

Space Travel And Leisure

By Kamal Baruah

We could discern a hawk visually in the distance hovering in the sky, waiting to swoop down on its prey. With pairs of wings spreading over the ground, birds remain airborne by quickly flapping their wings even we wondered, how a small raptor can soar and glide over us because birds knew how to let the wind do the work. Human beings every so often felt inferior to birds while observing them fly in the air. It's just fascinating to watch thousands of a starling flock flying in the spectacular evening sky with most dazzling displays that murmuration has cheered up everyone.

The curiosity to fly in the air finally made Wright Brothers to succeed in 1903 through a propeller engine. Later Jet engine made possible for non-stop long distance travel to the other corner of the world. But an airplane can't just fly into space since it can fly because of air. Large planes can fly as high as about 7.5 miles. The air gets thinner the higher we go.

But Rocket engine helped flying in space. It does not need outside air to lift them as it works for the basic laws of nature 'Newton's third law'. It says for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Most Rockets use high-speed gases that come out of the burning rocket fuel pushing the rocket up into space where there is no air. NASA put the boundary above 50 miles as space.

Yuri Gagarin successfully landed on Moon in 1961 reaching at an altitude of 196 miles. The International Space Station (ISS) has been orbiting our planet since 1998 at an altitude of 250 miles. Space Shuttle Columbia, travelling 190-330 miles above sea level, suffered a disaster in 2003 that put a stop gap for human exploration into space. Yet scientists are planning for Mars, Jupiter Mission in the future.

So far Astronauts have luxury to move in space. But now richest people in the world can also travel in space for leisure, while billionaire Richard Branson barely flapping in his own supersonic spaceplane 'Virgin Galactic Flights' on 11th July above 50 miles altitude experienced three Gs of force. After a week on 20th July, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos blasted off inside Rocket into space at 3 times the speed of sound reaching 63 miles above

While Jeff was sent in a Capsule mounted on top of a rocket from Blue origin's West Texas launch site. The flight lasted about 10 minutes. Capsule mounted on top of a rocket called New Shepard Spacecraft. The name is for the memory of NASA astronaut Alan Shepard, the first person from the US traveled to space in 1961 in his first Mercury flight that was a rocket booster and a capsule. After liftoff, three parachutes deployed on the 'Blue

with space travelers, an abort system has been integrated that can get away from the rocket, if there is a malfunction or can shut it down and glide to a landing, if there's a problem on spaceplane. As history witnessed, Astronaut Kalpana Chawla along with six crews died in 2003 in Columbia disaster, when it disintegrated over during its re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

Isn't it a really beautiful thing to be hovering in space and looking down at our planet earth as experienced by two space travelers recently? What makes it's worthiness to spend a huge ticket for luxuries to make an once-in-a-lifetime journey to space?

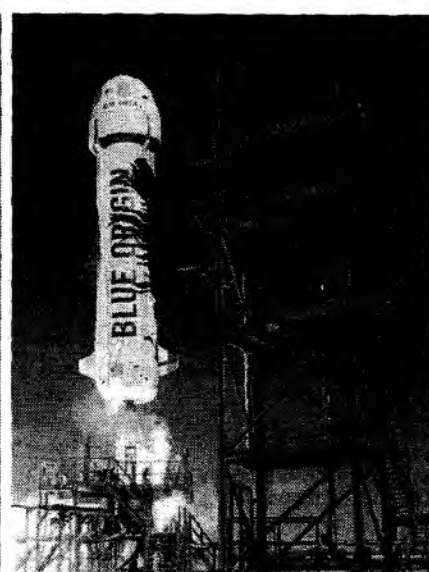
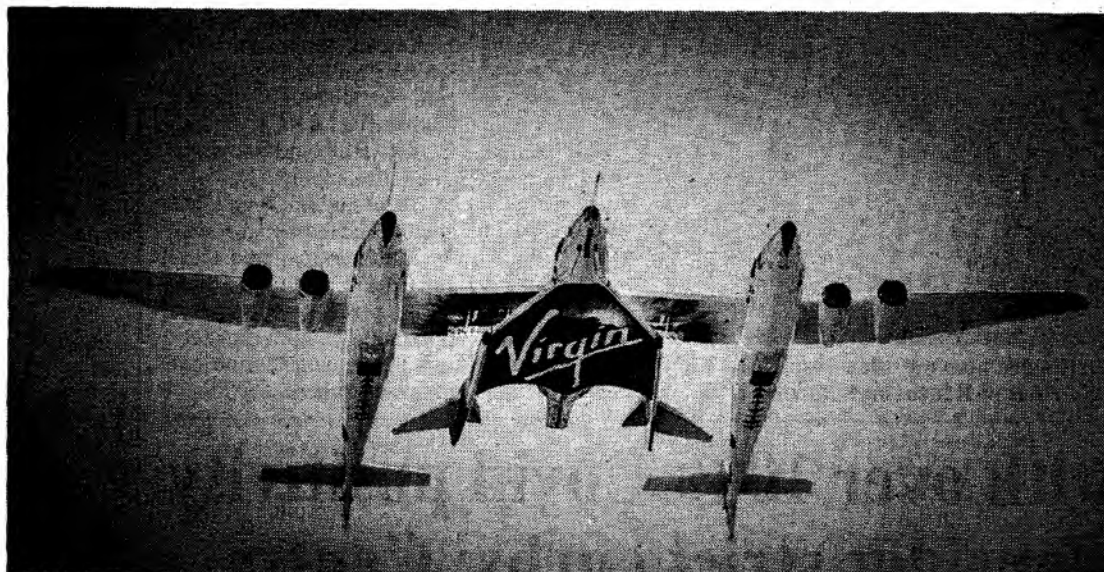
The amazing things for space travelers are to experience weightlessness, feeling extremely light, while escaping the force of gravity at earth orbit and able to perform astronaut tricks such as flips or spins. They can also look out the window, assuming they have a window seat. They can see the entire planet like god's eye view of seven continents of the world, where few people have ever had a chance to see it. The mountains, including the Mount Everest could be the wonder of the sight.

Travellers can also take photos, selfies with earth, but what I suggest, they shouldn't waste their precious few minutes in space for getting camera to

focus, unless they have been hired by a magazine or newspaper where travel operator will surely take many photos of them in space. The most important thing is to book it in advance. So that you can proudly display your status being such and such profile of space traveler.

Unlikely this writer is not in that race in view of the face that space travel is not my cup of tea, however I'm keeping my finger crossed that there will be a market for the extravagance of the space travel. I suppose, many Indians might have already felt a wistful longing for that space journey.

(The author is a former Air Warrior)



the earth in his 3 minutes of weightlessness and flight out of the atmosphere.

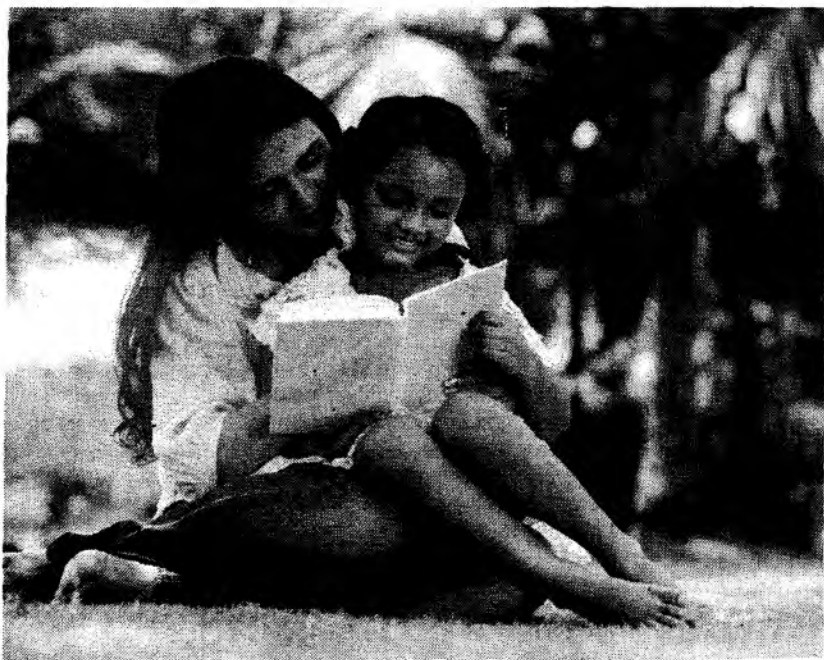
Their goals for commercial space flight are similar. Branson rocketed into space by a VSS Unity Spaceplane with pilots and crew members from the Spaceport of American launch site in Mexico. The SpaceShipTwo detached from its mothership and dropped momentarily before its engine screamed to life and the vehicle swooped upward. Pilots guided the spaceplane through a spiraling descent, and landed on the 12,000-foot-long runway. The flight lasted an hour. Richard enjoyed live-streamed in their trip as they floated free from their seats.

Origin' crew capsule to slow it down for landing as it descended back to Earth.

The race for space travel has finally begun. The ticket prices haven't been revealed by Jeff for Commercial Space Flights beginning from 2022, but Richardson fixed at \$250,000 (about Rs 2.2 crore). Both companies hope that the market will support economies of scale and lower prices down the road for affluent travelers. Common people can only dream about that million-dollar price tag on that product. Incidentally about 600 tickets are already sold at \$300,000.

With high cost and involving safety concern

Words For Children



By Puja Gupta

Taking care of your child's emotional growth has never been more important than it is today, owing to the pandemic. There are numerous tools readily available and easy to teach so kids can learn and practice affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that are encouraging and motivational. Kids can receive positive affirmations from others, like their parents or teachers, and they can learn to use them when they talk to themselves or think about things.

Inspired by her one-year-old son, Mumbai-based montreprenneur, Amrita Aswani, a long-term practitioner of positive affirmations and Founder of Summer Stories, recently released her first book called 'A to Z Affirmation & Wellness book for kids'.

She speaks to us about how

creating a healthy habit of positive self-talk and using affirmations on a daily basis can empower your child, and boost their self-confidence.

BUILDING SELF CONFIDENCE

As important as it is for parents to encourage, support and love their children, it is equally important for children to learn to create these feelings within themselves. Children learn their behaviour from their environment, and the rewiring of their brains from various experiences in life. Affirmations are an effective tool to keep them in a positive direction and directly help them with their inner self-confidence.

BREAKING SOCIETAL PATTERNS

Bullying is one major factor which plays an important role in

forming negative beliefs from the outside world.

For example if a child is bullied and hears things like 'You are good for nothing' or 'You are a loser', he might start believing in those things. But if at home he is using positive affirmations like 'I am worthy, I am secured then it can definitely help in his overall confidence. We all have our moments of self doubts and fears and that's okay.

The problem is when we keep repeating these statements and it becomes a part of our beliefs.

PROCESSING EMOTIONS

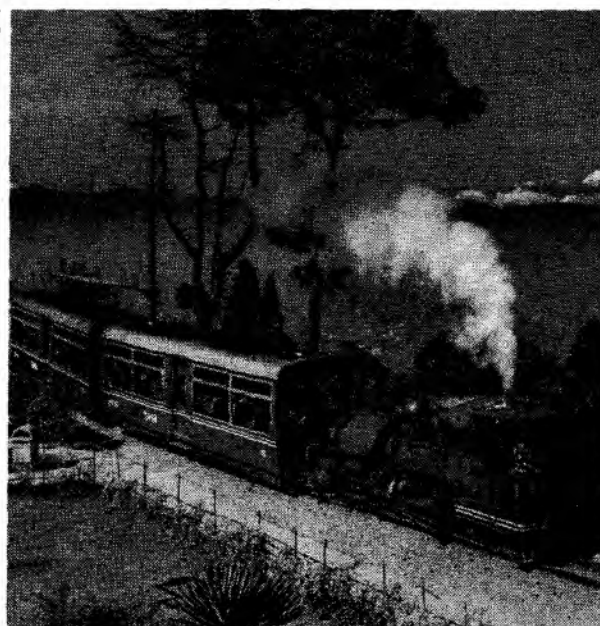
Kids who have a more positive outlook are generally happier and better equipped to handle stress. Affirmations not only boost self-esteem and promote a growth mindset, but they also help combat intrusive negative thoughts. If your child is prone to negative thinking, never fear! We can train our brains to think more positively.

POWER OF REPETITIVENESS

Children need to hear over and over again what makes them unique. They are now competing against a world where social media and media in general is sending them the message that they aren't good enough, so it's important they learn to be their own cheerleaders.

INCULCATING THE HABIT OF JOURNALING

The book that I have written is more of a personal journal for every kid. Journaling is a great way to know how you are feeling and what you are thinking. I am sure there are many parents out there who want to teach their kids how to think positively and believe in their capabilities. (IANSlife)



Trains in India are special and are one of the most reliable and affordable modes of long-distance transportation. Despite all the great things that they offer, one factor stands paramount: the unparalleled scenic beauty that we experience during the journey. A window to the unmarred beauty of nature, and even the briefest glimpses make a train journey exciting. Dinesh Kumar Kotha, Co-Founder & CEO, Confirmkt, shares a list of five Indian journeys by rail that one should never miss out on:

Kalka to Shimla on The Himalayan Queen

It can be best described as a 96 km dream journey. Started in 1903, this train transports you through 102 tunnels and 82 bridges. You also get to experience the steepest rise in altitude. For five hours, you are immersed in scenic beauties that are primarily showcased in Indian cinema. You will be travelling upwards till you reach Shimla, and there you get to gaze at the stunning beauty that Pine and Oak trees, valleys, and an abundance of rhododendrons provide. This journey has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008, and the picturesque treat it provides justifies the honour.

Vasco Da Gama to Londa

Much like the explorer, its derived name, this journey is explorative. From Goa to Karnataka, you get to witness the unique environment that Goan villages showcase. As the journey proceeds and you glide across the Western Ghats, you bear witness to the most breathtaking views of the Western Ghats and its picturesque waterfalls. You get to treat yourself to

Journey on rails

nature's best sights for almost 145 kms. This journey is recommended, especially after the monsoon season, as you get the added treat of viewing the vibrant red of the clay soil.

Kanyakumari to Thiruvananthapuram

This route is a testament to the fact that great things come in small packages. This is probably the shortest train route on the list, yet it holds no comparison to the sensory experience it can provide. It takes you through lush coconut groves and the best view of the bewildering Tamilian and Kerala architecture. You will be constantly surprised at the grandeur of the temples and the uniqueness of the Keralite churches throughout the journey.

Matheran Hill Railway

This train is truly special when it comes to its historical relevance. The train tracks were laid down by Akbar Peerbhoy somewhere between 1901 to 1907. It is also the only remaining heritage railway in Maharashtra. While on the train, you get to explore the tranquillity of nature for about 20 kms on the narrow gauge rail lines. Combined with the desolate ambience, the view is both eerie and exciting and genuinely a definite thing to experience.

New Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling on The Toy Train

Unlike its name, the train is very much real, and a journey on it can be fascinating. The tiny steam-operated train moving at a speed of 12 km/hr takes you through an immersive journey. In 7 hrs 15 mins, you get a chance to view dense forests, bountiful tea plantations and experience travelling the spiral at Agony point. This journey is best taken during a clear day, as you get to see the snow-capped tip of Kanchenjunga.

Trains are an engineering marvel, and the routes listed above are guaranteed to provide you with an amazing experience. The glimpses of extensive farmlands, astounding hill regions, lush flower beds, and the calming presence of still river water can produce a surreal effect. So next time if you're thinking of taking a break from the rut of daily life, consider these journeys. (IANSlife)

Into The Unknown



By N. Lothungbeni Humsot

Following a massive dip in cases after the second wave, travellers are all set to pack their bags and get back to travel in the coming months. The travel industry has witnessed a surge in bookings and queries recently, with people keen on resuming their travel plans after being cooped up in their homes for over a year.

The rise in travel and tourism over the years has made a lot of destinations popular, however, travellers always yearn to discover new places as the thrill of exploring an unknown, undiscovered destination is unparalleled. In addition to this, consumer behavioural change is expected as travellers are likely to opt for unexplored destinations to avoid massive crowds amid the pandemic.

Check out this list of least explored places across the world curated by EaseMyTrip.com:

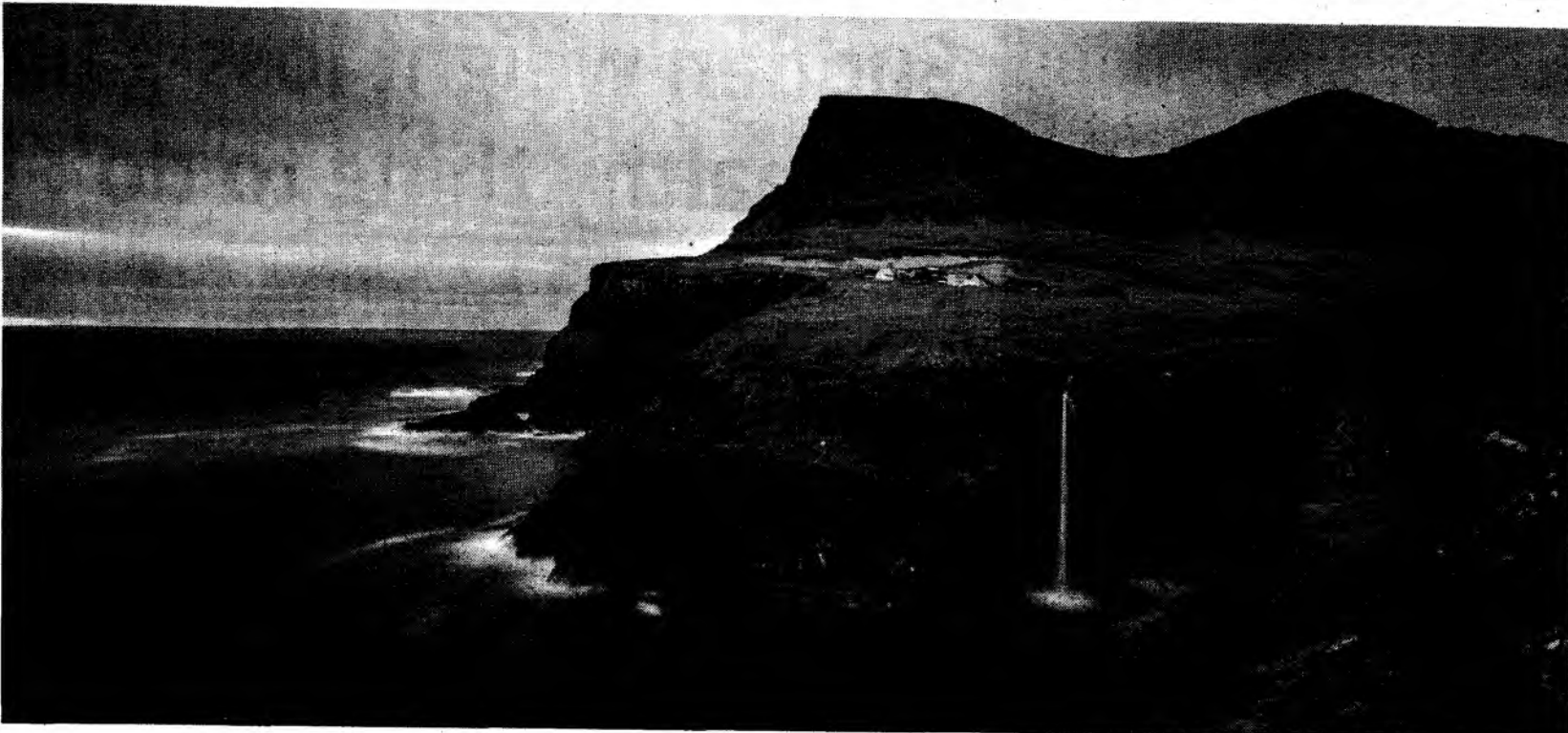
FAROE ISLANDS, DENMARK

The Faroe Islands, located in the chilling waters of the North At-

lantic Ocean sandwiched between Scotland and Iceland is an unexplored paradise. The untouched archipelago along with the striking views of mountains stretching in every direction brings the wilder side of the Danish kingdom to the fore. With its rugged coastlines and pristine waterfalls, Faroe Islands is also home to natural wonders that could truly be explored on an old fishing boat. The capital city of Tershavn is picturesque with eighteenth-century churches, museums, and rows of brightly painted houses. The island also houses some good spots from where travellers can view the Northern Lights in all their glory.

DOMINICA ISLAND

A hidden island country in the Caribbean, the Commonwealth of Dominica is adorned by lush greenery and scenic beauty. The topside landscape is perfectly complemented by the beautiful oceans and striking reef formations, which makes it an exciting diving spot. Nicknamed as 'Nature Island of the Caribbean', Dominica is home to the second-largest hot spring in



the world, the Boiling Lake. The Morne Trois Piton National Park and Emerald Pool Waterfall are some of the other key spots where people can indulge in adventure activities such as trekking and rappelling. The island is also rich in marine diversity with several species of Cetaceans, making the island an ideal destination for whale-watching.

MADAGASCAR

Madagascar is truly one of the most unique islands and is considered to be the most bio-diverse place on earth. Floating off the coast of Mozambique, this one of its kind islands is renowned for its vibrant wildlife, lush forests and vibrant coral reefs. An estimated 80-90 percent of Madagascar's wildlife and fauna is so unique that it cannot be found anywhere else in the world. From lemurs and rare bird species to colourful chameleons and humpback whales, the country is a wildlife paradise like no other. While it is rich in wildlife, Madagascar's layers of history and a blend of cultures as well as its beautiful beaches are surprisingly diverse. The island's unique landscape enables travellers to indulge in adventure activities such as diving, surfing and rock climbing. Since the past few years, there has been a growth in airline routes to the region resulting in

swifter travelling options. So, make sure that you figure out your travel options from EaseMyTrip.com before you decide your itinerary in this serene island.

MATERA, ITALY

Renowned for its ancient cave dwellings inhabited since the Paleolithic period, Sassi di Matera is fascinating as its history dates back more than 30,000 years. The "Sassi" is considered as one of the most unique landscapes in Europe and was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Referred to as the second Bethlehem, the charming city was the setting for Mel Gibson's movie The Passion of the Christ. The stunning churches of Matera, which dates back to the Middle Ages, are carved out from calcarenite rock and filled with vibrant and delicate murals. Most of the hotels and restaurants in the city are made from refurbished caves, and the city also provides travellers with a unique experience of staying in a cave hotel.

BOA VISTA, CAPE VERDE

Although a majority of Africa is covered with the Sahara desert, the continent has some hidden gems in the form of a small archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean. One such island country is Cape Verde, a group of ten islands. One of the islands here, Boa Vista, is an untouched



gem with its pristine landscape, dreamy beaches, sea turtles, and villages surrounded by the magnificent Atlantic waters. The Parque Nacional do Monte Roraima is a national park in the city that has unique monuments and sights, in addition to hiking trails. The region is also known for its sand dunes and moon-like landscapes in the Viana desert. The city is diverse as it has a few low mountain ranges as well, however, the city is primarily for travellers who wish to take a break from their busy lives and enjoy the sun, sea and serenity.

Magnificent architecture, scintillating beaches, lush green forests the world hasn't fallen short of destinations that remain to be explored. Curiosity is the only thing that will drive you away from the hustle of the cities to broaden the horizon of inquisitiveness. More importantly, as we look to recoup from the second wave of the deadly pandemic, it is imperative to prioritize one's health. (IANSlife)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 1, 2021

Moon conjunct Uranus on your solar return chart and it is going to give favorable results for the whole year. You will become very active and will finish your job with ease. Your colleagues will also give you full support and cooperation. You will suddenly get promotion in your job. You will also take a major decision to expand your business in partnership or collaboration. Your financial position is going to be good. You will also get money from somewhere. The favorable placement of planets increases the benefits and your fame will also increase. You will work very hard. You will also look after your family elders well. Even your health is going to be wonderful. You will have a pleasant relationship with your spouse/partner. You will be having plans to go on a short trip with your family for fun and relaxation you will enjoy.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



You will not deviate from your objective. And will take life as a challenge. You will be burdened with responsibilities in your job/work but will not feel tired. Your tasks will get completed within specific time frame. You will also focus on your internal strength and need not look outside for support. You will have gains in business. Your financial condition is going to be good. You will work hard and use your entire efforts in earning money. You will give maximum time to your family. It will benefit you a lot and you will come close to your near and dear ones. You can also enter into new love ties leading to marriage. You will spend money on luxuries, vehicles, jewelry and house.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



It is going to be a hectic week for you. Your work load will increase. You will also get opportunities to rise in your job/work. Along with this, your importance will also increase. And your colleagues will give full support to you. You will remain an enigma wrapped in mystery for others. But you will be full of kindness and empathy. You will also help those in need. You will be much loved too. New work will come to you. Financially you will manage to do well. Your budget will remain under control. You will get support from your spouse/partner. Love mates will have an amazing time. You will be concerned about your family.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



The time is very benefic and favorable. You will be able to achieve a lot with in a very short time period. This is the right time to fulfill your interests. You will enjoy good bonding with your seniors. You will also make contacts with new people. And will have total control on your business. With your good sense and intelligence you will find a solution to your problems. You will be able to balance your work and family life. Success will be yours. Your confidence will enhance. You will enjoy good time with your spouse/partner. You will also remain fit and fine. There can be a new addition to the family, that will give you a lot of happiness. You will make all efforts to increase your wealth.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



It is a very special week for you. You will do something new and will be under no tension. You will be easily able to complete your work with the assistance of your colleagues. You will also have financial gains. You will also have interest towards spiritualism and will perform noble deeds. You will have many wealth giving and auspicious days. Your prestige will also increase. You will have new job/business offers. Your communication skills are going to be second to none. Those who are unmarried will get good marriage proposals. You will also like to go to a peaceful place amidst nature to seek some solace. You will be artistic and imaginative. You will also be traditional and fulfill your desires and will also enhance your knowledge.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



You will have financial gains. You will receive new payments. And will also sign new contracts/orders in your business. Those who are unemployed will get new job opportunities. You will also see a major improvement in your life. You will get support of people around you. You will thus do every work carefully, with a lot of determination and on someone's advice. Newly weds will be able to understand each other properly and also take care of each other. Relationships will be engrossed in preparing for their job interviews, examination etc. Those who are unmarried will receive marriage proposals. You may become important for someone all of a sudden. Your self confidence will be high and you will not deviate and will also keep on doing your work.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



These are prestige enhancing days. Your financial condition is going to be strong and stable. You will also perform your job efficiently. Your confidence is going to be high and you will be in total command of situation. You will be able to influence others by your words and actions. Your social life will be active. You will get involved with a person working in your office. You will be able

to look after your parents very well. You will be ambitious, but people will still praise you. Those appearing for competitive exams will get lot of success. Your time will be great. You will do prestigious work in politics, society and community. Your name and fame will rise. This is an auspicious time for you.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



Time will be satisfactory. Your financial condition is going to be strong and stable. You will make progress in your job/business. You will also implement new ideas and will take decisions with a cool mind. You will also win praise of your colleagues. You will try to balance your professional and domestic life. Now is the time to pay attention to your family needs too. You will be busy with family work. You will also introduce new schemes in business and get opportunities to increase your profits. You will also get an economic advantage. Your relations with partner will get better and better. You will have the power to understand people better.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



It is going to be a pleasant week. You will work hard, and the results will be as expected. New job possibilities are looming large on the horizon. You need to grab them with both hands. You will also solve all your misconceptions. Success in political work will be achieved. Your popularity will also peak. There is no looking back now. Your children will make progress in their work field. From their side you will get happiness. Your marital life will be full of bliss and joy. Purchasing some innovative items may be positive. Your mental and physical ability will improve. You will come close to your family members.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



The beginning and end of the week is going to be particularly good. You will make new contacts and have good gains. Your financial condition will keep getting better. A special person will come in your life all of a sudden leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. You need not take unnecessary risks in your job. You will be worried about the family issues. You can get trapped in any trouble. The colloquial position between the father and son will remain. It is time to introspect and think deeply about your life in general and how you want to make progress further. You will make efforts to take care of children's career. Students will focus on their studies. You will also be involved in a wedding program. You will have satisfaction in job.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



It is going to be a wonderful week for you. There is going to be a possibility of business development. You will plan a major expansion in business. You will make progress in your job. There will be a feeling of satisfaction in your professional work. You will enjoy good bonding with your boss. You will get huge success in government related work. All the career related tasks will gain momentum and the new work will also be planned. Success will be with you. In the decisions related to career or business, take advice from seniors. Peace and happiness will prevail at your home. Your mate will be a source of inspiration. You will come closer to someone very dear.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



Time is gold and you will value it now more than ever before. You will take slow but sure steps to rise in your work. Your personality will radiate and you will be able to leave a mark on others. Your enemies will fear you. You may receive an invaluable inheritance. Your legal disputes will get resolved. And you will be at your manipulative best but you will be diplomatic too. You will enjoy a wonderful marital life. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. Your work will be completed very successfully and easily. The work you used to think very difficult would seem too small. There would be arrival of a new person in your life. You will be attending a party or ceremony.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You will be enlightened in your efforts to change your destiny. Time and tide wait for none. You will feel a lot more comfortable with positive developments taking place in your life. You will get good news from everywhere. Relationship between wife and husband will be lovable. Your health will be fine. Your financial gains too are showing an upward trend. You will get benefits from all sides. The relationship between father and son will become sweet. You will perform noble deeds and will engage yourself in social work. You will make great efforts and will be successful in accomplishing top position in any competition. In the matters related to love and romance, you will get success. Students will work hard. You should work wisely and carefully on many subjects.

Career against Trafficking

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the crimes against humanity is the human trafficking. The global report and data says that in 2018 about 50,000 human trafficking victims were detected and reported by 148 countries which means trafficking is a global issue and it has affected millions of lives around the world. 50 per cent of detected victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 38 per cent were exploited for forced labour. The sad part is that female victims continue to be the primary targets as women make up 46% and girls 19% of all victims of trafficking. The tragedy is that globally, one in every three victims detected is a child. The share of children among detected trafficking victims has tripled, while the share of boys has increased five times over the past 15 years.

The data compel us to think about what we have done with the issue. Well, trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights. Every year, thousands of men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Almost every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims.

This year's theme of World Day against Trafficking in Persons which is observed on July 30, puts victims of human trafficking at the centre of the campaign and will highlight the importance of listening to and learning from survivors of human trafficking. The campaign portrays survivors as key actors in the fight against human trafficking and focuses on the crucial role they play in establishing effective measures to prevent this crime, identify and rescue victims and support them on their road to rehabilitation.

Readers might be wondering why I am talking about trafficking in the career column. Well, the intention is to link career against human trafficking. There are op-

portunities to work against human trafficking in different parts of the world. Preferred academic qualification would be Master in Social Work / Development Studies or Post Graduate degrees in Social Sciences. The preferences would be of course coming from social work, sociology or psychology. There are many organisations apart from government departments which are engaged in the issue. There are organisations which are focused on advocacy and campaign apart from rescue and counselling.

To join credible national or international organisations academic qualifications is essential but to start one's own organisations one may not come from the above mentioned subjects. But social work and social science is preferred. One must have effective communication and other employability skills if they want to work in the field of ending human trafficking. Aspirants who are willing to work with United Nations agencies should have language skills like knowing UN languages like French, Span-

ish, etc apart from English.

Job profiles or activities may be doing awareness programmes, designing campaigns, rescue of the victims and then working with them for their sustainable future. Different governments are also supporting programme against human trafficking as we know that it is one of the crimes against humanity. The victims of trafficking are always poor people who have to struggle for food and other needs. Taking up a career in this field means also doing one of the greatest services towards humanity. There are people who are contributing to end human trafficking but if we take it up as career means we can do many things professionally apart from following our passions. Young people who want to contribute against human trafficking may contact yours truly for further details.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and may be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjjan@gmail.com)

*"If everyone is moving forward together,
then success takes care of itself."*

— Henry Ford

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Mamata's push for power

THE winner is one who makes a try. With the image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi suffering a dent in recent months, those aiming for the PM's chair in Delhi are getting restive. Maratha warhorse Sharad Pawar tested the waters and receded to the background, while West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was in the national capital this past week, pushing her favourite cause of uniting the non-BJP Opposition in order to grab power in Delhi in 2024. It involves a lot of ground work and efforts must start in right earnest. The massive victory that Banerjee has accomplished in the West Bengal assembly polls this year has obviously added to the confidence of the diminutive chief minister to revive her Delhi agenda. However, on the flip side, the ground situations have changed. Her previous clout in Delhi was the strength of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha, it having won 34 out of the 42 LS seats in the state in 2014. Prima facie, it is unlikely she can win more than half the LS seats from Bengal in a future election. For, there is a strong polarization in the state between her party and the BJP.

At the same time, if the TMC ties up with the Congress and the Left, the party can win at least 30 seats. This is seen as a reason why Banerjee had, in her Delhi visit, chosen to meet Congress chief Sonia Gandhi after a stand-off lasting many years. Else, she was keen on keeping the Congress away from an anti-BJP alliance out of a possible fear that the PM post will be appropriated by Rahul Gandhi. Known for her fighting spirit, she is capable of hard bargaining. The other Opposition leaders are mindful of this. What could also play spoilsport for Banerjee is the rise of MK Stalin in Tamil Nadu. While he is not interested in the PM's post in near future, he has made it repeatedly clear the DMK would like Rahul Gandhi to be the PM choice. He carries with him 38 of the 39 Lok Sabha MPs from the state in a virtual sweep in 2019. The rival AIADMK is perishing, as is seen from the assembly poll results this year too. Also, regional satraps like Naveen Patnaik and Chandrashekar Rao are unlikely to support Banerjee. So would the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra that has an alliance with the Congress to run the government. For a viable anti-BJP opposition, the Congress must lead from the front.

Waste an urban nightmare

By HH Mohrmen

In Meghalaya till date waste is considered a trivial subject, something that does not need due consideration and waste management is still considered unimportant. In spite of the fact that the Solid Waste Management Act 2016 is a law now, yet the government is not giving it the attention it deserves. But how long the government can overlook the important concern when the same is being recognised as a major urban issue the world over. In Meghalaya the problem has now reached rock bottom particularly, in Jowai town.

Some months ago the Jowai Municipal Board had to abruptly stop the collection of garbage from the homes of people and waste started to appear at almost every nook and corner of the town. The reason is residents of the town have no other option but to dump rubbish at every available space and waste mounds emerged in many commercial areas of the town. This became an eyesore and it has also damaged the good reputation of the town which this government has planned to develop as a smart town.

But this is not a problem of Meghalaya only. India like any other developing country is literally getting buried under mounds of garbage. It is estimated that the country is generating more than 1.50 lakh metric tonne (MT) of solid waste every day. It is also estimated that about 15,000 MT of this garbage remains exposed every day, and this results in almost 55 lakh MT of solid waste disposed in open areas every year. Approximately 90 per cent (1, 35,000 MT per day) of the total amount is collected waste which is a major contributor to pollution. It is also reported that only 20 per cent (27,000 MT per day) of the total collected waste, is processed and the remaining 80 per cent (1, 08,000 MT per day) is dumped in landfill sites.

Study also indicate that in India in normal sized towns each person produces 300 to 400 grams of solid waste per person per day. In cities like Delhi and Bombay the figure increases to between 500 to 800 grams per person per day. Further, the average composition of domestic waste produced by each household can be broken down to: 10% Glass, 30% Paper/Cardboard, 9% Metals, 3% Textiles, 4% Plastics, 23% Vegetable Waste, 21% Dust, Cinders and Miscellaneous.

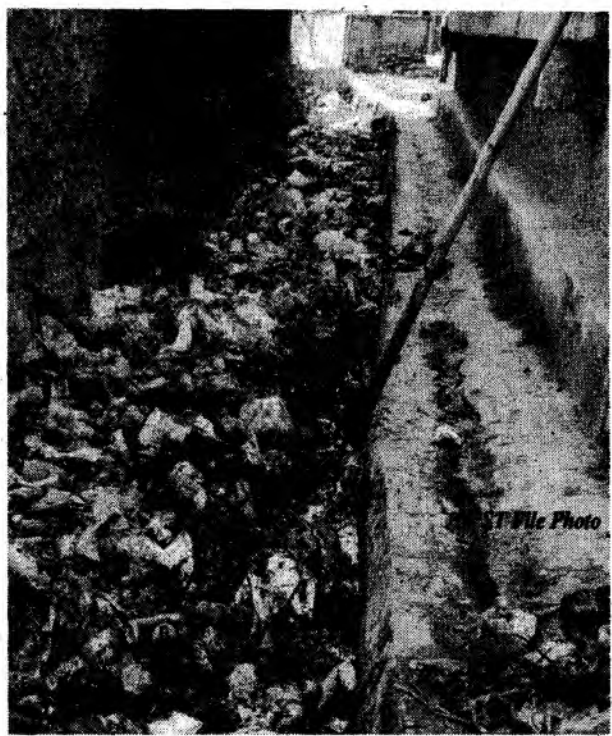
In India, based on the population of the different towns and cities, the census department of the country has categorised urban India into six tiers. Taking 2011 census as baseline and according to the census report, there are three megacities holding a

population of 10 million (1 crore) or more. There are 53 urban agglomerations with a population of one million (10 lakhs) or above and 468 towns with a population of 100,000 (1 lakh) and above as per 2011 census. Population of Shillong according to 2011 census is 1.43 lakhs while that of Jowai is 28,430. And as per information collected from staff of the Jowai Municipal Board, on an average the town generates approximately 60 tons of waste per day. Now the important question is and where is this waste being disposed off?

The town's impasse with the waste that it has generated reached its nadir when the JMB was stopped from dumping waste at the landfill located at Mupyt village. The protest led by pressure

markets. They question is why is the JHADC washing its hand over this important issue?

Jowai has one MLA and four MDCs Andrew A. Shullai Jowai Central, Saron Paswet Jowai South, Bright Star Chyrmang Jowai North and Lakshon Dkhar Khliehtyri Chyrmang Jowai South. Sadly, all the local representatives of the people have failed them. The MDCs do not consider it their duty to see that the Council honours the agreement it had with the Jowai Municipal Board and ensure uninterrupted disposal of waste. Except for Andrew Shullai all the MDCs are part of the Executive Committee headed by the CEM Thombor Shiwat and the MDCs have done precious little to help ease the problems facing the



groups and the local communities adjacent to the site has since then prevented the garbage collectors of the Board from dumping waste in the site. Interestingly, the land where the garbage dumping ground is located belongs to the Jaitia Hills Autonomous District Council and the Jowai Municipal board had an agreement with the council in August 2017 to use the landfill for 20 years.

Ironically, now even the JHADC has no place to dispose the waste produced from Jawthymme which is the council's own market. And by the way markets is the subject of the District Council hence all the markets in the district as per the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution are under the jurisdiction of the Councils. The matter becomes more complicated because all the markets in the Jawmusing area are technically under the jurisdiction of the JHADC and the council is duty bound to deal with the waste generated from these

people of the town.

At some point of time the Administration at the District level made an arrangement to dump the waste collected from Jowai at Marten in Shillong. Even this arrangement had to be stopped because of the protest from the local community. It is also no surprise that Jowai Municipal Board is already facing a plethora of problems. The Board's staffs including the garbage collectors have for the many years now not received their salaries due to them. And even if they do receive their salaries it's after a gap of many months. Sadly, in spite of that, the MDA government in its wisdom has appointed a Chairman to the Jowai Municipal Board. What is the Chairman going to do without the government conducting the election to elect the members of the Board? Or is he going to be a one man army who will take the problem-ridden Jowai Municipal Board out of its misery?

Another immediate solution to the problem is, the SM Act 2016 which also provides an opportunity for using waste as Refused Derived Fuel (RDF). RDF can be used in industrial boilers as a supplement to fossil fuels and the state already has many cement plants which can use waste as RDF. It is said that about 25-30% of household waste is suitable for conversion to RDF.

The government only needs to rethink ways and means on how best to dispose of waste generated especially from towns and cities. The JMB issue may serve as an eye-opener for the government in general and the Department of Urban Affairs in particular in how it can best deal with the waste that people generate.

hkmohrmen67@gmail.com

Border Disputes and Violence: Thinking beyond the Binaries

By Prof. H. Srikanth

Following the unfortunate firing incident at the Assam-Mizoram border, where some police officers of Assam were killed and several others injured, we see conscious attempts by vested interests to whip up communal passions, within the region and across the country. Public opinion is clearly divided based on locality and community identities. If you are a non-tribal person in Assam, or in any other part of India, you tend to believe the view that the crisis is because the hill states in the northeast are predominantly Christian and are infested with anti-nationals who don't believe in the Constitution of India. But if you belong to an indigenous tribe from any of the hill states of the northeast, you assume that Assam is against the tribal states and the people from the plains, especially the so-called Bangladeshis, are trying to devour their lands. Hence the only way to protect tribal lands is to organize on community lines and take up arms against the potential land grabbers. I view both these perspectives as biased and ill informed.

Fortunately, I worked in Assam as well as in Meghalaya. While in Silchar, I observed provincial Bengali nationalism directed primarily against the Government of Assam, but I did not get the impression that the people in the Barak valley as a whole are against the tribals or other nationalities. Several tribal and non-tribal communities co-exist in the Barak valley, and the ethnic clashes between them are rare. The Barak Valley people are the victims of the Partition which was thrust upon them, without their ever asking for it. Following the Sylhet Referendum of 1947, several Bengali Hindus from the erstwhile East Pakistan migrated to and settled in the Barak Valley in the first three decades after independence. But in recent decades one hardly finds the Bangladeshis coming in large numbers and settling down in the Barak valley. As such, there is no truth in the rhetoric that Assam is trying to grab the tribal lands for accommodation of the illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

Similarly, there is no substance in the vicious campaign going on in national and social media, painting all hill tribals of the northeast as anti-nationals and insurgents, and that this violence in the hills is because of the growth of Christianity, or because of Article 371. The Mizo Hills has no doubt experienced insurgency during the mid-sixties and the seventies, but it had nothing to do with Christianity. Barring the Nagas, most hill communities in the northeast voluntarily accepted to be a part of the Indian Union. The constitutional guarantees given to some of the hill areas are the outcome of the recognition of the historic specificity of the hill communities, and not because of any appeasement policy of Nehru, or the Congress Party. The hill states like Mizoram and Meghalaya are among the most peaceful states in India today. Over the years, most Nagas realize the need to be part of India. Although one sees occasional inter-ethnic tensions in the hill states, there is no substance in the campaign that all non-tribals in the hill states are insecure and are the passive victims of reverse racism. Over the years, the hill states have witnessed the rise of rational voices who respect ethnic differences and advocate the need for peaceful coexistence of different communities.

As such no community or state – tribal or non-tribal – is inherently bad or aggressive. If so, why do we see border clashes every now and then, between Assam and the bordering hill states? The answer, I think, lies in differing perceptions of territorial borders and land rights. The people in the plain areas of Assam, which was under the direct rule of the British earlier and then became a part of the Indian Union, subscribe to a legalistic civic conception of land

and territorial borders. They view land rights in terms of the rights of the State, or as individual property rights. In contrast, the hill communities, which were left almost unadministered during the British rule, and continued to have legal immunities even after independence, look at the issue of land and territory from community perspective. Here land does not belong to the State, or even to individuals, but to the clans and communities to which they belong. Even if the land is cultivated by individual families, they cannot part with it to the State or to any outsiders without the consent of the community. The borderlines that the governments draw on the map make little sense to them, if they contradict their community perceptions.

When we have competing conceptions of the idea of territorial borders and land rights, there is bound to be contradictions. But how do we resolve the differences? One may condemn the Mizos for the firing incident, but one should also ask what was the need for sending a big police contingent in the first instance? Was it necessary at all to send the armed police to deal with the Mizo peasants? If the Mizos had transgressed into the territory of Assam, the Assam government could have brought it to the notice of Mizo government and settled the matter through negotiation and mutual co-operation, involving the representatives of the border communities on both sides of Assam-Bangladesh border. If the governments and the state leaders have shown maturity, this firing and the death of the police could have been avoided.

What happened was tragic but what followed the incident is worse. Instead of dousing the passions, the governments and politicians started supporting their respective police/people's actions, and accusing the other party. People started identifying themselves with the police, governments and politicians of their states, and taking communal stances against the other. The regional and national media, most of them with their uninformed understanding of the region, entered and added fuel to the fire. Taking this as an opportunity, some national jingoists and communal forces in the country have started campaigning for abolition of the Article 371, the Sixth Schedule and the Inner Line Permit, and began appealing to the Prime Minister to deal with the hill states the same way, he and his party had dealt with Kashmir. Without understanding the wider implications, some tribal activists in the region have also started defending and advocating violent means to settle differences with Assam.

