLC MBOSE examinations. Now, they make the main stakeholders with regards to the implementation of CUET. The state government should have done a proper consultative drive before deciding on the matter. NEHU can decide

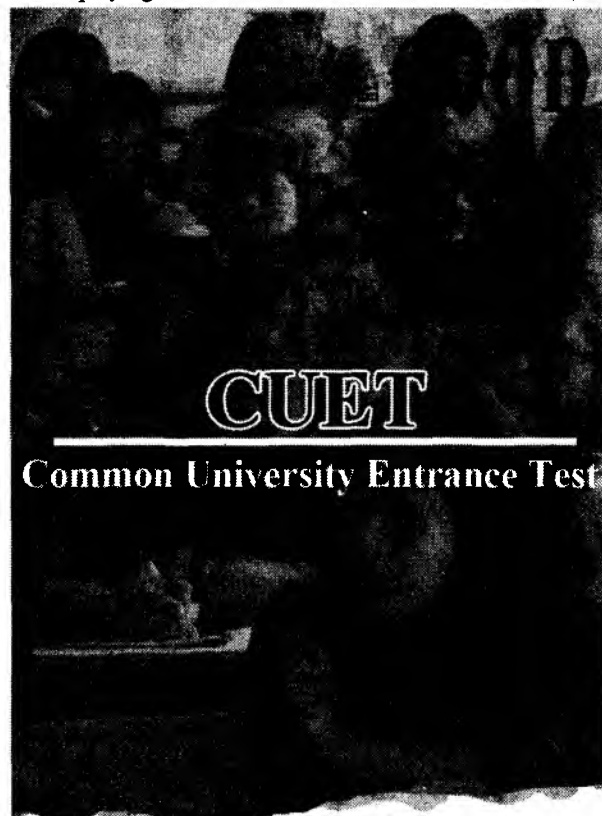
ernment would do well to be conservative and prepare for all last minute situations.

The ugly:

Imagine a situation if all the Meghalaya governments gave utmost importance to education and the welfare of the teachers and provided the best reading materials to the students with all the physical and ICT infrastructure. Then the introduction of CUET would have been a non-issue. The state would have been prepared and most importantly the students would have been ready. Alas, in reality it is not so! Talk to the students and there is anxiety and uncertainty. Now, there can be nothing uglier than this! Recently, MDC Rinaldo K. Sangma made a demand for a state university. It is a tenable but at the same time it is not a new demand. Many in education have been demanding for a state university for a very long time. However, let us be clear about one thing. The demand for a state university must not be taken as an escape from CUET. The demand is there because there are too many students who cannot find a seat for higher education. It is about breaking the glass ceiling of education inclusiveness. Therefore, even if there is a state university it would be best in the interest of education that the admissions are still done through CUET.

In the end, the education landscape of India is changing drastically in recent years. It will continue to do so. Meghalaya will have to prepare for it and adapt; else, as a people we will be left behind. Now, there is the case of double degrees. This is another red flag. What is the action plan for this? This is important as there will be many students who would like to go for double degrees as and when it is made available. Amidst these developments, we must prepare to seamlessly adapt to the changes. Today, it is CUET and double degrees; tomorrow, it will be something else. In the case of CUET, the state government may postpone adopting it for maybe a year. In that time, consult with the stakeholders and prepare. But, the inevitable truth is that we will have to be a part of it eventually. Let us be realistic, there is no escape!

(Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)



called NCERT vs. non-NCERT debate. It is unfair to presume that only the NCERT students would do well and that all the others would struggle. Fine, we must accept that MBOSE has shortfalls in terms of its course materials. Many have written and spoken about it. However, we must also factor in that today the students have many opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. Those who do so can give a good fight at any entrance examination.