It is high time the people of the north-eastern states rise above communal and regional passions. In the long run, they do not serve the interests of any peoples – tribal, or non-tribal. The idea of teaching a lesson to the other would take us nowhere. The use, or threat of use of force on both sides should be avoided. It's time we realize that the lives of the people of the north-eastern states are interconnected. All of them are in some ways connected to other states within the region and also to people outside the region. Hence, while it is good to think of protecting immediate local interests, it is also necessary to develop a wider perspective to look at border problems and issues. We should not blindly trust and support the governments, politicians, parties and media, for they have their own interests and compulsions. Let us hope the irrational passions subside and the people of the north-east realize their common interests and destiny; resolve their differences through negotiations, and work unitedly for a better future.

(The writer teaches at NEHU. Email: hskant@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Walk the talk

Editor,

As an ordinary and concerned citizen, I have observed that a series of talks at the high level, have been taken place between Meghalaya and its counterpart Assam right from the past till the present time. However, these talks fail to see the light of the day, as the talks remain talks with no solutions in sight till date. The border issue has been lingering for decades now and it will be a sad state of affairs for our state to celebrate its 50th year of statehood next year given the present circumstances. During the UPA regime, the states of Assam and Meghalaya were both led by the Congress Government. It was expected then that the Government of India would resolve the border dispute at the earliest but to no avail. Looking at the present scenario, the Governments at the centre and the states are the same and I hope this time around, there will be sheer political will and seriousness on their part to resolve the border dispute, which has been persisting for a number of years now.

It is high time that this issue is resolved amicably, before tensions start to rise and

flare up, as seen in the border between Assam and Mizoram recently. Lastly, our Government must at least protect our people in the borders and walk the talk this time around otherwise the border issue will continue to appear in the election manifesto of the different political parties in our state who actually forget about it the moment they are elected.

Yours etc.,
Terrence Thangkiew
Via email

Sorry state of waste in Jowai

Editor,

Jowai – my treasured and well-beloved town is the same town that my friends and I had the most cherished and memorable childhood. I am always proud to disseminate light about my town by engaging in conversations about our Pnar culture, the close relationship we share with our land and environment and how close are to the river banks where we would leisurely spend our time, clear our minds and not to forget the famous culture of picnicking with families and friends. This romanticism of an ideal Jowai town has gone astray after the recent events

that are trending in the media in which viral images and posts show the mountains of waste that keep on piling up daily. Recently, a widely circulated meme, "From smart town to sma town", which has gone viral, directly paints the incapacity of our local representatives (MLAs and MDCs) to tackle waste management. This however is not limited to the waste managers at the government level but we the residents are equally responsible, as well.

It is shameful that we, as the residents of Jowai, who are overly conscious about keeping our homes clean and polished, lack the civic culture of cleaning what is beyond our home boundaries (with a few exceptions).

A pnar analogy: da sarom da uwa peit ia u wa eit, a situation which roughly translates to the 'spectator feeling more uncomfortable than the defecator' is negatively impacting the residents, especially the localities around Tympang club, Mynthong and Ladthalaboh.

To be fair, we are yet to internalize the concept of waste management and reduction. A simple example is what we witness often – people disposing waste from the window of a moving car. This act of ignorance and

idiocy majorly contributes to the piling up of these wastes. Hence, we should learn and appreciate from the silent changemakers who pay heed and take ownership through small but impactful acts such as picking plastic wastes during their morning walks; the few that choose to keep plastic wrappers in their pockets or bags and wait till they get home to dispose them. These responsibilities may not appear as if one can change the world, but it is definitely a big step in bringing about change in the way we think and the air we breathe.

Now, the ultimate concern is how to get rid of all the stock of wastes that are lying around the whole town, which in turn is capable of adding fuel to the fire in light of the current pandemic. It is about time that we the residents under the leadership of local headmen, leaders/representatives in the legislature, district council and the concerned departments collectively combine our efforts taking into account the seriousness of the issue and go back to the days when Jowai used to be a pristine glory.

Yours etc,
Chenmiki Laloo
Via email

Odisha - A Govt that cares

Editor,

It is praiseworthy that Puri, the temple town in Odisha has set an example for other towns and cities in India in providing fit to drink tap water to people. In addition to being drinkable, the water is available 24x7. Further, the water level is measured and every bill is collected. Water quality is properly monitored and displayed. A community management system that employs women's service is functioning efficiently for this purpose. This scheme will be extended to every municipality in the state in a phased manner.

Puri's success story will certainly inspire administrators and political leaders. It is a fact that many deadly diseases are contracted by drinking contaminated water. By providing pure tap water the administration is not just protecting people's health, it is also showing the importance of functional governance.

Contaminated drinking water, especially tap water is a symbol of poor standard of living. Pure tap water, on the other hand, demonstrates a high standard of living. Contaminated water and

poor sanitation result in transmission of diseases. Also, it leads to malnutrition, morbidity and mortality. It causes loss of days of work, affects education and productivity. Providing consumable water and food to people shows a government's commitment to protection of people's health. Such functional governance must be transferred to other sectors so that the general standard of living will improve. Failed services lead to unnecessary expenditure. Failure of government services make people seek private services and they are forced to pay for other expenditure. If government services work properly, people would entirely depend on them and a large amount of money could be saved. Further, public places are littered with plastic bottles. It adversely affects the environment. By providing pure tap water, mineral water and plastic could be dispensed with.

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.

"There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it."
— Oscar Wilde

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIII No. 347 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2021

Health workers in distress
NO one knows for sure how long this pandemic will continue. Government and other institutions are concerned with the rising Covid numbers and the daily death toll due to Covid19. Before the second wave is over we are told the third wave is approaching and tension is already building up. So little is known about the virus even now but the socio-economic wreckage it has inflicted globally leaves a trail of destruction. Scientists and health practitioners are still groping. Every day is a new day. No one, not even the wisest soothsayer can tell for sure when "normalcy" as it was known it until 2019 will return. In this attempt to provide healthcare to Covid patients those who are forgotten are the health workers. From doctors, nurses to ward boys and cleaners engaged in hospitals and health care centres they are at breaking point. Some that are mentally strong are holding out but many others have arrived at a point where the stress is killing. The daily confrontation with Covid patients leaves the health workers exposed to the virus. Many have carried the virus home and transmitted it to their family members. It is impossible for health care workers to remain in isolation every time they attend to a Covid patient.

During the first Covid wave the Government was providing isolation centres for health workers so that they don't endanger their families. Hotels and guest houses were used. But these facilities cost money and the special Covid funds were evidently not sufficient to meet Covid-related expenses this second phase. While private hospitals might be able to provide the necessary isolation centres for their doctors, nurses and other staff working in Covid wards, the problem is with government and mission hospitals. They have limited resources to provide the additional wherewithal to their health workers. But the pandemic is taking a huge toll both physically and mentally and health workers are feeling the stress. It would be wrong to surmise that health workers have no fear of the virus merely because they know more about it than the lay person. The fears are real and health workers need empathy. They need to know that there is a de-stressing centre where they can recover from the anguish of death and disease which they witness up close and personal. They need a break from duties for a couple of days and the least that the state can do is to provide this therapy at a place with a rejuvenating ecosystem. Any of the Orchid facilities would be a great getaway for de-stressing and recovering from fatigue.

Letters to the Editor

Church abandons abandoned women?

Editor,
This is a reflection on Albert Thymiang's article, "Stan Swamy's death—time to look within" (ST July 13, 2021) and his observation, "the image from the mirror is the silence of the Church on social, political and economic issues affecting the less privileged."
In this context I would like to question or rather examine the role of the church in our state relating to one major problem confronting our society today and that is the increasing number of abandoned women with children and with no child support system, especially for those living below the poverty line; an offshoot of unregistered marriages.
In conversation with several Pastors who were assigned to administer churches in the rural areas of the state particularly in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, they admit not only about the prevalence of teenage pregnancies among under-aged girls, but also many cases of abandonment of their live-in rela-

tionships with no financial support from their partners and leaving these women with children that are open to exploitation. To add to this problem, many households in the villages have large families with about eight or more children and when faced with abandonment and poverty, this vicious cycle continues.
When asked if the church is proactive in trying to address this problem, they expressed their limitations and helplessness.
The Supreme Court in 2005 and the Meghalaya Government too had expressed the need to have a law on Compulsory Registration of Marriages to protect the interest of such women with children. This resulted in the passage of the Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act in 2012. But sadly this very important legislation which had been unanimously passed is not given the priority it deserves for its implementation by both the authorities concerned and the Church.
But when it is "time to look within", is it not the moral duty of the Church with its reach and influence right down to the village level through their educational and religious institutions

to create an awareness, for both members of their faith and those outside, about the drawbacks and illegality of teenage marriages and also the importance of registering all marriages? A proactive Church will go a long way in reversing this present trend which will have a positive impact on the progress of our society and our state in the long run.
To conclude, a friend of mine from the Sikh community who had observed the Matshaphrang Movement's campaign for the Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, once told me that this law is not really necessary in the Sikh community because their culture/tradition and their religion makes it mandatory that all marriages in their community should be registered. Perhaps we have a lesson or two to learn from this progressive community.
Yours etc.,
Michael N. Syiem,
Via email

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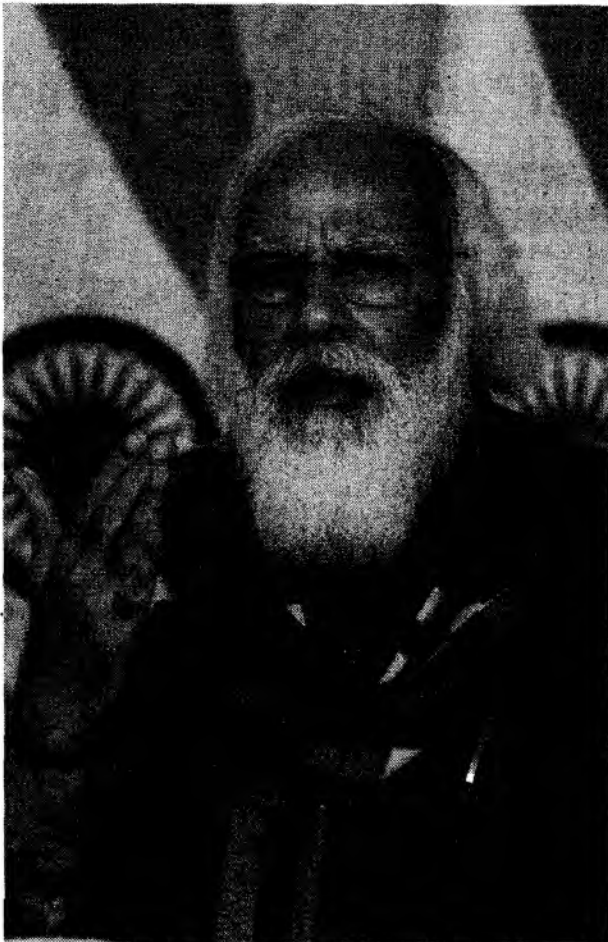
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Pegasus snoopgate: Why is Modi in denial?

By Rajdeep Sardesai

suggests that around 300 Indian 'persons of interest' might have been 'potential' targets. But who is to say that this was not a more scaled up operation where many more people were under the hacker's gaze. Truth is, even one person's phone being hacked unless there is a compelling national security threat involved constitutes a prima facie unlawful act. When the scale reaches the point that it allegedly cov-



ers political rivals, union ministers, journalists, judges, human rights activists, diplomats, businessmen, even scientists, then there is reason to believe that it isn't just individual privacy rights that are being violated but that constitutional democracy itself is being disfigured.
And yet, the Modi government has chosen to brazen it out with barefaced denials and a refusal to even debate the issue in parliament or order a probe. Why? Primarily because a brute parliamentary majority has convinced the political leadership that their dominance can't be challenged and any noise inside parliament isn't going to have an echo effect outside it. The absence of greater civil society indignation suggests that a large section of the Indian citizenry 'normalised' hacking by almost disregarding its likely consequences. Never before has the 'chalta-hai' attitude been more inappropriate since it reveals a

a French-based NGO coordinate a global expose into spyware hacking across 45 countries simply to coincide its revelations with India's parliamentary cycle?
Truth is, the Modi government knows that a court monitored investigation could lead to further embarrassment by exposing the nature of state surveillance under its rule. Which might explain why the government has tied itself in knots in its parliamentary interventions while staying away from answering a central question: did it have any contractual dealings with the Israeli company on Pegasus? Any admission on this key issue would amount to virtually conceding that government agencies were guilty of unlawfully hacking phones in contravention of the provisions of the Information Technology Act. The IT minister has claimed in parliament that India's official procedures do not allow for 'unauthorised' surveillance. This assertion is entirely disingenuous: can any country claim that clandestine surveillance is not part of its intelligence gathering set up?
Moreover, the very idea of being subject to any form of institutional scrutiny appears anathema to the Modi government whose Big Boss style of functioning has been marked by a resolute defiance of established procedures for political accountability. This is a government that refuses to accept that oxygen shortages led to Covid deaths, insists there was no migrant crisis last year, maintains the economy is on track and jobs are being created, rejects proof of Chinese border intrusions. Why then should it now choose to debate the hacking charges in parliament, or indeed, agree to any judicial oversight? Pegasus was, after all, a mythical winged horse. Perhaps, in the imagination of the government and its cheerleaders, snooping and hacking too are mythical concepts.
Post-script: Long before Delhi 2021, there was Gandhinagar 2008-09. Then, as revealed in my book 2019: How Modi Won India, top Gujarat IPS officers were called in by the state home minister for a top secret demo of an upgraded Israeli machine that could eavesdrop on all mobile conversations. We don't know for certain whether the spyware being shown was Pegasus and whether it was finally procured, but the then home minister of Gujarat, Amit Shah, is now the country's home minister.
(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

'Forest First' Approach: Meghalaya's Best Bet to Fight Climate Change

By James K Sangma

The Indian Ministry of Environment changed its nomenclature to include climate change in 2014 followed by states like Odisha in 2021 where sordid climate story is playing out with hurricanes crossing the natural disaster benchmark and becoming a regular feature of their existential reality. Meghalaya, too, due to its fragile strategic location in the Indo-Burmese hotspot, faces an impending 'environment armageddon'.
Climate Change is a complex and multi-sectoral issue - ranging from our food



systems to carbon emissions along with water and soil degradation. But in the region we exist, Forests play the most critical role in mitigating the climate risk for our state.
Closer home in Assam and Bangladesh, climate change resulting in heavy flooding has had an adverse effect affecting both the economically stable and the marginalised. Climate change can result in disaster emergencies or slow onset disasters that eat up the government coffers. Meghalaya itself has suffered either lack of underground water in the villages or too much

A recent report also suggested that natural forests are 40 times more effective than plantations for storing carbon and serve as the best carbon sinks. While there are rampant reforestation efforts in the state, it is also critical to note that we need to deploy resources in proper assessment of our bio-diversity in order to increase our forest cover. It should not be confused with plantations driven reforestation exercise.

water in the form of floods in the Garo hills. To mitigate and protect many generations in Meghalaya, community-led investments based on ecological values and ancient wisdom is a prerequisite.
Forests are the best carbon removal investments and reforestation strategies and improving forest management together have large potential to remove CO2 from the atmosphere. These "natural climate solutions" could provide 18% of cost-effective mitigation through 2030.
A recent report also suggested that natural forests are 40 times more effective than plantations for storing carbon and serve as the best carbon sinks. While there are rampant reforestation efforts in

Based on the on-going consultations with the indigenous green champions and local environmentalists, including learned community leaders pan Meghalaya, the Forest and Environment Department is collating inputs to conclude that there is a felt need to include climate change mandate. We need to build human and institutional capacities within the department to work alongside energy, soil and water departments to create a holistic climate change adaptation strategy for Meghalaya with renewed emphasis on a forest first approach for the state.
(The writer is Minister Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya)

BJP leader's arrogance

Editor,
The recent comments of the BJP National Gen Secretary, Mr Arun Singh, during

NEP 2020 needs traction

Editor,
It has been a year since the Government of India launched the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It is hoped that the NEP 2020 would reshape the future

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

“There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed.”
— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Public transports imperative

UNION roads minister Nitin Gadkari has come up with a proposal that vehicle manufacturers across all variants provide a minimum of six airbags to each new vehicle entering the market. Airbags are highly helpful in saving lives when a direct collision takes place. With a profusion of vehicles on the road, India recorded over 1,50,000 fatalities a year in recent times, meaning nearly 14,000 deaths every month. Large numbers of these deaths are happening on the highways where vehicles travel at high speed of which a significant segment of the deaths is of two-wheeler riders who tend to be adventurous. Airbag system will not help save the lives of two-wheeler riders.

Notably, several road mishaps take place across states and principal cities because of the poor condition of roads. Indian highways now boast of class, a far cry from the hopelessness of the past. Travel in hilly regions as in the north-east had in the past been difficult because of poor road conditions and landslides. There have been significant and laudable improvements now because of huge investments the Centre has made in the highways sector. At the same time, it must also be stressed that safety precautions and road engineering principles are not always adhered to even in the construction and maintenance of highways. There are one too many death traps across roads. Potholes are left unattended for weeks or months and there are dangerous, abrupt ending of lanes at many places, which are all invitations to accidents.

The minister has asked vehicle manufacturers to roll out flex-fuel vehicles running on cent per cent ethanol and gasoline. These will be environment-friendly. Electric vehicles market is developing of late and highways are being provided with charging stations. In the near future, large numbers of vehicles would be of this kind. The large numbers of road accidents are bound to continue in view of the steady and sharp increase in vehicle population. The lower middle-class too makes it a point to own a motor vehicle. Roads are unable to bear this load across cities, and even the wide roads in Delhi are mostly choc-a-bloc. The way forward is increased thrust on mass rapid transport systems like Metro Rail. Kolkata's tram services are eco-friendly and a pleasant experience, but have progressively been phased out. The need is to have such passenger-friendly, low-speed services in more cities. A city-state like Singapore relies mostly on public transport and this is because they are well-organised and well-run. India must learn from such experiences.

Spirit of North East or does something else matter?

By Albert Thyrniang

Security forces are killed in gun battles in international borders not in interstate boundaries. But in a shocking incident on July 26, six Assam policemen lost their lives and at least 50 were injured at the Assam-Mizoram border in a police firing between the forces of the two North Eastern States. Viral videos and images emerged from the scene and were widely shared on social media. National media reported and debated the clash between the two neighbouring states. The two states are now moving towards de-escalation but the damage has been done.

The North Eastern region comprising seven states (8 if Sikkim is included) is seen as a united block that has long been neglected by the centre. We have also often complained of discrimination that people from the region face in 'mainland' India because of their looks, dress and culture. Generally people from the rest of India know us as hailing from the North East. The July 26 tragedy revealed that the seven states are not so united after all. We are not really sisters. We often end up in flared-up boundary disputes. The next day following the bloody clash parliament was informed that out of the seven border disputes in the country four are in the North East with Assam involved in all of them.

The Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma is the focal point in the tragic confrontation. Two days before the hostility Sarma met his Mizoram counterpart, Zoramthanga in Shillong in the presence of the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah. Both agreed to settle the simmering border dispute amicably. Earlier when he met the Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, Sarma stressed on peaceful resolution adopting a 'give and take' policy to keep the spirit of North East alive.

The expectation was negotiations across the table. On the contrary suddenly about 200 fully armed Assam Police personnel led by IGP Anurag Agarwal proceeded to the disputed area. Whatever the claims and counter claims be, it is now established that the Assam police crossed the CRPF gate and overpowered the police post manned by the Mizoram police. This looks like a well-planned action. Sources say the order came directly from the Assam Chief Minister's office. The most converged view links the incident with the political ambition of the new Chief Minister of Assam. Having fulfilled his ambi-

bition of being Chief Minister by rebelling against the then three-time Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi; forming the North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), a NDA regional sub-group ensuring a 'Congress-mukt' in the North East and especially by leading the BJP to return to power in the last elections, he now wants to consolidate his position in his state. He wants to be seen as the undisputed leader of Assam. And what better way to do so than by raking up the border disputes with the neighbouring states? Though Sarma may talk peace but he has iterated over and over again that Assam will not surrender an inch its land. Prior to the 26th firing he had accused Mizoram of encroaching into Assam land. The aggression that unfortunately led to loss of lives was to defend the state's boundary. The aggressive stand in the aftermath of the violence has won hearts. Even the most vocal critic, Akhil Gogoi had to support his political adversary.

There are also allegations of a hidden agenda. The Assam government plans to settle the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh left out from the state's NRC via CAA in parts of the 509 square miles disputed border with Mizoram. If this is true Sarma could be a hero in the Barak Valley. The plan may not be in the interest of Assam's indigenous tribes but who cares if political ambitions are achieved?

Prior to the tragic clash Sarma had offered to resolve the border disputes with all neighbouring states before India's 75th Independence Day. The man with a growing cloud wants to make a mark during his tenure. And what better mark than solving the long pending disputes! He wants to live up to the image as the most powerful politician in the North East. Incidentally on the same day the Assam police were also involved in skirmish at longkhuli village on the border with Meghalaya. Shillong MP, Vincent Pala sees the personal ego of the Chief Minister of Assam in the surge of border clashes. From being a big brother, he seems to nurture bullying desires.

Sarma has also antagonised some tribal leaders. Ever since he occupied the hot seat he has been uttering Hindutva voices. He stated that 'most of us' descended from Hinduism. He introduced a cow protection bill that proposes banning of cattle transport to neigh-

bouring states. Post the fatal incident social media users in neighbouring states are sympathetic towards Mizoram. The fate of NEDA has also been questioned. Things have started to cool down. Conversations between the two states, with the centre as the facilitator, are on. Sarma has directed the police to withdraw the case against Mizoram Rajya Sabha member, K. Vanlalvena for his 'shoot them all' remark. Mizoram has indicated its willingness to reciprocate by removing the name of the Assam Chief Minister from its FIR. Time will heal. NEDA may be unaffected. As he himself voiced the 'spirit of the North East' may be preserved. But even if it is in jeopardy it does not matter. His main aim is to be an accomplished Chief Minister for a long time. Everything else is a means to that direction.

The background of the dispute traces back to two colonial border demarcations of 1875 and 1933. The 1873 delineation of the then Lushai Hills with Assam's Cachar district in the Barak Valley was carried out in consultation with Mizo chiefs and hence the people of Mizoram accept this demarcation. The 1933 Survey of India's demarcation that begins at the tri-junction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district and Manipur was allegedly notified without consulting Mizo chiefs and 'unreasonably excluded Lushai (Mizo) inhabited areas like Cachar, Jaintia, Tlangnuam, Lala Bazar and Banga Bazar'. Hence the boundary is not acceptable to Mizoram. Ever since Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1972 and then a full-fledged state in 1987 the border disputes have been simmering from time to time leading to scuffles.

We know that the British left India in a mess. After being in the sub-continent for 200 years and approximately looting \$45 trillion in today's value the colonial power got out of the country without overseeing the smooth partition of India and Pakistan resulting in one million deaths and 15 million displaced as Muslims fled to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs headed in the opposite direction in 1947. Till date the two nations are enemies squabbling over the international border.

Unfortunately, one of the remnants of colonisation are the unsettled interstate disputes. The Assam-Meghalaya dispute also has its roots in the British demarcation of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills

and Garo Hills districts under the then Assam province. Political circumstances and developments, including the creation of Meghalaya in 1970, were accompanied by the unsettled boundaries till date. Historically many of the villages in disputed areas might have been under the administration of traditional heads from Jaintia Hills and Khasi Hills. Many villages have Khasi names but things have changed now. I have been in some of these areas. For all practical purposes they fall under Assam administration. Government offices, hospitals, schools, police outposts etc are under Assam government. Demography has also changed. Some of the settlers are non-tribals who had to flee Meghalaya during the violence. Everyone craves for a fast-track solution but the ground realities are different. The Committees on border dispute may find it hard to navigate practical suggestions.

While politics is played out even for personal gains, the disputed areas have suffered for no fault of theirs. They are nobody's children. They are victims of total neglect. They are without basic amenities like schools, roads, water and electricity. Just imagine, the aforementioned skirmish with Meghalaya was because the Assam police went in buses to remove electric posts that Meghalaya had erected in the village. Till this day and age the village is in darkness. When one state supplies electricity the other removes the posts. When one states builds a road the other halts the work.

Successive central governments have not taken border disputes seriously. The present government seems to show a little more eagerness. It has set the 75th Independence Day as the deadline. Though the Centre says it will be utilising satellite mapping to demarcate boundaries and settle interstate boundaries in the North East but will that demarcation be acceptable to all? With agreeable solutions not in sight, outside the box suggestions like the ones offered by the editor of this paper to turn the contested areas into economic zones and educational hubs where they are homes to IT parks, health centres and tourist facilities should be considered. These areas could also become centrally administered territories for the overall development rather being hosts to petty politics.

Email: albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

Three Gujarati Musketeers messing with future of Island National movement needed to save Lakshadweep

By Sushil Kutty

The 'Save Lakshadweep Forum' did not take into account the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi spends at least 17 hours a day mulling what to do, and where, to disturb the status quo no matter what the cost because money is not a factor for his pet projects. One is to transform parts of Lakshadweep from coral paradise to cement and concrete abomination. And the Lakshadweep administration, deaf to marine biolo-

gists and common citizens alike, is only too happy to oblige.

The head musketeer should be given hearing aids, preferably of German-make. Reason: People keep calling him the Nazi 'H', and what if they're right? Of course, the German chancellor wouldn't like it. The three Gujarati musketeers think they know best what's good for Lakshadweep, what ails the islands and what remedies should be administered?

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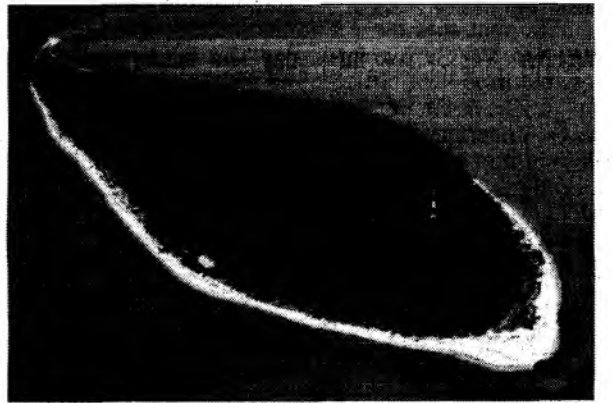
gists and common citizens alike, is only too happy to oblige.

A bunch of marine biologists have sent forth an alarm, warning the Union Territory that going ahead with the project to build 370 "beach floating villas" on three islands of the archipelago would pose a serious threat to the fragile coral reef islands. Even the dumbest would have taken the warning seriously, but not the Lakshadweep administrator Praful Khoda Patel, a Modi associate from way back, and who along with Modi and Amit Shah make up the three meddlesome Gujarati musketeers bent on turning

shadweep, what ails the islands and what remedies should be administered?

The trio has the whole course charted, the islands numbered and the fish accounted for. Before long when the 370 villas are built, the sharks will come -- the loan-sharks, and the other sharks, those with deep pockets. But first the so-called 'Bengalis' from mainland Kerala, the migrant workers and migrant labour to construct -- masons and carpenters, concrete-mixers and lumbermen. It will be one big assault on the coral, and on the flora and the fauna.

Very soon, the three tar-



Lakshadweep into a Gujarati outpost.

Imagine these coral islands have been there off the coast of Kerala for maybe hundreds of thousands of years, and human beings have inhabited them for maybe only less number of years, but those who were there never interfered with the islands or built their inflated egos on to them. Not anymore. The three Gujarati musketeers have landed. Three so powerful, they can do anything and get away with it -- alter, demolish, build, cut into Nature's bounties, deform them into eyesores.

geted islands wouldn't be recognizable. Maybe they will float away, or at least the people of Lakshadweep would wish they floated away. The marine biologists warned that building the 370 floating villas would be a "developmental misstep" of monumental proportions, but who is listening? The trio of Gujarati musketeers have wax in their ears and \$ signs for eyes, they can't hear or speak!

The villas will be built using the design, build, finance, operate, and transfer (DBFOT) model on Public-Private Partnership basis on the three chosen

The villas will be built using the design, build, finance, operate, and transfer (DBFOT) model on Public-Private Partnership basis on the three chosen islands -- Minicoy, Kadmat and Suheli. The villas will be under the care of the Society for Promotion of Nature Tourism and Sports (SPORTS) headed by the Collector.

The money-minded Gujarati trio is going ahead with the '370 Project' against sane and grounded advice. And, by the way, what is this obsession with the number 370? With Jammu & Kashmir it was Article 370, with Lakshadweep it's 370 villas. One to abrogate, the other to impose. Crazy! But that's how it's been since May 26, 2014.

For the most part Lakshadweep escaped undue attention. But on December 2020, the axe fell. The 70,000 natives of Lakshadweep haven't had a proper two winks. How to battle the might of a Government hell-bent on destroying the island? Not even protest works. The three Gujarati

islands -- Minicoy, Kadmat and Suheli. The villas will be under the care of the Society for Promotion of Nature Tourism and Sports (SPORTS) headed by the Collector.

The bunch of scientists and researchers who have petitioned the administration, warning it that the NitiAayog project would be an ecological disaster, haven't cut ice with Praful Khoda Patel. The Save Lakshadweep Forum needs immediate assistance to take on the Gujarati trio or else the islands will be lost forever to the Arabian Sea. No loss to Gujarat, but end of the road for the people of Lakshadweep. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

State's GST collection - A clarification

Editor,
Apropos the news item mentioned above that appeared in your newspaper on 2nd August, 2021, I am to state that the revenue collection figures reported by your newspaper pertained to collection under all heads of account comprising of CGST, IGST, SGST and Cess. It is clarified that except for outward IGST revenue (which actually goes to the destination state, being the IGST paid by the purchasers from other States on goods/services or both procured from Meghalaya) which showed a decline from Rs 78.63 crore in July, 2020 to Rs 70.10 crore in July, 2021, the revenue collection under all other Heads of Accounts actually showed positive growth despite the second wave Covid-induced lockdown. The actual GST revenue collection of the state of Meghalaya for the month of July, 2021 is Rs 89.07 crore (SGST Rs 28.98+ inward IGST Rs 60.09 crore) compared to July, 2020 at Rs 68.02 crore (SGST Rs 23.54+ inward IGST Rs 44.48 crore), thus registering a growth of 30.95% over the same period last year.

Yours etc.,
Arunkumar Kembhavi, IAS
Commissioner of Taxes,
Meghalaya, Shillong

Hearsay report

Editor,
Apropos of the news item "New Minister assumes office sans portfolio" (ST July 29), which says "it was learnt through the grapevine that Shullai was not interested in handling Health portfolio given his lack of experience and the enormity of the task of fighting Covid-19" is highly irresponsible and defamatory in nature. What is surprising and shocking to us is that such news was not verified before publishing in your newspaper. Such unauthenticated news is condescending and defamatory in nature and based on speculations and hearsay. The said report is an attempt to maliciously tarnish and defame the image of a public representative who has been elected by the people of 19-South Shillong Constituency for three consecutive terms to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly and five terms as Member of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. We are aware of the freedom of press in our State; however, it does not mean that you can publish anything that will prejudicially affect the image of any person but should do so responsibly after verification and confirmation appropriately.

Therefore, we in the 19-South Shillong Mandal demand that you apologise for publishing such condescending and defamatory news against Mr Sanbor Shullai and retract the aforesaid news item.

Yours etc.,
S. Marbaniang,
Vice President &
Office Secretary,
19-South Shillong Mandal,
Shillong-4

Our Reporter replies: There was never any intent whatsoever to defame the MLA of 19-Shillong South Constituency. Since the MLA was sworn in without being assured of any particular portfolio, speculations were rife as to the portfolios the new minister would be allotted. More so, since he was substituting former Health Minister in the midst of the grim pandemic situation in the state, the speculation was whether Mr Sanbor Shullai would handle the same portfolios or not. The reference to "inexperience" in the report was about his lack of past experience as a minister and not as an elected representative of the people. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that the report was defamatory in nature.

Politics and professionalism

Editor,
The recent cabinet reshuffle in Delhi saw the inclusion of several ministers with impressive professional credentials. Politics generally overtakes professionalism. Hence it is a nice change when a minister delves into the subject of his or her ministry.

Two articles by James Sangma, Minister for For-

ests and Environment have recently appeared in The Shillong Times (July 16 online version and Aug 3, 2021). These articles make interesting reading. If the Minister follows up on his ideas, perhaps he will lift this department out of the quagmire.

He has underlined two important points. Firstly, that plantations are not forests. This is absolutely right, as the perils of monocultures are well known. However, there are reports that Patanjali is planning to start palm oil plantations in Meghalaya. This is worrying. Jatropa, the much-touted biofuel has already failed.

In the other article, he calls for a bottoms approach to tackling climate change using grassroots efforts and indigenous knowledge systems. MLCU has conducted a UNDP funded study on climate change awareness in rural communities. The study found that the older farmers and traditional healers had observed climate change, and alterations in biodiversity and disease patterns, many years before global awareness of this phenomenon. In fact, Tangmang village planted a new sacred forest 45 years ago to provide "clean air".

Our forests are perhaps the greatest resource of our state. But it is not practical to save every tree or conserve every living creature. Economic development requires some of the natural resources available on the planet. What is needed is ecological restoration, health and human

safety, and the privileging of indigenous ways of conservation. These approaches will balance and ameliorate the extractions that we take from Mother Earth.

Even though there is Covid and economic mayhem around us, and that is our first priority, we must still look to the future with positivity and constructive action. I would suggest that the minister prepare some specific projects for the state's golden jubilee next year. These could include documentation and application of indigenous knowledge systems, declaration of bird sanctuaries, and highlighting the Meghalayan Age. Such projects will also boost livelihoods and tourism.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Why this special treatment?

Editor,
The Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills had banned all meetings, including political. But on the same day as the DC's order (31.7.21 with a similar ban in her earlier order a week back), the BJP held a booth level political meeting at Laban, attended by one of the party's national General Secretaries. Either a special permission was given for this meeting, or it was held without any permission. If per-

mission was granted, what was so "essential" about this meeting? And if no permission was given, can we expect action on the organisers of the meeting and those that attended it?

In any case, why should we the public take the DC's Orders seriously when those in power are constantly flouting them! There's a limit to which we can swallow such hypocrisy and accept whatever the government wants of us! This sucks and is absolutely sickening! Such instances make me believe that this government is not at all serious in addressing the present Covid situation! All the restrictions imposed seem to be only an eye-wash!

Otherwise, government should give a convincing clarification as to why this meeting was allowed. And we don't want the reply from the politicians - everything seems to revolve around them and their personal interests! The answer should come from the bureaucrats - the Chief Secretary who signs the general orders or the Deputy Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner who issues the district orders of curfew etc.

Yours etc.,
Eugene D. Thomas,
Shillong - 6

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

"We may get to the point where the only way of saving the world will be for industrial civilization to collapse."

— Maurice Strong

The Shillong Times

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Coke factories choking lives

IT took a public movement to bring to light grave irregularities committed by the state (meaning the Government and all statutory bodies) in setting up heavily polluting coke factories without following due procedure and therefore 'illegally, in East Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills. The public are protesting against large-scale pollution which is seriously damaging to their health. This action of the state violates Article 21 of the Constitution which says, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to law." The ambit of Article 21 has been widened by the Supreme Court to include the right to a clean environment which includes, clean air and potable drinking water. The Fundamental Right under Article 21 ensures that a person or persons are not deprived of life because of the action or inaction of the state. It clearly means that this Fundamental Right has been provided against the state. Article 21 of the Constitution deals with prevention of encroachment upon the personal liberty of a person or deprivation of the life of a person.

According to Article 21 the 'state' cannot be defined in a restricted sense. It includes Government Departments, Legislature, Administration, Local Authorities exercising statutory powers. Hence the Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 21 relates only to acts of the state or acts under the authority of the state which are not according to procedures established by law. Right to Life means the right to live a meaningful, complete and dignified life. It does not have a restricted meaning. It means more than just mere survival or an animal existence. The people of Sutnga Elaka have been repeatedly raising this issue of pollution by coke factories and had approached the District Administration with a request to shut down these coke plants for violating all the laid down norms but to no avail. Normally, it is expected that the elected representative/s would take up issues which affect the life and death of the electorate. But such is not the case in Meghalaya. All those vested with authority appear to be complicit in this attempt to make profit at the cost of people's lives.

For some time now the people of Sutnga have been complaining of poor health due to inhalation of polluted air. The smoke emitted by as many as four dozen coke factories in a small area and around human habitations has affected their health and the emission of waste from the factories has poisoned their drinking water sources. The role of the state in this case is clearly violative of Article 21. Why is the Meghalaya High Court a silent spectator?

We open the morning papers each day and scan for news on the status of the Covid plague that has hit us. There is anxious hope against hope that there would be some encouraging news of a decline in infections and fatalities, since Hope seems to be the only sustaining factor left. Alas, the bitter truth has so far been contrary to expectations. It then hits us in the face that there is hardly anything of cheer on this front. As a matter of fact things appear to be sliding from bad to worse. If the national review meeting on Covid chaired by Union Health Secretary, Rajesh Bhushan is to be believed, and there are absolutely no grounds to disbelieve it, Meghalaya is listed as one of the ten hapless states in India where the pandemic is merely continuing its rampage of death and destruction. Not only are precious lives being lost daily but the terrible truth is that whatever fragile economy we enjoy is also rapidly being destroyed. Our lives, our health, our livelihoods and the future of our children is now at stake. People are worried but the bitter truth is that we ourselves are perpetuating this calamity that has befallen our community and our state.

The Covid 19 pandemic is a world-wide phenomenon. It is not restricted to only Meghalaya and its communities. Globally as human beings we have so far developed only two responses to the disease. We either enforce social isolation through lockdowns and curfews or imbibe herd immunity through vaccination. There are no other available solutions. Prolonged or continuous lockdowns have a terrible and harmful impact psychologically, culturally and economically and Meghalaya is experiencing it. Trade, commerce and most significantly the livelihoods of the most vulnerable of society - the daily wage earner will and has been severely impacted. We are seeing this happening in most urban centres of our own state and the spectre of hunger and perhaps even cases of eventual starvation deaths cannot be ruled out if lockdowns are the only solutions we depend on. This has to change. People should be able to go about their daily routines without fear and worry. Our children must be able to attend school and centres of learning. Commerce and trade must once again resume as it should. Markets must open up and people should be able to travel freely wherever they want to go. Life must return to normalcy. Lockdowns are no answer to the pandemic and they must end as early as possible. Otherwise, we will slide down the scale of development to such an

extent that it will take our future generations the next 100 years to catch up with the rest of the world. Its something we can ill afford.

So we are left with vaccination as the only other proven method of successfully warding off the pandemic. Now with more than 500 infections daily and the Covid death toll refusing to taper off and with a Meghalaya 74.43% rate of literacy as per 2011 population census, one would have expected a rush of citizens demanding to be vaccinated. That is what is expected of educated people. Instead the opposite is happening in our state. A reluctance to be vaccinated seems to be the prevailing trend, so much so that Meghalaya is ranked as the lowest vaccinated state in the



NE. So why this hesitation to get vaccinated? Most people answer that they have the fundamental right to refuse and that force or coercion must not be used to enforce vaccination. That's fine but since there is no evidence of Government employing this approach, this excuse sounds silly and frivolous. What is becoming more evident is that anti-vaxxers are being influenced more by rumour, hearsay, unfounded gossip, by con-artists (usually posing as pious, bible thumping God men) or even by elected representatives who are more interested in populist votes than in real service to humanity. Look we are dealing with a deadly disease that can impair, harm and has already caused more than a thousand deaths. As educated people we have always used our common sense and consulted qualified doctors in relation to our health. Why are we ignoring this proven practice with regard to Covid? Please consult a qualified doctor on how to prevent, treat and manage the virus. Listen to his advice. Listening to quacks, charlatans and cranks (especially those who lecture and teach from Whatsapp University) is the worst service you can do to yourself and your loved ones

in a prevailing pandemic.

The real need of the hour if Meghalaya is to save its population from the pandemic and to salvage its crumbling fragile economy is to minimise the impact of the anticipated Covid Third wave. This can be done only if we develop herd immunity through a rigorous vaccination of our population, especially in the rural areas. The common man must be made to understand that vaccination, as in the case of smallpox, polio, diphtheria, hepatitis, tuberculosis and other life-threatening diseases simply helps in the production of antibodies that assist in suppressing the ruthlessness of the disease. It will minimise fatalities (91% of vaccinated Covid patients survive.

Chances of those who don't are almost nil). Covid vaccination will in no way cause barrenness or infertility; it will not cause death or other health complications; it has nothing to do with an alleged worldwide plot to wipe out indigenous people nor is it a state Government conspiracy to get more funding from the Centre. All the above are unfounded fears of ignorant minds and waging tongues that refuse to accept reality and the reality is that Covid is a disease that kills unless vaccination is taken to nullify its lethality.

One cannot deny nor refute the fact that the Government of Meghalaya is doing its level best to contain the pandemic by encouraging mass vaccination among the public. The results however are disappointing and perhaps part of the blame lies with Government for its stubborn refusal to accept practical reality. Unlike during the first wave of the Covid crisis, this time the Government has decided to go it alone. The effort to bring on board the active participation of the grassroots institutions of the state is clearly missing. Public and Dorbar participation in the vaccination drive is clearly lacking; the community enthusiasm

to be voluntarily involved is not visible and the brisk energetic engagement of people is missing. Look here, let's be blunt and to the point and the point is to prevent more of our people from dying. For this to happen both the Government and the Dorbars must work together towards a common goal and that goal is to get the maximum number of people vaccinated as fast as possible. Sorry to say but this time the Government has failed to bring in the Headmen and grassroot institutions as stakeholders in the Covid vaccination drive of the administration. There was no agenda towards a joint stakeholdership for public awareness and enlightenment to push the vaccination programme to its logical conclusion. Thus gaps in society were left wide open for Doubting Thomases to sow their seeds of suspicion and scepticism. Government must recognise it has neither the human resources nor the commitment for 24x7 dialogue with communities. On the other hand Dorbars exist, work and operate continuously amongst the communities. It is high time once again for the Government and the Dorbars to work together towards a common objective - service to the people and to prevent further deaths from Covid.

If the pandemic is to be stopped, we must have maximum vaccination. If we want normalcy to return we must learn to work together and not as isolated silos. To call a spade a spade, this time the Dorbars have failed to show the unity of purpose they did during the first wave crisis. To give the Government its due, if there is no Dorbar unity, then to whom does the administration talk to? Dorbars however also have their own set of grievances, chief among them the neglect the Government has shown towards Dorbar shortcomings especially the dearth of funds to meet expenses and financial commitments in the fight against Covid. Well we simply can't leave it at that. We can sit across the table and sort out our differences. Public interest and public health demands it so. If public enlightenment on vaccination is the need of the day; if vaccine hesitancy is to be erased, then Government and Dorbars must work together towards this common goal. A new Health Minister has taken over. Let this be one of his priorities. Only if we work together as one can this pandemic be defeated. Let us not waste this opportunity. Hurt and inflated egos should not determine the outcome of a health crisis we are facing as a people, a community and a state.

Conundrum of opportunity

By Lawrence Pherliam Sumer

We are still in the midst of a very pressing pandemic, which only seems to be on the upsurge, if not in the country, but at least in some parts of the North Eastern states. Even as I write this, another "state lockdown" looks imminent. As common citizens, we are yet to understand the gravity of the situation we are in and God help the authorities who are in the "thick of the action" to ensure the message of

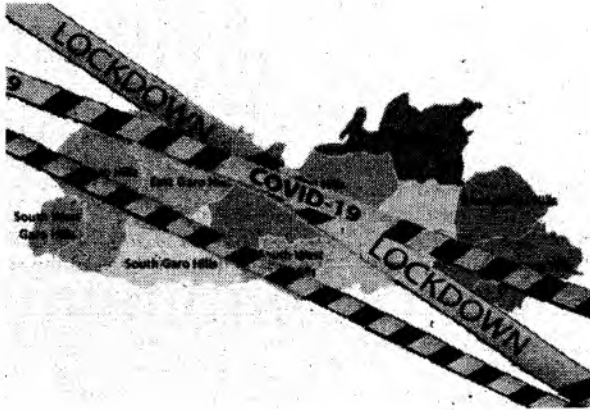
ronment we live in will have upon our children. Imagine, that phase of growing up in your life without any outings. Why would small children, without any fault of theirs have to go through an "indoor grind" day in day out? No friends to grow together with and more so having to go through the academic years with the so called "online classes" where half the time there is no proper network. We

At present, we have three categories of people, the first are those that are convinced of the existence of the virus, probably from witnessing close encounters with loved ones at home, the second type are the ones that are deeply embedded in the belief system of "a fake virus", those that are settled that it is the outcome of a pre-planned concept known as the New World Order.

protocols gets across distinctly. At present, we have three categories of people, the first are those that are convinced of the existence of the virus, probably from witnessing close encounters with loved ones at home, the second type are the ones that are deeply embedded in the belief system of "a fake virus", those that are settled that it is the outcome of a pre-planned concept known as the New World Order and therefore are not to be easily persuaded and the last group are those that are "neither

will not even mention the hardships that the "hand to mouth" population has to go through. If there is a phrase to describe the chaos that has set in right now, it is "we are all in limbo". It is a "disaster" that will take a long time if we are to rebuild each one of those broken walls.

Longer indeed, but we still have to start the rebuilding process sooner than later. So, where do we fit in all of this? What is our part? Do we have a role to play? Yes, certainly! Irrespective of the three categories we may



here nor there" but would choose to flow with the voice of the majority.

Nevertheless, whatever type of group we may identify ourselves with, we cannot deny the fact that we are all affected by whatever is going on at the moment and having attended twice the number of funerals during the last two years as much as I had attended in the last 20 years, I see three issues that this pandemic has brought about. A deep physical scar on many individuals that may take a long time to heal

each belong to we can still contribute in the rebuilding process. Maybe, post the aftermath, it does present us with a great opportunity to come back stronger than we had ever been. We may start with "self-introspection". We may not have been the reason for whatever is happening around us, but we may as well choose to become part of the solution, instead of remaining "a poult". We may try to become more disciplined in the way we put across our ideas, something more "constructive" with

"A deep physical scar on many individuals that may take a long time to heal - the rude shock that comes from the sudden demise of our loved ones during these times has a far reaching effect and worse is the inability to say those "proper goodbyes". Next is the relational scar that has affected our day to day relationship."

- the rude shock that comes from the sudden demise of our loved ones during these times has a far reaching effect and worse is the inability to say those "proper goodbyes". Next is the relational scar that has affected our day to day relationship. We may have never witnessed the most damaging of debates before this, whether in print or digital media alike, with friends turning foes for the sake of standing by what they believe in, irrespective of being right or wrong. Of course, the financial scar, that has robbed every family that has to go through hospitalisation thereof and probably, the very reason, why many middle-class citizens would deter from going forward for testing. It does leave a huge hole in your pocket and for some it just wipes off their life's earnings forever.

Let us also not forget the lasting impact that the envi-

words. Then we proceed to bring about a better "work culture" which will be a challenge for many, as they say "old habits die hard", but trying to pursue something as noble as such is worth trying. One of the roots for Japan's success after being totally wiped out after World War II, is the will to learn rigid rules of behaviour, such as the precisely choreographed submissive posture on how low to bow before each other. It is only as we learn to respect each other and one another's opinions that we shall overcome. When we try to create a more "conducive environment" for everyone around us, we will foresee a great future ahead of us. If there is one good thing that this pandemic teaches us, it is this, "We either fall together not trying or we try building together as one."

(The writer can be contacted at lawrencesumer@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Border disputes: Signs of weak administration

Editor, Border conflicts are the products of aggression between nations or countries or states that are bordering each other. Mostly, it is aggression from one party or sometimes, both. Borders are not just physical barriers, but also psychological barriers between neighbouring countries and states. When conflicts at the borders occur, the uncertainty continues for those who live close to those borders, where such conflicts are quite frequent. During conflicts in border areas, basic human rights are severely violated and compromised.

On July 26, clashes were reported from a border village of Jongkhuli under Jirang Constituency. It was alleged that Assam police personnel removed four electric poles erected by the employees of the Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) in the village. During this event, a confrontation occurred between the residents of the area and personnel of Assam Police. It was also learnt that the MDC of Mawhati, Charles Marngar was also pushed or we can term it as 'manhandled' by some As-

sam Police personnel when he went to intervene following which they had to allow Assam to remove the poles in order to avoid any further violence.

According to Union Home Ministry reports, Assam is part of at least four of seven border disputes in the country. It has border disputes with neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. During an escalation of the long-standing border dispute between Assam and Mizoram on Monday, at least five Assam Police personnel were killed and over 60 injured. However, this is not the first time that border disputes between Assam and other northeastern states have turned violent. In all of this, it is amusing to once again evaluate the role of our Home Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui and his Department. Although the Ri-Bhoi additional magistrate, Superintendent of the Police and senior officials who arrived at the spot were able to defuse the situation from escalating further, MDC Charles Marngar had expressed his concern stating that Meghalaya Police were late in arriving at the scene. This then makes us question the competence and functioning of the Home Department and the minister in charge.

This is not the first time

that tensions have escalated in our State under the watch of the present Home Minister. Series of events, communal riots or conflicts seem to occur every now and again in Meghalaya. Whether it is the communal riots that had taken place in February last year at Ichamati when a Khasi man was killed in a clash with non-tribals or the Golf Links incident in which another young man lost his life, all these incidents clearly point to the deteriorating law and order situation in our State, while the recent turmoil at Jongkhuli just makes us once again question the incompetence of Rymbui, who also is holding the portfolio of Border Areas Development besides the Home Department. The concerned minister has not been effectively performing his role if we may clearly put it so, no matter what portfolio he is handling.

Presently, the deteriorating law and order situation and border disputes make us question his role as the Home Minister, and the deteriorating education system based on the recent PGI report makes us question his effectiveness as the Education Minister. It is also a matter of shame that there was once a time when the UDP had questioned the competence of a minister who was handling the Home portfolio and they rejoiced when someone

from their Party got to sit on the same chair because of regional aspirations. Now a minister from the UDP is not performing effectively. On the contrary he is leading the State to a sinkhole.

I think it is also due season now for us as citizens to evaluate the performance of our ministers who we elect as representatives to look into the welfare of the State and its citizens. It is time to not be afraid and take a stand when we see a certain representative not performing effectively and question if they are fit enough to sit on the chair that has been handed over to them. After all, the government is for the people and we are the ones who elect them.

Yours etc.,
Maitshaphrang Khongwir
Shillong - 8

Inter-state boundary issue

Editor, We have governments who are indolent and insensitive, while the State's boundary lines are being shifted inwards by a neighbouring State with impunity. An intriguing statement by our representative (s) of "give-and-take" policy by "both sides" is laughable because it had never been reported that Meghalaya had trespassed into Assam territory.

A specific requirement for securing the border with neighbouring states is to possess relevant maps which should be acceptable internationally; but, our State government does not have any! This was revealed when RTI activist, Agnes Kharshiing sought information about the maps from the concerned department and was told that the vol.4 of "Compilation of State and Districts Maps of Meghalaya" is missing! Dare we expect that our Honble CM may throw some light on this matter? Or is he above being accountable for this lapse on the part of his minions?

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Shillong - 2

Race to the bottom

Editor, The recently inducted Minister to the Cabinet must surely love the taste of his foot going by his recent remarks on the LLP and corruption. To utter such callous and nonsensical statements in the capacity of a cabinet minister surely does take talent and he has no dearth when it comes to it. The joke is on us that such so-called honourable ministers are there to frame laws and policies for us the common citizens.

Yours etc.,
Robert R Khongwir,
Via email

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"Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision."

— Salvador Dali

The Shillong Times

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End of the beginning

ANY optimism on containing the Covid19 spread is tempered by new developments on the pandemic front. Clearly, vaccination in itself is no full guarantee for humanity to extricate itself from the lethality of the Chinese-induced virus.. India has by now administered nearly 50 crore vaccine doses, while the actual requirement is five times this number to cover a population of 1.3-billion-plus via two doses per person. India's vaccination drive has continued non-stop for more than six months by now. At this pace, it takes two more years to fully vaccinate the entire population.

Several of those who have taken the two jabs have contracted the virus and some of them in severe ways. The Indian companies that have introduced the vaccines did not promise more than 70 per cent efficacy to their products. The cocktails of vaccines are tried too, but the Delta and Delta Plus variants came in with more lethality and are threatening a faster spread. Originator China is grappling with this problem now after a flight from Moscow landed in the eastern city of Nanjing. The cleaning staff at the airport contracted the Delta virus in July and its spread has led to a fresh frenzy of lockdowns and internal travel bans covering more than a dozen Chinese cities including Beijing. The Delta variant has been detected in 135 countries so far, including India, which is also suspected to be a reason for the massive spread in Kerala in recent months. The state is now accounting for half the total infections in India on the health ministry's daily chart.—over 20,000 daily hits against the all-India figure of a little over 40,000 infections daily.

Yet, at national level, there is no sign of a third wave but chances are that it could begin this month and continue till October. With flight operations mostly cancelled and the Vande Bharat and some other select flights operating, the chances of an invasion of the new and deadly variants still remain. That fear is already evident in the US, where the government adviser on Covid control, Dr Antony Fauci, has said the virus is getting ample time to mutate into more deadly variations due to the slow process of the vaccination drive. South Korea and some other nations have reported the spread of the more deadly Delta Plus variant. What all these mean is that, by the second wave, we have just seen the end of the beginning and worse scenarios are only to be anticipated.

Letters to the Editor

Rise in cases of sexual abuse against minors

Editor, There has been a disturbing rise in cases of sexual abuse against children, and I wish to address it. Just recently we got the news of a nine year old getting brutally raped and murdered, and to be honest it's almost every day we hear it. What's even more terrifying is that people are becoming desensitised to such crimes, and shrug it off as something normal and unimportant. If we look into the matter more carefully, we can see that the problem lies in the representation of young girls in mainstream media. Nowadays, young girls are made to believe that they're "sexually liberated" and that they ought to expose themselves in order to be "empowered." But real empowerment is knowing that you need not wear anything that makes you uncomfortable.

A lot of people are into anime and manga, a Japanese form of entertainment. And though I myself am a fan, I can't overlook the fact that it is hugely problematic; sexualizing school going children and fetishizing school uniforms as if it isn't entirely paedophilic. The porn industry, adults playing teenagers in movies, glorification of teenage girls dating men in their twenties or thirties,

all of them contribute to it. Despite being a young, gender non- confirming person, I myself have faced harassment on the streets like whistling, derogatory remarks and hand gestures by men who are at least fifteen years older than me. The effects it has on a person is quite frankly traumatizing. But so many people look at it with such unimportance. No this is not normal; it has been normalized.

Patriarchy has brainwashed young girls to such extent that cat calling, objectification or sexualization is seen as a compliment or something to blush about. The term "boys will be boys" is often used to justify such behaviour. Boys will be held accountable for their actions. People love to victim blame and often when rape or molestation is reported, they ask, "What was the victim wearing?" Why were they out so late at night? They were asking for it." First of all, a dress doesn't mean 'yes'. Whatever a person might be wearing, gives no one the right to touch them or whistle at them, or shout anything at them. It is never the victim's fault. Never!

And if you are so concerned about the well-being of your daughters, why don't you lock your sons up after 7 PM? Why don't you slap them into a room when they say they'll be back by nine? Isn't that what you've been doing to your daughters? But guess what, they're still raped in their own homes.

It was in 1954 that Dwight Eisenhower the 34th President of the USA said, "Politics is a profession; a serious, complicated and, in its true sense, a noble one." That must have been the age of innocence. Eisenhower must be turning in his grave several times over to see politics degenerate into a power play where the only objective is to come out richer after the five-year tenure. This is true especially in the context of Meghalaya where even the lives of people are now endangered by poisonous fumes and polluted water sources. The problem with democracy in India is that voters are heavily reliant on politicians for all their needs. In Meghalaya the rigma-role is that when politicians don't respond people go to the dozen or more pressure groups to help them out of their predicament.

Interestingly in the case of the Sutnga episode, where dozens of polluting coke factories have come up just by a mere 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) from the traditional chieftain – the Dolloi, no pressure group has squeaked. How can a traditional chieftain who is supposed to be the custodian of culture, land and resources of the people sell away their rights to a few unscrupulous businessmen? The irony is scathing in that while pressure groups in Shillong are crying hoarse about "outsiders" taking away opportunities from the tribals, in Sutnga, barring two coke plants the rest all belong to non-tribals, allegedly from Assam. The question that merits a loud answer is, "Why are these otherwise raucous pressure groups whining about the Inner Line Permit in Shillong but silent about the benami coke business in Sutnga elaka, East Jaintia Hills and in West Khasi Hills? Why are pressure groups silent when trucks carrying illegally mined coal pass through the Shillong-Guwahati road and the Ratacherra-Malidor-Cachar road en-route to Assam and beyond?"

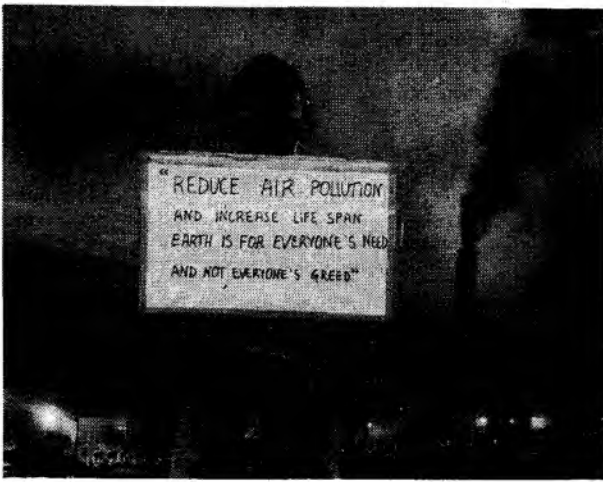
It was shocking to read the comments by Kyrmen Shylla on the coke units in Sutnga. He was speaking as Minister for Disaster Management and all he could say was that if the Dolloi of the area gives a NOC there is little that Government can do. Is that even an answer? Is Shylla suggesting that the Dollois or Rangbah Shmong or the Syiems are a law unto themselves? Did the Meghalaya High Court not rein in the arbitrary powers of these traditional chieftains who

sometimes think they can operate outside the ambit of the Indian Constitution?

In 2018, a case was brought before the National Green Tribunal in Meghalaya regarding the lethal accident in the Ksan mines, East Jaintia Hills in November 2018. The counsel for the mine owner argued that the mining activity was carried out under the orders of the Headman of the village under whose jurisdiction the mine falls and that there was no formal protection and regulatory mechanism adopted by the State for carrying on mining activity. The counsel for the Ministry

and any illegal transport of coal should not take place until orders were passed by the Tribunal. The ban on rat-hole mining continues and is considered illegal. The coal used in the coke factories comes from the adjoining mines which are all operating. Hence for the Union Minister for Coal and Mines to state in the Rajya Sabha that there are no mining operations in Meghalaya is a blatant lie fed to him by the State Government.

In a paper titled, "Legal limits to tribal governance: coal mining in Meghalaya, India," written by Hugo



of Environment and Forestry held that "the entire mining activity was being carried on without obtaining consent to establish and/or consent to operate from the State Pollution Court Board. The Court observed that it appeared the mining activity was going on

Stokke of the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Geneva (CMI Brief vol. 16 no. 2) the researcher makes out a case that Meghalaya is hiding behind the Sixth Schedule to continue with its illegal mining activities. The following are excerpts from the paper,

"Interestingly in the case of the Sutnga episode, where dozens of polluting coke factories have come up just by a mere 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) from the traditional chieftain – the Dolloi, no pressure group has squeaked."

in a most unregulated, illegal and in a manner opposed to the statutory provisions. At a later session, the Court found it astounding that no charge sheet had been filed, even after a lapse of two years since the accident when the case concerned matters under the Indian Penal Code.

Alongside this case, the Principal Bench of the NGT in New Delhi investigated the mining activity in Meghalaya, drawing on the evidence presented in the same case. The Tribunal directed the Chief Secretary, and Director General of Police, Meghalaya to ensure that rat-hole mining/illegal mining is stopped forthwith throughout the state

"At present, there seems to be a struggle between the Green Tribunal and the State Government whereby the Tribunal awaits a mining plan from the Government before lifting the prohibition and the Government extends the time for transportation of extracted coal in order to buy further time for submitting a mining plan to the Tribunal. Another tactic of the State Government is to refer to the special status of Meghalaya. Defenders of coal mining claim that the ban had jeopardized the livelihood of the tribal people, suggesting that the ban had infringed their right to life. Others have pointed to the potential for

if she's a sexual woman, she's demonized. Why? Because she chooses to be sexually expressive. She didn't choose to be sexualized, but she can choose to be sexual. And patriarchy doesn't like unashamed women who choose. Just be old enough to do so!

Yours etc.,
Rupsa Marak,
Tura

Double-speak on environment

Editor, The community in around Elaka Sutnga has for the first time realized that too much of everything is bad for the physical and mental well-being of all and which is why they had to stage a protest against the action and willful acts of omission and commission of the state government authorities in allowing the mushrooming coke plants in a small area surrounded by human habitations. According to sources, some of these coke plants are backed by politicians in the ruling MDA government. It is therefore no surprise that some of them to speak on the same wave-length like those who have committed this blunder on the fragile ecosystem. Politicians in the government love to talk of climate change, global environment protection etc., but their words and actions do not match. The

areas around East Jaintia hills district where rampant coal mining, illegal coke plants and mushrooming cement plants all in the name of so-called development without the real benefits pouring down to the poorest of the poor, have turned hellish. Now that things have taken a turn for the worse turn, it must be appreciated that the local villagers have rightfully and democratically expressed their Constitutional Rights.

Yours etc...
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

Storm Warning

Editor, A firm statement regarding the internal security of Meghalaya was brought to light by opposition leader Dr Mukul Sangma. The regrouping of militants in the once insurgency ravaged Garo Hills is a sad state of affairs. With the culmination of Operation Hillstorm there was no After Action Report (AAR) sought by the Government on the support lent by different stakeholders on bringing peace in Garo Hills.

The pandemic has been a double whammy, causing disruption to certain economic activities. This will pave the way for certain elements to take advantage of the situation. Looking at the State Security Commission, it is more or less

mining to lift people out of poverty. However, the big legal question is whether this Sixth Schedule can overrule Art. 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life. The courts have been crystal-clear on that question: this Sixth Schedule cannot overrule the constitutional right to life."

The paper further states, "It should be kept in mind that the ban is not against mining as such, but against how it has been practiced in Meghalaya. A related question is whether mining is in conformity with the tribal way of life. In a study of the artisanal coal mining industry in Meghalaya, Vakkyil and Canato examined key factors such as ownership, operations, control and impact justification. In terms of ownership, the study found that benami mining rights and absentee landlordism have led to a situation of rights alienation. A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another. The transaction is done to benefit the person who pays for the property either directly or indirectly. This is a way for non-tribals to hold property in a tribal state such as Meghalaya. In operations, low-volume, low technology extraction is giving way to higher volume, mechanized production involving the use of explosives. With regard to control, mining has led to ineffective tribal institutions and community norms being ignored."

The long and short of it is that politics in Meghalaya is centered round money power and all the rules are bent to achieve that limited goal. As Paul Krugman says, "Politics determines who has the power, not who has the truth." Political lying in recent times has reached its pinnacle. Now it concerns people's lives; their right to breathe clean air and drink clean water. If the coke unit owners are responsible for polluting the environment should they be allowed to continue just because they managed to get the NOC from an authority wielding extra-constitutional powers? Also just because they managed to get the Consent to Operate (CTO) licence after the state bent all the rules, is that still legit?

The MDA Government is a coalition of political parties that is so wrong about so much and refuses to acknowledge its faults. Hopefully the voting public will realise their folly of voting business sharks to power.

defunct. It needs to be revised by studying how various insurgencies in the past such as Malayan Emergency, Algerian Revolt and Vietnam war have taken place. The hard lessons of one's mistakes rather than achievements could put us far ahead.

In a March-April 2005, the Military Review article dubbed Anthropology and Counter-insurgency, rightly mentioned that insurgent organizational structure is not defined militarily but through tribal structures and their weapon of choice are not tanks but IEDs. Where is the Meghalaya Home Minister? Holding the Education portfolio, he should start reading the book, 'The Accidental Guerrilla' by David Kilcullen. In the book Kilcullen recommends a full-spectrum approach to counterinsurgency, encompassing political, security, economic, intelligence, and information ("hearts and minds") tracks. He approvingly quotes Vietnam War historian and counter-insurgency theorist Bernard Fall that "a government that is losing to an insurgency is not being out-fought, it is being out-governed."

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gaphoph,
Shillong-10

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"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust"

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

There is an unmistakable finality to the words of the funeral liturgy, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." This phrase was first used in the Church of England's 'Book of Common Prayer,' published in 1549. The words are simple yet powerful because they describe so succinctly the finality of death and the stark reality of earthly disintegration. It does not matter what creed you believed, what ideology you professed, how much wealth you possessed, death is the common end. It does not matter what method your pall-bearers followed, whether burial, or cremation, or disposal to birds of carrion, or burial at sea, the result is the same: 'earth, ashes, dust.' Perhaps the only exceptions are the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt whose corpses survive as mummies.

Contrary to popular perception, the exact phrasing is not found in Scripture, although the thought is derived from it. The Book of Common Prayer is the basis of many liturgies in the Anglophone world, from weddings to baptisms to funerals. While the Book has undergone several revisions, many of the original phrases still remain in the later editions and translations; with abridgements in some modern liturgies: "earth to earth, dust to dust." On the occasions when I have to recite such words, I am also required to throw a handful of mud on the coffin down the open grave. Everyone follows suit. There is something decisive in tossing earth over the remains of your loved one. It signifies the chemical decomposition of what the deceased once prided as "my body, ... my physique, ... my beauty."

What remains is what theists generally call the 'soul,' or more precisely, the 'spirit.' Some believe that the spirit enters either eternal peace or eternal torment, or waits in intermediate suspension; others believe that the soul transmigrates from one body to another. The materialists reject the notion that personality and consciousness survive after death. Among theists, some teach that personal merit determines the afterlife, others believe in divine grace through a Saviour. The materialists of course refuse to speculate beyond this present life.

Whatever your beliefs though, everyone agrees that funerals have an important social function: comforting the bereaved, providing closure to family and friends, bringing hope amidst their loss. Funerals are a transcultural institution. All human societies organize funerals, whether as a religious ceremony or as a civil function. Certain traditions are indispensable: reversing rifles and the Last Post in military funerals, draping the national flag in state funerals, tossing handfuls of earth, laying wreaths, and for Khasis, distributing kwai.

This pandemic however has affected such traditions and reduced the number of mourners. Usually, hundreds and even thousands would attend funerals. They were the audience during the tributes to the deceased at the penultimate function at home; they formed the procession to the final rites and rituals at the cemetery, or the crematorium. After the funeral, close friends and relatives would accompany the family back home. They took charge of matters and gave the family space to rest and to reflect on the passing of their loved one. In life, the family had given the best medical treatment they could afford; in death, they had bestowed the final honour in the company of relatives, friends and religious leaders. There was solemnity in funerals, dignity in the details and comfort through the ceremonies.

Unfortunately, since the pandemic we have had to shorten the rites and rituals and cancel the usual condolence service in the evening. Funerals for the COVID deceased are the most painful as the coffin from the

hospital is not allowed inside the house. It enters the compound briefly for the family's final glimpse, then the PPE-clad pallbearers quickly remove the body for burial or cremation. Funerals for the non-COVID deceased have relatively fewer restrictions; family members often express relief that they have full access to the body before the funeral. Our usual social participation in funerals has been diminished, the grieving process has been truncated, and the recovery of the bereaved has been affected.

Funerals have religious, social and cultural components. While pastors and priests perform the religious rites according to the prescribed liturgy, we are also mindful of government SOPs. Sadly, many of the social and cultural components have been abridged and even abandoned. In the past, people visited the bereaved family whether the deceased was rich or poor, whether the family had social status or were humble citizens. Every family was assured that relatives, friends and community members would come to comfort them. They would listen to stories of the deceased's last days, receive the obligatory cup of tea and finally, discreetly palm their funeral contribution with the final handshake. All these are now conditional on the results of the RT-PCR test.

There have been cases where Containment rules meant we could not enter the house but had to speak and pray across the fence. Ten persons in white-and-blue PPE were allowed at the burial: seven from the Shillong Municipal Board, the pastor and two family members. It is heart-breaking when children and grandchildren are barred from accompanying their loved one on the final journey. It is tragic when they cannot physically witness their loved one being laid to rest, when they cannot directly hear the liturgy of comfort and hope, but must be satisfied with streaming on social media.

Khasis value funerals because they bring together even the most distant relatives, long-lost friends and old colleagues. Close relatives usually stay on for at least three days after the funeral to help with house-cleaning, receiving visitors and in moral support. Other communities prepare for religious ceremonies and formal receptions after the prescribed number of days. It was a system that worked very well and brought immense comfort and encouragement to bereaved families. Unfortunately, the pandemic has disrupted our traditions of funeral and mourning.

Death is not a pleasant subject, either to discuss or to write about in an article. But whether we like it or not, it forces itself into everyday life. More so during these COVID times when the media sends us daily statistics of infections and deaths. Most of the COVID fatalities are, humanly speaking, preventable, through obeying SOPs and mass vaccination. But when such deaths occur, it is our duty as religious functionaries to conduct the funeral. It is also our responsibility to comfort the bereaved family with Scripture, counsel and prayer.

Death is not an easy subject to write about. But we must speak to the bereaved, because during this pandemic many did not receive the consolation and support that they expected from others. Many are still grieving inside and are struggling with despair, anxiety and loss of hope. Some blame themselves for the death, some are angry with hospitals and health-care workers, others question the goodness of God. To such, I would humbly ask that you accept the frailty of the flesh, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Death will come to each of us, sooner or later. But beyond the grave, and here I speak my faith, the spirit survives. And if you will just believe, the tears of reunion will far surpass the tears of parting.

“You have succeeded in life when all you really want is only what you really need.”
— Vernon Howard

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Education: A question mark
THE SSLC and ICSE school final results are the most thrilling events for students. If not for the pandemic the streets would have been choc-a-bloc when the SSLC results were out on Thursday; all the eating joints would be filled with laughter and chatter. Alas these last two years have been uneventful for students. First they had to adjust to online classes which are unsettling for quite a few students. Next is the uncertainty of the examinations due to the pandemic. The MBOSE, SSLC exam was conducted offline between April 19 and May 3 while the HSSLC exams were scheduled between April 16 and May 10 even while Meghalaya went into lockdown on May 5. Examinations for some papers of the HSSLC had to be postponed and held later.

The ICSE examinations which are usually conducted in February/March were cancelled by the board due to the pandemic. Originally, the ICSE and ISC exams 2021 were scheduled from May 4 to June 7. The Board also reduced the ICSE syllabus 2021 by 30 per cent this year owing to the pandemic. Ultimately the exams could not be held. Students were finally assessed on the basis of the best three percentage marks obtained in subjects for which board exams were held and the marks of their internal assessment as well as project work were considered.

India's education system is deeply embedded in examinations and marks scored. The other attributes of students; their life skills, their creativity their co-curricular strengths are hardly evaluated and yet these are what stand the students in good stead in their future lives; not the percentage of marks scored. The pandemic has disrupted the smooth flow of the “business as usual” education system. No one ever imagined that the staid and predictable mode of dispensing education would now have to undergo a complete makeover because no one is sure now as to when schools, colleges and universities will open up and function “normally.” Yet that ‘normal’ where students attend school, meet with their teachers and peers, discuss anything under the sun and test out their ideas is imperative. It must be appreciated that private educational institutions rely mostly on students’ fees and are actually finding it tough to sustain themselves and to continue to pay the teachers’ salaries when students are not paying their fees regularly. This will take a toll on private institutions. Only those relying on Government funds continue to have it easy. But the best education in this country is mostly provided by private institutions. Government has to consider all these aspects and open up schools, colleges and universities. Students and teachers need to rebuild their lives.

Letters to the Editor

Elegy of a Motorcycle

Editor,
I write this letter with a heavy dark cloud hanging over the skies of North East India and our heads as an avid motorcyclist and on behalf of others, who I am sure are feeling the same. The journey began with a motorcycle and we first started traveling the length and breadth of North East India, whether it was for pleasure, tourism, planting of a few trees or plainly to just meet more people from the region (the eagerness to learn and live from each other is a lesson we will remember for many years to come). We saw how different we are from each other, yet we built a bond (a brotherhood) accepting these differences with a respect forged through understanding.

We were accepted and welcomed by families and communities across the length and breadth of all the North East states without a hint of doubt, hate, jealousy or greed. Our motorcycles slowly became a medium to learn from the knowledge of each of our states, their culture, religions, food habits, ways of living, languages etc. The harsh terrains, landslides, snow, rains, floods, heat and dust we endured, became minuscule with just the warm welcome by differ-

ent homes and families. Our thirst for knowledge from each other pushed us on.

The axe of politics to break this forge built over the years, hangs heavily and sadly over our heads.

We also wait patiently for the virus to go away someday so our motorcycles can weave through the region again to rebuild what is being attempted to be broken. The different motorcycle clubs, individuals and associations in India have been instrumental in bringing regions and people together with a sense of love, respect and acceptance of each other. Even if some of us hang up our boots with age, I hope the Motorcycle Communities will continue to weave these broken threads in the years to come.

Yours etc.,
Ashley Erasmus Lyngdoh
Green Route
Via email

Lessons from Tokyo Olympics

Editor,
The Tokyo Olympics offer many lessons for the Government of India and Indian sportspersons. The incredible performance of Indian sportspersons hailing from villages proves that if talented sportspersons are given proper training

‘Human behaviour’ will determine intensity of 3rd Covid wave

By Sushil Kutty

The delta variant will gallop this month, say US scientists. The prognosis is for the US. But how much it will peak will depend on “human behaviour”. And America has humans of various variants. From the Texas variant to the Florida variant. And landlocked human behaviour isn’t the same as sea-facing human behaviour. That said, human behaviour, whether sea-facing or landlocked, is highly “unpredictable”.

So, August will test the United States. It’s currently averaging 85,866 cases per day. The last high was on Valentine’s Day. Last summer’s

in India also this month. But watch Indian “human behaviour” and you get the distinct feeling people are in the Tokyo Olympics mood. Imagine if India was winning Gold everyday. The celebrations would have rocked the country. People jowl to jowl, hitting it out at every public venue. Just one Silver and we couldn’t hold ourselves back! Everyone from the Prime Minister down to the peon was celebrating like lunatics!

Did anyone see masks? Social distancing? This,

Heel. The Co-WIN dashboard says some 40 percent of India’s adult population – 375 out of 940 million – has got one dose as of August 3. The two doses percentage is only 11%. Primarily because the second dose interregnum has been set longer. Most people who have had the first dose haven’t so far “qualified” for the second dose! Crazy, but that’s how things stand.

The point is more people would be eligible for the second dose soon, and then will begin the clamour for vaccinations. More than half

cinations differs from state to state. Ask a poorly vaccinated state ‘why?’ and the answer is a clipped “shortage of vaccines”. Reports in the media come armed with a picture of a cardboard “No Vaccines”. There’s no use fighting a cardboard that’s already hanging, and playing dead!

The threat of “community transmission” also remains pretty grim, and vaccine protection against community transmission isn’t all that comforting. The disparity in vaccination coverage from state to state depended on the difference in population share that received at least one dose



peak was 67,000. The “winter highpoint” was 260,000. An August jump is “really hard to predict, and really hard to control.” It’s hard to predict because “it is in our control to change the trajectory” and everybody has to be careful and vigilant, and look out for each other.

What about the Indian? Should he display similar behaviour? The answer to that is what’s good for the American and the Englishman should be good for the Indian, too. UK cases started dropping after the highs of June and July. This has raised hopes in the US, and it should also in India. Indian cases these days are in the range of 40,000. August 3 it was 40,710, thanks largely to Kerala, where goats were allegedly taking revenge and the political opponents of CM Pinarayi Vijayan were beefed up for all we know.

The delta variant, which is India’s contribution to the pandemic, will go hyper

when we’re told that “India is witnessing the beginning of a third wave”! And unlike in the US, it isn’t the “unpredictability of human

What about the Indian? Should he display similar behaviour? The answer to that is what’s good for the American and the Englishman should be good for the Indian, too. UK cases started dropping after the highs of June and July. This has raised hopes in the US, and it should also in India.

behaviour” which is a bother to us. We are scared the third wave would be a replica of the 2nd wave. Three factors will determine how acute the 3rd wave will be, say experts. 1) Pace of vaccinations. 2) Regional and demographic variations in vaccination. 3) Antibodies in the population.

The Opposition says the pace of vaccinations is the Modi Government’s Achilles

of the adult populations of the US and the UK have been vaccinated and yet Covid cases haven’t fallen in those countries. This, experts say,

is because of the delta variant. For a short period there was talk of a ‘delta-plus variant’, but delta-plus got devoured somewhere along the way. Now people speak only of “delta”, not forgetting to add “deadly” to it.

True, vaccinations have brought down deaths. More in the largely vaccinated West, and less in poorly vaccinated Asian and African countries. The problem for India is that the pace of vac-

of the vaccine. Himachal Pradesh had a high percentage of 73 compared to 30 percent for Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Kerala, which accounted for half the number of cases post-Bakraid, vaccinated more than 55 percent!

As for the presence of antibodies in the population, India might be in a happier position compared to the United States and the UK. The ICMR says a June-July sero-prevalence survey showed a big spike in the presence of antibodies – 24 percent in December-January to 67.6 percent in June-July. Again, Kerala has the lowest presence of antibodies, and the most number of new infections, proof that high antibody states are better protected against a possible new Covid wave. At the end of the day, however, it’ll be “human behaviour” which will determine the infection level, and the death count. (IPA Service)

Round the states

By Insaif

J&K’s 2nd Anniversary

Are the winds of change blowing in Kashmir? Far from it, says the People’s Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD). Observing the second anniversary of revocation of Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir, on Thursday last, members of PAGD claim “the situation on the ground is worsening.” In a statement, the PAGD said “J&K has been in lockdown since August 2019, the hard-line approach of arrests and detentions hasn’t receded in past two years and the clampdown and continuous restrictions on movement and association of people and gagging the media has resulted in a “forced silence.” But Prime Minister Modi tweeted: “A historic day. Two years ago, on this day, the first big step towards a #NewJammuKashmir was taken. Since then, there has been unprecedented peace & progress in the region...”

Is he off the mark, as there is disappointment. More so as he had raised hopes after a recent all-party meet with the members, but nothing concrete has come out of it to restore people’s confidence, says the PAGD. Ask the local chambers of commerce and industry, it says as the Centre’s claim of development and investment is hollow. The big question is who will decide whether J&K continues to remain far from Delhi or that it’s still [heart] of India?

States Disregard SC?



The Supreme Court is agast. Section 66A of Information and Technology Act 2000, which it declared as unconstitutional, continues to be used by governments! On Monday last, it issued notices to all States, UTs and Registrars General of High Courts, saying “this cannot continue”, while hearing a petition by People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUC). The petitioner was too asked to make all States parties to his petition, as police is a State subject. Recall, the apex court had in March, 2015, struck down Section 66A in Shreya Singhal v. Union of India case, saying: the law in its entirety being violative of Article 19(1)(a) and not saved under Article 19(2) clearly “arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades right of free speech and upsets balance between such right and reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on such right”. Given “shocking state of affairs”, the SC asked Centre’s response, which said as police and law and order being State subjects, law enforcement agencies across States share equal responsibility to comply with the ruling. Both Ministries of Electronics and IT and Home had written to States’ Chief Secretaries, UTs administrators and DGPs asking them to sensitise their agencies and direct police not to register cases under the quashed provision. More needs to be done. Where will the buck stop?

N-E Border Skirmishes

All is not well in the north-east. The recent violent skirmishes at Assam-Mizoram border, in which six Assam policemen were killed and over 45 injured, is a cause of concern for North Block. It was jolted to get its act together and had to get the leadership of both States issue a joint statement after a week on Thursday last. The two States agreed to lower tensions and “find lasting solutions to the disputes” through dialogue. But it’s easier said than done. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Mizo counterpart Zoramthanga agreed to abide by the agreement: maintain peace in the inter-state border areas, welcomed deployment of

neutral forces by Centre; States won’t be allowed to send their forest/police forces for patrolling, domination, enforcement or for fresh deployment to any of the areas where conflict took place between police forces; take all necessary measures to promote, preserve and maintain peace and harmony amongst the people living in the border area, among others. Will peace and harmony be lasting and will governments go all out to honour the agreement? For it’s not the first time that border skirmishes have taken place. The fact is that demarcation of land when States were carved out of Assam, continues to be a sore point with the locals, specially at the border and there is need for the political leadership to have a continuous dialogue and involve them as well. Knee jerk reaction is certainly no solution.

UP Poll Season

The countdown to UP elections has more than begun. While BJP top brass leadership has already started wooing the voter, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is realising it’s time to ride the tide. On Thursday last, he embarked on a “cycle yatra” and raise issues such as unemployment, price rise, farm laws and crime rate and not just mark socialist leader Janeshwar Mishra’s birth anniversary. He is doing what BJP and its Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath are best at – proclaim themselves as



the winner already. Akhilesh claims SP would win not just 350 seats but 400, given people’s anger. Outstretched, as the Assembly has 403 seats! How will he meet his target? It has already proclaimed not to have any electoral alliance with major political parties (Congress or BSP) but smaller ones. Be that as it may, it’s a long haul before the polls are announced and much could change. BSP too is posturing and its chief Mayawati has ridiculed Akhilesh’s yatra as gaining “cheap popularity”. Will SP’s next move of having a ‘Rath Yatra’ in October change minds? What is going to count, however, is the people’s angst against Yogi’s administration and its handling of the second wave of Covid, where lives were lost because of lack of hospital beds and oxygen. The BJP is worried but a lot depends on how the Opposition, including SP, touches the cord of the grieving voters.

Kudos To Odisha

Three cheers to Odisha indeed. It too needs to bask in the glory of the Indian men’s and women’s hockey teams at the Tokyo Olympics. It was the State’s Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, who heralded a new era, when in 2018 his government decided to sponsor both the Indian women’s and men’s hockey teams for five years till 2023. This after Sahara had withdrawn its sponsorship and the Odisha Mining Corporation, stepped in on his instructions to donate Rs 150 crore. It is now being seen that the Rs 20 crore provided to the teams annually has done wonders. Patnaik, an avid hockey player in his school days, sought to spot talent in the sport among tribal youth and also built infrastructure of international standard. He had said: “Hockey in Odisha is more than a sport; it’s a way of life especially in our tribal regions, where children learn to walk with hockey sticks. No wonder Odisha has produced India’s finest hockey talent.” Importantly, the two Vice Captains of the teams are from his State. Odisha has carved its place and is now at par with Punjab and Jharkhand on the hockey field. Kudos! INFA

Take the politics out of borders

Editor,
It is interesting that the regional committees on border disputes headed by different MLAs are branching out into the different areas under dispute between Meghalaya and Assam and are also reporting back about the ground situation obtaining there. The group headed by KP Pangniang, HSPDP chief and MLA had reported that while the majority of residents in the disputed areas have stated their preference to remain with Meghalaya, there are some that have expressed a desire to remain with Assam. As someone who knows the border dis-

putes between Langpih in West Khasi Hills on the Meghalaya side and Lampi on the Assam side, the border residents have confided that it is easier to get their grievances and to obtain their documents such as Aadhar etc., from the Government of Assam because they are non-tribals and it is difficult to get any response from the Government officials of Meghalaya.

It is a fact that Assam is proactive in providing documents to people in the disputed areas. Assam is also keen on building road connectivity between the border residents and the district headquarters. Meghalaya has been very slack in bringing development to the border areas. Everywhere, the border areas of the state are least developed. What have those MLAs representing those border areas, especially the disputed ones, done over the decades?

Then there is official apathy and politics too. In Ri Bhoi district when people from the disputed areas come to Nongpoh to get their names registered for Aadhar etc. the pressure groups intimidate and protest that these people should not be given documents because they are of doubtful identity, merely because they are non-tribals. But such is not the case with Assam where they are even asked to come and get their documents, including the EPIC. People residing in borders are interested

in politics only to the extent that it brings development. They have no special affinity to any state in particular. They want to live peaceful lives and to carry out their economic activities without any hindrance.

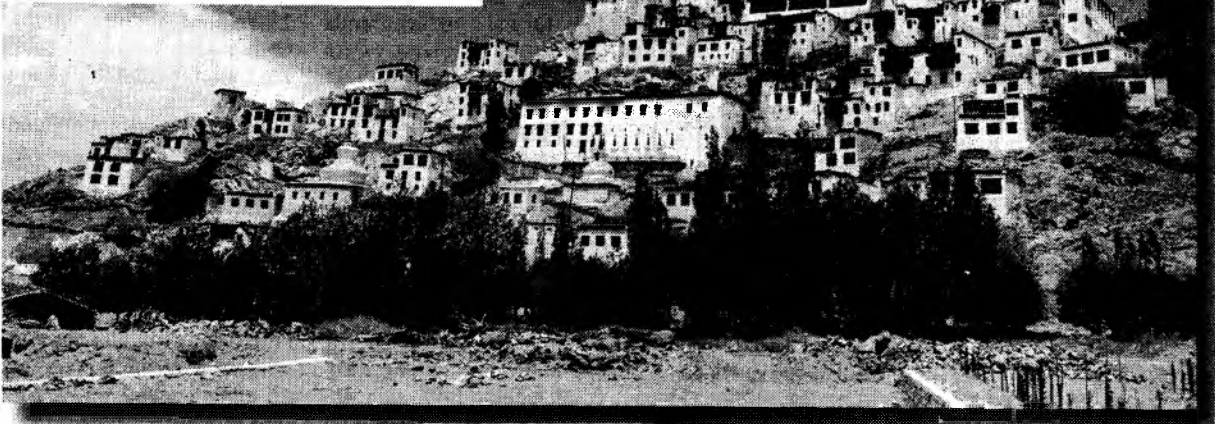
Meghalaya has identified 12 areas of difference with Assam and submitted documents on these, since August 2011. Meghalaya has also been asking for the creation of a boundary commission monitored by the Centre to resolve the disputes. The total disputed area is around 2700 sq. km. The question is why has this demand for a boundary commission not been met by the Centre. Is Delhi also playing its own games?

On the Meghalaya side, resolving border disputes has been part of the election manifesto of the regional parties in particular, for several elections since 1972. Once elections are over, borders are a forgotten topic until the next election comes. Let us hope that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma resolves the border issue once and for all and calls the bluff of the regional parties. Let’s see what agenda they have for the next elections.

Yours etc.,
Ksankupar Syiem,
Via email

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Tourism vs Ecology: Ladakh's Dichotomy



By Nivedita Khandekar

Two years after it was separated from the parent state of Jammu and Kashmir and granted the Union Territory status, Ladakh is on crossroads over choosing between sustainable tourism and saving the fragile trans-Himalayan ecology.

Tourism has been steadily increasing in Ladakh over last few decades and with every passing year, created an unviable strain on the local natural resources. While on the one hand, people want more tourists to come; on the other, environmental experts are wary of negative impact it will have on the local environment.

A few days ago, when a video of a reckless tourist's four-wheeler stuck in the sludge at the shore of the serene Pangong Tso lake went viral on social media, there was a lot of hue and cry from all strata of people from Ladakh, in person, in media and also on the social media.

"Ladakh has some beautiful high-altitude lakes, which are not only home to several wildlife but also has rich traditional values and sacredness. Enjoy the peaceful awe-inspiring lakes but please don't pollute them," president of the International Association for Ladakh Studies and Founder of the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation Sonam Wangchok had tweeted.

With its nature's bounty, Ladakh attracts large number of tourists and the numbers of have been increasing by the year. Apart from backpackers and regular tourists, Ladakh has attracted bikers from all across India and the world.

On Wednesday, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) opened the highest motorable road in the world at 19,300 feet at UmlingLa Pass in eastern Ladakh, which is set to attract more and more bikers who were attracted earlier to the 18,000+ feet of the Khardungla Pass. This development, many fear, would bring on

more tourists, especially the bikers. Pre-lockdown, there were more than 2.7 lakh tourists to this vastly beautiful cold desert.

Just like the viral video about the fancy SUV stuck in the lake shore, another video of a bunch of bikers kicking the sand dunes in remote Ladakh too drew lot of criticism.

"Sand dunes are an independent eco-system. There are ground nesting birds, there are lizards, there are scores of insects and other species that are found in the sand dunes of Ladakh. Once the balance is disturbed, ecological process is disturbed and it can have an impact on the eco-system services," Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust's Tsewang Namgail said.

Therefore, he said, it is imperative that both locals and tourists need to understand the fragile ecosystem and need to respect the environmental fabric.

And then there are others who equally blame the local administration's inefficiency. "It is my sincere request to all tourists visiting Ladakh. Respect the beauty, respect the ecosystem, respect the people. Yes. However, I'd also like to add that the authorities in Ladakh have to do a much better job of enforcing the rules," said Rinchen Norbu Shakpo, a journalist from Ladakh, now based in Bengaluru.

Ladakh generally witnesses domestic tourists in May and June with little less in July each year. Last year saw a stop due to the lockdown but this year, the tourists are back with a vengeance. "Plus, this year, several people from north-west India have parked themselves off Ladakh due to work-from-home system," pointed out social worker Fariha Yusuf.