The bad:

CUET has been implemented in a hurry without proper thinking and stock-taking of the ground realities. This may even come down to a scenario where the students who were not able to give the test shall still be considered for admission into under graduate courses. The gov-

only academically. However, in terms of the ICT and test centres ground realities and preparedness it is only the state government that can have a final say. This is because it only knows best with regards to the logistical preparedness of Meghalaya. Hence, in the very first instance the state government should have asked for at least a year's time to assess and prepare. If things do go wrong this time, then the Education Minister and the state government may have to lay down mitigating measures so as to protect the interests of the students. This may even come down to a scenario where the students who were not able to give the test shall still be considered for admission into under graduate courses. The gov-

Round The States

By Insaf

Silencing Loudspeakers

Yogi acts, Uddhav dithers

There is to be no blaring noise in Uttar Pradesh. Following Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's orders to remove loudspeakers from religious sites and a compliance report be submitted from districts by Saturday, the authorities have got cracking. Nearly 21,000 loudspeakers had been removed so far from mosques and temples and volume of 42500 loudspeakers lowered as per parameters. Yogi explains that while 'everyone has the freedom to follow his/her method of worship according to his/her religious ideology and that microphones can be used, the sound doesn't come out of any premises. Other people should not face any problem.' Besides, no permission is to be given to install loudspeakers at new sites. Importantly, the urgency being shown may have to do with Eid and Akshaya Tritiya likely to fall on the same day and that there should no repeat incident as in Delhi during Hanuman Jayanti. Indeed, Yogi's claim of the State excelling in law and order cannot have a jarring note. What better way than silencing the loudspeakers.

However, unlike UP, Maharashtra is dithering, despite the MVA government being egged on by MNS chief Raj Thackeray who has given an ultimatum that if loudspeakers from places of worship, especially mosques, are not removed in the State before May 3, his cadres will 'read out Hanuman Chalisa outside the mosques.' In the background of the trio of SS-NCP-Congress having their own coalition political compulsions, the government has put the ball in the Centre's court. After an all-party meeting on Monday last, to discuss and evolve a 'consensus' on the issue, it has sought New Delhi come up with a law and rules for the use of loudspeakers at religious places across the country in light of Supreme Court's 2005 guidelines. A delegation will also go and place this demand. Till then, it reasons no action to be taken for there is no provision for the State government 'to either install or remove loudspeakers' and that 'right wing BJP, MNS are clearly targeting the mosques' loudspeakers.' And even though Shiv Sena has its own hindutva agenda, it can't upset alliance partners. The Supreme Court order can be ignored.

Nagging Suspense

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant is bracing for a political storm which could unseat him. Governor Ramesh Bais meeting Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday last has sent out ominous signs. Though he is in a denial mode viz alleged cases of corruption against him, the Election Commission could at the end disqualify him as an elected candidate of the Assembly on grounds of holding office for profit. More so, after Bais had sent a communication to Nirvachan Sadan to examine the matter under Article 192 of Constitution. The cases are: One, wherein Soren allotted himself a 'mining lease' while in charge of mining department and even got environment clearance while holding charge of environment and forest department. Two, allotting an 11 acre plot to his wife while holding the Industries portfolio. The mining case is in the High Court, which was informed during a hearing that the lease has since been 'surrendered.' This doesn't get him out of the woods. All eyes are now on how the EC interprets documents submitted by Chief Secretary and how soon. Nagging uncertainty for Soren.

Coal Shortage, Power Cuts

Several States are going through blackouts in the backdrop of a record demand for electricity due to unprecedented heat wave and an

acute coal shortage. According to reports, consumers are facing power cuts ranging from two to eight hours across the country and factories are the 'worst hit' as it's the industrial sector which is the first port of call for regulating electricity supplies. Thermal plants across are grappling with coal shortages, indicating a looming power crisis in the country, says the All India Power Engineers Federation. The estimated electricity shortage is 623 m units. Reports reveal that UP has started load shedding in rural areas and smaller towns; Kashmir valley is facing unscheduled and prolonged power cuts; industry in Tamil Nadu is particularly hit; Andhra Pradesh is trying to ensure power supply to agriculture to save standing crops; in parts of Punjab, farmers are protesting against irregular electricity supply; Bihar is witnessing frequent power cuts in rural and urban areas; Rajasthan is having power cuts of 5-7 hours a day...the list is long. But the Centre is in a denial mode and claims there's enough coal to meet the demand. In the same breath it has asked States to step up coal imports for the next three years to build inventories.