Yusuf is with the Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG) that has carried out cleanliness awareness drive regularly along with the administration and also encouraged the administration to compulsorily enforce 'segregation at source' for the municipal solid waste. "Fortunately, the hotels and other local people are complying pretty well. We have also started clean-

ing the landfill site which is overflowing with all the years' of waste. It will take time but at least, a start has been made," Yusuf added.

The change is slow but beginning to happen. On the occasion of celebration of the second anniversary of the formation of Union Territory of Ladakh, the Ladakh Tourism department launched e-bus and also conducted a 'sustainable cleanliness drive' at Skara Spang, a meadow in the neighbourhood of Leh.

While both the initiatives earned good words for the administration, there are concerns raised for the overall changes happening since last two years. With so much of infrastructure planned, concerns are raised towards the processes that will ensure environmental due diligence. For instance, Namgail pointed out to a certain Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report prepared for a road building project in Ladakh.

"One of the EIA reports I saw mentioned, 'There

are no trees in the area, so we can go ahead with the project'. This shows a clear lack of understanding about the ecology here," Namgail said.

Environmentalist Karma Sonam pointed out how the status of UT is being problematic for better environmental administration.

"The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council is now a powerless body, and all the decisions are taken at the central level. Tourism has been increasing over the years but now it is time to put a check as excessive tourism can be a problem for environment," he told IANS on phone.

From being part of a large state to being a Union Territory and then from demanding Schedule Six status to now demanding separate state, Ladakh and Ladakhis have come a long way. Time for this old silk route destination to find its own place again! (IANS)

Curious Soundscape

By Sukant Deepak

He was four-years-old when he started learning tabla under Pt. Amar Bose, before moving to sitar at the age of seven. However, Abhisek Mallick stresses that his training in the percussion instrument has been instrumental in shaping him as a musician.

Adding that in order to be a successful artist, it is paramount to have a deep understanding of the taal or rhythmic cycles, he adds, "Melody and rhythm go hand in hand. The tabla training laid the foundation of my musical journey and helped decode the intricacies of Indian layakari, the mathematical aspect of our music. And let's not forget, in Hindustani classical, the sole companion of any instrumentalist or vocalist during the performance is the Tabla. So, knowing it is like knowing your companion," says this recipient of the President's Gold Medal awarded by All India Radio.

But it is not just classical that moves Mallick. Talk to this youngest member of India's best known band 'Rhythmscape', and he remembers that when the band's first album was released in 2003, he was still in college.

"My first concert with Rhythmscape was in 2012 after I went and met Bickram Ghosh and played before him. My journey started since then and I have been fortunate enough to be playing, learning and travelling with the Band all over the world till now.

"In fact, as part of his Drums of India project, I have been lucky to perform in some of the most coveted music festivals in the US, Europe, and South Africa. The Cape Town Jazz Fest is one such."

Talk to him about his electric sitar which he designed himself, and



the musician says that with the advent of fusion music, as sitar players started to play in fusion bands, a necessity was born for the sound of the Sitar to stand out amongst instruments like keyboards, electric guitars, bass guitars, and drums

all of which have a very loud and powerful sound, something that would not have been possible with an acoustic sitar.

"Fortunately, I have not faced any criticism from purists probably because my Electric Sitar actually

sounds like a Sitar and not like some distorted electric guitar as it was in most of the cases earlier. I have also successfully experimented with playing it in selective fusion concerts to attract generation X. I did much research work to select the right combination of pick up and processor for my electric sitar so that the originality of the tone is retained. My aim was always to magnify and embellish the original tone by electrifying the instrument."

Realising that the audience for classical and fusion are distinct, Mallick prefers to keep his two 'avatars' distinct. He says, "This way I can keep experimenting with different genres of music while maintaining my roots in Hindustani classical music intact."

Mallick, who was part of the recently organised HCL 'Baithak' feels that more corporate houses should come forward to patronize and promote musicians and artists. "The mandatory CSR activities of the corporate houses should also focus on the welfare of musicians and artists. HCL is doing a wonderful job in terms of providing opportunity, promoting and propagating the artists and their work."

Currently, working on a series of digital concerts where the performance of fellow artists from all over the country will be showcased on an international platform, Mallick, along with other musicians has formed the band 'VEDA'. "I play the Sitar, Ratul Shankar plays the Cajon and Mainak Bumpy Chowdhury is on the Bass Guitar. It is essentially an instrumental set up although we do occasionally feature singers from different genres. Right now, we are working on our upcoming album which we are planning to release in October," he signs off.

Welcome to the gang!

By N. Lothungbeni Humtsoe

Just like there's no one-size-fits-all jeans, one diet that suits all or one beauty routine that we all follow, there is no label to define the woman of this generation. She is neither traditional nor modern, passive nor rebellious, old school nor progressive — neither here nor there. It is this dichotomy that inspires Gajra Gang — a brand and a community that acknowledges that while her choices make her stand out, they also unite her with her girl gang.

Nykaa Fashion celebrates the spirit of sisterhood and the freedom of choice, as it introduces Gajra Gang — a new label that is an ode to every woman who refuses to be labeled. The newest addition to an already formidable repertoire of consumer brands like Nykd by Nykaa, Twenty Dresses, RSVP, Mondano, Likha and Pipa Bella, Gajra Gang comes with the same curatorial vision that is unique to Nykaa Fashion.

With a ready-to-wear collection of modern occasion wear, the brand is a little bit bold, flirty and feminine, yet always free-spirited. Explore a range of romantic floral lehengas that twirl, crop top sets that rock, one-shoulder tunics that remix and light-as-air Chanderi and organza sarees that are pure love.

"It often strikes us at that the greatest gift, particularly for a woman, is the right to choose. Not only do women want to express their individuality in all aspects, from their clothes to bigger life decisions, they also crave judgement-free communities that support



these choices. With Gajra Gang's assortment and social media community, we will strive to do both: inspire as well as support women to fearlessly build the lives of their choice." — says Adwaita Nayar, CEO, Nykaa Fashion.

(The author can be contacted at lothungbeni.h@ians.in)

The Things People Do

The road to survival is rough and rambling, often taking travellers to uncharted career paths, but when it is a pandemic year and the work itself is unconventional the course is that much tougher – and the future more uncertain.

Powerbocking, extreme biking stunts, hip-hopping, freestyle football or simply the art of standing still as a 'living statue'... the many varied things people to earn a living and also fulfil a passion for the unusual makes for an eclectic list. After months of lockdown, however, the stars of the unconventional in the pre-pandemic era now find their work space shrinking perilously.

Rohan Singh's worker as a 'powerbocker' artist would have many looking for a dictionary to understand what exactly he does. Simply put, it's the art of running, jumping and doing acrobatics on special stilts. Till the COVID pandemic hit in March last year, the 27-year-old was always on the move – and not just on stilts – as he travelled countries to take part in different events.

Ultimate Striderz, the company founded by his brother Rahul in 2012, was India's first and only powerbocking group, Rohan said proudly. It was also his only source of income. "The entertainment and event industry faced a massive blow in the pandemic. Many businesses have reopened, but not ours," Rohan said. He even started working as a sales representative to makes ends meet but that did not work for very long either.

He is trying to stay positive and keeps himself occupied with Instagram videos and work outs to maintain fitness. It's a challenge to stay focused on a better tomorrow for so many others as well.

If Rohan uses stilts, Akshay Yadav juggles the humble football with various parts of the body (except the elbows and hands) as a mean of creative self expression and entertainment. The 26-year-old, considered among the best freestyle footballers in India, said he wants to change the perception of football. But COVID-19 has hindered his plan.

Akshay, who performs for high end events and TV commercials and has spent years honing his art, suddenly finds himself with little work. The man, who shared space with stars such as Salman Khan and Varun Dhawan and earned plaudits from international football players Del Piero as well as Baichung Bhutia, said he was willing to even become a delivery boy.

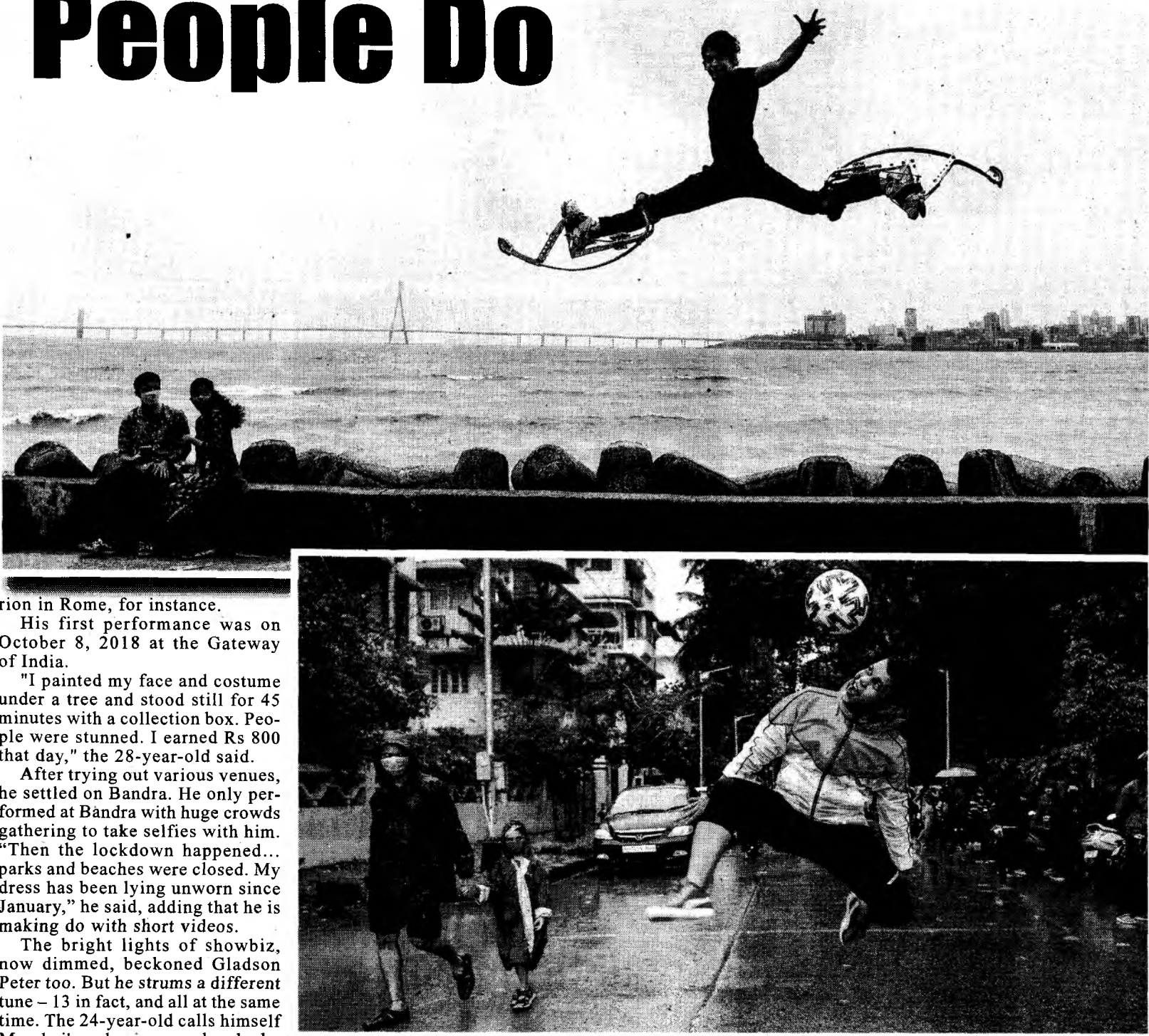
"Due to the pandemic, all events shut down. International trips were cancelled, shootings were called off... I couldn't even practice outdoors as all the parks and beaches were closed. All my savings finished and for the first time in my life I had to borrow money from a friend," Akshay said.

With COVID numbers coming down, things are slowly beginning to look up. "I have got two movies. I just grab any opportunity and at any price....," he said.

The lows after the highs are difficult to handle, taking a huge emotional and physical toll, agreed Pravin Habib, a popular name in the Indian BMX (bicycle motor-cross) circuit. Like Rohan and Akshay, 27-year-old Pravin too has travelled the world. He came into the limelight in 2016 when he represented India at the World Leisure Games in Chuncheon, South Korea. He was the only BMX rider in the Indian contingent and finished 15 of the total 21 participants. Pravin, who has fought disapproving parents and indifference to the sport, was just settling down to some glory after the Chuncheon Games when his world came crashing down with COVID.

"All events and shoots were called off... I became a zero from a hero as there was no income. As I was uneducated, I couldn't get any job. The lockdown has changed my life," Pravin said somberly.

Girish Gaud is proud to call himself Mumbai's "first living statue". Gaud covers himself in gold and stands still so people can come up and take pictures with him. Quite like other living statues in global tourist hotspots, a centu-



He has painted world renowned personalities, deities and done abstracts and stylised canvases too, and was getting ready for an exhibition last summer. That didn't happen of course and he is now trying to sell his works online – without much success, "Three years of my work is lying in the studio..." Bhatkar, 35, said, hoping for normalcy to return. Like him, Vishal Suryakant Shinde, well known for his eco-friendly Ganpati idols, is self taught. Shinde, who also exports fiberglass idols, has innovated for the COVID times with small eight-inch idols that can be immersed at home.

But business was down by about 50 per cent and Shinde is now earnestly hoping this year will be better. (PTI)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 8, 2021

Moons opposite Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. This is going to be an amazing time period for you. You will be in a positive frame of mind and will look forward to accomplishing all major goals that you have envisaged. You will have loads of patience to get the difficult task completed. Your colleagues will provide you all support in your pursuit. Your bosses and superiors would be generally satisfied with you. You may look for new job avenues. There are possibilities of transfer/posting in your job. Your salary and pay package will increase.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

...selves to achieve high. Your disputes with neighbors will get resolved. Officials will be happy with your work. You might buy new clothes and ornaments. You will do right things and achieve your objectives. There will be lot of peace at home.

Your efforts will bring good results. You will impress one and all with your never say die attitude. You will be satisfied and happy with the outcome. You will also have luck on your side. You will achieve success and good things in life. Those connected with technology and media will get success. You will work with lot of determination and also remain sensitive. The pace of success will be steady. Your income too will rise. You will interact with lot of people. You will also meet a special person at this time who will open the doors of success for you. Along with your domestic affairs will also be resolved. Engagement might take place. You will get attracted to the opposite sex. Mutual exchange of feelings will give you happiness.

You will pay attention to your house, property, family and your partnerships. You will have monetary gains. A major expansion in business is round the corner. You will also get a good job offer. You will be mentally agile and fit. There will be a slight inclination towards spirituality. You will have some new interests and enjoy yourself. Your personal life will get cool because of love and romance. The small worries regarding home will dispel. You should curtail your expenses. Everything that shines is not gold is the saying that should be kept in mind while buying things. Spend only as much as you have in your pocket. After lot of struggles and efforts you will finally succeed in getting a loan.

Your work will get done with ease. So you need to make best use of this opportunity. You will get success in legal matters. There are strong chances of division of property. You will also get success in love and romance. Love mates will enjoy a good time. Your income will also rise. There will be various activities in different directions. Marriage function will take place. Commercial situation will improve. Your business partner might betray you. You need to remain alert. There is possibility of getting separated from your dear one, for a little while. You will also have differences of opinion with your life partner. You will have to remain cool and peaceful under all circumstances.

You will focus on your work with seriousness and also get good results in the bargain. Your bosses will also praise you for your efforts. You could be given additional responsibilities too. House wives will learn new recipes, for that they will take the help of internet and youtube. You will have financial gains. Your superiors will hand over more responsibilities to you. You will do some work for the welfare of the people. You will also fall in love with a person known to you. Your desires and dreams will be fulfilled. Pending works will soon be completed. Your mind will be peaceful. You will meet lot of new people. Your communication skills will be second to none. You will fulfill your responsibilities with great aplomb. Disputes will be peacefully resolved. Money that was struck somewhere will accrue to you.

You will get good opportunities for professional growth. Your boss and seniors will be happy with you. You will also get new orders/contracts. You need to remain alert as you could be a victim of some evil conspiracy. Your disputes with family members related to property will get more complex. But you will find a way out. You will also bring about a massive change in your organization and staff. You will focus on cost cutting. You will enjoy a good time with your partner. There will be joyous and blissful moments. The progeny related worry may get considerably neutralized. You will devote time in research and higher studies. And may read different subjects.

Students will do well in exams/interview and will be willing to learn new techniques. You will have good time amidst your close ones. You will come in contact with top officials. You will also buy something new for the house. You will be quite spiritual and ethical during this phase. Your reputation, prestige and glory will take an upward plunge. You will not compromise with your ideals and principles come what may. You will recover your long due money held by a party. Your enemies won't be able to scratch you, no matter how hard they try to damage your interest. You will travel a lot. You will consolidate your energy and resources.

Career Options in the Fashion World

By Ranjan K Baruah

Are you passionate about new styles, innovation or anything related with fashion? If yes, then you may choose fashion as your career. Fashion is not only fashion shows or wearing a few stylish dresses. It is more than that and one of the most creative professions is associated with fashion. Fashion is a form of self-expression and autonomy at a particular period and place and in a specific context, of clothing, footwear, lifestyle, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, body posture, etc. In its everyday use, the term implies a look defined by the fashion industry as that which is trending. Everything that is considered fashion is available and popular by the fashion system.

When we look at fashion from career perspectives then many terms would come to our mind right from fashion design, interior design, textile design, footwear design, fashion photography, fashion journalism, etc. We should be aware that the domestic textiles and apparel industry contributes 5% to India's GDP, 7% of industry output in value terms and 12% of the country's export earnings. India is the 6th largest producer of technical textiles with 6% global share (12% CAGR), the largest producer of cotton and jute in the world. There is no doubt that the recent pandemic and lock down has negatively impacted the industry but that does not mean that the situation will be the same every day. After the pandemic is over, there would be new initiatives and activities which would certainly boom the industry.

Courses in leading institutes like National Institute of Fashion Technology include Bachelor of Design in Accessory Design, Fashion Communication, Knitwear Design, Leather Design, Textile Design and Fashion Design. In the master level course it provides courses tutes offering courses related to fashion. Aspirants must be careful and vigilant while taking admission in private colleges as all institutes may not be credible and there might be issues of placement after finishing the courses. Job options include Fashion designer, Retail buyer, Retail manager, Retail merchandiser, Stylist, Textile designer, Visual merchandiser, etc. One may join in different industries or start their own initiatives like starting fashion studios or boutiques, etc.

Apart from having academic qualifications like degrees or diplomas one should have employability skills to be placed after completing the courses. One must remember that a career in fashion means one must be creative and innovative. Using technology for innovation is another way which means one must have required technological skills to be successful in this field. I have seen students and young people engaged in e-commerce activities with different products. If one is interested in selling then they can think of learning and getting trained in this field to start their own ventures. As the northeastern region is rich in diversity of clothing and other souvenirs hence our youths may take up the required degree or diploma and get engaged in promoting our rich traditions and earn at the same time. We shall write about more options related to the fashion industry in our forthcoming editions.

(The author is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkranjank@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



"The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery."

— Anais Nin

The Shillong Times

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The ga-ga over gold

INDIA went gaga on Saturday evening. The jubilation survived the night and spilled over to the morning and was carried forward over television sets. Everyone patted their own back for the Gold that Neeraj Chopra won for India in the last lap of the Tokyo Olympics. "We did it", and we carried with us two Silver and four Bronze as the curtain fell on the grand show. Elsewhere, there was palpable gloom. China got more Gold than the US, 38 against 36, and the Americans were upset. US took more medals than China, 108 against 87 – and the Chinese were upset too. The jubilation here will continue for some time and then India would go back to slumber and wake up by the next time the Olympic bell tolls for another show – Paris 2024. All said, India improved on its previous abysmal tally. In the 2016 Rio Olympics, the Indian tally was no more than a Silver and Bronze each. In 2012 at London, India lifted two Silver and four Bronze. That was the best number India had ever had, save for a Gold by Abhinav Bindra in the Beijing Olympics. India took one small step forward this time in terms of medal tally.

Notably, after Narendra Modi took charge as Prime Minister in 2014, and after the Planning Commission was renamed NITI Aayog, this institution aiming at national rejuvenation had, at its outset in 2016, set for India a target: 50 medals for the 2024 Olympics through a progressive improvement in the performance of Indian athletes. Two years later, at Rio in 2016, it was a near-total washout. There is nothing to suggest that the present performance will help India substantially raise its stake in another three years' time – for the 2024 event. India had joined the Olympics for the first time in 1900, four years after its formal start, and took two medals. Till the time of the Tokyo Olympics this year, India's total medal tally at all the Olympics put together was just 28, including the Gold that Bindra lifted in 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Olympics is just another barometer for the hopelessness that India is today; a nation messed up by wayward, corrupt and dynasty-minded anachronisms for over 70 years. Merit is overshadowed by increased indulgence in nepotism, which has become a way of life here. The huge funds earmarked for sports are going down the drain – a part of it pocketed or pilfered, a part of it unutilized and some part misused. The results are there for all to see. The problem with India is that politics subsumes everything; sports included and there is scant respect for professionalism.

COVID-19 Pandemic: The Universal Liminal Experience

By HH Mohrmen

An article from the most recent readings provided a word which best describes the current state of affairs the world is in due to the pandemic. An article in The Inquirer (issue 8012/29 May 2021) which is a fortnightly of the Unitarian Church in the UK by Jacqueline Woodman discussed the word 'liminal' which best describes the situation that the entire humanity is in today. The state of affairs that the world and the entire human race is caught in today which is being betwixt and between. Simply put liminal relates to a transitional or initial stage of a process.

Never in the history of the world or that of peoples belonging to different races and countries have so many experienced the same anguish and uncertainty at the same time. Since the beginning of last year till date, the entire world is plunged into a dilemma. Nobody knows what will come next. People cannot make long term plans and will have to avoid visiting distant places except for emergencies. It is the universal experience of being all in the same boat and people in the entire world are all floating along with the waves in the wide span of the ocean not knowing what will happen next.

The fortnightly magazine defined the word 'liminal' as a place or time or experience of disorientation which is followed by uncertainty. It is that which has thrust humans into an uncharted future and thrown out the stability and comfort that they once knew. It is something that makes people disoriented and throws them into uncharted waters. Even though they are confident about the past and it is only natural to be unsure about the future (as it has always been), there is something extraordinary about the current Covid-infused situation. In fact the pandemic has not only brought everything to a standstill but has sent everyone helter-skelter. The pandemic has not only made people's lives disoriented but they cannot even plan for the future because one never knows what the future has in store for them.

As a tribal one sees how the entire tradition that one so deeply cherishes crumbling like a pack of cards in the blink of an eye. Not to talk about those who died due to Covid where protocols need to be observed in conducting the

funeral rites, but Covid had impacted even on those dying of other reasons. One cannot attend the funeral of even those who die an ordinary death. Everyone has missed attending the funeral of their near and dear ones which in ordinary circumstances one would be there to stand by the bereaved family and to lend one's shoulder for them to cry and rest their heads on.

In ordinary times even if one cannot visit the bereaved family during a funeral, one would always make sure to visit them later. But due to the pandemic the obligation of visiting and supporting one another during the time of trials and tribulations is being dispensed with. The community support no longer exists and the bereaved family is left to fend for itself. The million dollar question



is whether the pandemic has ushered in a new era among the tribal community of the state.

Like a tree in the autumn which sheds all leaves waiting for the spring, it looks like once in a lifetime a situation like this occurs when the old gives way to the new. The fact that market day is slowly giving way to Saturday as a traditional day for shopping is something that will remain true for good.

The liminal experience that this writer experienced recently was when a member of the family tested Covid positive. It was a shock no doubt and there was fear amongst the family members because the relative is an elderly person who had not even taken a single dose of vaccination. Fortunately she is Covid negative now and recuperating. At the personal level during that brief period all the plans went haywire. Few meetings had to be cancelled even as one floundered about when to plan one's next move till the test is done and

the result is out. The angst of having to stay quarantined at home until the RT-PCR test result comes out was another anxious space in one's life. It is only when the result came out negative that one could heave a sigh of relief and start all over again.

On the other hand one cannot help but watch in wonder how the lives of young people unfolded during the last one and half year period. They were also caught in betwixt and between as there is no certainty in what they are doing. Their education is in disarray as online classes barely help them learn; the truth is online classes are no substitute for classroom teaching. It also helps one realise that not only is classroom teaching important but the school and college atmosphere is also an important element of

education. In reality even if a student remains absent or does not attend classes and fails in the exams, and has learned nothing from the classes, the fact remains that the student would have learnt something from the campus environment.

Surely, the students who graduated from different classes during the pandemic period via online classes would definitely feel something amiss. They were ecstatic when their results were out and rushed to get admissions in their dream schools and colleges, but the joy was short-lived as they have to stay put in their homes and attend classes through the online mode. The feeling of one's education being incomplete in spite of being declared passed and promoted to another class will always be there in the minds of the learner. What impact this will have on the education in general and the psyche of the young students in particular will remain obli-

ous until and unless a study is conducted to understand the issue.

The other question is whether the lockdown which began last March and continues till this year helps make humans more spiritual? Or does it at least make even those who have an aversion to using the word spiritual, to think? It is true that individual life is a never ending journey from certainty of the past to uncertainty of the future. So one may ask what the fuss is all about then. One may argue that the entire life as a human is living in betwixt and between the past that one knows and at the same time living in apprehension about the future that one does not know. One may also argue that in life the future is always uncertain anyway, but the time space during the pandemic is different. The global pandemic has put the entire world in one capsule (if one may say so), and the commonality of one human race and the fact that the entire world is one, is being reaffirmed. One may describe such an experience as part of one's spiritual journey, but the difference is, this time around for at least the present moment of history, the pandemic has succeeded in putting everybody on the same voyage. Everybody is living a Star Trek moment in a Starship Enterprise on a journey to a place where humans have never been before.

Unlike in the past when humans with knowledge about the past walk to the future with confidence, this time the certainty of the past does not give one the reassurance to plan for the future. Till today everybody is waiting for the new normal. Everybody is anxiously hoping that the new normal will arrive sooner than later. Unfortunately uncertainty still looms large in the universal horizon. When will this be over is the question that is in everybody's mind?

The global pandemic is one big bubble where humans share a common experience that people regretfully conclude, 'we are all in this together.' The division that we created on the basis of religion, race and ethnicity has lost its meaning. Surely the one and half years had given each and every one ample time to reflect and decide on their next move as one walks into the post Covid era. Individually one must have been familiar with living in a liminal space, but the pandemic is one profound illustration of the world and the entire human race experiencing the occasion of living together in the same liminal space.

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Stagflation looms large

RBI panel for cut in taxes

By Shivaji Sarkar

Severe price rise and plummeting consumer confidence is rattling the monetary policy management of the Reserve Bank of India. Once again the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) finds the high petroleum taxes spurring prices of all commodities and inflation index across the country. A dissent note on the price front has called upon to cut all taxes on petroleum products, saying that bank expects inflation to touch 5.7 per cent in 2022 against the present 5.1 per cent.

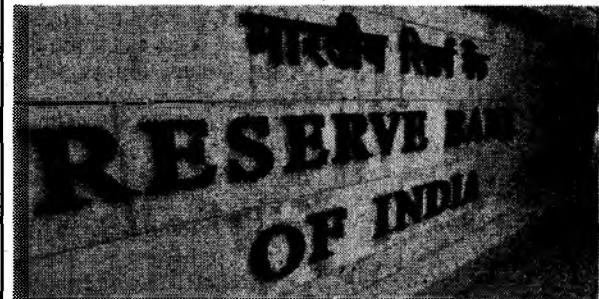
The rising inflation should have resulted in higher repo rates but the central bank has with reluctance and caution held the rates back to 4 per cent to help the government. Economically, it is not supposed to be a prudent decision, as it further restricts the purchasing power capabilities. This means the industry may not find a very conducive environment and the demand side will remain weak.

A look at the RBI Consumer Confidence Survey for July reveals weakness in the bargaining powers of the working class and high prices putting a squeeze on the non-essential spending, a crucial factor for the socio-economic progress. The current situation index (CCI) fell sharply from its March 2020

ues above which signify an expansion in activity, compared to last month. The Nomura India Business Resumption Index has also shown a marginal fall in the last two weeks. The Nomura India economist has pointed to the dissent of an MPC member against the accommodative policy rate stance.

The dissent note of Raj Kiran Rai G, Chairman of industry lobby of Indian Banks Association (IBA) and head of Union Bank of India, states, "RBI 'nudges' the governments at the Centre and States to cut the high indirect taxes on fuel products to bring down the pressure on prices. It is pertinent to note that while the decision of the monetary policy committee for continuance of the accommodative stance was unanimous in the June policy, it is not so in this policy." He underlined the building of the price pressures.

That is vital. The growth remains uncertain. It fell to 4.04 per cent in 2019-20 from 6.53 per cent in 2018-19. In 2020-21, it plummeted to minus 7.25 per cent and is expected to grow by 9.5 per cent. There are many doubts though. Even if it grows by 9.5 per cent, it is to be noted that it is over



value of 85.6 to 48.5 in May 2021 and has not recovered till July as per CCS findings between June 28 and July 9. The survey indicates negativity about jobs, incomes and concerns about rising prices. The bank is concerned because if the economy does not show a turnaround it will have to dig into its reserves, a difficult reminder of the 1991 crash.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das's statement for its effort for recovery is significant. He states: "The RBI remains in 'whatever it takes' mode with a readiness to deploy all its policy dimensions – monetary, prudential or regulatory. Our focus on preservation of financial stability continues. At this juncture, our overarching priority is that growth impulses are nurtured to ensure a durable recovery along a sustainable growth path with stability".

The MPC fine print, however, underlines worrying trends like stagflation threat for the country. A stagflation is low growth with high inflation. The MPC might have retained the GDP forecast for 2020-21 at 9.5 per cent, projected in the June meeting but MPC members are seemingly more bearish in their outlook than they were earlier. The MPC has revised downward of the second, third and fourth quarter projections because of demand-side projections.

According to an educationist's observation, the demand-side problem is even reflecting on the university admissions, particularly of private universities. The admissions are suffering at all levels as parents have squeezed income and little to spare. This indicates that a deep malaise is setting in.

Inflation is prime concern of the RBI, according to its Deputy Governor Michael Patra. He says, "It is important to bring that down". The current assessment is that the inflationary pressures during 2021-22 are largely driven by adverse supply shocks. The MPC says that there is large amount of slack in the economy with output below its pre-pandemic level. It hints at weakness in demand.

To support it one may refer to the Purchasing Power Index. It remains below the critical threshold of 50, val-

minus growth. The actual growth at that level would be a mere 2.25 per cent.

The World Bank (WB) has now slashed India's GDP forecast 8.3 per cent as against its earlier forecast in 2022 and may even plummet to 7.5 per cent and may fall to 6.5 per cent in 2023. It states, "The pandemic will undermine consumption and investment as confidence remains depressed and balance sheets damaged."

The World Bank may not be off the mark. The pandemic has disproportionately affected labour and the informal sector. The output gap is predicted by the MPC though it is not confident about the growth. The International Monetary Fund defines output gap as an economic measure of the difference between the actual output of an economy and its potential output. In monetary policy terms, potential output is also taken as the limit which can be reached without stoking inflation.

The MPC does not rule out 5.7 per cent inflation in 2021-22 fiscal, almost a per cent more than what was predicted in April meeting. Even if this is true, this would be the year of highest inflation since 2012-13. Consumer price index is at a high of 6.16 per cent. With income losses it hits the demand to critical levels. While bank lending is not picking up, the growth of bad loans spell trouble not only or NBFC, the prime lender for the unorganised sector, but the whole of Indian economy. If their ability to lend is curtailed due the surge in bad loans, consumption and demand would weaken further.

This might hit the banking sector as the RBI financial stability report (FSR) estimates bad loans to touch 9.8 per cent by March 2022 from 7.5 per cent in March 2021. It means lenders may see bad loan rising by Rs 1.3 lakh crore and outgo of Rs 7000 to 9000 crore as interest payment.

The RBI has given the prescription for the government to follow. If it follows the steps to check inflation the economy may spur else more difficult days await the nation. —INFA

Letters to the Editor

World Indigenous Peoples' Day & USOF

Editor,
The United Nations General Assembly in 1994 observed August 9 as World Indigenous Peoples Day. This happened at the first meeting of the JN working group on indigenous population for promotion and protection of their human rights. It is strange that while almost all countries have been mentioned in the UN map of indigenous peoples, India does not find a place there because it is not a signatory to Resolution 49/214 of December 23, 1994, although we have the highest population of indigenous peoples. India is a country with diverse cultures and with a highly stratified society replete with prejudices. The fear of minority superiority, loss of control over minority by majority is the biggest hurdle in signing of the 1994 UN Resolution which will be of a binding nature to the member states that are signatories to it. Indigenous people from countries that have signed this Resolution come under the ambit of the United Nations Human

Rights Council (UNHRC). Since India is a rights-based democracy, to further expand the rights of indigenous peoples so that they will not be left behind, requires a new tripartite social contract between UNHRC, indigenous people and the Government of India.

Many agencies and organisations are celebrating this day across the country to bring awareness to the present generation about their customs, culture, traditions, technology, environment and an organic value system they practiced centuries ago. This year the theme of World Indigenous Day is, "Leaving no one behind: indigenous peoples and the call for new social contract." This theme directs that humanity which has witnessed a pandemic where in the name of social distancing, economic distancing has left many behind, should take a fresh look at rights. There are many ways to empower the powerless and to give voice to the voiceless so that all can live life with dignity.

Five years after the declaration of World Indigenous Peoples Day by UN, India announced a New Telecom Policy (NTP)-1999 for support to Telecom Service Providers according to the mandate of the International Telecommunications Union

(ITU), the United Nations specialized agency for Information and Communication Technologies – ICTs. Article 1(d) of the ITU seeks to promote the extension of the benefits of the new telecom technologies to all the world's inhabitants. Accordingly, the Indian Telegraph Act was amended in 2003 and gives statutory status to Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) whose main objective is to enable rural Indians to achieve their fullest potential and participate productively in the development of the nation by being effectively connected through a reliable and ubiquitous telecommunications network; access to which is within their reach.

In the six north eastern states, excluding Assam and Sikkim approximately five thousands villages which have been primarily inhabited by indigenous peoples have yet to have access to telecom connectivity. Once they are enabled with ICT their culture can penetrate across the globe and this unique and incredible culture will win over millions of hearts.

ICT is the only tool which opens up new opportunities to indigenous peoples', including financial stability and sustainable livelihoods in order for them to realise

their fullest potential so that the gap between actual and potential will be minimised. Technology with values and culture calls for a new social contract in order to become a super soft power. This will only be possible when no one is left behind. For that the USOF, is connecting the unconnected indigenous people of India.

Yours etc.,
Dilip Singh, ITS officer
Via email

Appoint qualified tribal as Pro-VC, Tura Campus

Editor,
Apropos of the news item 'GH groups seek revamping of NEHU,' which appeared in your daily on August 3, 2021, I am of the view that NEHU Tura Campus which has completed 25 years of its existence on February 23, needs special attention from the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor Prof Prabha Shankar Shukla. It is encouraging to note that within five days of his taking charge as VC, Prof Shukla visited Tura Campus on July 31 and interacted with teaching and non-teaching fraternity, including the local NGOs to get first hand information

about the status of the NEHU, Tura campus. It is apparent that over the last six years the overall performance of NEHU has slumped. NEHU Tura campus has been in the public domain for the wrong reasons.

What NEHU Tura Campus was in its initial stages is not what it is today. The problems and challenges faced by the Tura Campus are multiple in nature. To name a few, there has been no regularization of non-teaching staff who have been working for over 25 years. Despite having eleven departments with one of them being self-financing no recruitment has happened both for teaching and non-teaching posts after 2012. Apart from that there was a lot of discrimination in the selection process where even a local Garo who is a gold medalist was denied appointment to the post of Assistant Professor under UR category in the Horticulture Department. Often the programmes organized by the University staff are in disarray and chief guests comprising dignitaries such as elected representatives or senior government officials were not formally addressed. There was a breach of protocol in the National Science Day celebration 2016 programme where the vote of thanks which is always

proposed in ascending order was not observed. There were occasions when the Pro-VC arrived to the programme very late and spoke after the Chief Guest. One senior citizen of Tura Town humorously told me, "If I attend a NEHU programme I have to take a sleeping pill at night." What he meant to say was that school or college programmes of Tura are far better organised than that of NEHU.

Till date the NEHU Tura Campus has no potable drinking water, no stationary shops, no banks, no post office and lacks other basic amenities. Considering all these factors I urge the present VC to appoint a well qualified tribal Professor from any of the North Eastern States, with enough administrative experience and one who is presentable in all aspects as Pro-VC. Only such a person can take the NEHU Tura Campus to greater heights. Such a person is one we can look up to and will in turn provide academic and intellectual leadership.

Yours etc.,
SA Sangma
Tura

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 environment will continue to deteriorate until pollution practices are abandoned.”
— B. F. Skinner

The Shillong Times
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The garbage challenge

IT'S been a couple of weeks since the waste from Jowai, approximately 63 kms away from Shillong was brought to the state capital to be dumped at Marten. The irony here is stark. It means that 49 years after statehood our political and social leadership failed to envision that people would no longer be able to dispose of even their kitchen waste and grass and weeds etc., within their own compounds. The question therefore is why the need for a waste management system beyond our respective households? There are two important reasons here. First, homes are built without any specifications and without having to adhere to a set of guidelines such as having enough space for a septic tank, and organic/kitchen waste disposal pit. Hence every space became built up. Secondly, forty years ago households did not generate as much plastic waste (plastic bags, food packages, paper, aluminium foil etc.). Those days electronic and metal waste was unknown. Civilisation has introduced many items to make life easier for humans but it has not shown a sustainable model for waste reduction, waste management and waste recycling.

The purpose of governance is to envision the state and its future needs and not just to deal with immediate issues and to fire-fight. Indeed, fire-fighting is what is happening with the garbage from Jowai since there isn't any place for dumping that mess in the vicinity. The problem today is that even recycling plastic and metal garbage has other consequences. All talk about cement companies buying up plastic waste has had no visible results.

Meghalaya Government needs to take hard decisions based on its own experiences with garbage. First, there has to be one uniform rule for building permissions within and outside municipalities. Houses must have space for dumping organic waste. That must be a precondition for granting building permission. Landfills are an outdated idea. Other cities have democratised waste management by making localities responsible for managing their own waste through use of waste converters installed locally. The Meghalaya Government has to ban the use of plastic carry bags and call upon all commercial establishments, petty shopkeepers and hawkers to cooperate in this initiative. A call must be given to reduce waste as much as possible. People generally don't think much about waste because once it goes out of their homes their responsibilities are over. It's time to make every household responsible for the waste it generates and to pay by weight and not just a monthly collection charge which only goes towards paying salaries to waste collectors and maintenance of trucks. The public is actually not paying the cost of managing the waste at Marten. There has to be some strategic thinking on this issue.

Letters to the Editor

Border disputes resolution should transcend politics

Editor,
Of late, there have been a lot of unnecessary border skirmishes amongst the North Eastern States. The latest fallout at the Assam-Meghalaya border of Longkhuli, Ri Bhoi District and the Assam-Mizoram dispute in Lailapur-Vairengte border are results of a "collective failure" on the part of all state governments, past and present and more importantly the Center. In all the border issues among states of the North East though, there is one common denominator, Assam and understandably so, since every other state apart from Manipur and Tripura have been carved out of it. The longest border dispute in the North East is between Assam and Nagaland since the latter gained statehood in 1963. It is highly commendable to see the two state governments recently reaching an agreement to de-escalate border tensions with immediate effect. However, looking back at history, the border disputes between states in India as a whole has never been kind, whether it is between Karnataka and their southern counterparts or Assam and

its surrounding sisters states and as the record shows, not one border dispute among states has been resolved post India's Independence. The question then is whether the Union Home Minister's wish and advice to the North Eastern states to sort out their border differences before the 75th Independence Day Celebration will ever materialize. It looks highly improbable. Closer home we have 12 points of dispute along the 884.9 km long border with Assam and so far the collective decision of both the governments during the second round of CM-level talks to try and solve the issues in phases within the first six areas is a step in the right direction. There is a remote possibility that such a long pending land thorny issue will even be resolved in the next few years, certainly not even in the backdrop of a "bonhomie" that both the CMs share at the moment. There are too many stakeholders that have to be taken into account, especially, political rivals whose political agenda moves in the opposite direction. The apolitical class, though, desire to see this issue solved once and for all, irrespective of any political affiliations. There is no need to hide that past governments have failed us especially during those periods when we had

the same regimes ruling Meghalaya and Assam for a long time and not to mention a friendly government at the Center as well. It was indeed a missed opportunity for them, to say the least, in spite of their rhetoric in recent days. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the present dispensations have a big moment before them - a moment of history in the making. The beginning, resulting from the first two rounds of CM-level talks is promising, but to be progressive in achieving the desired goal, one needs to go beyond the so called "political will" and the "bhai-bhai pradarshan" that the two CMs have exhibited thus far. It needs the unraveling of their charisma, the digging of their personalities, and the summoning of all their political experiences, even the need to go beyond their party's decree. It may be the toughest battle in their political careers yet, but an opportunity nevertheless. For both the CMs who have so far displayed unparalleled leadership qualities in their respective states, their coming together to solve this long standing issue is not an accident. It is a moment though, that will prove their mettle. It is a challenge never seen before but the goal at the end of the road is worth fighting for and even if that goal seems too high to

achieve during our lifetime, as a famous personality once said "If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success."
Yours etc.,
Lawrence Pherliam Sumer,
Via email

Complexities of the boundary issue

Editor,
For some time now, the inter-state border problem with neighbouring Assam has been cropping up. People residing on the Meghalaya side of the border continue to face threats and intimidations of various kinds both from state and non-state actors from the Assam side. It is also noteworthy that the Assam-Meghalaya border skirmish had led to the loss of innocent lives in West Khasi Hills a couple of years ago. To add insult to injury the Assam Government did not take any action on the personnel responsible while we kept our eyes shut over this. It is also ironic that the political will and sagacity is lacking in the present set of politicians. Some even contend that they need to handle Assam with kid gloves as Meghalaya is "over dependent" on Assam for

everything. The present set of politicians do not reflect the characteristics of those like late HS Shylla, HS Lyngdoh, EK Mawlong and others who have left this world. I remember that a senior SP of the district was transferred when he stood up to call a spade a spade in the light of the Assam police intrusion. I often wonder why the same principles of justice is found wanting in the present set of police officers of our state. Coming to our ADCs, both the KHADC and JHADC will need to undertake a cadastral survey and for this they should call a Dorbar involving all the Syiems, Dolois, Sirdars etc., who truly represent the rights of the local communities and who know the lay of the land which can then be represented to the State and Union Government. However, for this we will require an honest approach not a populist vote-catching strategy. It has to be in the best interests of the state and its people.
Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

Garib diplomacy
Editor,
Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a recent video inter-

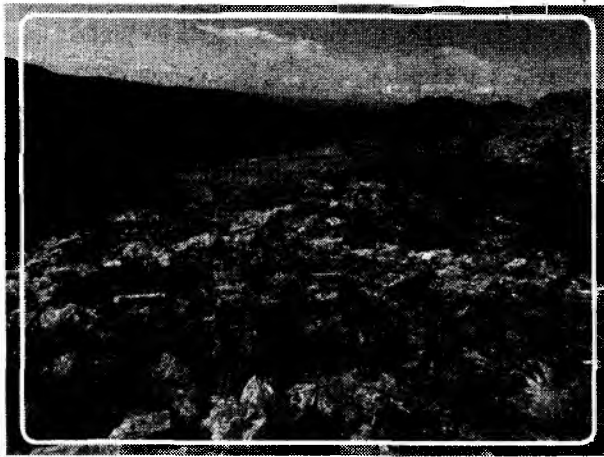
action in Madhya Pradesh categorically blamed the Congress for using 'Garib Diplomacy' without doing anything substantial for the poor and marginalised. While there may be some element of truth in his accusations, the fact is that no government at the Centre whether BJP or Congress did anything remarkable over the years for the uplift of the have-nots as testified by different economic indices. It is an irony that in a democracy like India all political parties use jargons like 'Nyay' or 'Garib Kalyan' simply as a bait to win elections. While the Congress regime was marked by rampant corruption in implementing different welfare schemes, the Modi Government with its pompous and whimsical policies like demonetisation, instant lockdowns, corporatisation etc. further testifies that over the years the pro-poor mantras chanted by different political parties are nothing but a mirage in the desert, designed only to win elections.
Yours etc.,
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati

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A waste disposal problem called Marten

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

is just looking for a landfill replacement. Apparently, there is no thought on waste management. By all means, it looks as if it is only about shifting the problem into another site. The main gate and front of Marten is something that most people are familiar with. However, it is also important to note the rear of the site. This can be viewed and experienced when one travels through what we call in Khasi as 'ka lynti rim'. It is an old road which is seldom used now. Its termination point is at one end of Umiam



Lake. This end is common for fishing. The road is manned at the entry-exit point by the forest department of the Government of Meghalaya with specific opening and closing timings. The good thing about the rear of Marten

and rich fauna. The most prominent of which are birds, monkeys and snakes. Marten is a threat to these. As of today, there is not enough evidence to suggest categorically that the seepage percolates into the water bodies downstream. Nonetheless, the soil pollution around the site is prevalent for all to see. The rainy season makes it worst. The flora is already affected and it is just a matter of time before the animals would face the brunt of it. The interior of Marten leaves a lot to be desired. The stench is normal. The

waste is extremely dangerous and someone has to do something about those big yellow bags before they cause serious health problems. If anything, it seems as though there is no concern for the welfare of the employees working inside Marten. Well, what is the way out? The immediate solution with regard to Marten is two-fold. Firstly, it is about reducing the quantum of waste that goes into disposal. For this to happen, households can revert to the age old practice of 'compost pits'. They are an effective way of handling organic waste (apart from meat waste). The product is the generation of fertile soil that can be used for plants and flowers. If there is a space, every household in Shillong should revive this old practice. It is beneficial and environment friendly. If some of the homes do not have the space for this on account of fully concrete/cemented premises; it is still not a problem as wooden crates can be used as a compost pit. This will be of immense help for reducing organic waste at Marten in the short-term. Secondly, if at all a new site is identified for waste disposal then it must encompass adequate provisions for proper waste treatment and waste management as a whole. Finally it is sad to note that till date Shillong does not practice waste management. Marten is not the solution. It has ceased to serve its purpose. It is time to think in terms of generating fuel from organic waste and effective recycling inorganic waste. In relation to this, what is the outcome of the visit of the state government delegation to Alappuzha town, Kerala in 2018? This town is renowned for sustainable waste management. Its practices are considered to be amongst the best in the world. Their waste management model is a decentralised action of waste collection, segregation, processing, composting, organic farming and recycling. These are done at the locality/community level. There are multiple waste management units in the town. In addition, Alappuzha once faced waste problems like what Shillong is grappling with now. So, has the State Government learnt something from the visit? Which of these learnings are viable and can be replicated for waste management in our urban planning? It is high time to revisit the issue! (Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

Clarion call to resolve border disputes

By Shining Star Lyngdoh Marhillong

The creation of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh from Assam has sparked several border issues. Assam has 8 districts bordering Meghalaya, 3 districts bordering Mizoram, 4 bordering Nagaland and 8 bordering districts with Arunachal Pradesh. The longest-running border dispute in the North East is between Assam and Nagaland, which began soon after Nagaland became a state in 1963 followed by several major clashes between the two states along the border in 1968, 1979, 1985, 2007 and 2014. Mizoram and Assam had a relatively peaceful relationship except in 1994 and 2007. The major border row between the two was on July 26, 2021 which led to the intervention of the Union Government of India. The territorial dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh started soon after the latter got statehood in 1987 when certain territories were transferred from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh. Meghalaya's border disputes with Assam emerged even before Meghalaya got statehood that is in 1971 when it challenged the Assam Reorganization Act of 1971 suggested by the Chandrachud Committee that recommended handing over of Blocks I and II (present day Karbi Anglong District) to Assam. Meghalaya claimed that Blocks I & 2 are part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district as notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act 1873 and as per the survey maps of 1872 and 1929. Meghalaya has at least 12 points of border disputes with Assam as per the recent talks between Himanta Biswa Sarma and Conrad Sangma. Assam has resisted developmental work in the border villages of Meghalaya, ranging from road construction (November 7, 2019), erection of electric posts, construction of footpath under MGNREGA scheme, construction of schools, anganwadi centres and others. Some of the border related issues between Assam and Meghalaya include Assam police intruding into Mawsikar village and planning to erect boundary pillars near Kyrdum on August 1, this year but it was stopped by villagers. Assam claimed land at Solairtek area under West Garo Hills and implemented the MGNREGA scheme there as per the reports on August 1, 2021. Assam police stopped the erection of electric posts at Longkhuli village installed by the Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) and manhandled a Member of District Council (MDC) Charles Mangar on July 26, 2021. Longkhuli is under Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. Assam Police arrested two cowherds below 12 years of age, from Mawsikar village, West Khasi Hills District in July, 2021. Assam Police wanted to make a police outpost at Umwali village on February 20, 2020 which is still part of Meghalaya but villagers came out to protest and foiled the plan. Assam government stopped construction of a police outpost at Umru village, Ri Bhoi District on April 5, 2018. Assam police also stopped construction of sericulture project at Madan Umwang, Ri-Bhoi district on August 2, 2017. On August, 2015 Assam Government took control of the land at Mallangkona and Mallang Siminaguri area belonging to West Khasi Hills District. People of Block-I comprising of Mowluber Skap, Shnong Thymmei, Mowjem, and Madan Nongkylia along with people from Tum Tum, Khatkasla and Psair under West Jaintia Hills District live in fear each day because Assam police continually interfere with their lives. Langpih in West Khasi Hills is one of the major border disputes which started since 1974. In 2010 four citizens of Meghalaya had lost their lives when Assam police opened fire at Langpih, thereby prompting the two-state governments to take up talks. To resolve the border disputes several dialogues between Meghalaya and Assam had been going on, however, nothing notable has been achieved so far. On July 23, 2021, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam and Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister had agreed to a proposal for a 'give and take policy' to amicably resolve the long pending border issue. The row between Assam and Meghalaya at Longkhuli Village on July 26, which happened on the same day that triggered the violent border clash between Assam and Mizoram led to a point that called for a quick intervention from the Union Government of India. The Union Home Minister, Amit Shah after discussion with the Chief Ministers of North Eastern states suggested to solve the long pending border dispute between Assam and other Northeastern states by demarcating boundaries through satellite imaging. The Umiam-based North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC), a joint initiative of the Department of Space (DoS) and the North Eastern Council (NEC) was given the task for scientific interstate boundaries demarcation through satellite imaging and mapping. Amit Shah mooted the idea of the scientific interstate boundaries demarcation through satellite mapping stating that it will amicably and permanently solve the border disputes in the Northeastern states as new boundaries would be drawn. Areas of dispute between Assam and Meghalaya include Umru village in Block II under Ri-Bhoi district; Langpih, Umwali, Mawsikar, Mallang Siminaguri, Aradonga Tarabari, Gizang and Hahim under West Khasi Hills District, Block-I, Tum Tum, Khatkasla and Psair under West Jaintia Hills District and Mahipara and Solairtek in West Garo Hills. To speed up resolving border issues the Government of Meghalaya has appointed three committees headed by a cabinet minister one for West Khasi Hills, one for Ri-Bhoi and one for Jaintia Hills. Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had said that internal border issues should be solved in a peaceful manner and urged Northeastern states to cooperate with the Centre as the central government is keen to permanently resolve the internal border disputes. The question arises as which method of solving the boundary disputes would be a safer bet. Is scientific interstate boundaries demarcation through satellite mapping as mooted by Amit Shah or 'give and take policy' as agreed by Sarma and Sangma a better option? Will the opinion of the people residing in border areas be taken into consideration? Will the political parties, pressure groups or NGOs from both the states accept the new boundary delineation or will they stick with historical records and claims? The questions might seem difficult to answer but one thing the Government of Meghalaya needs to be firm about is that before the state celebrates 50 years of statehood, the long pending boundary issues should be resolved. The Government needs to walk the extra mile. Political parties and pressure groups need to give full co-operation and people should be willing to solve the border disputes permanently and build up a friendly relationship among the Northeastern states.

"Only the unknown frightens men. But once a man has faced the unknown, that terror becomes the known."
— Antoine de Saint-Exupery
The Shillong Times
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Afghanistan on edge
THE recall of Indian citizens from Afghanistan, as it emerges now, comes in the context of the heavy fighting by Taliban militants, who are seizing territory after territory there. It's only a matter of time before the fundamentalists target Kabul and send the Ashraf Ghani government packing. The elected government there is tottering and does not have the wherewithal to challenge the heavily armed Taliban, which has been given full backing by the Pakistan military in terms of weapons and ammunition. The Taliban fight in Afghanistan is today led from the rear by Pakistan and its implications on India are bound to be grim in multiple ways.
The US is still in the picture but it is not clear as to how far it would go to hold the Ghani government erect. In fact, a land army or ground-level support matters little in warfare as was proven since the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Warfare has eminent emphasis now on air power and use of missiles. The US can do what it did in Iraq and the Afghan ground forces can take care of the rest. The moot point is how President Joe Biden and his administration are sizing up the scenario.
India on its own cannot do much. If it enters the fight, it would swiftly turn into a fight between India and Pakistan; and a full-scale war in the subcontinent will be the result. China can be expected to back both the Pakistanis and the Taliban with a sense of camaraderie. Foreign minister S Jaishankar was in Iran this week to attend the inauguration of a new head of state there and Afghanistan figured prominently in the Indian minister's discussions there. He is also heading for another visit to the Americas, touching down in the US as well. Indian diplomacy is active vis-à-vis developments in Afghanistan, where India had put in a lot of efforts in the past two decades. It did so by building on the previous strengths of bilateral relations from the time of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and carried forward in the years of Hamid Karzai as the head of state there in recent years. Yet, the only hope now is based on how much leeway Ghani would get from the US in facing the present situation. One can only hope the US would continue taking adequate interest in checking the drift in Afghanistan, which could otherwise mean a resurgence of the terrorist outfits in the subcontinent. This will also have grave implications on the Indian side of Kashmir.

No patronage, only a level playing field

By Albert Thyrniang

It is no mean feat that Kevinstrong Lawrinang from Mairang in West Khasi Hills topped the SSLC examination 2021 beating all the elite institutions in the state. Coming from the humblest of backgrounds to record the lifetime achievement makes it more special. The second position was also secured by Wanteibok Pator from Mookaiaw. There were also inspiring stories of how students excelled in spite of challenges arising out of the pandemic. A student among the top 10 narrated the story of how she had to share online classes with her four other siblings using the same mobile phone.
As it's Olympic season we have to share success stories from Tokyo. Manipur's Mirabai Chanu, India's first medallist who won silver in women's 49 kg weightlifting had to travel 50 km daily by truck to and from her practising venue. The Olympian who eats on her kitchen's floor honoured the lorry drivers after returning from the "Land of the Rising Sun". Boxer Lovlina Borgohain who won a bronze medal in the women welterweight hails from Bara Mukhia village in the Golaghat district of Assam, did not have a motorable road to her house. The greatest history maker is javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra who became the first Indian ever to win a gold medal in athletics at the Olympic Games and only the second Indian individual gold medal winner in Olympics history. The 23-year old is the son of a farmer in a village in Haryana.
Equally headline making is the revival of India Hockey. The men's hockey team won its first Olympic medal after 41 years, the last being the Moscow 1980 gold medal. The women's team agonisingly missed the medal podium but won lots of hearts for their scintillating display.
We witness these exploits in level playing fields. Competitions are on equal footing. The victors emerged purely on merit. So Mairang and Mookaiaw could leave Shillong and Tura behind. The 'coup' should help debunk the myth that rural students cannot shine. It is irritating to me when 'educators' themselves say 'village kids cannot learn computers, are not able to speak English and cannot compete with their city counterparts'. This writer was privileged enough to oversee rank holders in two institutions. On both occasions the rankers were from rural settings. The level of knowledge, ability, skills and achievements do not depend on the place of origin. All children are born with equal capabilities. It's opportunity that determines their growth, development, career and future. If opportunities are

provided the Lawrinangs, the Mirabais, the Lovlinas, the Neerajs, hockey plays and athletes will surface from any corner. Academic excellence and sports medals and trophies can come from unexpected quarters. Given the opportunity stars can be produced from anywhere.
Does equal opportunity exist in education and elsewhere? We noted that the Mairang student triumphed over candidates from more celebrated city schools. But Mairang is not an unknown location. It is not an unheralded town. It is a flourishing centre. It is going to be the capital of a new district. If candidates from obscure hamlets grace the merit lists then we can say education in the state has come of age. If institutions from far flung villages produce first divisioners or achieve cent percent results then education in the state has matured. But that scenario will not be a reality in our lifetime because in villages infrastructure is pathetic, teacher absenteeism is at an all-time high and 'contract' teaching is rampant. There are rural primary schools (Classes I-V) with just one teacher. There are schools without maths and science teachers for most part of the year. How can they be asked to compete with schools whose teachers have off periods? How can they compete with schools with qualified and trained teachers? There is no level playing field.
If a comprehensive analysis is carried out South West Garo Hills (23.01 %), South Garo Hills (27.50 %), North Garo Hills (27.88 %), West Garo Hills (34.63 %) and East Garo Hills (35.10 %) performed poorly in that order because educational opportunities were denied to their students and certainly not due to inferior intelligence of students! On the other hand the reason for West Khasi Hills (58.28 %), Ri Bhoi (62.40 %), South West Khasi Hills (70.78 %), East Khasi Hills (71.97 %), West Jaintia Hills (73.41 %) and East Jaintia Hills (85.09 %) doing well is because of better opportunities and not because of higher capabilities of their students.
Do we provide a level playing field in the society? Do we promote fairness?



judgements assuring of quid pro quo post retirement appointments. Elections are perceptibly won with the help of the Election Commission and the propaganda media houses. Pegasus is illegally spied on opposition leaders, journalists and activists to access information secretly. Draconian laws, investigation agencies, and enforcement organizations are selectively used against opponents. Elimination of fairness is the mission.
In his swearing ceremony speech that has been posted in Youtube and Facebook, the present president of the KSU narrates how job aspirants approach him. On being asked the reasons if they have the necessary skills and qualifications they revealed that they know no influential individuals and they do not possess the ten/fifteen lakhs to chinch the dream job. So government jobs in Meghalaya are for the highest bidders together with nepotism.
One of the MLAs of South West Khasi Hills reportedly stated that youths should depend on themselves and not depend on political patronage for jobs. However, he was caught with a text message mistakenly sent to another Whatsapp group where he instructed his supporters to apply for vacancies in government departments. So clearly words and actions do not match. Merit has gone for a toss and thrown out of the window. The ruling class controls the government 'job market'.
The mushrooming of illegal coke factories under Suttunga Elaka in East Jaintia Hills cannot happen without traditional leaders-bureaucrats-political nexus. The trick that did the job are cash, bribes, corruption and personal interests. One of the owners is a minister in the MDA government. How could the 32 coke factories, that have become health hazards, get the single window clearance under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister himself to set up units adjacent to human habitats? How are the illegal and polluting 'chimneys' able to operate till they literally choke the breath of villagers? Why have we welcomed with open arms the exiled businessmen from Arunachal Pradesh to pollute and damage our environment? Who benefits from this harmful deal? How dare the factories not comply with the closure orders of the Deputy Commissioner on July 15? Who are the owners linked to? Why was the DC not able to penalise the non-compliance? The government is teaching citizens this - 'You can even do dubious business provided you have the right connections'.
What follows is a brazen and blatant disdain for the law. The coke factories were able to procure an uninterrupted supply of raw material - coal in the midst of a mining ban by the Supreme Court. Was NGT unaware? Was the district administration blind? Did the police look the other way? Was the state government ignorant? Why has the court not taken suo moto cognizance of multiple reports of existence of illegal coke factories? Coke and coal illegalities and scam and favouritism in MeECL are public lessons on the absence of fairness in the state.
It is amazing that the income support for the poor promised at the onset of the pandemic almost two years ago is still to be expedited. It requires an unrelenting follow up from Thma U Rangliuki (TUR) for hopes of the beneficiaries actually receiving the meagre Rs 2100 meant for the 2019 lockdown. Had it not been for the civil society it would have passed off as an undetected 'pandemic scam' that enriches few pockets. It is a classic example of the poor being taken for granted and taken advantage of by the powerful.
A group has alleged special treatment to the BJP. The saffron party was permitted to organise political meetings during the pandemic attended by a general secretary in Shillong and Nongpoh even by-passing the deputy commissioners and exceeding the limit of attendees. Reportedly there was no subsequent censure for violations. If the BJP is granted permission for political gatherings while Coronavirus rages, why not for other parties? If in the Laban meet violators are not punished why are others elsewhere fined for the same offence? We demand equality as a right!
albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

Climate change is here. no luxury of postponing measures Drastic cut in fossil fuel emissions imperative

By Anjan Roy

Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change — better known by its short acronym, IPCC — has raised a red alert on the grievous situation of earth's climate.
The IPCC's sixth report, released by the UN on Monday, clearly pointed out that the earth is warming up faster than earlier estimated and the string of extraordinary climate events happening across the world are all related to man-made changes in climate. The kind of drastic cuts required to achieve zero net emissions mightn't be possible now or even by 2050.
A reading of the report smacks of determinism. Evaluation of the data and charts seem to indicate that it would be nearly impossible to control greenhouse gas emissions to levels required to stay the current rate of temperature rise.
This will call for resetting the entire economic model from the present orientation to growth. Instead of trying to have an ever growing cycle of economic growth, mankind must target a growth asymptote. That is, at least for the developed countries, the objectives should be to maintain the current level of activity and hit a stable state economy rather than an ever growing paradigm.
This could be an extremely difficult mental adjustment. After the second world war, when the principal concern for macro-economics shifted from climbing out of a deep recession through macro-economic expansionist policy, the principal objective became attaining optimal growth.
This was exemplified by the Harrod-Domar kind of growth models which showed that an economy must keep growing. Without growth it will shrink. This was the well-known "knife edge problem".
Today, the virtuous cycle is upwardly spiralling. Companies must report higher earnings, higher turnover, higher profits and so on. Higher every year. Countries should also record growth. Even the growth rate must keep growing.
This is absurd and cannot go on. At some point or other, the growth cycle has to stop and corporations and countries must face the reality. Instead of growth, it should level off and activity should stabilise, although at a high level. This would be compatible with climate. With its population bulge and economic activity, we have now reached a stage where an adjustment would be inevitable: a resetting of economic activity such that we do not drastically raise temperature above the pre-industrial age.
The touch stone, therefore, for assessing the ill-effects of the rise of emission of CO2 and fossil fuels is how much earth's temperature is rising above the pre-industrial levels. Large scale industrialisation and way of life based on burning fossil fuels like petrol, diesel, coal, and also of even more damaging gases like methane, were contributing to heat trapping in the earth's atmosphere.
The overall impact is a rise in the average temperature of the earth. Use of fossil fuels and emissions are tilting the critical and sensitive balance and spread of temperatures from the polar regions to tropics and in the oceans' surfaces.
The critical threshold has been set at 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial level. Temperature rising close up to that point and then above would be disastrous and the earth would get trapped in ever rising temperatures making life on earth impossible.
The emission of greenhouse gases is resulting in faster changes in average temperature and this is disturbing the delicate balance in weather from breaking up of arctic ice-sheets to changes in surface temperature of seas and oceans, different directions in sea-currents (thereby circulation of cold and warm waters on late seas surfaces), torrential rains and floods.
The superior computing powers of today's climate scientists and computers have convincingly shown that the warming up of earth's atmosphere has taken on a faster clip. Thus if there is a rise in temperature by 1.5% by 2050, the tipping point, might come earlier.
Faster warming up means also a consequential pump of the rate of rise. Thus, the temperature rise could assume as much as 2.5% to 3.5% above pre-industrial levels and higher. These would be temperatures at which human life and that of the earth's ecosystem could be altogether changed from what was seen for millions of years.
Every fraction of an increase has its impact, IPCC has pointed out. The best scenario would be if the world cuts emission to a level that temperature increase falls below the threshold of 1.5 degrees. The lower the ceiling could be the faster the earth can start cooling and thus the adverse consequences could be avoided.
The finding is that the world has rapidly warmed by 1.1 degree above the pre-industrial average already and this had to be checked immediately as there was "no window left for a future date for action". That action must be taken here and now, emphasised the UN secretary general.
IPCC experts have linked the extreme climate events of the current year, from massive wildfires in California in the USA, to those currently blazing in Turkish mountains, North American heat dome, to massive flooding in Germany and Belgium, rising ocean levels which are threatening Pacific Ocean islands, record rainfall in central China all to rising temperature caused by CO2 emissions and heat trapping.
A head of state level meeting on climate change is slated to be held sometime later in the year. The publication of the IPCC report is a clarion call for action to be considered by the country heads.
Some experts have urged a complete shift from use of coal — a fuel mankind has known for the better part of the last ten thousand years. Coal is one of the worst polluters and contributes most to faster warming up. However, eating habits also are contributory factors.
Meat consumption, particularly beef, has multiple impacts and one of the most deleterious. Beef production calls for huge use of fodders and grazing, apart from burping of cows which gives out methane.
The greatest concern is the consumerist lifestyle of the west which has become synonymous with development and prosperity. Individualised transportation, using petrol, contributes a lot towards emission of carbon dioxide. Transportation industry, moving goods across continents, is no less polluting. Shipping industry is one of the contributing factors to pollution and new modes are being sought for controlling their emissions. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Worshipping mammon

Editor
The recent news items in the dailies have rightly shifted focus from the invisible enemy to the visible one. Both are designed to kill people. The only difference is that the corona virus kills people and we see them in hundreds and thousands every day but the virus of coke factories kills people slowly but surely. We will notice them when it is too late. The basic necessities of life, namely air and water will become so toxic that people either die or leave their own land. The UN are currently debating on climate change and how we can reduce carbon emission, while we are busy producing carbon emission. It baffles any common man with basic common sense as to how the so-called knowledgeable members of the Single Window Agency could recommend so many coke factories as many as 50 or 60 in an area of hardly

10 to 15 square kilometers. If the coke factories work to their full capacity, the whole area will become a gas chamber reminiscent of the gas chamber of Adolf Hitler.
The SWA members are all living in a fool's paradise. We are killing our own people. We remember the slogan in the sixties - 'No Hill State, No Rest' and how our leaders had demanded the state so that they could develop it according to their own genius. Mr Modi and Mr Amit Shah must be laughing out loud. Here are these people who demanded LLP so that they can protect the indigenous people from the outsiders. How can you protect them when they themselves are killing and exploiting their own people? Nobody can protect them; the god of mammon has blinded their eyes. Only the divine Creator can change people's hearts and protect His people. The Psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it, Unless the Lord guards the city, the watch-

man stays awake in vain." (Psalm 127)
Those whose thought is only of amassing wealth to enjoy life will get disappointed as Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"
Yours etc
T. Mark
Via email

Olympics medal tally

Editor,
The USA topped the medal tally at the Tokyo Olympics with 113 medals. Although the USA trailed China for the most part of the Olympics, they succeeded in racing past their arch rivals on the last day of the Games. However, USA'S medal table slipped considerably from the Rio Games. They had won 46 gold medals in 2016 but they won only 39 in Tokyo.
The Tokyo Olympic Games were held under

Covid-19 conditions. The Olympic Games were to be held in 2020 but had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Until the opening ceremony there were protests against hosting the Games. However, the authorities were able to host the Games without any major incidents. Even though the players put up brilliant performances, the events had to be held in front of empty stands.
India participated in the Tokyo Olympics with its biggest contingent and finished with their biggest-ever medal tally. In spite of the disappointments in sports like shooting and boxing, there were plenty of positives for India. The Tokyo Olympics witnessed India's hockey renaissance. Both men and women's hockey teams reached the semi-finals. India's 41-year old wait for an Olympic medal ended when the men's team won a bronze. In golf, rowing and race walking the players put up brilliant performances. India's campaign started with a silver medal from

weightlifter Mirabai Chanu and ended with a long-awaited gold medal. When Neeraj Chopra won the Men's gold, it became India's first gold in track and field. It will definitely boost the morale of Indian sportspersons and prospective Olympians in the country. If the winning of the gold is a herald of what is to come, we can expect great things for India in future Olympics.
However, India cannot afford to be complacent about its total medal tally of 7 and its 48th position on the medal table. A country with a population of over 138 crore must be in any one of the first 10 positions on the medal table. India must learn lessons from the countries that excel in the Olympic Games. The Government of India and the sports authorities must understand why a small country like Jamaica always puts up electrifying performances in Olympic sprinting events. Young runners are groomed by recruiters and coaches. The country's living legends

also play a vital role in developing champions. Coaches in Jamaica go through intense training and educational programmes. Similarly, India needs to learn lessons from countries that win the most medals like the US, Russia, Great Britain, Japan, China, Australia, Ethiopia and Kenya. They concentrate their resources on "focus sports". India must identify its "focus sports" and concentrate the resources on them. Apart from this, there must be focused Olympic training facilities. Sports must be made a viable career option for athletes. Grass-root level scouting and talent identification are essential for creating a positive environment for the players to push for greatness.
Yours etc.,
Venu GS.
Kollam

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"Always bear in mind that your own resolution to success is more important than any other one thing."

—Abraham Lincoln

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Between a rock and a hard place

THE IED blast happening in broad daylight in a busy marketplace of Shillong on Tuesday should make the government sit up and take notice. The outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) through its general secretary has claimed credit for the blast through its missive addressed to the media. The present Government and the one before it has been blowing hot and cold over extending the olive branch to the outfit and whether to call it to the negotiating table to talk peace. Recently, former Health Minister AL Hek had also broached the topic of initiating peace talks with the HNLC but it remained only an intent. Does the Government know for a fact the present strength of the outfit? In recent times the HNLC has placed an IED in a police station in Jaintia Hills. Now it wants to make its presence felt in the capital city. Interestingly, the outfit has now questioned the Meghalaya High Court on why it has put an embargo on the media to publish news about bandh calls by the outfit. The HNLC has also warned the media to remain free and independent and publish releases they send from time to time failing which they would teach the media a lesson. Now where does that leave media professionals? On one side is the High Court directive; on the other is the HNLC threat! The media finds itself between a rock and a hard place.

Meanwhile the East Shillong MLA, Ampareen Lyngdoh under whose constituency the Laitumkhrah market falls has accused the state of intelligence failure. Former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma of the Congress had been warning the MDA Government that militant outfits are regrouping. The discovery of detonators and arms at a place in Ri Bhoi recently should have upped the ante of the Government. The police force of this state had fought long and hard to contain militancy in Meghalaya. They have lost some of their best men in encounters with militants. Economic activities in the state suffered due to large scale extortions. No one wants to go down that road again. This is where governance matters. At this juncture Meghalaya needs a no-nonsense Home Minister who knows what he's talking about. The state also needs a refurbished police force that is psychologically geared to tackle a fresh bout of militancy. After the GNLA supremo, Sohan D Shira was gunned down in February 2018, the state of preparedness of Meghalaya Police had slackened. Illegal coal mining and transportation goes unchecked making it appear that the rule of law does not exist. This is what gives non-state actors a filip. The MDA Government needs to remain alert to this new challenge.

The recent IED blast : An analysis

By Rudi Warjri

I was with the United Nations in Cambodia trying to bring peace to a civil war in a country of the Killing Fields ruled by a maniac called Pol Pot. I was detained by the armed to the teeth and merciless Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer) while on a mission to enlist the population in the peace process. How I got out of it, is another story. I served in Peru the country of the Marxist Leninist guerillas Shining Path. And then later also in Colombia which suffered the longest extremist and terrorist violence in the world of more than fifty years.

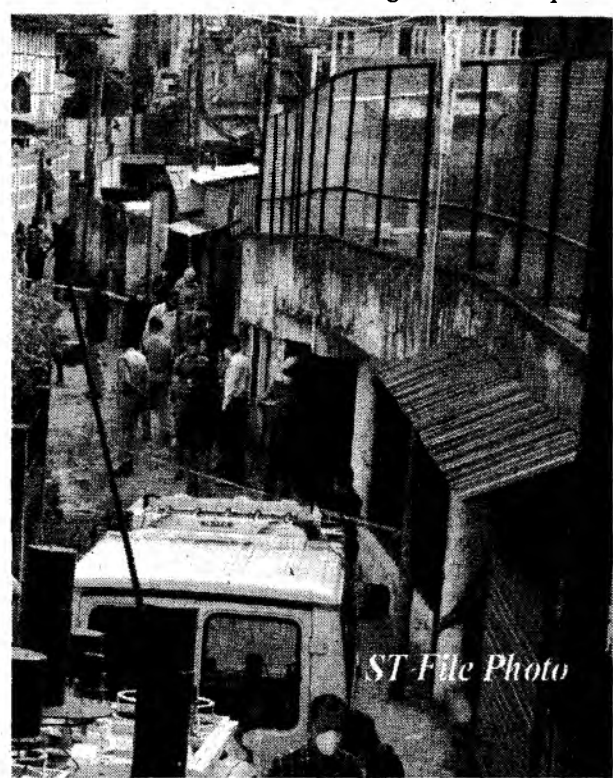
There is one common factor for the survival of all these guerillas, insurgents and ter-

rorist groups. Finance and source of funding. Osama Bin Laden financed the Al Qaeda which attacked in the US. The Tamil diaspora around the world which financed the Tamil Tigers. The precious stones mines bordering Cambodia - Thailand which financed the Khmer Rouge; the Cocaine industry which financed the guerillas in Peru and Colombia.

It now brings me to the next question. Where does the HNLC gets its funding from now? Gone are the days when Bangladesh was offering a haven. So, it must be extortions from the rich tycoons of Shillong and its environs. Extortions from budding entrepreneurs which forced some my own relations to close shop. Besides, friendly big brother ULFA and other insurgent groups in Northeast are themselves

cians tell us that they are being treated with kid gloves. It is believed that there is a value in their survival. They can be a bargaining chip with the central government. They are used during elections by candidates directly or indirectly. That they enjoy the sympathies of pressure groups of all hues and colours goes without saying. A blast takes place; some routine condemnation takes place; the next day everything is forgotten.

Thanks to the High Court of Meghalaya for the ban on bandhs and even prohibiting the media from publishing bandh calls made by underground and overground pressure groups. HNLC is not only threatening the Government; it also has the temerity to even threaten the media and to tell them that they should listen to them instead



regular but at least a contractual post. I personally know a director's son who during his academics never performed well but after graduation was immediately absorbed in his father's department.

This nepotism has got to stop. We the youth want a chance to compete for whichever post is vacant and we want to see that only the deserving candidate gets the job.

For so long we have heard our elders say, "khyannah mynta te" (Ah the youth of today) whenever any young person does something wrong, but they forget that they're the ones who teach us that hard work no longer pays unless you know someone or are rich. The elders are the ones who normalize these devious ways of cheating and lying. Nowadays, no one really empathizes with another's feelings anymore. All they care about is their own self and their families but fail to understand what it's like to be in the other person's shoes. What if the same is being done to them or their kids? What if their kids are always being denied their rights?

Sadly, the same elders would be the ones who would lead in churches or preach the word of God. Oh, the hypocrisy! But, in the end karma never fails to do its work. "What goes around comes around." You take

of the High Court.

We are living at a time when trust in established politicians and established institutions is at an all-time low. The current ongoing pandemic has placed majority of the population in a state of dystopia. Compounded by rise in fuel prices and chain reaction to rise in commodities. Other than the salaried class or Government servants, the rest are suffering to some degree or the other. Besides deaths due to Covid or comorbidity, daily reports about corruption add to the skepticism.

Society is caught in a double whammy of a fear trap. Fear trap due to violence; and fear trap due to an uncertain future. Moreover, to the public in general and the hoi polloi academic exegesis and explanations about fall and rise in GDP (gross domestic product) due to the pandemic and its socio-economic impact means nothing. Government handouts is a pittance. Rs 6000 which works out to Rs 500 per month to a farmer is what a daily wage labourer gets.

The danger is that the wider and deeper the grievance and suffering, the more fertile ground it is for social unrest and violence. Both underground and overground. The UN has published the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report 2021. It contains details of the adverse impact of Covid 19 pandemic on eradication of poverty, hunger, health, quality education etc. It offered several recommendations to overcome the problem. One key action is investing in data and integration of geo-spatial information and household survey. Satellite imagery and household surveys to produce municipality - level data on multi-dimensional poverty are imperative. Machine learning algorithms coupled with social science can further the understanding of public perception on issues such as gender discrimination, measuring social distancing compliance and leveraging the power of collaboration and partnerships.

Noted political scientist Francis Fukuyama said that factors responsible for successful pandemic responses have been state capacity, social trust and leadership. He also added that the practical realities of handling the pandemic favors professionalism and expertise instead of demagoguery. I hope the rulers in Meghalaya and in fact the whole of India realizes this.

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National Security no camouflage for illegal activity Govt's Pegasus denial amounts to confirmation of complicity

By K Raveendran

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's plea to the Supreme Court hearing the Pegasus snooping case amounts to virtually admitting that the government has things to hide. The Modi government's approach in this highly sensitive issue has been suspect right from the beginning and every new development is an indirect acknowledgment that it is not above blame. If it was ready to come clean, it had several occasions to do so, which would have averted the logjam in parliament that is costing the nation dearly. Prime Minister Modi keeps lamenting about the loss of legislative time, but is doing precious little to clear the air so that normalcy can be restored.

The government strategy is to somehow obstruct the Supreme Court proceedings, especially as it got a foretaste of the court's stand on the first day that the truth has to come out. The brazen attempt

cern of the ministry.

The government has somehow managed to see the monsoon session come to a close, without a discussion on the vexed issue, but it is doubtful if it can be described as an honourable conclusion. The needle of suspicion remains pointed to wherever it was ever since the news of the abuse broke out.

The next course of the government action in the Supreme Court is also predictable. The next anchor in the government's defence is most likely to be the invocation of national security. The Modi government had used this route effectively to stonewall further disclosures about the Rafale deal when the Supreme Court was dealing with a clutch of petitions on the controversial deal, particularly the aspects of the fighter aircraft's final price and the out of the way accommodation of Reliance



to buy time so that it can first avoid the embarrassment in parliament over further adverse remarks by the court has betrayed the government's complicity. It was shocking that when the entire nation was waiting to hear the government's response to the Pegasus petitions when the court took up the case, it even failed to send its law officers. This meant that the court had to grant the government time to come back prepared.

More diversionary tactics was on show in parliament, when a specific question was asked in the Rajya Sabha by CPI-M member Dr N

group interests. When the court overruled the government's opposition and insisted on specific details, the government invoked confidentiality in the name of national security and submitted the information in a sealed envelope.

The contents of the envelope have not come out yet, but the announcement of a new probe into the alleged corruption and favouritism in the fighter deal with India has reopened the issue in France and the French national financial prosecutor's office is already looking into possible wrongdoings. The

The defence ministry may not be involved, but that is only a small part of the government, although an important part. There is neither denial nor confirmation whether any other agency of the government, including the most likely home ministry or the IT ministry, was involved. The home ministry under Amit Shah is not known to set store by its commitment towards the protection of individual liberties. Similarly, the IT ministry, particularly under Ravi Shankar Prasad, has shown little respect for privacy and freedom of expression, both of which are technically the primary concern of the ministry.

Sivadasan whether the government has carried out any transaction with Israel's NSO Group Technologies and 'if so, the details thereof'. The answer was as much mischievous as it was misleading: the defence ministry has not entered into any transaction with the NSO Group.

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new French investigations have provided a shot in the arm of the opposition campaign against Modi's Rafale deal, particularly Rahul Gandhi's relentless attack against the prime minister for reworking the terms to favour his friends.

The resurfacing of the Rafale scandal is yet another manifestation of the fact that it will be truth that triumphs ultimately, an aphorism that we keep invoking in all official functions in and out of context. But there is nothing yet that negates the true import of the ultimate symbol of hope.

And just as it is happening to the Rafale deal, the misdeeds in the use of Pegasus to snoop on political rivals, journalists and those who may hold a contrarian opinion cannot be hidden by the labyrinths of secrecy that the government is building around its activities. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Dealing with terror

Editor,
After a long hibernation the proscribed HNLC triggered a low intensity IED blast at Laitumkhrah Bazar on Tuesday. This was followed by a long incoherent message from its spokesperson, Sainkupar Nongtraw the gist of which boils down to a demand that every institution in the state, right from the state Govt, the police, the media and the High Court should from now on show respect and deference to this terrorist outfit or else! In short surrender to it. Can the state stomach such nonsense? Are all right thinking citizens supposed to cower in fear and accept this threat in silence?

What were the ordinary people of Meghalaya supposed to learn from yesterday's blast? I think there are three messages that we are supposed to imbibe. Firstly, that the HNLC or its rump is still alive and kicking and capable of mischief such as this. The underlying truth is that the outfit has run out of funds and is desperate to once again create the atmosphere of fear and panic from where it can once again launch its extortion campaign. The tragedy is that there are many Khasis who cannot see through this ruse of deception and who firmly

believe that this criminal band of thieves are patriots out to save the Ri and the Jaitbnyriew.

Our state is beset with major economic problems that has increased poverty; it is afflicted with a plague that has claimed more than a thousand lives; our education is in the dumps and the future bleak and gloomy. Has the HNLC ever spoken about these problems on which the Jaitbnyriew depends for its survival? Never. Its only interest is to make money through terror. While I am no admirer of the Congress or the BJP I fully endorse the call of Bah Hek and Mukul Sangma for reviving the State Security Commission to come up with a strategy to wipe out this menace once and for all.

The second message that comes out loud and clear is the reaction of the Govt to the above bomb blast. What a feeble and pathetic statement from our Chief Minister. "No one will be spared" and we have heard such rubbish too many times to believe in them. What we expected was for an angry CM to pull up his Home Minister and DGP and tell them what they are supposed to do. The perpetrators must be caught or eliminated (we did this before under tougher CMs and wiped out both the HNLC then and the GNLA). The HNLC wishes to create

the impression that it will talk to the Govt from a position of strength. What strength? Their bases in Bangladesh have gone. They can only operate in our urban centres under extreme conditions. If the Meghalaya police wishes to wipe them out it can be done within one month. Let us have more encounters or send them under UAPA to central jails in Tezpur or Naini in UP. After all former freedom fighters spend jail time in these places and not in the comfort of Shillong jail. Let's see how tough these riew iet Ri really are after spending a few months outside the comfort of these hills. The only way is the tough way. Govt should realise this otherwise terror will raise its head again. Talks with criminals should only start when they lay down their arms.

The third point to be made is if the HNLC wishes to convey a tough message the Govt must respond in a similar language. No soft talking. Dealing with terrorists with velvet gloves has never worked.

Yours etc.,
Balajied Majaw,
Via email

Mr CM, give us a break!

Editor,
Chief Minister, Conrad

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.

"Now and then it's good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy."

— Guillaume Apollinaire

The Shillong Times

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Young blood for India

FOR any citizen, a government job is a godsend. It carries with it power, a decent salary, pension for life and more. Yet, less than 38 lakh posts exist in central government service and not more than 32 lakh people form the workforce. The central and state government employees across the country total four and a half crore — out of a population of 135 crore — and nearly 10 percent of the Union Budget resources are spent on its own employees.

Government employees as a whole are a well-tended lot for their entire life. Added to this is the scope for additional income by many of these segments via corruption that is a steadily increasing trend from village panchayat level to the central secretariat. The thumb rule is, pay a bribe and get things done. Those who form and run governments for five years have little interest in setting such wrongs right. At the same time, joblessness among the educated in India has spiralled and the central government itself has admitted a joblessness rate of 12 per cent for this segment alone. It is in this context that a recommendation from the Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, submitted this week, is to be viewed. It wants the retirement age of government employees raised. The Centre had raised the retirement age from 58 to 59 last year and chances are that it could now be raised to 65. The reason cited in favour of this is the increase in life expectancy among citizens due to better health infra.

An argument often advanced in favour of an increase in retirement age for government employees is that they get half the basic salary as pension after retirement even as they sit back at home. After their demise, their life partner would get this pension. "So, make them work for more years." The counter-argument is related to the plight of the jobless youths. If nearly five per cent of the population is in government, this is more than the requirement and yet the governmental wheels run slow. Administrative reforms are long overdue and the Modi government failed to act on this vital front. The result is that the whole scenario linked to the bureaucracy is largely vitiated. Unless India finally gets a visionary leadership, rather than those who warm up the chair for a few years and scoot from the scene, the nation is bound to suffer. It is important that young blood is inducted at all levels.

Anti-vaccination and vaccine hesitancy - two different things

By Patricia Mukhim

We all have friends and acquaintances who are either vaccine hesitant or anti-vaxxers. With the latter it is pointless to argue for they will always be one up on information culled from the internet. As medical experts universally say, it is best to address the vaccine hesitant group for they are open to changing their attitudes towards the vaccine if they understand the implications and if they get that information from sources they trust.

Dr Tom Aechtner of Uppsala University, Sweden says, "Vaccine hesitancy is much broader than the classification of anti-vaccine, hence understanding the difference between anti-vaccination beliefs and vaccine hesitancy is key to creating public health communication strategies. At present, there are many who are pro-vaccine but have concerns that the Covid vaccines were developed too quickly or relied on untested technologies. These are fears that come from the half-informed or ill-informed and are therefore understandable Aechtner says. There are others with different concerns. They feel that the perceived benefits of the vaccine are outweighed by its ability to create adverse impacts, especially, if they are immuno-compromised.

Research by several agencies across the world found that the percentage of people who might be truly anti-vaccine is only around 2 to 3%. It is the vaccine-hesitant groups that is much larger and is anywhere from 20 to 40%. Hence it is important to tailor health communication strategies to meet the specific needs of these two distinct groups. Each set of people have to be dealt with differently. Aechtner says that it is unfortunate that even the scientifically minded tend to make the mistake of confronting the anti-vaxxers head on and to dismantle their arguments with facts. He says this approach is wrong and unlikely to yield results. It is more effective to communicate to the vaccine hesitant group that is confused by misinformation than to attack the vaccine deniers who send these messages around. Hence health workers and communicators should invest their energies in reaching out to vaccine hesitant people. They are more likely to be convinced that vaccination can protect them from a severe form of Covid which might not require hospitalisation.

The misinformation about vaccination is that (a) it will kill people in two years (b) there is a magnet ticker in

the vaccine (c) it might affect the arms and people may not be able to work as they used to do (d) It could cause loss of fertility. These fear reactors might have caused the consternation. Vaccine hesitant people may have strong opinions, but they have not yet taken the final leap to the anti-vaccination camp. Between 2020 and 2021 much research has gone into how to reach fence-sitters. Studies suggest that success comes, not from lecturing them or telling them they are wrong, but rather finding

thought it was a hoax. They thought it was political. They thought because they had a certain blood type or a certain skin colour they wouldn't get as sick. They thought it was "just the flu." But they were wrong. And they wish they could go back. But they can't. So, they thank me and they go get the vaccine."

It is sad indeed that the young are infected and dying because they refuse to be vaccinated. The Delta strain we are told is highly infectious but by rejecting the vaccination we are giving



their desires, identifying their values, and leading them to a solution that works for what they want, which is, in most cases, the safety of their children" or some other rational goal.

Researchers have also concluded that health communicators should actually avoid trying to convert anti-vaxxers or ardent vaccine deniers. That's because fervent anti-vaccinators are least open to impartial argumentation, scientific evidence, and discussion.

In an article in the New York Times, "What if the unvaccinated can't be persuaded," Ezra Klein narrates a heart-breaking story from a Facebook post by Brytney Cobia, a doctor in Alabama who wrote the following:

"I've made a LOT of progress encouraging people to get vaccinated lately!!! Do you want to know how? I'm admitting young healthy people to the hospital with very serious Covid infections. One of the last things they do before they're intubated is beg me for the vaccine. I hold their hand and tell them that I'm sorry, but it's too late. A few days later when I call time of death, I hug their family members and I tell them the best way to honour their loved one is to get vaccinated and encourage everyone they know to do the same. They cry. And they tell me they didn't know. They

free rein to the virus to infect the defenceless. This, health experts say will give birth to a strain that evades vaccines while retaining lethality, or that attacks children with more force. Throughout this pandemic, the same pattern has played out. Countries had not done enough to suppress the virus when they still could, so they had to impose more draconian lockdowns and see more deaths. For this reason alone, those who object to vaccination saying, "My body, My Choice," should perhaps widen their tragic imagination.

The vaccine does not promise 100% efficacy, we are told and breakthrough COVID infections are possible. Some vaccinated people will get infected, some will get sick, and in rare cases, some may even be hospitalized. The only claims that scientists have made for the vaccine is that it prevents severe illness, which is a proven fact, rather than on preventing any infection. Health experts say the Delta variant is not a major threat to everyone but is largely a threat to the unvaccinated. It's more infectious, it's spreading more quickly, is causing the unvaccinated to get sick, and unfortunately, to die.