Politics

Tripura's tribal politics is hotting up. The demand for statehood, 'Greater Tripura' by The Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) Motha is slowly picking up steam. So says its chief and royal Pradyot Debbarman. On Wednesday last, he declared plans the party shall fight Dhanpur seat, having a high tribal population and once held by former Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, in 2023 Assembly polls. He also appealed to The Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) and Left leaders to join in. In fact, a poaching tug-of-war between BJP and Motha has begun--the former says over a thousand of the latter's supporters have joined, whereas Motha claims 4 BJP leaders have left and joined it. Denying practising 'ethnic politics' as accused, Debbarman urges tribal leaders "not to think about their positions (joining other political parties) but Tripura interest" and that Motha is 'open to all people.. more important people from different parties will join...Our women and youth groups are active in the field...We need a full and final solution from the Centre.'" Will small (as his party is called by BJP) turn big?

Renaming of Villages

Change their names rather than develop the villages, is sadly a priority with the Delhi unit of the BJP. On Thursday last, it asked the Kejriwal government to rename 40 villages with "Mughal era names" after 'names of freedom-fighters, brave-hearts of armed forces, those who won laurels for the country in fields of sports, art, music, and culture.' Noting that the villages have names such as Jia Sarai, Zamroodpur, Masoodpur, Jafarpur Kalan, Tajpur, Najafgarh, Neb Sarai, its President Adesh Gupta said "Delhi is no longer a sarai (inn). It's the national capital. The villagers, including youths, don't want their villages to be identified with any symbol of slavery. They want to know who was Captain Vikram Batra, Bismillah Khan, Ashfaqullah, and Mohan Chandra Sharma who was martyred in Batla House encounter!" The unit claimed it was not its idea but of villagers who have approached it. In fact, on Wednesday, the unit chose to rename South Delhi's 'Muhannadpur' village to 'Madhavpuram', on its own after the AAP government didn't 'clear the proposal'. The latter counters saying the BJP doesn't want the government to function and was just looking for opportunities to start 'hooliganism'. Predictably, it won't end here. --- JNFA

Letters to the Editor

Unemployment crises

Editor,
New data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt, a private research firm in Mumbai paints a grim picture of the intractable unemployment problem in India. The report reveals that a substantial number of people are no longer even looking for jobs. Widespread frustration at not being able to find the right kind of job prompts people, especially women to exit the labour force entirely.

The findings of the study seem to be an ominous sign for India's progress and human resource development. Between 2017 and 2022, the overall labour participation rate dropped considerably. As for women, the data is demoralising and discouraging. About 21 million disappeared from the workforce. It is worrisome that 900 million Indians in the working age do not want a job. Given that about two-thirds of the population is between the ages of 15 and 64, competition for jobs is fierce. As government jobs provide job security, millions of people compete for such jobs. Considering the gravity of unemployment, 90 million new non-farm jobs need to be created by 2030.

In spite of advancements in different sectors, unemployment seems to be insoluble and unmanageable. And despite India's attempts

to liberalise its economy, India's dependency ratio is rising. People may become older, but not richer. A majority of people survive on meagre sources of income. In a world of rapidly changing technology, those who lack required skills fail to keep up with it and eventually become ill-equipped for the job market. Considering the enormity and complexity of the unemployment problem in the country, the government needs to take drastic measures to solve it.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Digital Banks and the North East

Editor,
This refers to the recent move by the Union Finance Ministry to introduce Digital Banking in India at the earliest. With the younger generation hooked to the digital media, banking may become a difficult proposition for the older generation, more so if digital banking becomes more profitable for the banks. Many among the older generation are not even comfortable with ATM operations. Very often we also observe that bank's don't welcome the physical presence of customers in their premises. The Government's move may unwittingly close the gates for customers. One of the fallouts would

be the impact on local and regional banks like Meghalaya Rural Bank and Meghalaya Cooperative Apex Bank, which would be disadvantaged in this respect, and because of their limited resources. Fraudulent online activities may also see a phenomenal rise because of the unleashing of full digital banking. Further, it can be gauged that local banks would be constrained in this respect. The Meghalaya Government should take corrective steps by pleading with the Union Government so that these local entities do not suffer because of the latest changes in Digital Banking.