Dr Arnaud Gagneur neonatologist and a professor of pediatrics at the University of Sherbrooke and Karin Tame-

rius a former psychiatrist and the founder of Smart Politics, an organization that teaches people to communicate more persuasively, agree that most vaccine hold-outs are not anti-vaxxers or conspiracy theorists. They suggest that the common persuasive styles — commanding, advising, lecturing and shaming don't work; on the contrary they backfire.

Hence the main task of governments is to create a pool of advocates who are recognized as the 'voice of authority'. People generally know which sources to trust in their immediate circles. Messaging too must be nuanced and take the form of a discussion rather than a lecture from a 'know it all' position. That usually puts people off. The vaccine hesitant group needs more understanding and clearing of doubts than a lecture. Since distrust about Covid-19 vaccination is the main driver of hesitancy, who the message comes from is just as important as what the message entails. Trusted messengers and communicators whose messages resonate with the community are much needed here. They include doctors, nurses, pharmacists, national medical experts, teachers, faith-based and community influencers, athletes, musicians, actors etc.

At this point Government needs to invest in good research and identify the most harmful misinformation and then combat it head-on with the most powerful and approachable truths. Research from credible institutions like WHO have found that trust is at the root of hesitancy. It is important to build that public trust but that's a challenge since people are so used to being let down by the system (read government), especially when it comes to health care. Those who build communications capsules need to work in different ways to reach their audiences with education and information that will resonate and help build trust. However, communities are by nature heterogeneous. The communication therefore cannot be homogenous. Health workers should not push a, "one-size-fits-all," message. This will not work. What also doesn't work is pointing fingers, blaming and shaming those hesitating to take the vaccine.

As for the anti-vaxxers, one only wishes they would stop converting others to their viewpoint. But that's what they do best. I guess we have to learn to live with such sceptics too.

Naidu's hurt feelings: he was himself not above blame

Effective intervention could have averted ugly scenes

By Arun Srivastava

Any decent individual would feel extremely hurt at the Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu breaking down and narrating his battered emotion that he could not sleep because of the sacrilege in the "temple of democracy" by some opposition MPs who had climbed on the table in the House.

Naidu has been a senior national player in the BJP politics. Perceptibly he ought to be aware when the rot into the system crept in; from when the opposition started desecration of the sanctum sanctorum of the house. It was his leader L K Advani who had encouraged his colleagues in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to disrupt the proceedings and show disrespect to the houses. This was promptly supported by the then BJP leader in the Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley.

Our great leaders, who firmly believed in secularism, were described as pseudo-secularists by Advani. But they had maintained the dignity of not violating the sanctity of the house and endangering the democratic functioning. They knew that if they resorted to this kind of behaviour the next generation would further endanger the institutions.

No one can deny, more precisely a person like Naidu, that the current situation has been the creation of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. These two leaders do not have any respect for democracy and also do not respect parliamentary ethics. They behave like dons and believe that they are above the law and Constitution. For them their words are the law. If Modi had agreed to have a debate on Pegasus, this situation would not have been created. It is really a matter of shame that the house could not function for nearly 15 days.

Incidentally the Supreme Court only a couple of days back had made some court observation on the government response to Pegasus issue. Naidu should have done some introspection and by virtue of being senior leader who at this stage of age has nothing to lose, should have asked one straight question to the government - why it was reluctant to order a probe into the Pegasus snooping. Who was the Modi government trying to protect? It is widely known that Naidu commands immense respect from the opposition members. In this backdrop any such move from his side would have strengthened their trust in him and probably responding to his directive they would have refrained from disrupting the house.

Naidu also ought to realise that in electoral democracy it is not necessary that BJP would continue to be in power for ever. Even if Modi at the advice of RSS transforms India into a Hindu Rashtra, elections to the Lok Sabha would have to be held. Some other party would eventually come to power. Can Naidu give a guarantee that the new government would not be more ruthless and would not provide any space to the BJP which would be on the opposition bench? Being a senior parliamentarian he is fully aware that the element of dirty competition was never there in the past. It is once again the gift of the BJP. Once the BJP resorted to the politics of disruption, the idea was borrowed by other parties and in the process it came to acquire the character of parliamentary practice.

Naidu blames the opposition for tarnishing the image and sanctity of the house, but the fact is he owes some explanations to the people of the country - Why did he allow the three laws which farmers describe as black laws to be passed by Rajya Sabha that too only in nine minutes; second, why did he not allow the members to

vote on these bills; thirdly, is it due to the fact that on that particular day the Government did not have adequate vote to pass the bills?"

No tears rolled down Naidu's eyes at the humiliation and insult inflicted on the farmers by the BJP cadres and leaders. He did not even speak against the goons threatening the farmers. He did not lament the manner in which the parliamentary procedure and practice were trampled inside the Rajya Sabha for adopting the bills.

Question also arises that at a time when the farmers are on Satyagraha for the last eight months and have been seeking withdrawal of the controversial farm reform legislations, why did he allow the Modi government to play with their sentiments by permitting a discussion on agricultural problems? Why was he unmoved by the plight of farmers? Why did he not prevail upon the Modi government to come clean on Pegasus? It is the right of the government to place the subject it wants to discuss before the house. But as Pegasus has acquired the dubious character of snooping on the citizens and is related to the security of the country, he could have used his discretion to direct the government to clarify the situation. This is the usual norm. Even if the subject is not mentioned in the list of Business, the Chairman can use his discretion and direct the government to make a statement.

The fact cannot be ignored that after the debate once the issue was put up for approval of the House, the opposition would have lost and the BJP enjoying an upper hand would have pushed through the Bill. This would have got the parliamentary sanctity. This was enough to bulldoze the farmers' agitation. This would have virtually sealed the fate of the farmers and their movement would have turned futile.

Since eleven rounds of talks with the farmers have failed to find a solution the Government tried to use the floor of the house to finish the movement. The prime issue was not of members going on record with their positions on all issues relating to the plight of the farmers. The issue was the reluctance of the Government to concede to their demand to scrap the black laws. The opposition was wary that the Centre would pass this off as a debate on the 8 months-long farmers' agitation.

On Tuesday, when the Chair announced a discussion on farmers' issues, Congress chief whip Jairam Ramesh cited a ruling by the Chair in 2015 and said his notice for calling attention motion was converted into a short duration discussion without taking the sense of the House. This, he said, was a unilateral decision.

The Centre tried to spring on the Rajya Sabha what the Opposition described as a "mischievous" discussion on agriculture. The Opposition, which wanted the Bill to be sent to a select committee, felt that the provocation was intended at dividing them ahead of the insurance bill.

The Opposition had smelt "mischief" on Monday night itself. Late on Monday night, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had tweeted: "Tomorrow, in a clever-by-half move, the Modi government has scheduled a discussion on 'The agricultural problems and solutions' and added my name to it. The discussion has NOTHING to do with my notice given on July 23rd on the ongoing farmers' agitation."

Naidu should have taken a firm stand and not allowed the Modi government to play mischief. This would have averted transgression of the sanctity of the house. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Posers on Hek's ouster

Editor,
According to the report in your paper (ST Aug 12, 2021) the BJP in charge Meghalaya and BJP national president were not consulted before replacing cabinet minister AL Hek With Sanbor Shullai. Come to think of it, there is something curious about the recent sacking of Mr AL Hek. On one hand, he has been repeatedly harping on the point that he was unceremoniously shown the door; on the other hand, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has decided to maintain a discreet silence. Apart from the unprecedented nature of political one-upmanship, to lay people like me, there are a few unexplained turns and twists in the whole drama.

Going by the published reports, the Chief Minister acted after State BJP chief Ernest Marwie wrote a letter to Sangma for replacing Hek with Sanbor Shullai. A few days later, the BJP in-charge for the state Dr M. Chuba A contradicted the report in no uncertain terms saying that no letter was sent from the BJP seeking the ouster of Hek. This report has neither been contradicted by the BJP President nor by the Chief Minister. The ques-

tion therefore is: What is the truth? Did Marwie send the purported letter? Did the CM consult the BJP central leadership? If not, what prompted the Chief Minister to rid the cabinet of Hek?

Speculations are rife that Hek had become a thorn in the flesh of Sangma, having opposed a number of controversial moves in the cabinet. One such thing that Hek opposed tooth and nail was the construction of a shopping complex at the current MTC bus terminus at Police Bazar. It is reported in your daily that the move was to seek a loan from HUDCO to the tune of hundreds of crore. Perhaps Hek had his own reasons to oppose the grandiose plan which would have added to the congestion of an already congested area. Perhaps he also saw a clear design in the move for some bigwigs to reap a harvest out of the project. Moreover, Hek also had made an embarrassing press statement which virtually implied that he suspected some foul play by the CM's elder brother in the Power Department. Could this have enraged the CM? Knowing as we all do about the suave, easy-to-get-along personality of Sangma, it is quite unlikely that such a statement would be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. What

then could have induced Sangma to plot against Hek? Is there more than meet the eyes in all this juggling? Did Sangma have more compelling reasons to ease out Hek? Was it his handling of Health portfolio? Was it the handling of COVID pandemic? Or, as is being speculated, there could be some damning charges against Hek? We are unlikely to know the truth unless the chief political executive, Conrad Sangma himself bares it all.

Yet, there could be a third factor weighing heavy on Conrad's mind. With an experienced old war horse like Hek in the cabinet, Sangma may have found his presence a hindrance rather than helpful. If a cabinet minister questions CM's every move, he is asking for trouble. By getting Sanbor Shullai in, Conrad Sangma has ensured that he would now have a personally loyal colleague. It's a different matter that the new minister may embarrass the CM by his unbridled public utterances, but the fact remains that Shullai is seen to be too eager to align with the CM.

With no investigative journalism worth its name in Meghalaya, we the public are unlikely to know the truth of these political shenanigans and can only be kept guessing. There is

much happening in the MDA Government that journalists can't seem to get their hands on because they are too busy doing their routine jobs. Investigative journalism is a different genre altogether. I wonder when the media in Meghalaya will get there. Until then politicians, especially those in the Government, have a cushy time in deal-making.

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email.

Why destruct Shillong's green lungs?

Editor,
Apropos of the news item "GAD hands over land for SMB office" (ST Aug 9), I am deeply pained by the allocation of land in Bivar Road to a busy office like the Shillong Municipal Board. The land in question is forest covered. During the British era, there was no permission for destructing the green cover of the area. This area overlooking the Polo Grounds has always stood out for its natural beauty. Already the ruling National People's Party (NPP) has been allotted a big slice of land for constructing their party office. And now with

SMB arriving there, the place will not only lose its sheen but also add to crowding. I therefore appeal to the Government to rethink on the SMB project at the same spot. For heaven's sake, let's preserve the trees we still have.

Yours etc.,
Dorothy Marwein,
Via email

Peace & harmony under attack

Editor,
We often talk about mainland terrorists brainwashing people in the name of Jihad and sacrifice. What mainland terror outfits are to the world, the HNLC is to Meghalaya. Their actions also focus on influencing people by saying that they wish to save the local culture and civilization but eventually, the motives are ulterior. The blast on Tuesday is a defining moment in the history of Shillong and the government must address this issue at the earliest instead of just putting out messages on social media to condemn the attack. A similar IED explosion had been carried out in June and back then, The Shillong Times had published an article which rightly indi-

cated that it seems like the government is waiting for the natural death of the outfit rather than doing something on its own.

It is to be noted that the militant outfit has warned of more explosions in the future which makes it all the more important for the flag bearers of the city to take action. Back in the 80s and 90s, the HNLC had huge control over the city and it is evident that it is now thirsty for power again and as stated by RG Lyngdoh, it will be largely successful in doing so in a fearful environment. In the past, HNLC has indulged in a number of illegal activities, including killing, abduction, robbery, arms smuggling, cattle smuggling and extortion and if appropriate and timely action is not taken, the future of Shillong will be extremely dark and tumultuous. This development must not be taken for granted and the general public and authorities must be on the same page because right now, it is a massive threat to the state.

Yours etc.,
Dhriti Bhardwaj,
Shillong-1

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*"An eye for an eye only ends up
making the whole world blind."*

— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Peace talks derailed?

THE demise of Cheristerfield Thangkhiw the former general secretary of the proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) in a police encounter on Friday brings to an end an important chapter in the history of militancy in Meghalaya. Thangkhiw was known as the brain behind the outfit. He was the master strategist that gave direction to the movement and it was his orders that were carried out by the military wing of the outfit. When Thangkhiw came overground in October 2018 he made an important statement that he had not 'surrendered' but had retired from the HNLC. That statement has wide connotations. Retired people can still be reemployed and they usually find it difficult to leave their old trade behind. It is possible that his expertise was still in use by the remaining batch of the cadres who might be missing the strategic wisdom of the old war horse.

It goes to the credit of the MDA Government that they were able to bring overground a formidable force in the HNLC — its general secretary and also its founder member who had given the best years of his life to the movement. Amongst some of the founder members that Thangkhiw named in his interview in 2018, not a single one has remained with the HNLC except himself. He seemed convinced in the idea of fighting for the "country" which is "Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep" or Khasi-land as understood by the Khasis of yore and which has become the idealism pursued by the disillusioned youth of the early 1990s. In their enthusiasm to prove a point they used all tricks in the book adopted by all terrorist outfits - which is to hit where it hurts the most and let those actions trigger a fear psychosis among the innocent public. Extortion became their only means to procure arms and creating terror was one way of getting compliance from selected targets of extortion. Insurgents don't believe in the 'ends and means' ideology. For them the ends justify the means and they pursue this assiduously. Even killings are condoned to achieve these ends.

Many lives of both civilians and uniformed personnel have been lost in the years between 1994- 2000 when the HNLC was at its peak. The outfit met its toughest challenge in 2000 from a government that meant business and a no-nonsense Home Minister. The HNLC lost steam and that's when cadres began to surrender. Meghalaya or at least the Khasi-Jaintia part of it has had a peaceful run until the IED blasts that seemed to be warnings that the remnants of the cadres should be taken seriously and that the peace talks should be given importance. The MDA Government should give serious thought to this.

Letters to the Editor

The wonder of being Khasi

Editor,
I came to St Edmunds College last week to submit the application form of my nephew. It was raining and I somehow found shelter in the arms of a boy who looked really young, so I thought he came to take admission. I was wrong; he's now waiting for his graduation result. Then while standing in the queue, I struck up a conversation with a girl who I thought was also taking admission. I was wrong again. She had completed her Masters. Both looked incredibly young for their age. Most of my non-tribal friends do agree that we Khasis and other communities in NE India look much younger than our actual age. I guess it's in our DNA to look young. The boy is about to become a mathematician and he's highly ambitious. NEHU is not on his radar. He's planning to go outside for further studies; the girl on the other hand has just finished her MSc in Biotechnology and she's highly ambitious too. She wants to take a break from studies for now and to pursue her studies again

later. It's a refreshing sight to see such ambitious attitude among our youths. It fills my heart with joy and pride to see our youths doing well in their studies and branching out into fields of studies that require a lot of head-scratching, hard work & dedication.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Need to cleanse the rot in the system

Editor,
The letter to the editor, "Mr. CM give us a break" (ST Aug 12, 2021) though written anonymously reveals the sense of anger and frustration of our generation. While there is anger there is also fear and hopelessness due to lack of employment and future prospects. Their being aware of the existence of nepotism and favouritism in every sphere leaves them feeling deprived and disgusted; hence the birth of "negative thoughts." The fact that they long to prove their worth and excellence and are eager to compete in a healthy environment must be

Climate chaos aggravates as agreements fail

By TP Sreenivasan

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) invented a new phrase, "Climate Chaos" to describe the situation in its latest report to assert that climate change is "widespread, rapid and intensifying". It had no new revelation to shock the world, but it deprived the Indian Prime Minister of the first headline that day on his address to the UN Security Council. His warning about maritime security was drowned out by the prophecy of doom on account of climate chaos. It said that many of the changes observed in the climate are unprecedented in thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years, and some of the changes already set in motion—such as continued sea level rise—are irreversible over hundreds to thousands of years.

The scientific evidence was always there that anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases will ring the death knell of the earth. But what the report reveals is the inadequate response of the international community to the impending disaster. The Paris Agreement has turned out to be a hoax that President Trump and several others had called it. Even if the Paris Agreement is fully implemented, the earth will be too hot to live in.

The hopes raised by the Stockholm Conference of 1972 and the historic Rio Summit of 1992 were shattered in Copenhagen in 2009, when Kyoto Protocol was repudiated and buried in Paris in 2015. The greedy industrialised nations insisted on continuing their "luxury emissions", while depriving the developed nations of their "survival emissions". Some of the following fundamental principles adopted in Rio were deliberately abandoned in Copenhagen to alter the path laid out in 1992.

Common but differentiated responsibilities. Mandatory reduction of Greenhouse gases for developed countries. No mandatory reduction for developing countries.

Right of developing countries to increase emissions. Developed countries should meet the "incremental costs" for adopting environment friendly technologies. Financing and concessional transfer of technology.

Per capita emissions should be taken into account for calculating GHG emissions by various countries. The basic terms of the Copenhagen Accord were brokered directly by a handful of key country leaders on the final day of the conference.

It charted a new course in the global climate effort. The Paris Agreement's central aim was to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Additionally, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change. To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate financial

flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework will be put in place, thus supporting action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries, in line with their own national objectives. The Agreement also provides for enhanced transparency of action and support through a more robust transparency framework.

The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts

new estimates of the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next decades, and finds that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5 degrees Celsius or even 1.5 degrees Celsius will be beyond reach.

The report shows that emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities are responsible for approximately 1.1 degrees Celsius of warming since 1850-1900, and finds that averaged over the next 20 years, global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming. This assessment is based on improved observational datasets to assess historical warming, as well progress in scientific understanding of the response of the climate system to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

The report projects that in the coming decades climate change will increase in all regions. For 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming, there will be increasing heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2 degrees Celsius of global warming, heat extremes would more often reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and health, the report shows.

The IPCC report is a reality check and a strong warning signal. But it will serve its purpose only if the industrialised nations change their mindset and return to the Rio principles of climate justice. It is not the lack of scientific evidence or data that inhibits progress, but the reluctance of developed nations to change their lifestyle of conspicuous consumption to make life sustainable. It does not appear that climate change can be halted by conventions, protocols or agreements.

Ultimately, science may have to step in and find the technology to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and put it to some productive use rather than expect negotiations to lead to zero carbon economies.

(TP Sreenivasan is a former Ambassador of India and a member of the National Security Advisory Board and presently the DG of the Kerala International Centre. He has nearly 20 years of experience in multilateral diplomacy and has represented India at a number of international conferences organised by the UN, the Commonwealth and the NAM. He has chaired several UN Committees and Conferences).

Round the states

By Insaaf

Criminalisation of Politics SC hammer on states

Three cheers to the Supreme Court. State governments can no longer aid criminalisation of politics. "We deem it appropriate to direct that no prosecution against a sitting or former MP/ MLA shall be withdrawn without the leave of the high court," was a clear directive issued by it on Tuesday last. Further it asked the HCs to examine "withdrawals, whether pending or disposed of since 16 September last year" in light of guidelines it had laid, whereby Chief Justices were asked to constitute Special Benches to monitor progress of criminal cases against sitting and former legislators. Plus, all HCs were directed to provide details of judges' posting and number of pending and disposed cases before them; that judicial officers presiding over Special Courts or CBI courts involving such prosecution shall not be transferred until further orders so as to ensure speedy disposal of pending cases.

The apex court directives follow a PIL seeking setting up of fast-track courts for cases against legislators. It was in November 2017, that the SC had ordered the same in each State but so far only 12 such courts have come up. Worse, instances of State governments withdrawing or wanting to withdraw cases against legislators, came into sharp focus: 61 cases withdrawn in Karnataka last August; Uttarakhand wanting to withdraw a murder case against a sitting MLA and UP wanting to do so in 4 cases; Maharashtra deciding to withdraw political cases against activists registered before December 31, 2019. Apparently, the prosecution was withdrawing cases under political consideration, to stifle the process of law, rather than what is permissible i.e. in public interest. Further, it came to light that investigating agencies such as CBI and ED had ignored directives. Peeved, the SC expressed disapproval over non-filing of status report on cases against MPs/MLAs being probed and warned it may set up a special bench to hear this matter. The big question is whether State governments would pay heed this time. Or will the intended 'Operation Clean Up Politics' continue to languish. Time will tell.

'Sacrilege' in RS

The Council of States, the Rajya Sabha, witnessed a new low in the history of Parliament. A 'sacrilege' as described by its Chairman Naidu. Though his views were echoed by many a minister in the Modi government, the Opposition said "voice of 60 percent of the population was crushed," as there was 'no Parliament session'.

The monsoon session ended abruptly on Wednesday, two days earlier than scheduled given Opposition protests over the Pegasus snooping controversy and the three contentious farm laws, which marred proceedings daily from the start. Not just murder of democracy, is the Opposition charge, but Rajya Sabha MPs accused the Presiding officers of being partisan players and worse women Congress MPs on Wednesday last were allegedly "physically bullied by male marshals as they were protesting in the Well of the House". On the other side, the chair described Opposition MPs climbing atop a table and throwing an official file at the Chair and some squatting on the tables in the front row as 'sacrilege'. The House functioned for 17 hours out of roughly 97 hours. In all 19 Bills were passed, but in minutes, without discussion. The Government-Opposition standoff has led to the people's voice being stifled, with their representatives not doing their job. Enough is enough, did one hear.

TN Financial Crunch

Tamil Nadu needs to tighten the purse strings. It's fiscal deficit, says its Finance Minister, is "unsustainable" and "alarming". A white paper on Monday last, proposes to usher in major

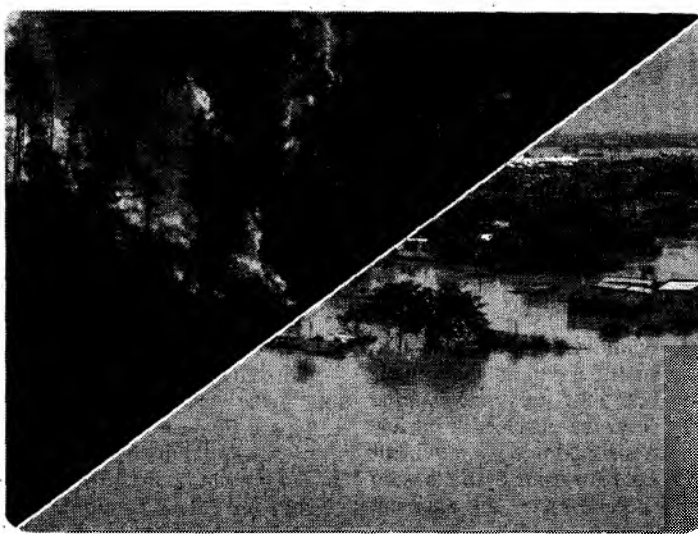
structural changes to drag the State 'out of the financial sinkhole.' As explained: Revenue generation is said to have come down and "a government without revenue cannot address problems." Predictably there is politics involved too. The DMK minister blamed the previous AIADMK government for the financial mess: a revenue deficit of Rs 61,320 crore in 2020-21 — which made up over half of the fiscal deficit in that year, Rs 92,305 crore. Since 2017-18, the share of revenue deficit in the fiscal deficit had a substantial increase of up to 50% or more, which means government's borrowing is not for capital expenditure but for current expenditure. And, quick fixes would not suffice, as the State's current debt of about Rs. 5.7 lakh crore translates to a debt burden of around Rs 70,000 on each citizen. This is apart from Rs 1.10 lakh debt per person generated from operational losses of the electricity department, transport corporation and interest payment. All eyes will now be on how Chief Minister Stalin gets the State out of the red.

Setback for UP

Holy Cow! The Uttar Pradesh government should be red in the face. The Allahabad High Court has quashed the detention of three individuals picked up in Sitapur district in July last year under the National Security Act in a cow slaughter case. While hearing habeas corpus petitions filed by the families of the three, the court in its order said: "... an act of slaughtering a cow in the secrecy of one's own house in the wee hours probably because of poverty or lack of employment or hunger, would perhaps only involve a law and order issue." And, "could not be said to stand on the same footing as a situation where a number of cattle have been slaughtered outside in public view and the public transport of their flesh or an incident where an aggressive attack is made by the slaughterers against the complaining public, which may involve infractions of public order." It ordered their release forthwith. Clearly, the Additional Government Advocate's argument that "cutting of beef to sell it offends religious faith and feelings of a section of society..." did not hold water. Much less detention under the draconian law. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath must see the writing on the wall and stop abusing the NSA.

Chhattisgarh's first

Chhattisgarh may have a first to its credit. Its police in Dantewada district is creating a township exclusively for surrendered Naxals. Dantewada SP said that it will provide not only accommodation for their safety but offer skill training to lead a better life. The official claimed it to be the first-of-its-kind initiative in the country and said some of the surrendered Naxals are also involved in the construction of the township. Remember Dantewada is one of the worst naxal-hit districts in Bastar region, which has witnessed many deadly Maoist encounters. Just 400 km from the capital Raipur, the State government had in June last year launched a surrender/rehabilitation drive 'Lon Varratu' (return to your home/village) to encourage naxals to quit the gun. The Rs 9 crore township project, funded by the Home Affairs Ministry is being developed in 39 acres in front of Police Lines, Dantewada and shall be inaugurated on 26 January 2022. It will have 108 one BHK (bedroom-kitchen) apartments, a recreational centre, yoga centres-cum-gym, a primary school, primary health centre, transit hostel, anganwadi, alivelihood college to offer training in 20-odd different trades, including modern farming, motorcycle repair work and processing of minor forest produce. So far 400 naxals have surrendered and the township should not only give hope to them, but set a precedent for other States to follow. — INFA



billion in 2010-2012 to help developing countries; and a goal for mobilizing \$100 billion a year in public and private finance by 2020. The accord also called for the establishment of a new Green Climate Fund.

The Paris Agreement brought all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such,

forts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts. In 2018, Parties took stock of the collective efforts in relation to progress towards the goal set in the Paris Agreement and informed the preparation of NDCs. There is also a global stock-taking every 5 years to assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the Agreement and to inform further indi-

The greedy industrialised nations insisted on continuing their "luxury emissions", while depriving the developed nations of their "survival emissions".

vidual actions by Parties. The Paris Agreement moved away from the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and all countries were placed on equal footing by making reduction of greenhouse gas emissions voluntary. The Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) so far submitted will not result in the desired objective of limiting increase of global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius.

According to the IPCC report, it could take 20-30 years to see global temperatures stabilize. The report provides

functioning of Parliament shows a bad situation. Both the opposition and the Government must be held responsible for not allowing the institution of democracy to function properly. Even a small disruption in the Parliamentary proceedings costs heavily. Even a minute of disruption will cost lakhs but while the monetary cost of disruptions in Parliament can be estimated, how it affects people's lives cannot be estimated. Lack of proper legislation will adversely affect the lives of people cannot be calculated in financial terms. As in the case of the Central farm laws, when a Bill is passed during disruption without any deliberation, the impact is tremendous. The conflict between the farmers and the Central government has led to a chaotic situation.

Apart from productivity, reduced role of Parliamentary standing committees and increased promulgation of ordinances are also a cause for concern. Parliamentary standing committees play an important role in deep analysis of laws and adding expert data in legislation. In the 16th Lok Sabha between 2014-2019, the involvement of these committees declined

we must join hands and fight against the prevailing evils. Yes, together we are stronger and better.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Parliament pulverized

Editor,
It is worrisome that over the years, the very business of Indian Parliament has declined sharply. Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned sine die, two days ahead of schedule bringing to an end a tumultuous monsoon session disrupted by Opposition protests over the Pegasus snooping row and farm laws. During the monsoon session the Lok Sabha functioned for only 21 hours, lost 74 hours 46 minutes to disruptions and its productivity was 22 per cent. The productivity of the Rajya Sabha was 28 per cent and it lost 76 hours 26 minutes to disruptions. This pathetic state of the functioning of Parliament is a cause for concern. In fact, the business of the institution has declined both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The present state of the

to just 25%. A law enacted for a diverse country like India must come through proper deliberation.

Hence, the causes of Parliamentary disruptions must be identified and solutions found for them. Smooth functioning of Parliament is dependent on how well the Opposition comes out with severe criticism and how well the Government builds a consensus. An institution of democracy must not be allowed to be badly affected by vested interests. The importance of law making must be understood by everyone involved. Parliament's precious time must not be wasted for running political narratives. It is of paramount importance to restore the sanctity of Parliament. The temple of democracy must be used for serving people and not for petty political gains. Voices must be raised there for people and it must be heard attentively.

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

Once Upon a Time In Mumbai

Located in the middle of the 'gaathan' (a settlement area), the large shed with a covered roof can be a key point of your visit if you are on a walking tour in this part of Mumbai on a Sunday.

"You have to be here in the morning if you want to see how the fish market operates," says the guide for the walking tour to a small group of tourists.

"The smell and the noise takes some getting used to," she says, and adds with a smile: "The main reason why we bring people here in the afternoon."

Well, you are standing in the middle of the Worli Koliwada in Mumbai, one of the few surviving villages of the earliest inhabitants of the area, the Koli (pronounced Kolee).

Despite the world around them changing drastically, the Kolis largely follow their traditional occupation – fishing, and have been able to retain their unique cultural identity.

The walk will take you through the narrow lanes past neat little houses, most with tiled roofs. Occasionally, there will be quaint reminders that the lives of the people were closely linked to the sea – a mariner's wheel on the wall of a house or a small tulsi plant in a boat shaped holder.

Walk past old temples, including the 'Palmochan Temple' in the middle of the urban village, past churches, grottos and crosses dedicated to Our Lady of Velankanni, and then descend a flight of stone steps leading to the jetties and the sea, where colourful fishing boats bob among the waves.

In between you can stop to talk to some of the friendly residents who eagerly share information about their lives, the perils of fishing in the sea, the dwindling catch. Interestingly, the name Mumbai comes from Mumba Devi, the patron goddess of the Koli community.

Your walk ends at the little known Worli Fort, which was likely raised as a watch tower in 1675. The Bandra-Worli Sea Link looms in the distance.

While a walk through a Koli village may not be possible now owing to the pandemic situation, you can take a deep look into the life and times of the Koli community through a virtual exhibition which has been curated and developed by Bombay61 Studio, in collaboration with the Ministry of Mumbai's

Despite its stellar development, Mumbai cannot ignore the knowledge that resides with its earliest inhabitants, the Koli fishing community. A digital exhibition launched on World Indigenous People's Day on Aug 9 now explores Mumbai through the lens of these first residents. Uttara Ganguly reports

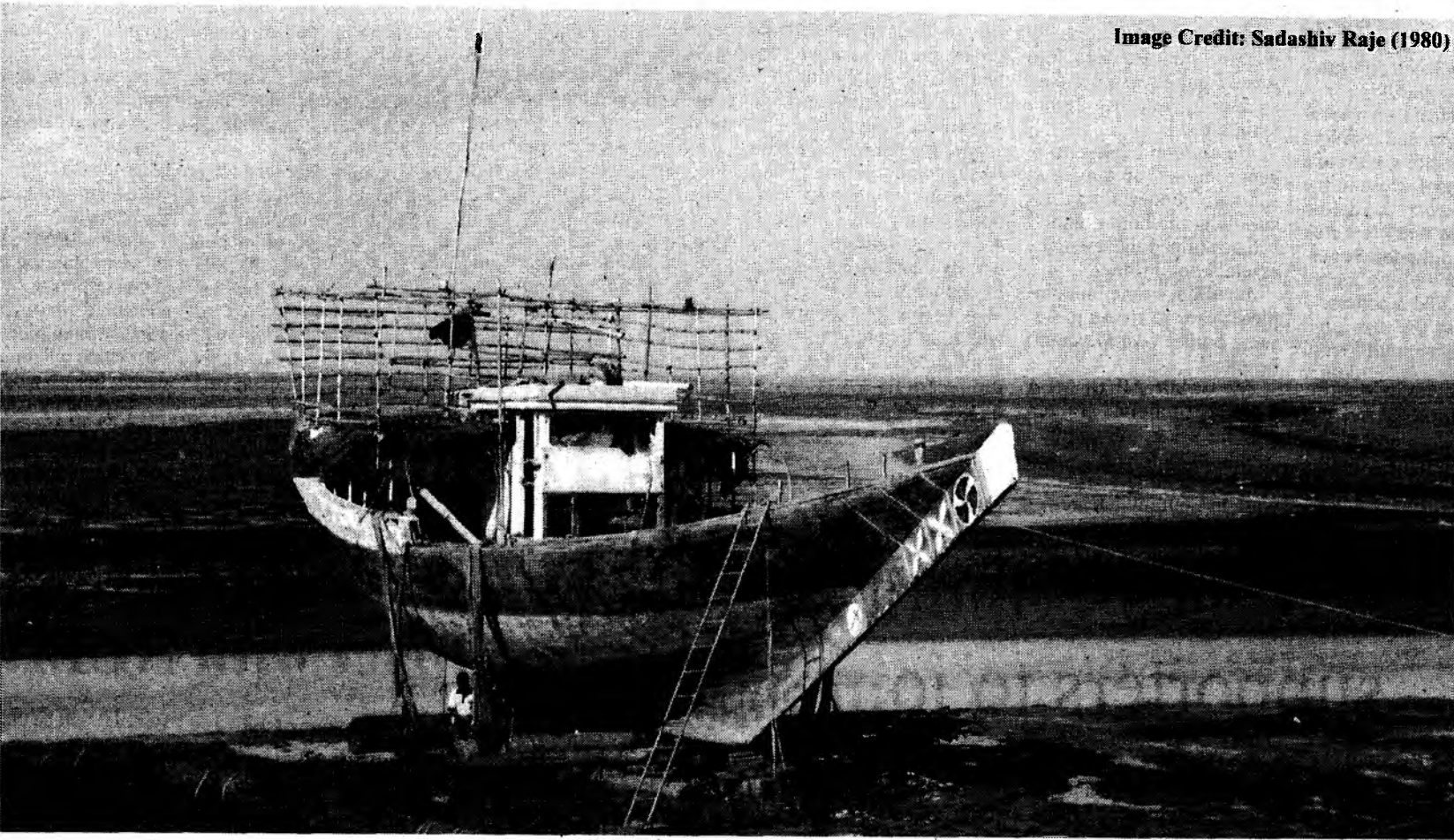


Image Credit: Sadashiv Raje (1980)

Magic, a collective of Mumbaikers. It is hosted by The Heritage Lab, a digital media platform connecting citizens to cultural heritage through stories.

Named 'Through the Eyes of the Kolis: A reflection on Mumbai's past, present and future', the show is part of the Biodiversity by the Bay campaign.

While the exhibition may be Mumbai specific, the lesson it imparts holds good for many Indian cities which have been growing in scale with scant regard to the ecosystem that once existed here, ignoring the collective knowledge of the original communities.

The photography exhibition explores various aspects of the city of Mumbai through the eyes of the Koli community.

The exhibition contains a series of archival photographs from the 1950s - 2000s which have been sourced from the Koli community by Bombay61 Studio, an

experimental think tank working across architecture, urban design and public participation.

Regarded as the first residents of Mumbai, the Kolis livelihoods are deeply intertwined with the rivers and the sea that they inhabit. This exhibition presents a pictorial narrative of the generational history of the Kolis and the deep relationship they share with the natural environment.

According to the collaborators, the Kolis had been witness to rampant urbanisation in Mumbai and the rapid degeneration of its water bodies, impact of climate change on the city's coastline and have had to face the immediate repercussions.

The exhibition explores these physical, socio-cultural and ecological transformations through four sections:

The Community and their Livelihood - a series of images explore how the culture and traditions of

the community are tightly interlinked with their occupation and their traditional knowledge of sustainable fishing methods.

The photographs will highlight how rapid urbanisation and instant gratification for profits in recent years has affected the community, even forcing many to leave Mumbai altogether.

THE COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

An exhibition exploring the impact of climate change, developmental pressures, ecological deterioration and changing aspirations on the livelihoods of the Koli community. Images document the changing coastal ecosystem as fishermen are forced to go deeper into the high seas for their catch.

ALTERATION OF THE 'EDGES'

Due to expansion and construc-

tion along the coastline, the Koliwadass offered a cheaper cost of living for migrants that resulted in overpopulation of Koliwadass and a fight for resources. As a result, a slum narrative has been associated with the Koliwadass of late. These photographs depict the loss of belonging and cultural identity this has created across the Koliwadass.

MAPPING THE HISTORIES

After extensive conversations with the older generation of Ver-sova Koliwada, Bombay61 Studio has developed a community map that documents the historical narratives regarding the Koli's relationships with the natural resources. This map will complement the photo archives and is an inclusive approach that documents the past as the Koli's have witnessed it, taking into account the community's voices.

Say Jai and Ketaki of Bom-

bay61 Studio: "Environmental degradation in Mumbai has a sense of normalcy to it. Most casually we refer to water bodies as nullahs (drains), something that is dumped with sewage waste, both domestic and industrial.

"These were once vibrant water channels (creeks and rivers) that have been ignored over time and reduced to a thick sludge. A generation of Kolis have seen the degeneration of what was once a healthy environment alongside which they flourished."

The exhibition relives the glory days of the community and how they are placed today in a bid to understand the transformation of the coastal systems of Mumbai, said the duo. The exhibition hopes to reverse the amnesia of the urban youth and strengthen their relationship with the surroundings.

Medhavi Gandhi from The Heritage Lab says that they believe that culture and heritage is community-created, and community-owned, and therefore the responsibility of the community and citizens to preserve/ protect.

The Heritage Lab (THL) is a digital media platform connecting citizens to cultural heritage and museums through stories, public engagement programs, campaigns and free-access resources.

"We're really looking forward to seeing the conversations inspired by this exhibition," says Gandhi.

Mumbai's Ministry of Magic (MMM) is a platform to unite citizens and showcase their collective action, mobilizing them to draw the attention of the local government to prioritise protection of Mumbai's biodiversity hotspots, green spaces and its inhabitants.

Arpita Bhagat from MMM says, "The Kolis have witnessed the evolution of Mumbai's ecosystems more closely than any other inhabitants of this island city. Their intimate relationship with the sea for survival has also meant that they are the first to adapt and respond to the effects of the climate crisis.

"We want to invite Mumbaikars to experience this relationship through visual narratives and learn lessons of resilience from the Koli community."

You can see the exhibition on <https://www.theheritagelab.in/mumbai-koli-archives/> (IBNS/ TWF)

Celebration of Diversity

From searching how to make sweets online to themed birthday cakes, the character of the Mighty Little Bheem has authentically captured India's culture through the adventures from cooking Pongal to flying kites in his village, since its premiere in 2019. Now, Netflix and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) have announced coming together to celebrate India's rich cultural heritage through the homegrown



series. Over the next year, a series of fun short videos themed 'One Country, Incredible Diversity' will shine a light on India's cultural journey, including monuments, living heritage, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festivals such as Dussehra, Diwali and Holi. UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity, they announced.

The short videos to be released

on UNESCO New Delhi's Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter pages, will demonstrate how cultural history enriches people's everyday lives by covering everything from food and traditions to languages and storytelling.

The first video was released ahead of the 75th Anniversary of India's Independence (Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav), a day that brings the entire country together.

Monika Shergill, VP, Content, Netflix India, tells IANSLife: "We are excited to partner with UNESCO to celebrate India's rich cultural heritage through our beloved preschool animated series, Mighty Little Bheem. At Netflix, we want to make stories that are compelling, meaningful, memorable and resonate around the world for authentic representation of their respective cultures."

Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, adds, "We are pleased to partner with Netflix to take you through a journey of India's rich cultural diversity. In today's interconnected world, culture's power to transform societies is clear. Its diverse manifestations -- from our cherished historic monuments and museums to traditional practices and contemporary art forms -- they all enrich our everyday lives in countless ways."

The series is created by Green Gold Animation. (IANSLife)

Classroom in Bus

By Mohammad Suaib Khan

Eight-year-old Nirmal has started thinking about his career and now he is very serious about studies. "I want to be a police officer," he said, talking about his future plan sitting in a moving classroom in a bus.

Not only Nirmal, several underprivileged children who were deprived of the studies now join him in the 'Classroom Bus' for study.

Every day four buses that have been converted into moving classrooms ply on Delhi's roads to provide education to the children living in slums. These buses aim to provide education to such children who have not been to schools.

Presently, about 50 children are studying in these classroom buses and most of them are rag-pickers. These four buses go to different locations in Delhi for this noble cause.

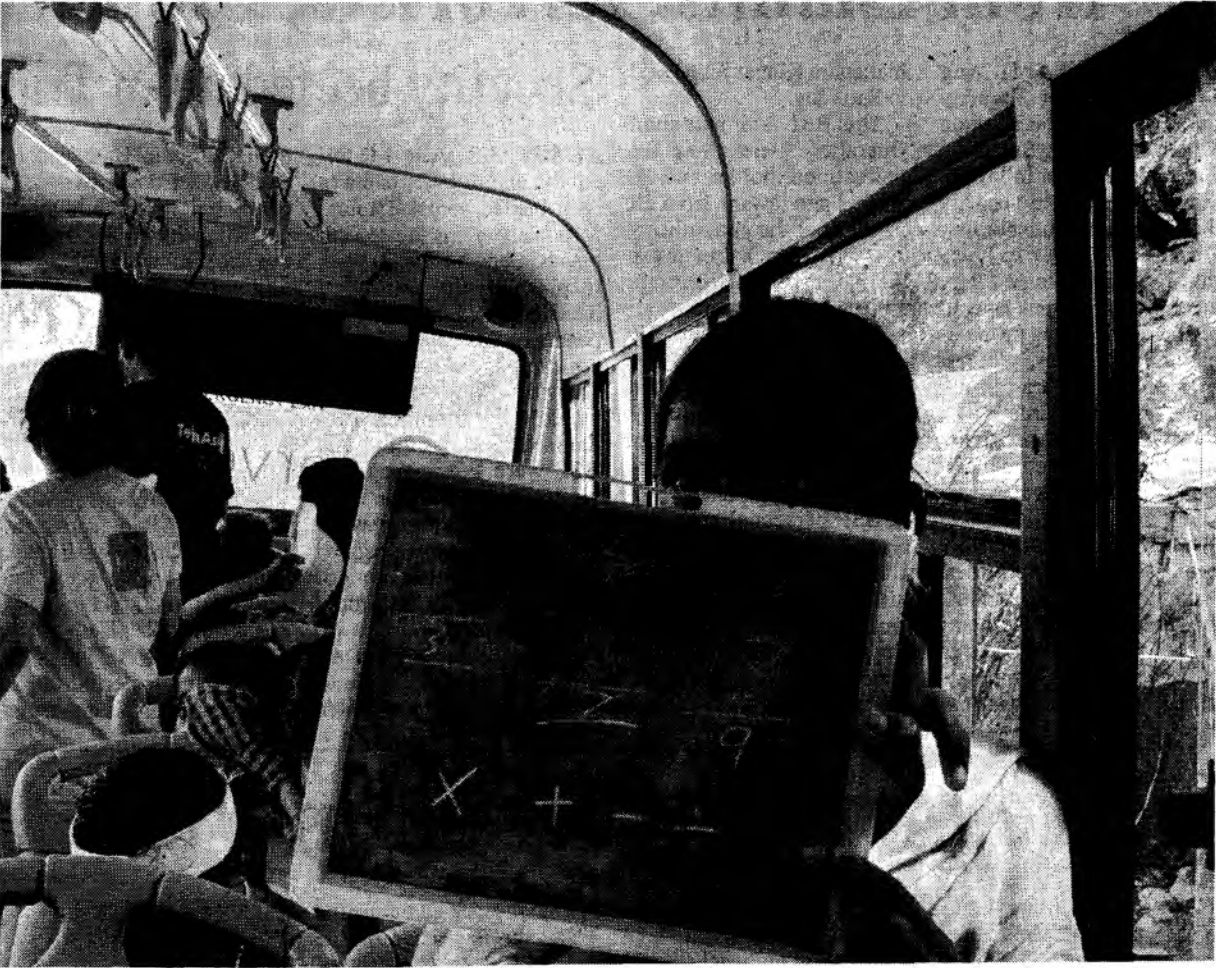
There is a driver, a helper and two teachers in every bus. A black board is installed in the bus and children are also provided with slate and chalk.

Besides, food is also available for children.

Non-government organisation 'Tejasia' has named these vehicles 'Hope Buses'. Tejasia is involved in social works since last 10 years and it has taken responsibilities of these children.

This project was started many years ago with a single bus and now the number has reached to four.

A team of the NGO does survey of a particular area to find out if number of children who need to be educated are more. Then a bus is sent to that area. Presently, the buses are visiting eight such locations in the national capital. In the



last several years, many children who studied in these buses got enrolled in government schools.

Besides basic education, the children also learn social etiquette -- like how to live, talk or behave.

Ebna Edwin, working with the NGO, said, "We are teaching children in Kamala Nagar, a colony in R.K. Puram and Gurugram."

It starts at 9 a.m., the bus reaches all the locations in an hour, after which a class is held from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

After that the same bus goes to another location to teach other children from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

According to the NGO, 80 per cent of the children are those who have never attended school. There are also some children who are school drop-outs.

Parents of these children are very poor and belong to labour class like rickshaw puller, household worker and rag-picker etc.

Though there is a small school in addition to the bus, but due to Covid, it is closed these days.

About 40 volunteers are associated with this NGO, while about 900 children have been provided education so far. There are more than 20 teaching teams.

Teachers prepare children for admission in government schools. The NGO also helps children in getting the documents for the admission.

Interestingly, the teaching teams also include teachers who lost their jobs due to Covid and now they work with the NGO on a token amount. (IANS)

'No two Ramayanas are entirely similar'

By Siddhi Jain

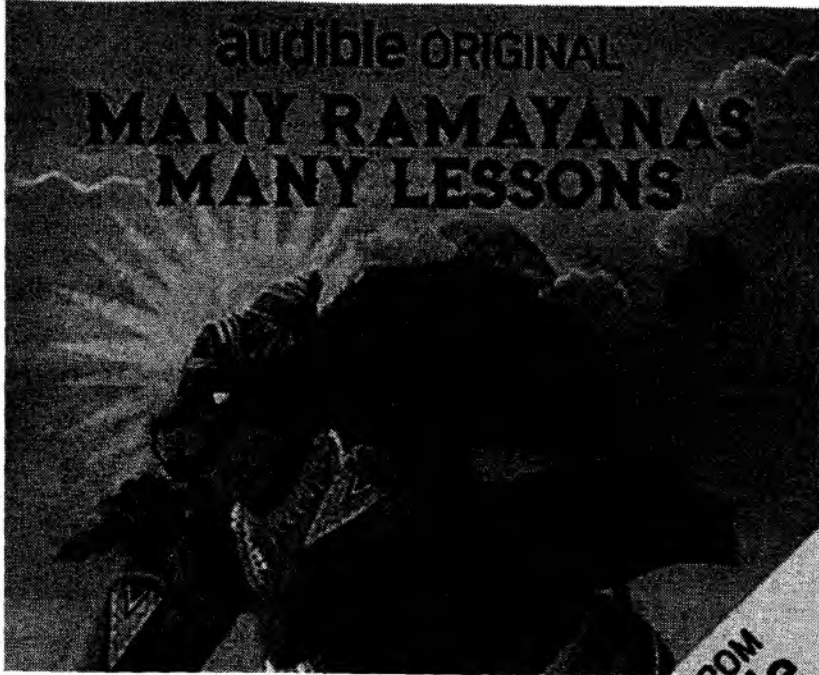
The rich heritage of mythological epics in India has begun to reflect in the popular audiobook production and listener-ship. The latest in this direction is 'Many Ramayanas & Many Lessons' by India's best-selling mythological fiction author Anand Neelakantan, launched on audio storytelling platform Audible.

This audiobook is available on Audible in both Hindi and English languages. Spread across 29 episodes, this audiobook is an attempt by Anand Neelakantan to introduce different versions of this great epic and draw enduring lessons for audiences of all ages. The story is told in chronological order, with each episode featuring different Greats like Sage Valmiki, the Lord Rama, Sage Vishwamitra, Sita, Bharata individually, thus taking interesting detours to introduce the various versions of this story that exist across Asia.

'Many Ramayanas & Many Lessons' has been narrated by Manish Dongarvide and the Hindi version titled 'Ramayana-Anek Kathayein, Anek Sandarbh' has been narrated by Babla Kochhar.

Anand Neelakantan, the best-selling author and writer of the audiobook tells IANSlife: "Writing audiobooks is different from writing printed books. The word choices, the rhythm of writing, and the structure's nuances take another form in audiobooks. I hope Many Ramayanas & Many Lessons would be an immersive hearing experience."

He says: "The Ramayana is one of India's greatest epics and forms an integral part of our tradition of storytelling. Across Asia, there are close to 300 forms of the Ramayana that are known to exist including the popular version by Valmiki.



Through Many Ramayanas & Many Lessons, I have attempted to create an immersive storytelling experience with different versions of the Ramayana to familiarise audiences with alternative theories and approaches that exist in various other cultures."

IANSlife speaks to the author to know more:

There are not many tales that survive the test of time, as Ramayana and Mahabharata have. In addition to being a matter of faith, what makes these stories appeal to readers or listeners generation after generation?

Neelakantan: There are only two ways for stories to survive. One is by the imposition by some religious authorities that all the followers must read a particular book. Such books will endure as long as the religious authorities that impose them survive. The second

way is for the book to evolve as per the needs of every generation. They need no religious authorities to impose the book's reading, nor do they require to be uniform. Ramayana and Mahabharata belong to this category. Hence they transcend the borders of religion and culture as each culture can contribute to the corpus of these epics and make the epics their own. It evolves as per generation and culture. They are living tradition. As long as this freedom exists, it would remain relevant till the end of the human race.

The oral medium of passing down knowledge and legends kept many stories alive, historically. So your 'Many Ramayanas & Many Lessons' is returning in the audio medium, in a different, modern way. Thoughts?

Neelakantan: Oral medium is the oldest form of story and idea

propagation. However, in the long history of human culture, literacy is a comparatively new concept. Oral stories keep changing as per the audience, and this adds to their vibrancy and relevance. A recorded audiobook may not have that much flexibility, but it remains closest to the original storytelling tradition. An audiobook can be a good travel companion. You can hear stories while you drive, exercise, or walk. When people find it challenging to squeeze in reading time in their busy schedules, audiobooks can be a lifesaver.

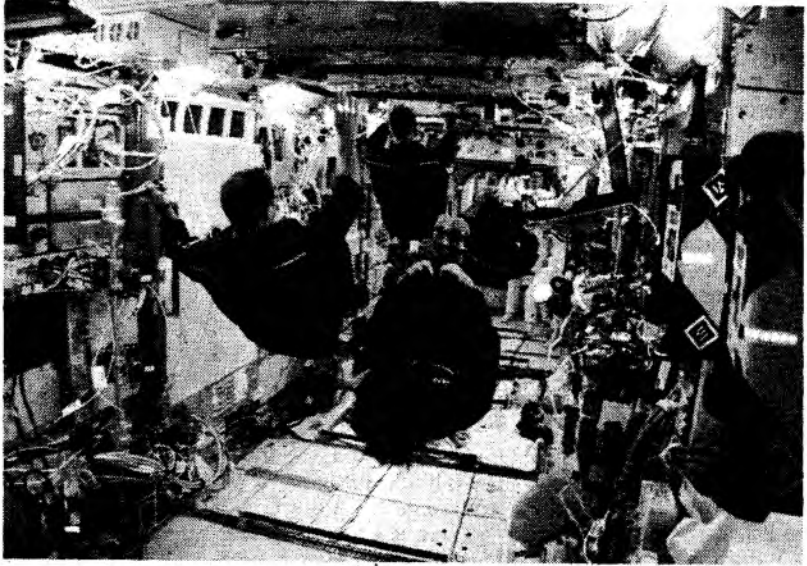
How was the process of collating and presenting different versions of Ramayana for this audiobook? What did the research entail?

Neelakantan: I have been collecting such stories for more than two decades now. All my books are based on oral stories that I had collated over the years. In this book, I used my previous notes that gave birth to my works like Asura, the tale of the vanquished, Vanara or Valmiki's women.

Did you face any challenges during the compilation, like any conflicting story angles?

Neelakantan: No two Ramayanas are entirely similar. There are many conflicting and contradicting stories, and that is what makes them so attractive. I am not trying to claim there is one authentic Ramayana. There isn't. Nor am I trying to give a research document about Ramayana tradition. I neither have the scholarship or the erudition for doing the same. I am a mere storyteller, and I am just arranging some of the stories I have heard or read over the years and wondering aloud about their subtle meanings and what these stories mean to our lives.

Olympic Games in Zero Gravity



From synchronised space swimming to 'lack of floor routine' gymnastics, astronauts at the International Space Station (ISS) enjoyed their own Olympics games in zero gravity before holding a 'closing ceremony' to bid goodbye to Tokyo 2020.

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet of the European Space Agency (ESA) posted a series of videos on Twitter over the weekend, showing some of the ISS astronauts performing their favourite games sans gravity.

They also had a 'weightless' sharpshooting session where they shoot what look like rubber bands at a makeshift target.

"Weightless sharpshooting - concentration and skill (or luck) proved necessary to reach the target," posted the French astronaut.

During the synchronised space swimming, the astronauts worked

hard on the routines despite the lack of water.

"Synchronised space swimming -- an opportunity to show teamwork and crew cohesion," Pesquet posted.

"No-handball -- we had to adapt the rules a bit during the match, much investment on both sides for the win," he added.

The astronauts even hung little flags of all the countries represented over their performance zones on the space station.

Finally, they held a closing ceremony where Aki Hoshide of JAXA (Japan's space agency) handed an Olympic flag to Pesquet, as Olympics 2024 is slated to happen in Paris.

The president of IOC, Thomas Bach, declared the 32nd Olympic Games closed on August 8 as the Olympic flag was handed over to France, the host of the 2024 Paris Games. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 15, 2021

Sun is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Neptune on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results for the whole year. Your behavior will be very good. Some new work will be completed. You will make progress in your work. Your financial condition will get better. Love mates will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will also get marriage proposals. Students will perform well in studies. You will also make plans to buy a new house/vehicle. You will adorn new clothes. You might take leave and go to some nearby place for a holiday. You will try your best to achieve your objectives. There will be happiness in family life. Property disputes will get resolved with ease. You will do the right thing and achieve your objective. You will buy something nice and expensive for your house. There will be lot of peace at home.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)



Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



from all quarters. This will be the time to travel. Do not trust anyone in business. Keep a distance from strangers. Your health will improve.

You will think about yourself and complete all your tasks. You will also pursue your hobbies. You will enjoy gardening, cooking, walking around eating, photography etc. Your family members will give you company and make you feel a lot better. You will also have gains in business. The economic side will be strong. You will have mental peace. You will also do your work properly. Most of the time will be spent on social media. Your time will be good. You will engage in government related activities. Your mind will move about your business and you will pay more attention to it. You will join important meetings. You will also introspect deeply. You will also think about family and financial matter. Your thinking will be such that you take such steps, so the life can be enjoyed with pleasure. This is a lot more favorable phase.

You will be able to live comfortably. You will also respect the feelings of others, understand and help others. Your thoughts will be positive. You will go to your native place and enjoy the climate there. You will be busy in working. The officers will be happy and your salary will also increase. Business will double up. People will believe you blindly. You will spend time in love, romance etc. You also need to control your anger. Do not criticize or resist any kind of criticism, if you do not pay attention, you will be better for you. You will enjoy good food. You will finish your work in a unique style.

The week will be in your favor. You will be able to do your work smoothly. The scope of friends and fans will increase, which you will enjoy in good deeds. You will feel tremendous attraction towards anything. All kinds of partnerships and relationships will be important to you. You will earn a lot of money. You will be relaxed with your goal and be very close to achieving success. You will have full enthusiasm. Your honor will also increase. You will meet good people and they will help you in completion of some works. The loved ones and family members will come close to you. Your health will be good. Stay away from disputes. You will also help yourself by helping others.

If you have political approach, then important leaders will come in contact with you and your respect will increase. You will get financial benefits. You will feel relaxed. You will do all your work smoothly. At this time, you will not do anything special, but experience mental peace. You will forget all the problems and get involved in the work. You will remember your loved ones in difficult times and miss them too. You may get trapped in any litigation. You will get knowledge to learn something new. You will be careful about money matters. You will take time for family, food and entertainment. You can develop an interest in spiritualism. You will be a position to compromise with the circumstances. You can feel refreshed yourself.

The week will be spent in a great way. You will have time for your family and will enjoy some unforgettable moments. You will be very happy, relaxed and cheerful. Because of busyness in the work, the irritability will prevail over you. You will expect a lot from your family members. They too will not disappoint you. You will be very fortunate in financial matters and will have gains in business. You will be welcomed as a special guest somewhere. Your social popularity will peak. You will also value the sentiments of your well wishers. They will stand with you at every moment. You will have a sense of satisfaction in you. You will get benefits in financial and business areas.

Your work will be appreciated. Your expectations and hopes will be fulfilled. Your dilemma and restlessness will overcome. You will feel yourself full of energy. It will be your beneficial time. You will have the power to make even a difficult task possible and successful too. Your personality will develop. Legal issues will be resolved smoothly. You will use the best of both hearts and minds. You will not be able to handle the relationships due to your fierce and indecisive nature. Your relationships with parents will be good. You will enjoy happiness from children. Moon and Jupiter will give you success. You will be engaged in interviews, meetings, conferences, higher education and research. You will get relief from a chaotic life. Money matters will be the main matters of concern. Yet, you will not have much problems.

Do We Have A Career Freedom?

By Ranjan K Baruah

We are celebrating our Independence Day and it means freedom. When we are celebrating the day and the occasion we also think about ourselves and our future. One of the buzz words for any student or other young people is career. The career is an individual's metaphorical "journey" through learning, work and other aspects of life. There are a number of ways to define career and the term is used in a variety of ways. There are dictionary meanings but sometimes we may not precisely define what is career to one individual as there might be different perspectives. Whether we agree to any definition or not, career is important for all of us.

Like defining career we may not exactly define career freedom. Let us try to talk about it according to simple understanding. I am mentioning it as many students do not have the freedom to choose what they want. The influence of parents, teachers are dominant amongst many for which many miss their passion and get engaged in work which they do not like passionately. It is not possible for everyone to follow passion and make it to their profession but with proper planning things can be made possible instead of impossible.

If we can choose the subjects of our interest and get placement or get self employed in the field which we like then we can say that we have career freedom. There are many elements that would affect when it comes to career freedom. There are situations for which we may not be able to take the subjects of our interests or join a profession according to our interest. Freedom is missing when we do not act and plan accordingly. We can get information related to many options and plan accordingly for our future to make our career a vibrant one.

Now the question is what do we need to have career freedom? Well, it is challenging to have career



freedom but it is possible to make it happen. We need good counseling and mentorship and ideas to plan according to our interest. Many parents and guardians are not aware of the present job market but they emphasize on traditional subjects which they think are prestigious like taking up a few technical courses which may be a degree or diploma. For career freedom of any child or student their parents or guardians must be aware of different options as their pressure directly impacts on one's career. Like parents and guardians, the roles of teachers are also crucial when it comes to career freedom as they can guide the students according to their interest and choice. Apart from parents, guardians or teachers, the role of career mentor is also important but this will come later as they are not directly related with students like parents or teachers.

There are opportunities and options in various fields with different subjects. Let us not think that only science courses give more benefits when it compares with arts or commerce. Nowadays all the subjects are important and it is

important for aspirants how they use their qualification and their skills to get a job or become self employed. Let us focus on career planning and plan strategically with the help of others who can give ideas for our future. If we can choose the right subject and prepare well, it means we shall end up in the right profession. Let us celebrate our independence day and also focus on our career so that we can proudly say that we have career freedom too. There would be challenges but they can be overcome and let us take up the challenge to build ourselves and also build our country. As India is entering 75 years of freedom, let us celebrate it with joy and also contribute to making the nation a developed nation instead of a developing nation as soon as possible. A good career means we shall be able to contribute to the growth of the nation hence we can say that we do need career freedom.

(The author is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com)

"When the fabric of society is so rigid that it cannot change quickly enough, adjustments are achieved by social unrest and revolutions."

— John Boyd Orr

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.7 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2021

Rule of law suspended

ON August 15 while the nation celebrated Independence Day a cloud of gloom hung over Meghalaya, particularly its capital city, Shillong. On August 13, Cherister Thangkhiw, the general secretary and founder member of Meghalaya's longest running insurgency – the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) founded in 1991 was gunned down in the early morning hours by a police posse. The police team was well prepared for a showdown except that it was an unequal face-off. At dead of night when a man is asleep he would not have his wits him. To be rudely awakened past midnight by a police team can send shock waves down the spine of even a hardened militant. Thangkhiw it is alleged tried to fight back with a knife against armed policemen. They shot at him, ostensibly in private defence whatever that might mean. At such close range the bullet would have caused instant death.

Police claim they have incontrovertible evidence that Thangkhiw was masterminding the series of blasts in East Jaintia Hills beginning December 2020, then July 2021 and then at Laitumkhrah on August 10. The HNLC has proudly claimed to be behind these blasts and used them as a bargaining point for peace talks as opposed to their unconditional surrender. The best option for police would have been to arrest Thangkhiw for questioning. That would have revealed the HNLC 's modus operandi. Killing Thangkhiw means silencing him forever. But why?

Thangkhiw's funeral procession was slated for Sunday, Independence Day. A day before, a call had been given by sundry pressure groups that youth across the city should converge at Mawlai for a black flag demonstration. Hundreds of two wheelers hit the road with shouts of "Long Live HNLC." This is the first time that a proscribed outfit in Meghalaya was hailed by civil society – the same civil society that had rejected them in 2000 after having seen their crimes of extortion and killings at close quarters. What also was ignoble was the snatching away of arms from a police outpost at Mawkynroh by a few hotheads who then took the vehicle around the city, holding the weapons for public demonstration, while the police ran for cover. After the joyride the masked men set the vehicle ablaze. The rule of law was temporarily suspended on that Black Sunday. It is a dangerous portent and one that does not bode well for the state and its police force. Police morale must be refurbished so that they are in a state of preparedness. Policing should be free from political influence. Police are duty bound to follow the Constitutions not the dictates of the political class.

Letters to the Editor

What a tragedy this is!

Editor,

The series of incidents that have taken place since the gunning down of former HNLC General Secretary, Bah Cheris Thangkhiw on Friday last indicate a collapse of the law and order machinery. How could the police be so unprepared as to be attacked by a mob and to leave their post and to run for safety without putting up a fight? They even left their weapons behind and the mob got a free run of that vehicle and the ammo before the vehicle was burnt. It's unbelievable that a police force that entered the home of a surrendered militant and shot him instead of simply overpowering him and arresting him for questioning should find itself running away from the battlefield. This is demoralising for the public

who now know they cannot rely on the police to secure their lives and property. If this is not a collapse of law and order then I wonder what more to expect!

As a citizen who has been observing the situation since the MDA Government came to power I see that the corruption in the form of illegal coal mining and transportation is being allowed to flourish. Then there are those coke plants that have just come up in East Jaintia Hills and West Khjasi Hills. It needed a public outcry for the Government to take action. Is this Government working against all environmental norms while its Environment Minister keeps talking about the climate change crisis? What hypocrisy is this? All these hypocritical acts have given rise to hordes of malcontents amongst the youth who are just waiting to vent out their anger and frustration. The death of

Bah Cheris has given them a cause to come together under one umbrella and to shout anti-government slogans.

In fact, many fiery speeches were made at the residence of Bah Cheris before his funeral, many of them directed at the police. As a peace loving person I hope that this incident does not flare up into another law and order situation. We have enough problems dealing with Covid and its ugly ramifications. Today there is a ban on internet and curfew has been imposed. This is to contain the situation which seems to have gone completely out of control with all Covid protocols thrown to the winds. If the internet ban continues the online classes will be disrupted and that will be a huge loss especially for high school, college and university students. It seems like calamity is on us all of a sudden. The misfortune for the people of Megha-

laya is that there is not even a single statesman at this juncture that can come out to lead us without expecting something in return. We are tired of politicians and their popularity contest. I am sure many agree with me. Politicians are in fact the ones who have got us into all these problems in the first place. Now many want popularity even from Bah Cheris' death. All our social institutions seem to have failed too. We need fervent prayers to save us from imminent doom and destruction.

Yours etc.,
Kyntiew Sing Nongrum,
Via email

We will not react but will respond

Editor,

It is a tragedy when those who are supposed to gov-

ern over their people, no longer see themselves as shepherds, but rather behave more like tyrants and dictators. The thought that a single individual with a knife could have the strength to overpower a group of well-armed, well trained and well equipped policemen, does not only defy logic, but is a great insult to the intellect of any average layperson with basic common sense. The big question is not whether the deceased individual is guilty of the crimes he was accused of, but rather that the judiciary was not even given a chance to exercise its duty, if that should have really been the case. The really disturbing thing about this incident is that nobody seems to be accountable to anyone. Lawlessness breeds lawlessness, and it is a sad thing when it is the ordinary public who always have to pay the price to satisfy the need of some power hungry

politicians, bureaucrats, law enforcers or individuals. As a person of faith, I would like to humbly remind all of us, that God does not need man's certification to prove that He exists, but because God is the only reason why we exist, all of us will have to give an account to Him for how we live our lives, be it kings or subjects. The temptation is to immediately react to what has happened, and swing to the opposite side of the pendulum by taking up arms and using violence, when we can be wiser than those in authority by simply stating, "We won't react, but We will surely respond".

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Shillong- 2

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

While he was dancing to the drumbeats in Delhi

By HH Mohrmen

office of the Sub Division Office in Jowai which again till date is located in the same area. It was when the leaders of the locality declared that they are going to celebrate the 75th Independence day by organising Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav at the same spot where the British raised the scaffold to hang u Kiang

but as usual it was a case of easier said than done. Suggestions came thick and fast but without specific solution to the problem. The garbage problem in one's hometown has compelled this writer to try find out ways and means to solve this vexed problem.

Since 21% of household waste is kitchen waste which



Nangbah that rumblings began. The Home Minister Lakhmen Rymbui who till the day before was in favour of the total ban of dumping of waste in the old landfill (understandably because it falls under his constituency) had to change his mind. The Minister in the MDA government who until the other day was behaving more like a constituency minister had to meet the seven villages and compel them to withdraw their protest.

The Jowai garbage issue may be over for now and the credit goes to Home Minister Lakhmen Rymbui, the Deputy Commissioner and the CEO Jowai Municipal Board for making the deal. But the permission to dump the waste in the old landfill was only for three months. Hopefully Rymbui who is

can be converted to compost or even animal feed, it is also therein that the solution to the problem can be found. There is an adage that for every problem there is a solution and oftentimes the solution is in the problem itself. A project to convert vegetable waste which is generated from households of the people to pig feed was pilot-tested recently. The outcome of the finding was very promising. It is not only that the method is simple and easy to operate but it is commercially viable too.

This project is also going to introduce segregation of waste at source because it involves segregating all vegetable waste from the kitchen in one bin and other wastes on the other. The Khasi Pnar like other tribal people consume pork regularly and in

"At the dawn of August 13 again while the Chief Minister was in Delhi, news of the death of Cherister Thangkhiw the former leader of the HNLC has shocked the whole state. The police claim that he was killed in self defence and the family of the deceased said otherwise."

number three in MDA government along with the concerned officers will put their heads together and come up with a permanent solution to the issue. The question that begs the answer is whether three months is enough for the government to make new arrangements for disposing the garbage generated by the residents of the town?

Since the beginning of this crisis people were generous with their suggestions to start solid waste management to solve the problem

SOS planet Earth

By Barnes Mawrie

Watching on TV the flames and smoke engulfing the Mediterranean countries of Italy, Greece, Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia, some people say "it's apocalypse time." It is horrifying to see our planet turning into a tinder box and so susceptible to flames. Who could imagine that a place like Siberia with its freezing climate could be affected by bush fires. Beside the bush fires, other natural calamities like flash floods, landslides and volcanic eruptions are becoming frequent occurrences. The terrible floods that took place in parts of Europe and the on-going floods in China, Japan, India and other countries, have claimed a lot of lives and destroyed property worth billions of dollars. Climate scientists have predicted that worse times are ahead. Everyone agrees today that all these are man-made. These calamities are signs that Mother Nature is taking her revenge on humanity because we have mistreated her for too long.

The words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Actor and former Governor of California are true, who said "I've starred in a lot of science fiction movies, let me tell you something, climate change is not science fiction. This is a battle in the real world, it is impacting us right now." Those who deny global warming and climate change, are either blind or arrogant. We witness day after day the adverse effects of these two natural phenomena.

destructive activities.

Climate change as we experience today, has become irreversible and all we can do is to slow down its impact through our responsible behaviour. As Leonardo Di Caprio has rightly said "climate change is real. It is happening right now. It is the most urgent threat facing our entire species and we need to work collectively together and stop procrastinating." It took a little girl Greta Thunberg to awaken the adults to the reality of climate change. Perhaps because the adults are drunk with power and wealth and have become insensitive to the future of their posterity. Perhaps because we have become too ego-centric, self gratifying that we do not care for the well-being of our future generations. In the words of the former president of the US, Barack Obama "we are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it." Humanity is ingenious, creative and resilient and whenever a crisis arises we have always found some kind of solution to it. Positively, today like never before, the whole world has come to acknowledge the reality of an ecological crisis we are in. All countries are decisive in finding solutions to climate change like the global agreement to cut down CO2 emission by having recourse to clean energy like solar and wind energy. Many countries are on a war footing to produce



How many Earth Summits and how many ecological conferences have been held for the past many decades, yet humanity seems never to have learnt the hard lesson. The craze for economic prosperity has taken precedence over the very survival of humanity itself. For too long mankind has exploited Mother Nature beyond limit. Extraction of fossil fuel has brought about material well-being for many countries, but the use of it is causing a collateral damage on the planet. The mining of coal for example, causes pollution in the atmosphere and the use of coal in thermal plants is responsible for the massive pollution of air due to the CO2 emission. As someone has rightly said "God has purposely hidden these minerals deep in the recess of the Earth because

electric vehicles to phase out fossil fuel automobiles. Most developed countries have already closed down thermal power and nuclear energy plants. These are right steps in the correct direction to save our planet. Although the efforts have come a bit late, yet as they say "better late than never."

The recent IPCC report on climate change comes with a great warning for humanity if we do not change our behaviours. One section of this report says "observed changes in the atmosphere, oceans, cryosphere and biosphere provide unequivocal evidence of a world that has warmed. Over the past several decades, key indicators of the climate system are increasingly at levels unseen in centuries to millennia, and are changing at rates unprec-

"The craze for economic prosperity has taken precedence over the very survival of humanity itself. For too long mankind has exploited Mother Nature beyond limit. Extraction of fossil fuel has brought about material well-being for many countries, but the use of it is causing a collateral damage on the planet."

they are harmful to living species." This is why the exploitation of these natural resources which appeared at first to be a great boon, has ultimately become a bane. Human beings unlike other living species are endowed with extra intelligence but unfortunately we are using it to gratify our greed and ambition. Human greed is so vicious that human beings are not satisfied with exploiting the Earth, but today they intend to exploit the Moon and other planets as well. Today there is already a race among powerful nations to colonize the outer worlds. It is evident that humans are not satisfied with destroying their own habitat but they are on a rampage to extend their

edented in at least the last 2000 years." Such a report should therefore awaken all of us to this grim reality of our planet. Ultimately we realize the futility of the so called "material prosperity" or "economic power" when we witness the very ground on which we stand (our planet) crumbling beneath our feet. The questions we need to ask ourselves would be: what for are we exploiting Mother Earth when in reality we are digging our own graves? For whom are we amassing wealth when our children and grand children would inherit from us a dilapidated Earth unfit to live in?

Email: barnesmawrie@gmail.com

"You will never understand bureaucracies until you understand that for bureaucrats procedure is everything and outcomes are nothing."

— Thomas Sowell

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.8 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2021

Taliban and talks

AFGHANISTAN has gone the Taliban way again; but not quite yet. Discussions continued between the Islamic fundamentalists and representatives of the political establishment under US mediation. A period of chaos and confusion is unfolding. India has reasons to be wary but, as its representative at the UN said, there are both challenges and opportunities as a new government takes charge. India is stressing that the new regime should not allow terrorists from Pakistan as also the others like the ISI and Al Qaeda to make their bases out of Afghanistan.

Curiously, the Americans are out, and yet not out. They are mindful of a Chinese over-reach there and also attempts to again make the nation a theatre of terror. As of now, other than the militia, the Taliban has no back-up to resist an aggression from outside. Its namesake military that had once been ranked a poor 75-th in the world in terms of might, has ceased to exist. The armed forces have disintegrated and made of with arms, ammunition and equipment. Under these circumstances, any government in future can collapse the way it happened in December 2001. To be sure, Americans have strategically anchored themselves on the control towers of Kabul's airport in the guise of evacuations. This is tantamount to the US holding a gun to the forehead of the Taliban to ensure, among other things, that the power is transferred to someone that is acceptable to the Americans as well.

Granted that none of those who had conquered Afghanistan in the past could hold on there, the fact is also that the US called much of the shots there for the past 20 years. The famished nation will not have the resources to raise a strong military in the near future. This means that foreign players will remain active. India's role in Afghanistan, even as New Delhi took care of its strategic interests there, was constructive in nature and the Taliban too appreciated this. A Taliban regime cannot remain in isolation for long. It would require building bridges here or there. China has already extended an olive branch. Pakistan is too keen on encouraging the Taliban. Indian support depends on how the new regime functions. The options are many for the regime. In the interim, the Taliban can be counted on to play havoc in multiple ways, mainly in respect of human rights violations and women's freedom. It is here that the UN agencies would need to keep a close watch and intervene.

Afghanistan-like scenes in Shillong

By Albert Thyrniang

the under fire Home Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui had tendered his resignation due to the 'gravity' of the situation while proposing a judicial inquiry. Unfortunately the Home Minister's tenure was marked by coal and coke illegalities and at least two mining tragedies.

Among the public representatives who publicly questioned the government action while iterating for a judicial inquiry were PT Sawkmie, Mawlai MLA, Himalaya Shangliang Mawsynram legislator (Both INC), Adelbert Nongrum, North Shillong

of possessing a knife or a gun. Anyone can be a victim of police actions. The police can also make up stories of being attacked to escape the process of law. There was no independent witness that Cheristerfield was in possession of a knife and the firearm let alone that he attacked the police given his frail physical condition.

Similar incidents have happened in the past and the public still don't have the answers. The GNLA 'Commander-in-Chief', Sohan D Shira was gunned down alone though his associates

or later but the bruises could remain for a long time. The black flag day could become an annual event.

The sensational killing of the long serving HNLC leader shocked the state. The unexpected demise might have hurt the sentiments of a lot of people, particularly the younger generation. We may blame the police and hold the government responsible. But the violence and unrest, the stone pelting and arsons, the attacks and assaults on the patrolling police, the hijack of vehicles and the wielding of seized arms are never justified. The trouble makers are anti-social elements and such acts of lawlessness have to be condemned. They cannot be condoned.

Late Cheristerfield is hailed a hero, a martyr and a legend because he was a founder General Secretary of the HNLC. Does it mean that we approve of the ideology and activities of the rebel group? Are we going to throw away the hard earned peace and go back to the violent days of fear psychosis of the late 90s and early years of 2000? Do we like to see extortion notes being served to the public? Do we agree with the chilling warning to journalists and press persons sometime back for complying with the High Court order? Do we bat for the HNLC? With due respects the contributions of the late leader did not match the massive mourning. He 'returned' to the mainstream. So did others. Some surrendered cadres received threats for coming over ground. Late Cheristerfield probably never faced any threats. Was it because he continued to maintain links with his former friends that were more than the 'mediator's role'? Had he not formed the HNLC his death would not have evoked such an enormous response even if he was killed by the police bullets.

As a founder ideologue he motivated many a youth to join the Organisation. They fought against the state and many died prematurely. What about them? Who is responsible for their deaths? Are they given the same honour? What about the parents and families who lost their beloved sons because they were made to believe in a 'dilution'? What about the policemen who fell to the bullets just because individuals decided to rebel against the state? Whose fault is it that they had to die in battle fields? Are they not part of the 'Jaitybnyriew' that they had to be enemies?

With the Meghalaya Human Right Commission (MHRC) taking suo moto action on the suspicious encounter and the government's decision to order a judicial enquiry things will cool down but the ugly turn of events could have been avoided had the law been respected.

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lawmaker (KHNAM) and Paul Lyngdoh, Mawkhair MDC (UDP). The outspoken KHNAM leader even termed the killing a 'fake encounter'. Significantly Paul Lyngdoh advised his colleague, the Home Minister to put in his papers to save himself from the embarrassment of being removed by the Chief Minister. His views prevailed in the emergency meeting of the party's top guns that followed leaving Rymbui with no option but to quit. In the meantime, sensing the public mood, the BJP consoled the death of the once dreaded militant leader.

The truth of the 13th tragedy is not known for now. For the family members and the general public at large it was a cold blooded murder. For the police it was a firing in 'private defence'. For the supporters of the former militant it was a pre-planned pre-dawn operation. For the police it was a tactical move to prevent another 'hit' in the city. A lot of questions have flooded social media. Only a scaring implication is mentioned here. The police insist that its personnel shot at the chronic renal patient because he attempted to stab the armed men with a knife. If the police can't arrest an incapacitated person armed with a knife in a room, how can they get hold of hardened goons with such weapons? How can they apprehend criminals armed with guns and other lethal weapons? Does it mean the police have to shoot and kill them? The professionalism of the police is under question. Their training level is under scrutiny! The implication is serious as killing can be justified just because someone is accused

also were probably present with him. Was it not possible to arrest the feared militant alive? The gang leader, Fullmoon Dkhar was also shot dead though others too escaped from prison along with him. As their nexus with politicians was alleged, were they eliminated to spare big wigs? Is the life of ordinary citizens threatened by the law keepers who turn law breakers? Criminals too have the right to life. Killing criminals in fake encounters is against human rights. Are human rights violated on orders of the higher ups to seal cans of worms? Does the Cheristerfield case have these elements? Was Cheristerfield silenced to shut down the HNLC's modus operandi? If so, at whose behest?

Opinions on intelligence failure have been echoed in the wake of the Khliehriat and Laitumkhrah blasts. One aspect of intelligence is also to anticipate the consequences if a certain action is taken. Clearly the police and the government did not anticipate the consequences in the event of 'Bah Che' being harmed. The police had anticipated that the operation could cause injury for they had carried a stretcher to the spot. But they did not foresee the aftermath in the event of the death of the 'interlocutor'. They did not predict the chaos, unrest and lawlessness. The government could not sense that the already existing desperation of the youths due to the sentimental ILP and border issues could escalate at the slightest provocation. Now the ugly law and order has to be dealt with. Though with imposition of curfew and unjustified internet ban normalcy may return sooner

The shameful side

By Sandeep Roy

There is no such thing as race. None. There is just a human race – scientifically, anthropologically. This was stated by Toni Morrison, American novelist, essayist, book editor, and college professor. Her first novel, The Bluest Eye, was published in 1970. The critically acclaimed Song of Solomon brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award. Racism and racial relations in India have historically been complex. India is ethnically diverse, with more than 2,000 different ethnic groups. There is also significant diversity within regions, and almost every province has its own distinct mixture of ethnicities, traditions, and cultures. Throughout the history of India, ethnic relations have been both constructive and destructive. The other day a girl from Manipur won a silver medal in the Tokyo Olympics and instantly she became Bharat Ke Beti. Everyone said "Well done India," and "Bharat Mata ki

started kicking the dog away being scared that it would bite her. Then the attackers started beating her and when the other woman intervened, they dragged her out by the hair. According to them, despite being in the lane crowded with people, no one came to help them. In October 2014, there were two separate incidents, one in which a North-East student was beaten by three men in Bangalore for not speaking Kannada, and a second where a North-East student was beaten by seven men in Gurgaon, Haryana.

In Assam, there have been many attacks on those from outside the region. In 2007, thousands of Hindi-speaking labourers fled from Assam after a series of massacres and bomb attacks. In May 2007, nine of them were killed and another 20 injured in violent attacks. The next month, 26 people from other parts of India were killed in a series of attacks over a period of six days. The police blamed the United



Jai." The same set of people before the Olympics stood together and abused North-East Indians as Chinese and virus asked what their rate was and ordered them to go back to Nepal.

The unfortunate state of affairs is that we are racist from the core of our hearts. We are the greatest self-centric racist country in the world. We identify our fellow countrymen as Bangalee, Asamee, Noga-sob, Paiyaan, Sattu, Katwa, Khaaseeya, Beehari, Bahadurs, Coolie, Madrassee, Beef Eaters, Bangladeshi, Gujju, Maroos and now Anti-national, Tukda, Tukda gang, Lutyens Walon, Moosolman, Farmers and more. The list is growing each day and the end is endless. Rupam Borah - Founder of VIRUS Communication says "We all rush to the blood bank on emergency. Who survives on who's blood, hell knows." Every coin has two sides and my intention is to highlight both the sides.

In 2007, the North East Support Centre & Helpline (NESC&H) was started as a separate wing of All India Christian Council. Its initial goal was to increase awareness regarding prejudice and attacks against people from North-East India. Many North-Eastern Indians face discrimination; are refused living accommodations when they travel to urban areas to study and are subjected to racial slurs in reference to the appearance of their eyes. A spokesman for the NESC&H has stated that abuse and harassment of North-Easterners are increasing.

A study from the North-East Support Centre & Helpline reported that 86% of North-East people in 2009-2010 said they faced racial discrimination in metro cities of India, based on such cultural profiling. In 2012, in an attempt to prevent discrimination, the Indian government asked all of its states and union territories to arrest anyone who commits an act of atrocity against a North-Easterner under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

In 2014, a North-Eastern student named Nido Taniam was killed in New Delhi. On 24 January 2014, two women from Manipur were assaulted and thrashed by locals at Kotla Mubarakpur, Delhi. They were at first hurled racial abuses but when they did not react to this, one of the accused untied the leash of his pet dog on one of the women. She

Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Karbi Longri National Liberation Front for the violence. In response, the members of Purvotar Hindustani Sammelan (PHS) staged a hunger strike in Dispur to protest against the "merciless killings of innocent and defenseless Hindi-speaking people." Overall, 98 non-locals were killed in Assam during 2007. In March and April 2008, a banned Meitei outfit killed 16 non-locals in Manipur. PHS alleged that anti-social groups in Assam were carrying out a continuous hate campaign against the Hindi speakers in the region. In May 2009, nine Hindi speakers were killed in Assam and Manipur, after the attackers set around 70 houses on fire. During 8-10 November 2010, 21 Hindi, Bengali, and Nepali speakers were killed by a faction of the NDFB in Assam. In Meghalaya, the non-indigenous people (who are collectively called Dkhars) are often targets of militant groups.

The recent clash between Assam and Mizoram Security Force is taking another racial turn. Fight of words on Twitter is going on, while someone in a Whatsapp group wrote that it is time for Assam to show who is bigger. The actual participation in such a racial attack is never a victim but his/her act will always leave a scar on society. The political racial feeling should also stop. It is time for all the political parties to join hands and make the country strong. Audre Lorde was an American writer, feminist, womanist, librarian, and civil rights activist. She was a self-described "Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, and poet" who dedicated her life and her work to confronting and addressing injustices of racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, hetero-sexism, and homophobia. She said, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." As you sow, so shall you reap, still stands strong. So many countries inside one country make India, therefore, we should all try and bring in the sense of Indianness for every countryman without waiting for those special moments like a medal in the Olympics or a Cricket Match.

I leave you here with your fine sense of judgment to ponder upon. It is not enough to be quietly non-racist, now is the time to be vocally anti-racist.

Letters to the Editor

Why the rise in insurgency is not distant?

Editor,

In the wee hours of August 13, while the entire world was asleep, a 57-year-old man was shot dead at his own residence while he and his family too were asleep. This man was a surrendered militant of the HNLC who in 2018, had surrendered and was felicitated by the Meghalaya Police. However, this has become an issue that has not gone down well with the public, including the different organizations, the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission and the traditional heads.

People from different walks of life have condemned this act and are demanding justice for Cheristerfield Thangkiew. What makes this issue complicated is the Police stating this as an 'encounter'. Just like everybody out there, it makes me wonder too that why did this operation take place in the darkness of night and not during broad daylight. I am sure that if the police

had suspected him of having a hand in the blast that took place, they could have got a warrant, taken him to custody and interrogated him.

Another surprising thing is that this man was brought in to meet the Deputy CM in a programme for surrendered militants conducted by the Meghalaya Police Department in October 2018 which could only mean that he was cooperating with the police and likely acting as a mediator. Then why would they want to get rid of him?

Before being deployed and posted to their respective locations, every personnel, whether employed by the Police Department or the Armed Forces, are made to undergo a training to deal with armed criminals that may prove to be a threat to them or to people around. In most situations, they would go for a hand-to-hand combat. Only in extreme cases and with no viable option left do they actually shoot a person. Under very rare circumstances would they shoot someone dead. The ex-cadre of the HNLC was said to have attacked the police personnel with a knife. If this was the case, I am sure they

could have overpowered him especially since he was already weak and ill and suffering from a kidney ailment. But the fact is that the police shot him.

This then brings me to the question - who actually gave the order to shoot the man. If orders were given not to shoot the man but to bring him in for questioning and only injure him if he attacks, he would not be dead. People would not be out in the streets and over social media crying out for justice on his behalf. What is sad-dening is that they also took his two sons into custody. On what grounds were the arrests made? Only because they were both together with him? The fact that it was a mistake from the part of those who arrested them because they thought that the sons were his bodyguards (security) just shows the poor intelligence in the Police Department. The sons' statement to the media that they were manhandled while in custody is abhorrent. Why this inhumane treatment?

All this just brings me to question the role of the Home Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui who surprisingly

handed over his resignation asking to be relieved of his portfolio. He is a misfit as Home Minister. The tension at the border areas died down because of the meeting of the Meghalaya CM with the CM of Assam and not because of the intervention of the Home Minister or the Department concerned. What else do we have to see now? Who do we blame if there is a rise in insurgency with the recent incident that occurred on August 13? I fear that this will just increase the angst in the younger generation, especially young men who are in their prime, not knowing what the future holds for them. Who do we blame then when our youth turn towards unethical ways that would put their lives and the lives of their dear ones in danger only because they see such incidents that creates a different perception of the police force in their minds? We need someone capable to handle such an important portfolio which oversees the law-and-order situation in our State.

Yours etc.,
Jordan Diengdoh
Shillong - 2

Meghalaya Police lose the plot

Editor,

"Bangs and smoke were more often the marks of ineptitude than expertise." This is the conclusion J K Rowling's protagonist came to and may aptly be applied to Meghalaya Police's handling of the current situation. From being caught sitting on their haunches with the Khliehriat blast, to the double embarrassment of the Laitumkhrah blast, and subsequently what can at best be called a botched attempt to arrest a former HNLC leader, the MLP has come off looking as inept at best. And I'm being kind!

Intelligence failure is one thing, but the apparent lack of any kind of "Institutional memory" when dealing with the aftermath of such situations, shows a complete lack of leadership amongst its senior officers. Even if we were to accept the official version of the fateful arrest of Bah Che, it is a damning assessment by the Depart-

ment itself that a posse of policemen weren't able to disarm a knife wielding senior person! Add to that the personnel abandoning their vehicles along with automatic assault rifles in the face of unarmed mobs and it's clear that morale is at rock bottom.

The Home minister may have resigned, but senior officers remain, who are responsible for training, morale, dealing with sensibilities of the local population, etc, all of which are clearly lacking at present. With the common man still recovering from the suffering caused by Covid restrictions, responsibility for this fresh bout of violence and its aftermath lies squarely on the shoulders of senior police leadership. One can only hope things do not get worse from here.

Yours etc.,
V Khongwir
Via email

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

"Progress is man's ability to complicate simplicity."
— Thor Heyerdahl

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Crisis of governance

SINCE Friday 13 August, Covid19 has receded from the front pages of newspapers. What has made headline news is the deterioration of law and order in the capital city of Meghalaya after an ailing and retired militant was shot down apparently for putting up a fight when police entered his home after midnight. After that all hell broke loose in Mawlai the area where the retired militant resides. He became a martyr and the police lost face. The only explanation that police had was that the retired militant was aiding and abetting in the IED blasts at Khliehriat and Laitumkhrah. In that case getting information is more important than having a person killed. This case requires an independent enquiry so that the public get to know the reason behind the killing of the retired militant which is a human rights violation since the rule of law cannot be circumvented under any circumstance. The fall-out of the shooting incident is that all Covid norms were violated as crowds gathered at the residence of the deceased militant and attended his funeral by the thousands – something that is disallowed by the district administration to ordinary citizens.

Crisis of governance is visible in the deterioration of moral standards in the political and administrative system. It happens when there is all-pervasive nepotism, corruption, misappropriation of state funds, absence of transparency and accountability in public administration, lack of respect for the rule of law and the complete lack of ethical behaviour in public life. When the political system has lost public confidence and when the institutions that constitute the core of democratic governance structure are imperilled, we have crisis of governance.