Yours etc.,
D Bhutia,
Guwahati - 24

NEET & CUET: Two sides of the same coin

Editor,
The devastation on our toppers in Physics, Chemistry and Biology, since 2019, the year NEET took over from DHS (GOM), is too well known and too often expressed in this newspaper. The views of our leading experts on education in Delhi and Shillong with the principals of UCC and Synod College, and also a few voices of NEHU Professors were already expressed in The Shillong Times. It is sad to

hear the lone cry of AM Rynjah (ST April 18, 2022) "Is Meghalaya ready for CUET? This was not echoed by our educationists in the state. We tend to behave like ostriches that bury their heads in the sand to not see the dangers lurking ahead. In doing so we fail to realise that CUET and NEET are two sides of the same coin.

I need to repeat the fears of Dr Abhi Dev Habib, professor, Delhi University that multiple choice questions (MCQs) of IIT, NEET and JEE are trick questions, and not found in textbooks. Dr Dinesh Singh, ex VC Delhi University lamented at the dismal performance of IIT and NEET aspirants at the international platforms. He attributed that to MCQs lacking creativity and concepts. It is true as most MCQs are nothing but memorisation of hidden conversion tables and formulae with lengthy arithmetic. The significant constants we were furnished in our era are asked in MCQs as rote learning. If MBBS results of the last five years are analysed they will reveal how those who performed well in NEET actually scored in their MBBS.

The trend in our country looks scary indeed, as money plays a vital role to elbow oneself to heights of glory while the meritorious poor become the sacrificial lambs no different from doctor aspirants, though the amount paid for CUET coaching is not as heavy as that of NEET.

To cite the examples of

the UK or US to argue for CUET is incongruous. Universities in the above countries enjoy universal curriculum and prescribed text books and students have options to choose from a range of subjects, especially the much needed modern ones in the field of environment, advanced software, satellite communication etc.

With CUET allowing the tests to be taken in 13 mother tongues of which Khasi/Garo are excluded would be discriminatory for us in Meghalaya. In 2021 March, students were allowed to write their engineering exams in 13 mother tongues. When students protested, the 13 were reduced to 5 recently. But no one in Meghalaya bothered.

Of course, to pass is not a problem as narrated by students. The lectures in Hindi are not understood. For a diverse India, English is the link language. But no one in the Secretariat ever ponders on this. Do we ever dispassionately ponder on the evaluation part? Khasis, Mizos, Nagas and South Indians answer in English. But no matter how morally infallible the evaluator is those answering in the mother tongue will always score better.

Late Dr B. Pakem, as VC of NEHU, decoded the answer scripts to do justice to all colleges as none could deny a soft corner for their own college examinees. And this was only in respect to the lone university - NEHU. In a national examination

the mother tongue can play unsavoury tricks. CUET with 13 mother tongues may not escape the indulgence of evaluators towards those of their own kind.

Our rural students would encounter problems in digital technology. Already fear and apprehension is brewing amongst many. What we don't understand is why the school education would finally melt down to a 3-hour test with defective MCQs which are from the Class 12 syllabus only. Two weeks of deliberation on matters involving the future of our students is equal to being bulldozed.

The jettisoning of topics on Democracy, Diversity and poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz and history of the Mughals from the CBSE syllabus of Class 10 and 12 Class is telling us which way the country is going. My sincere request to Mr P Tynsong even while thanking him for his assurance on CUET after the Education Minister had backtracked, is to exempt CUET for now until Meghalaya gets its own State University. Otherwise our children will become sacrificial lambs and guinea pigs.

Yours etc
W. Passah
Ex HOD Electronics
St Edmund's College
Shillong

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