The series of events that occurred on August 15 which included the ignominious snatching of weapons from inside a police outpost is a heinous crime under the Arms Act. But now it looks like the Government is willing to overlook that and is instead extending general amnesty to the arms snatchers. Bad governance is marked by knee-jerk decisions which put the public at a great disadvantage. The sudden imposition of curfew on August 15 in the Shillong agglomeration areas merely because trouble was brewing in one locality of the city reeks of paranoia in the administration. That the curfew lasted for 56 hours leaving people stranded and unable to get their essentials is an infringement on their rights. But what's worse is the internet ban which started on Aug 15 and lasted for 3 whole days disrupting studies, banking and business transactions. Why punish the entire city for transgression of law and order in one part of the city? And when the Chief Minister is making light of the whole incident now then wasn't it an unnecessary punishment for the public? Who will answer these questions?

Letters to the Editor

Are we really a democracy?

Editor,
The recent chaos in the city, and the series of unfortunate events taking place makes one doubt the government, it's system, it's capacities and its ability to deliver justice.
To make myself clear let me state upfront that I am against terrorism of all kinds. And I strongly disagree with those who think that taking up arms is the answer. There are better ways to redress grievances and make our voices being heard. Violence and terrorism will only lead to misunderstandings, unnecessary hatred and tension which will go on in infinite cycles with no positive outcomes.
Firstly, I condemn the barbaric acts of the people who went into the streets and escalated the situation instead of acting sensibly and responsibly and in a more humane and civilised manner. I also condemn the recent IED blast. Fortunately there were no serious casualties. But, we were all in shock when the police who are meant to enforce the law, went and unlawfully killed the former HNLC General Secretary, Cheristerfield Thangkhiw who was defenceless, in his residence. We were dumb-struck at the action of the police force. Aren't they trained to coun-

ter a knife attack because that what they claim it was. Whether or not Mr Cheristerfield was involved in the IED blast, it is a violation of human rights to execute someone without a fair trial. I remember someone's statement when Ajmal Kasab got himself a defence lawyer: "The proudest moment for me as an Indian was when Kasab the terrorist of 26/11 attack (he killed 72 people during the attack), got a lawyer to defend himself in court. That's when we realised that we are the world's biggest democracy."
So what really went wrong in Meghalaya? The rules are still the same, the laws are still the same, the country is still the same. Simply put we are either discriminated against or the people running the Government are incapable of governing. One kept on wondering how in the world the MLP could be so sure that Mr Cheristerfield was involved in the blasts because police are not capable even of tracing and finding a stolen motorcycle of a friend in Laitumkhrah way back in 2018, or my family member's wallet which was picked-pocketed in Motphran since 2015.
Secondly, from what I've observed, the rich and powerful can say whatever they want. It doesn't matter who their words hurt, simply because they are exercising the freedom of speech and expression. But that same

Dream for India @75

By Rajdeep Sardesai

As India enters its 75th year of independence, it's a fitting time to unveil a dream of a 'better' India. An India where harmony prevails over hate; where those who target any citizen for their religion, caste, community, region, are prosecuted and convicted for hate speech. Hate cannot be 'normalised' in any manner or the culture of impunity promoted under the guise of tedious what-aboutery of competing religious identities. A modern progressive society must have no place for exploiting historical scars from a previous century to settle scores in the present. Just throw all those who engage in hate speech across communities into the same jail cell and toss away the keys.

An India where opaque governments do not try and hide Covid deaths, where data is not falsified to create a fake perception that 'all is well'. Why should a citizen's death certificate not provide an accurate description of cause of death? Callous in life, do we have to be insensitive in death too? If there is a shortage of oxygen, admit it rather than try and hide behind medico-legal jargon. And when bodies are found floating down a river, don't engage in a perfidious cover-up by refusing to even acknowledge the scale of death and despair.

An India where access to quality healthcare is not determined by social and economic status. Where a public health system puts the 'aam aadmi' above VVIP privilege to ensure that no one is denied a hospital bed in an emergency. Where we build more hospitals than places of worship, where doctors and not self-styled Godmen are seen as true icons of devotion and compassion.

An India where we lessen divides and not exacerbate inequalities. Where poverty alleviation is seen as the greatest service to humanity. Where when a lockdown leads to mass-migration of daily wage labour, governments don't pretend that the problem is imaginary. Where the gaping digital divide in pandemic times needs to be addressed effectively. Where the lack of a smart-phone or varying levels of technological literacy must not become barriers to education.

An India where the parliament is the ultimate symbol of democratic values of debate, dissent and dialogue and not of unilateralism, obstructionism and rowdiness. Parliament cannot be an extension of a domineering executive where decisions are bulldozed by brute major-

ity nor can it become an arena for stalling key legislation.

An India where governments accused of snooping and violating the right to privacy of their citizens are subject to institutional scrutiny. Where a free and open society must ensure that those who threaten their much cherished democratic freedoms are probed and censured.

An India where democra-

statute books and dissent is not criminalized.

An India which respects its federal pulls and pressures and where an authoritarian Delhi leadership doesn't always know best. Where states are not divided based on party affiliations. Where when the police forces of two states fire at each other, the Centre steps in quickly to reconcile differences. Where local antagonisms do not spill



cy is not reduced to a once in five year ritual that doesn't go beyond casting a vote. Where the elected representative is accountable to the people and is not a feudal lord disconnected from the multitude. Where citizens can engage their leadership in robust interaction and force them out of their cocooned high security comfort zones.

An India where those who are ideological opponents of the government are not

over into a violent conflict, where the nation's peripheries matter as much as the heartland.

An India where constitutional authorities retain their autonomy and integrity by resisting pressures. Where the Election Commission acts as a neutral umpire and not a twelfth man for a party in power. Where enforcement agencies are not misused to settle political scores and where judges are not com-

"An India where those who are ideological opponents of the government are not instantly labelled 'anti-national'; where we do not confuse a majority government with nationhood and realize that true patriotism is not a blind acceptance of government diktat, right or wrong. Where a colonial law like sedition is struck off the statute books and dissent is not criminalized."

instantly labelled 'anti-national'; where we do not confuse a majority government with nationhood and realize that true patriotism is not a blind acceptance of government diktat, right or wrong. Where a colonial law like sedition is struck off the

promised by an over-bearing executive.

An India where our economic policy makers snap out of denial mode. Where the true state of the economy isn't determined by a rising sensex or fanciful V shaped graphics but by the reality

of falling incomes and loss of jobs. Where a shattered informal sector and distressed micro and small industries become the bedrock of policy initiatives and not fat-cat cronies who have little to lose.

An India where protesting farmers are not 'enemies' of the state but sons of the soil who deserve a hearing. Where the angry farmers are not barricaded behind iron nails and barbed wires but instead are encouraged to return to the path of negotiation and conciliation.

An India where a woman isn't assaulted every 15 minutes, where convictions in such cases are swift and assured. Where the family of the victim doesn't have to wait for years for court decisions, where witnesses are not intimidated into changing their testimony, where a woman's dignity is not compromised by typical misogynistic attitudes.

An India where local tribal groups are not denied their rights to land, forests and livelihood, where those who stand up for the rights of the poor and marginalized are not labeled as 'urban Naxals'. Where when an octogenarian priest is arrested, his lifelong commitment to tribal rights is not demonized as terrorist activity with scant evidence.

An India which recognizes climate change as arguably the biggest challenge of the next century. Where policy makers address the ecological crisis caused by reckless deforestation in the mountains and encroachments in fragile coastal areas. Where air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions are not seen as elite pre-occupations but become part of an ever-widening dialogue on global warming and the right to breathe clean air.

An India that becomes an Olympic super-power and not just a cricket obsessed country. Where it isn't another 13 years before India wins its next Olympic gold. Where even as we celebrate our Olympic stars, we remember that only a country with a genuine sports culture will win medals consistently. And yes, an India where next time the athletes are felicitated, their images are larger than those of political leaders!

Post-script: The dream is not just for a better India but a better media too: one which puts sense above sensation and news above noise. And yes, speaks truth to power rather than bends before it. As India enters its 75th year there is so much to reflect on.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

Fragility and stabilization of terror

By Maitshaphrang Khongwir

The recent IED blast that occurred on August 10, afternoon in Laitumkhrah yet again makes us question the inefficiency of the Home Department and the Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui who had apparently stepped down out of guilt and shame or maybe because it was the right thing to do. Few hours after the incident, it seems the general secretary of the proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) comes up with a statement taking credit for the blast while also threatening that this was only a trailer.

A similar IED blast took place in July this year at the Khliehriat Police Reserve, which is a clear sign that the

very beginning, when the Khliehriat IED blast took place. The wake-up call should have been heeded to then and not now. Analyses and preparations should have been an agenda for the Department and the Home Minister so they can nip the issue in the bud and prevent further danger to innocent human lives.

It is also interesting to see that as always, the UDP as a Party had deemed it convenient to stay quiet until they convened the urgent meeting on August 15, during which a decision was made that Lakhmen Rymbui should step down as the Home Minister, a decision he had stated was needed for a fair



outfit must be regrouping and planning more such attacks in the near future. The HNLC also came out with a warning that the media should act as free and independent bodies and publish their releases and statements which they send to them from time to time failing, which they shall also suffer the consequences. This threat to the media though is uncalled for and unwarranted because they play an important role in helping information reach the masses, keeping us informed of issues that we may not be aware of just by sitting at home.

Ironically, it seems that the Intelligence sources had passed on information, alert-

enquiry. As a Party that aims to work for the aspirations of the people of the region, it should have been top priority for them to convene an urgent meeting on the day the when the IED blast occurred or the following day. Perhaps it would have saved the situation from escalating and our youth from going awry and acting like a bunch of hooligans. It would not have warranted a curfew and internet ban that is affecting everyone especially those belonging to the not so well-to-do families including students. As always, this Party likes to keep quiet and turn a blind eye whenever an issue is related to a legislator of their own, but are quick to fire guns when there is

"The HNLC also came out with a warning that the media should act as free and independent bodies and publish their releases and statements which they send to them from time to time failing, which they shall also suffer the consequences. This threat to the media though is uncalled for and unwarranted because they play an important role in helping information reach the masses, keeping us informed of issues that we may not be aware of just by sitting at home."

Government trustworthy?
Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

Power at all costs

Editor,
That a senior political leader of the UDP said that his party will not pull out of the current coalition government shows that the Party doesn't care a damn about what public sentiments are towards this coalition in the backdrop of a recent alleged 'fake encounter' in Mawlai area of Shillong. The regional parties cannot wash their sins away by claiming they are not in the know of things. Neither can they also point fingers at the current Home Minister of the State or on the Chief Minister. If they have the courage and political will they can easily walk out of the coalition and not play with the mood of the common public. Elections are not far away and this incident will surely will be brought centre stage by the regional parties who would try to portray themselves as 'innocent' sheep that are not aware of the acts of omissions and commissions of the MDA government. There is a saying that you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time but not all of the people all of the time..

Yours etc..
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

Voice of a young Khasi mother

Editor,
At the very outset I wish to express that this letter has no malicious intent to any group - government or non-government. I grew up in Mawlai and was proud to say that as residents of Mawlai we are united for a cause. We have seen and heard what has happened in the past few days and the manner in which a surrendered HNLC cadre was killed in what can be termed as a violation of human rights. But we cannot take the law in our own hands because two wrongs don't make a right. Can't we be patient to wait for the judicial probe? Yes, pressure groups are required to keep the government on their toes. Can we not have non-violent protests? Is the show of masculinity and pride required by driving the stolen Scorpio to the cheer of bystanders? Is thug life the way of life? What message do we want to transmit to our children? That might be right? That abuse of power by the government is the way?

papa be caught in a cross-fire when he goes to work?" As a young mother I too am confused and need to reflect and think of the best possible answer to give to these hopeful, yet scared children. The fear psychosis I felt as a teenager wearing a salwar kameez which I deemed comfortable going to college, is the fear I do not want my children to face. I do not want them to face an identity crisis. They need to be clear that they can be both Khasi and Indian and yet be fearless. That one act by the police triggered the sleeping giant and the dormant volcano became alive yet again. The government had better solve the problem tactfully and I still hope in the fair judgement of the law. The guilty should be punished. We need an accountable government. This is not an easy juxtaposed position to take.
People may call me a coward for writing this anonymous letter, but I do not want to give them a reason to vandalise my home for the security of my family... But I want my voice to be heard.
Yours etc,
A concerned mother
Name withheld on request
Via email

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ing the Government and the Department about a possible HNLC attack in the city. According to sources that got in touch with The Shillong Times, it looks like the Home Department did not take any pre-emptive measure, even though they had been warned about the same. If this startling revelation is true, then it is ignominious that the Department did not act on it and that innocents are being targeted. The recent blast, although not a big one, left two innocent people injured. What would happen then if what the outfit stated is true? With the recent incident, it seems the much-anticipated peace talks between the Government and the HNLC may be derailed. If this is the situation then the future looks bleak and there is fear that more innocent lives are going to be at risk.
The Home Minister had also accepted that there was a lapse, as they did not anticipate an attack in the city. This statement from the Minister is banal as this was something that should have been a priority from the

another minister from another party who commits an error. If this Party really cares for the people and the State, it is due time now for them to evaluate their own and criticize them too if they commit errors, or else it'll only be fair to term them as the ignorant ones who cover up for the mistakes of their own but are quick to judge the faults of others.
In addition, the Government and the Home Department needs to analyze these situations and take all information from the intelligence sources seriously, analyse that and be prepared to deal with situation, otherwise terror will strike again and this time it just may not be a minor blast. If the Home Department wishes to and sets their mind on it, I am positive that they shall be able to prevent such untoward incidents from taking place. It is high time now for the Department and the Government to be serious in protecting the citizens, or I fear, the return of insurgency in Meghalaya is not far off.
Email: maitshaphrang.khongwir@yahoo.com

"Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured."

— Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Judges for Apex Court

A nearly two-year-long deadlock has ended over the appointment of a set of new judges to the Supreme Court. Word going around is that India could expect to have three new women judges at the apex court and the first woman Chief Justice there a while later from among this list. These are welcome developments and the last word on the appointments is expected from the Centre soon.

When Chief Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde retired recently -- from where the present CJI NV Ramana took off -- he had visualized a scene of the nation having a woman as Chief Justice in the near future. One of three new women judges stands a chance to be the CJI, though for a short term in view of the age constraint. While there is wide media blitz about this, a question that could arise is, why had no woman ever become CJI in the past 70 years of Independent India; and this, even as women have been accorded equal rights and a few women had become judges at various levels. Of significance is Pakistan where the judiciary is perceivably more independent which is set to have its first woman judge next month and a woman CJI could be a reality there too in later years.

The judicial system in India famously has its flaws. The vacancies in the judiciary are many and crores of undecided cases have clogged the justice dispensation system. A national judicial services commission to draw in the best brains to the judicial system remains a far cry even though the second UPA government had taken a decision, which was sadly not followed up by the two terms of the Modi government. The nearly two years' delay in processing the names for the Supreme Court vacancies was caused by a stand taken by Justice R Nariman as a member of the Collegium since 2019 that a consensus is not possible as long as two senior-most judges -- one each from Karnataka and Tripura -- were not named first in the list. The issue apparently had political overtones. It is good that the issue was overcome. It is hoped that there will be no further delay in making the final decisions, so that the judiciary's work could be carried forward in a smoother manner. It is also important that, considering the heavy backlog of cases at various levels, the rest of the judge vacancies too are filled without further delay.

Glorifying crime extracts a cost

By Patricia Mukhim

August 15, 2021 is a landmark in the history of Meghalaya. It was a day when the keepers of law decided to retreat to a corner and allow the youth who were fired by rage, frustration, belligerence all the transferred variety that shoots up rapidly like uncontrolled blood pressure to vent their rage. One can imagine the situation. It has all the makings of an urban legend. The more one listens to narratives dished out by excited raconteurs who have come out of their homes after a lockdown hiatus and have just felt the winds of freedom blow across, the more adrenalin courses through our blood.

Indeed the fateful incident of Friday the 13th will be locked in our memory banks for a long time. Millions of people across the globe suffer from paraskavedekatriaphobia, or a fear of the unluckiest day on the calendar, Friday the 13th. But no one really knows the origin of that fear. So let's leave it at that! It was the events that played out on Independence Day, (Sunday) which portend dark days ahead for Meghalaya. Sunday was when the slain HNLC leader, Cheristerfield Thangkhiw was to be buried. It is ironic that a person who questioned India's claim over the Khasi-Jaintia land and who had for decades sent out warnings that people should not observe the two national holidays of January 26 (Republic Day) and August 15 (Independence Day) should be buried on that very day. Talk about karma!

The Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) has, for decades beginning 1990's to about 2004 considered itself the sole custodian of resentment against the Indian state which it considers an alien coloniser. This is a privilege they believe frees them from accountability and gives them justification to extort money from the business community of Meghalaya. For nearly three decades Cheristerfield Thangkhiw was the master strategist of the Organisation and its founder General Secretary. Those who have come over ground confide that it was Cheristerfield took all the important decisions on behalf of the Organisation and we know what those decisions were. The HNLC was responsible for the elimination of several business persons; of bank robberies and kidnappings. Those were meant to send a chill down the spine of others so that they comply to extortion demands.

When Cheristerfield surrendered in 2018, not a single criminal case was filed against him and his other colleagues. This must be one of the most fatal decisions of Government of India's surrender policy then. And that

two surrendered militants would successfully contest elections is also a reflection of the exaggerated sanctity of elections in India. Actually election subordinates democracy to the tyranny of representation. There is nothing sanctimonious or democratic about hardened militants joining politics -- many of them without even going through the process of re-socialisation and re-adoption into civil society (because militants violate the laws and live by their own laws). It is no accident that insurgent organisations are outlawed. It is intuitive that

identity group trespassed into the Police Outpost at Mawlai, Mawkyroh, vandalised the gate, made off with a Scorpio vehicle and with INSAS assault rifles and then drove away boldly without police putting up any resistance. After their joyride, with one masked person in the front seat brandishing the weapon in an act of mockery against the state -- the hotheds set the Scorpio ablaze. That was actually an act of terror and the perpetrators should have been booked under relevant sections of law including the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).



the HNLC Chairman, Julius Dorphang even after his surrender and his election as an MLA, believed he could live by his own rules and rape a minor girl, for which he is facing imprisonment today!

While the police action of killing Cheristerfield is condemnable in the harshest terms, we cannot choose to forget that in his own time he caused the death of many innocent people. But of course the public mood is not easily tamed, especially for a highly charged, emotionally volatile crowd. What became a Black day for Meghalaya is that the Police on account of their own actions had to retreat into their barracks on August 15. A senior police officer said the bike rally in Mawlai

Unfortunately while those cops who fled the scene have been booked, the perpetrators are still at large. The tragedy here is that these were not ordinary constables. They are a special force - the SF -10, who as we are well aware are tested to the maximum for their endurance. They are trained in various mind games to help them deal with militants. They are a strike force - commandos - but that they should abandon their weapons and run for cover shows a complete loss of morale, perhaps brought on by lethargy inherent in the system. These series of actions in fact represent the nadir of Meghalaya's governance. After this we can only sink lower.

"The HNLC was responsible for the elimination of several business persons; of bank robberies and kidnappings. Those were meant to send a chill down the spine of others so that they comply to extortion demands."

and the funeral procession that violated all Covid norms and for which anyone else could have been booked under the Disaster Management Act, was allowed free rein, ostensibly for the youth to vent their anger. This seems to be the new model of policing in Meghalaya.

But what took the cake that day was when some masked men who were part of the sol-

What is puzzling is the action of the State Government following this incident. A naive Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma "appealed" to those who stole the rifles to quietly hand them over to the Dorbar Shnong and their names would not be revealed, nor would any action be taken against them. Perhaps the CM forgets he has to follow the Indian Constitution at all

times because he has sworn by it, and that Constitution clearly says that entering a police outpost with the intention to vandalise and steal weapons and a vehicle violates several legal provisions that cannot be easily condoned. One is unsure if the entire cabinet is privy to this act of political naivety. It, in fact, resembles schoolyard bravado.

It is a fine thing for Conrad Sangma to reach the summit of his aspirations -- to be Chief Minister at a young age. But governance isn't easy and leadership is much more than running the day to day business of government. Leadership is to rise to the occasion during a crisis. That's when leadership is tested and the CM has failed this litmus test miserably. The Taliban-like image of August 15 has spread like the pandemic across the country and the globe and everyone wonders what the government was doing to allow this, not on any day but on Independence Day! Sometimes one wonders who the CM's closest advisers are. They don't seem to comprehend that he is not running a tribal council but a government in a state of the country which is also the world's largest democracy. Mr CM, that Scorpio episode is no innocent prank; it's part of a carefully thought-out strategy and you have been outwitted.

What is a grave tragedy is the quiet acquiescence of the regional party MLAs who seem to have become victims of their own success even when their narrative has run its course.

As citizens we are made to feel that Meghalaya is now a private limited company, governed by the rules of pure business and where profits are all that matter. This private company with only 40 shareholders (not sure if Adelbert Nongrum is a shareholder) is running the show and running it with the ineptitude of a bad CEO. Officers working for the company get their salaries and perks anyway. The company has to develop roads and create infrastructure to promote its business. It also has to allow some of the crumbs to find their way to healthcare and education for the workers and their families who are needed to sustain the company.

But let these 40 people now in the government turned private company remember that defeat is the distance between a bed time story and a wake-up call. The former starts with, "Once upon a time;" and lulls the voter to sleep. The second is an energiser that announces a new dawn! Don't live with the illusion that you will sit on those comfortable chairs in 2023.

The little child and the Church

By Joshua Rynjah

In recent days there have been many shocking events in the state which have created fear and chaos both in the lives and in minds of the people of the state. However, there is another shocking incident which has gone unnoticed or even if it was noticed it has gone ignored and it has not been given enough attention. This incident received widespread attention in Garo Hills, where it took place, but it seems that the people of other districts of the state or even of the state capital are not aware of it or have not given it too much thought. This incident is the sexual abuse of a minor girl by a Catholic priest, Fr James Paranathu. The incident took place on July 24, 2021 and the Priest fled after committing the crime but was arrested on August 11, 2021.

This incident is important in many aspects. First and foremost, it is a heinous crime against an innocent child, and the perpetrator must be punished as per law; it is the betrayal and abuse of trust placed by the child and family on the priest. The other aspect of this case is that it is connected to the large-scale child abuse committed by priests that has plagued the Catholic Church all over the world. In most cases the perpetra-

again I do not know if this has anything to do with the lack of government or public coverage of this crime. (These facts are available online from the state government websites).

Many organisations, religious and secular, and many religious members of different faiths from Meghalaya had publicly condemned the death of Father Stan Swamy while in custody. But there seems to be a lack of public condemnation in Meghalaya of this crime of child abuse and a lack of public support for the child and the family. I think the public deserve to know the stance of the Catholic Church with regards to this case of child abuse by a member of its faith. The Congregation of Christian Brothers in India (CCBI) made its stance clear in the sexual abuse accusations levied against its members in 2018 in Meghalaya. At that time the CCBI had instituted an internal inquiry into the accusations, but the findings are yet to be made public. I have read many enlightening articles, published in The Shillong Times, written by religious members of the church in which they highlighted important issues ranging from education to culture to politics and militancy. I hope that they will also enlighten the public on



tors are simply transferred to another country; they escape arrest, trials, and punishment but they continue abusing children and others. In most cases the crime is also hidden and never made public even when the victims and the children have testified to being abused. This has been observed in Kerala and other states in the country. It is to be seen if this case in our state reaches its logical conclusion as per law or if it will be swept under the carpet and hidden from the public.

The other point I would like to raise is that there has not been any public condemnation of this crime or even public appraisal of this case by the relevant government authorities, i.e the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR). The only government coverage I could find online was the press report of this crime given by the East Garo Hills SP and the demand for an Action Taken Report given the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to the SP of the concerned district. (Once again this is only an online mention of this request by the NCPCR so I cannot verify it from the State Government or the SCPCR).

A disturbing fact that I came across is that the accused Priest, Fr James Paranathu, is a member of the Juvenile Justice Board of Meghalaya, and he represents South Garo Hills and by default he is also a member of the State Childline Advisory Board of Meghalaya. I wonder if his membership in such government appointed committees has any connection to the lack of state government appraisal on the criminal case and lack of coverage of this disturbing crime. Furthermore, there are other members of the same church who are also part of the various government committees that he is part of and once

this heinous crime that has taken place.

The final point that I would like to make is that this case is also related to the current affairs of militancy that is taking place in Meghalaya. At present we have one surrendered HNLC leader who has been booked under POCSO and is awaiting sentencing. I hope that the judicial system in its wisdom will serve justice to the minor who suffered at his hands and also spare future generations of minors from the same fate. It is to be noted that this HNLC surrendered leader has not faced any other legal charges of murder, extortion, kidnapping, terrorism etc which were related to his activities in the banned terrorist organization. This absence of legal persecution of crimes is part of the 'Militants Surrender Package'. This surrendered leader of HNLC is being tried in court solely under POCSO i.e as a child rapist and the SCPCR filed two FIRs under POCSO with regards to his crime as a child rapist. (This information is also available in the public domain.)

It is not yet known publicly if Fr James Paranathu will be tried under POCSO. I have yet to come across any public government notification from the SCPCR or State Social Welfare Department on the same. This is my humble observation. But I also want to strongly put forth one point that in both cases of the paedophile priest and the paedophile militant, the innocence of children has been abused, the suffering of children is before us, the future life of children is at stake. If we fail them now then we betray them; we betray justice; we betray ourselves; our beliefs, our conscience and our future generation will be watching and observing how leaders and elders of our society decide on the fate of the innocent.

Letters to the Editor

Learn from history to avoid mistakes

Editor,

The editorial "Crisis of governance" and the special article "Fragility and stabilization of terror" (ST August 2021) are timely and appropriate. Both the editorial as well as the special article by Maitshaphrang Khongwir have dealt with the current crisis in parts of Shillong Urban Agglomeration in totality and have factually brought out the facts and both are a rational assessment of the situation and failure of governance of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance led by the National Peoples' Party under the leadership of Conrad K Sangma. It is a shame for the MDA government not to be able to control law and order only in 11 percent of the Shillong Urban Agglomeration area where only 11% of the population of the city resides. As a result it has caused unnecessary inconvenience to the rest of 89% of the population of the city. The government lost control because it was busy pursu-

ing other matters. As the editorial aptly put it "Crisis of governance is visible in the deterioration of moral standards in the political and administrative system. It happens when there is all-pervasive nepotism, corruption, misappropriation of state funds, absence of transparency and accountability in public administration, lack of respect for the rule of law and the complete lack of ethical behavior in public life. When the political system has lost public confidence and when the institutions that constitute the core of democratic governance structure are imperiled, we have crisis of governance."

Last time I had mentioned that due to insensible lockdowns, business opportunities lost were to the tune of Rs 11,000 crore. This time for five days from August 13, the loss of business opportunities in the two commercial hubs of the city, namely Jewduh and Khyndai Lad works out to Rs 45 crore due to the illogical curfew while data for other areas of Shillong Urban Agglomeration are not available. Who will pay for this loss?

Certainly not the Government of Meghalaya but the taxpayers!

The Government has failed to learn from history about insurgency in the last two decades. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), of the 610 terror attacks in Meghalaya in the last 2 decades (2000 to 2021) the fatalities were 30% civilians, 12 % security forces, 55% terrorist/insurgents/ extremists and 3% were non-specified fatalities. The number of killings is 79.35 % in Garo Hills, 16% in Khasi Hills, 5% in Jaintia Hills and 2% in Ri Bhoi. Out of 610 fatalities 79% were in Garo Hills, 14% in Khasi Hills, 5% in Jaintia Hills and only 1% in Ri Bhoi. From 2018 to 2021 (13th August) out of 9 fatalities 33% were civilians, 22% security forces and 45% were terrorists/insurgents/ extremists. Of these fatalities 78% were in Garo Hills and 22% were in Khasi Hills. It is time the MDA government learns what history tells us and takes appropriate action to secure its citizens

Yours etc.,
V K Lyngdoh,
Via email

Palm oil plantations at what cost?

Editor,

I write in response to the approval and implementation of the National Mission on Edible Oils. This mission plans to introduce, promote and assist in the cultivation and production of Palm Oil in the states of the North East and the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Palm oil is an extremely valuable product. It is used in almost everything that we use in today's modern world. However, the cost of its production, both monetary and environmentally, does not justify the means to this end.

It is a hugely destructive plant. The best example of destruction and chaos of this plantation is Indonesia which produces almost 80% of the world's palm oil. There the forests and bio-diversity has been completely destroyed to make way for these plantations. The home of the Orang-utans, the closest

relatives of us humans have been destroyed and they are now living in crowded reservations and animal shelters. Palm oil cultivations are also hugely water dependent. The natives of the islands are also suffering with constant droughts, forest fires, man and animal conflict, decreased income levels and lower standards of living.

Do we want this to be the fate of our people? While huge corporations like Patanjali make profits by exploiting our native land, we the people will be left with nothing. While they drain the resources of native lands, we are left to suffer the consequences of drought and water shortage. It must be mentioned that people of Meghalaya still lack potable water in their households and our rivers are being polluted at a terrible rate including the picturesque Umngot river which would also be "dammed".

Not to be unduly suspicious but why has the Union Government (led by the "supreme leader") awarded the Patanjali Group (led by

Baba Ramdev) such a valuable contract? Why is this mission being implemented only in the North East and the Andaman and Nicobar islands where a majority of the population is indigenous and aboriginal? And why is this being announced when the region is under violent clashes and still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic? Is anyone going to oppose this? Are we going to offer up the region to these destructive forces?

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya seems to be quite ecstatic with this proposal. Only time will tell if the State and the region will choose greed, destruction and death or sustainable development and the protection of indigenous wildlife and human life.

Yours etc.,
W. Sohtun,
Via email

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"It always seems impossible until it's done."

— Nelson Mandela

The Shillong Times

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Underworld back in circulation

THE ugly era of organized crimes has returned to haunt Meghalaya after several decades and this has admission has come from none other than the Chief Minister of the State. This is not to say that extortion has been wiped out of the Meghalaya and that only underground outfits are involved in this. Several overground organisations also thrive on extortion and those at the receiving end are business people of all shades. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has for the first time confessed that even his cabinet colleagues and other politicians too have been receiving demand notes. This marks the return of an ugly phase in Meghalaya's tryst with militancy. The series of IED blasts have been triggered to drive fear into the hearts of prospective victims of extortion. Fear is what makes people pay. In the past those who resisted paying the militant outfits paid with their lives. Those doing business in Meghalaya have learnt to pay up and recover the money from goods and services by charging a higher rate for them.

Politicians in the government will not have sleepless nights since they are already making money out of every development project and the extortionists know this. It is when extortion begins to hit the hoi-polloi that a counter-revolution against this reign of terror will begin. In Nagaland budding entrepreneurs and small businesses face similar pressure from underground outfits whose pre-occupation is to make easy money from people who sweat and strive to earn an honest living. Extortion thrives when corruption in governance prevails. To eliminate extortion and other criminal tendencies good governance is imperative. And good governance requires citizens' participation. Prof Michael Johnston of Colgate University, USA defines good governance as "legitimate, accountable, and effective ways of obtaining and using public power and resources in the pursuit of widely accepted social goals". This definition links good governance with the rule of law, transparency and accountability, and envisages partnerships between state and society, and among citizens. Good government is also associated with justice and impartiality.

Good governance requires an integrated, long-term strategy built upon cooperation between government and citizens. It involves public participation and robust institutions. The Rule of Law, Accountability, and Transparency are technical and legal issues but are integral to producing a government that is legitimate, effective, and widely supported by citizens, as well as a civil society that is strong, open, and capable of playing a positive role in politics and government. The problem in Meghalaya today is that citizens have "othered" the government and vice-versa. There is no longer a working relationship between the public, civil society and government owing to a trust deficit. And that trust has eroded because government lacks transparency.

Letters to the Editor

Officers don't forget you are public servants!

Editor,
The events that occurred on August 17 at few Mawkyrwat have brought to the fore an issue that has long been festering. That of how those who have climbed the social ladder tend to lose compassion or empathy towards others that haven't. In this regard, the anger exhibited by the people of Mawkyrwat against their Block Development Officer was clearly warranted. I say this not as some mere spectator with little knowledge, but with clear empirical proof of the same. Studies conducted by the Department of Psychology at the University of California by Paul Piff and Dacher Keltner among others, have clearly shown that those with a higher status by virtue of the jobs they hold, or the wealth that they possess have a clear disregard for those that are less fortunate. This is a universal issue anywhere else in the world just as well.

It is pertinent to note that his actions equate to taking away the food that a struggling individual is trying to put on the table considering the present circumstances and hardship we are all in, the outcome of which, is quite obvious to anyone.

Further, it is important to note that this is not an isolated incident but one of many over the years to the point that such officers have developed a reputation of which there is a collective dislike towards them. Most of these officers are surely picked up and dropped off home.

Their tea is brought to them while they sit comfortably in their nice offices with a "Yes Sir" and a "Yes Ma'am" at every turn. Clearly they do not understand, or rather, no longer do so, as to what it means to have to sit on the floor or on a "Lyngknot," while barely making ends meet for their families. Their salaries are deposited to their bank accounts at the end of every month, and even an unprecedented catastrophe like Covid does not affect them the same way it does for those that are less fortunate in terms of employment and wealth. With regards to what that officer did to those people in Mawkyrwat, it was a clear misuse of the respect and privilege that his post commands, and must be met with commensurate action.

The posts that these officers hold come with immense privilege and power, while also commanding great respect to their names. To them I would like to say, carry yourselves accordingly, but remember to treat those that are less fortunate than you with respect. For, the moment you lose that respect, you gain a certain disdain that will surely and gradually take an ugly turn. Your status, wealth, and privilege has given you a new perspective to life as you know it, but in no way does that mean that you treat those unlike yourselves with disrespect. A little empathy goes a long way.

Yours etc.,
Peter W Shylla
Shillong - 22

Dysfunctional intelligence?

Editor,
When the Meghalaya

The Indian constitution guarantees stability and order, so that deeper societal conflicts are prioritized for resolution without the use of unnecessary violence or extreme measures. However, people are developing instincts and counter-tradition to resist it.

Any democratic society would have been outraged by the unjustified extra-judicial killing of Bah Chesterfield Thangkhiw. Vandalism, on the other hand, is not tolerated. However, how does the government handle the situation? The deluded government, paranoid, cynically activated the internet kill switch mechanism. Hence, the following question looms: Was the recent 72-hour shutdown of mobile internet justified?

To understand the context, consider this outrageously simplified analogy. Imagine one puts a reagent in a test tube. A reagent here refers to the slaughtering of Bah Thangkhiw. Next, imagine the hazy mixture that is developed. It is the natural reaction of a democratic society. Then imagine the hazy mixture clears and the precipitate one was looking for settles down. It is when the truth emerges, guilty are punished and peace is settled. One skims it off. This is a natural orderly flow. The attempt to quell the protest with highly intrusive censorship while making no progress towards peace is analogous to pouring water into a test tube while ignoring critical steps. It could either explode or the precipitate will not appear in its ideal form. In our case, it didn't explode. The precipitate will eventually settle but it won't be as good. Verily I believe the internet blackout is unjustified for the following reasons.

First, it is 'speculative' to believe that the internet blackout aids in the restoration of peace and order. In a small city like Shillong, motivated young people could have mobilized and coordinated violent protests even without the use of social media. There had been many examples of protests mobilized by 'hashtag activism' and social media, such as the famous Black Lives Matter movement last year in the US against police atrocity and racism, kids fighting climate change all over the world, and Kashmir protest in 2019 over the loss of special status, among many

'Kill switch'

By TFL Mawlong

others. But to believe that the internet would quickly turn the Mawlai incident into full-fledged social violence in the city is insane. In any case, if a blackout is deemed necessary, a limited shutdown of social media would



have sufficed. Besides, with an internet outage, how will citizens be informed of the critical ground realities of the protest?

Second, internet access is not (yet) recognized as a human right. But in this pandemic internet is most definitely an important enabler of human rights. Stripping away the citizens' access to essential e-services and impeding critical Covid information flow adds to the sense of helplessness, rage, and frustration, and may

the scale and intensity of the vandalism and society's reasonableness before taking such drastic measures. Having said that, we are a reasonable society. We have active and responsible women's groups. And as a

society, we had categorically condemned the stray vandalism of August 15. So, why does the government have to take such drastic measures? If the government can't trust its people why should people trust the government!

Fourth, the government appears to have made a hasty decision that lacked even the most fundamental concepts of public reasoning. The vandalism was nascent, bloodless, and is hyper-localized. And, while ferocious, it is nowhere near the Taliban's

Any democratic society would have been outraged by the unjustified extra-judicial killing of Bah Chesterfield Thangkhiw. Vandalism, on the other hand, is not tolerated. However, how does the government handle the situation?

even constitute a violation of human rights. Thus we may have just witnessed a potential double violation of human rights: the killing of Bah Thangkhiw and the internet blackout amid the Covid crisis.

Third, governments that want to quell violent protests frequently use internet shutdowns as an extreme form of censorship. While peaceful democratic protest cannot justify blackouts, vandalism can. As a result, the vandalism incident gives the paranoid government an excuse to justify its invasive censorship. A good government would have considered

ferocity. As a result, it is unclear why the government must impose a total mobile internet blackout throughout the Khasi-Jaintia Hills as a "last resort" and "preventive measure" under the relevant statutes. The government in its response to these kinds of situations should maintain a degree of 'proportionality' to ensure a fair balance between freedom of people and its legitimate interests.

Perhaps the government believes that a 72-hour blackout will have no significant socio-economic consequences! But we are a digital economy! Apart from the massive boredom experienced by

thousands of desperate youths as a result of the twin horrors of micro-lockdowns and internet blackouts, a lot must have happened during the 72-hour internet outage. Many observers may not notice the 'economic loss,' but I assure you it is significant enough to certain boot-strapped startups or budding internet-based businesses in our budding gig economy. For example, because I was in my home-town and equipped with just a Smartphone, I lost no less than 900 US dollars during the blackout.

The 'opportunity loss' because of the internet outage could have jeopardized the very existence of tens, if not hundreds, of such budding startups in Meghalaya. Running a startup is far more complicated than any 9-to-5 job. Existential questions are constantly confronting every entrepreneur. Any shortfall in quality, one wrong move, one failure, or one loss of opportunity could mean the end of a startup, or at the very least a long period of loss-making.

Then there is a 'social loss' when we impede the internet-based essential services such as mobile banking, education, e-delivery, and Covid related information flow, as well as when consequently the trust in government machinery erodes. And, lest we forget, a 72-hour blackout is a massive enough disruption for thousands of students taking the NEET exam next month and studying online.

My Meghalaya's inept leadership in the economic, academic, and political spheres is as perplexing as ever. Our political leaders, I am sure, do not want to learn the "values" of our constitution through delusional and violent pedagogies! But ignorance is a heartless bitch. And lastly, evidence suggests that our leaders are not 'solving' any major 'problem of people,' but rather, their 'inability' is the 'burning problem for people.'

To conclude, the political leadership should begin rebuilding trust by acknowledging how far from decency, fairness, and justice, the politically sedated and uncivil police machinery has taken you this time around. They should remind themselves of how sacred our Constitution is. And before the government reactively uses the internet kill switch next time, perhaps it should pause a bit and think hard if the internet blackout could quell the protests?

Dead men tell no tales

By Arbin Dhar

This article is written with deep love, respect and concern for the people of Meghalaya, its traditional institutions and in the general interest of 'Ki Khun U Hynniewtrep'. The Mawlai Town Durbar (MTD), a conglomeration of headmen of Mawlai Pyllun, had met on August 17, 2021 and taken decisions which I hope these wise elders had given serious thought to in view of the prevailing situation in this part of Shillong and of the consequences of such decisions. The first decision was not to take part in the Peace Committee formed by the Government under the Chairmanship of the Dy CM unless the murderers of Cheristerfield Thangkhiw were first apprehended and brought to justice. They have demanded an enquiry by the National Human Rights Commission into the Cherister killing. The Peace Committee initiated by the Government is a smokescreen, so no big loss. But there is a growing circle that believes Cherister knew too much and so had to be killed. Cattle smuggling across the border, illegal coke production, illegal mining and transport of coal, the active participation of surrendered HNLC cadres in other shady activities of this MDA Government are some of the alleged illegal activities carried on under the supervision of Cherister. These operations were allegedly run in connivance with state police personnel and the proceeds went to the highest level in the police organisation and in the political echelons that controlled the police. Cherister was in the thick of this but he was also talking to the IB, the SB and other intelligence agencies to whom he might have unwittingly spilled the beans. He had to be silenced. Our former Home Minister and the present DGP will be of great help in the investigations by the State Human Rights Commission into the August 12 incident.

The next decision of the MTD, however, defy reason. They decided that the safety of vehicles plying on the GS Road would be the responsibility of the local organisations and the Dorbars and that no policing was required. This means keeping police out of law and order duties in Mawlai. No sooner was this news out when the Governor's cavalcade was attacked and stoned at Mawlai Lewrynghep. The stone pelters are unknown but the stones came from the direction of Lewrynghep, hence the Dorbar of that area will have to take responsibility. Fact is, the Governor is a representative of the Central Government. Luckily he was not in the vehicle but rest assured this incident will not be taken kindly by the Home Ministry. So are the assurances of the MTD just empty words or can they swiftly apprehend the culprits to prove they really have control over their respective jurisdiction?

The death and funeral procession of Cherister has demonstrated that there is strong public support for HNLC terrorists among the youth of the area. This has emboldened the HNLC to retract its offer to surrender and to renew its call for all-out war on the Indian state. The incident at the Mawkyrwat Police outpost; the seizure of arms and vehicles of the police confirms the growing suspicion that Mawlai is fast becoming a base and recruiting centre for these militants. Flushed out of its camps in Bangladesh, the HNLC will now seek to operate from within Indian territory; from areas where it has public support and sympathy. From incidents of August 15, Mawlai provides the base for all future HNLC operations. Since the MTD has declared that henceforth no police presence or operations will be allowed within the Mawlai Pyllun area, is that a wise decision? Is this an open declaration

by elders that henceforth Mawlai is outside the territorial jurisdiction of Indian law and its law enforcers? Are people of Mawlai and their Dorbars in open support of terrorists who seek to destroy the sovereignty and integrity of India? This, it appears, is the message conveyed by the MTD! Let's be clear; no nation will ever allow its internal security to be compromised. This could result in the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) being imposed in Meghalaya like in other militant affected NE states. This means armed soldiers will patrol every corner of Mawlai. Is that what we want? The MTD will then no longer have to deal with our own police but with the army who will be operating under the draconian AFSPA. I hope the MTD is fully aware of the consequences of its decisions and are prepared to deal with the outcome.

It is obvious by now that the killing of Cherister was a premeditated fake encounter. People are demanding that the murderers be brought to justice and rightly so. But who is the real culprit here? The man who actually pulled the trigger might be a mere trigger happy SOT constable following orders of those who planned the murder. Who had to gain the most from this fake encounter, the constable behind the weapon, or those who sent him to do it? From all the corruption and mis-governance that this MDA Govt has been indulging in with the active assistance of its police force, there are strong grounds to believe that the Chief Minister, the former Home Minister, and the DGP are the persons responsible for all the troubles that erupted in Shillong since August 12 morning. I strongly believe they had the most to gain from Cherister's murder. Hence they are persons who we must demand to be interrogated. We must demand justice for the murder of Cherister but let's not forget that Cherister himself was a former terrorist and killer (definitely not a martyr or a patriot as painted by some emotional hotheads). He was a surrendered militant responsible for innumerable extortions, kidnappings, murders and what made widows and orphans of our own people. The only difference between him and his murderers was that he was a surrendered outlaw while they are people elected to uphold the law. For this betrayal they deserve to be punished.

This incident will soon be forgotten. Public memory is that short. Governance and public service will, however, continue to demand the services of the Dorbars and the Rangbah Shnong. We still have Covid to fight and to figure out how to reopen our schools and to bring normalcy in our day to day lives. The Dorbars and Government will need to mutually assist each other since both work for the welfare of the public. One can understand public anger at what happened at Mawlai Kynton Massar on August 13 but life must go on. The Dorbars cannot afford to get carried away by emotions and to be seen as patrons of banned terrorist organisations. Dorbars don't operate under the dictat of militants and neither do they provide shelter to such banned organisations. Dorbars provide security to their people; to afford their citizens the protection of the law of the land Dorbars must work with the administration and the police. Let common and the wisdom of ages prevail, let not the emotion of youthful inexperience chart our future course of action. Let's allow maturity, wisdom and social responsibility to direct our actions. This write-up is given in the best interests of our people and with deference to our traditional Dorbars. I hope it is taken in the right spirit and in the best interests of the state and the Jaitbynriew.

to the other members all are literally confused over their management of portfolios.

Fixing intelligence requires a firm response from the public for reforms, analysis and sharing of raw data not only on criminal networks but on unemployment and school dropouts. This is another factor which makes or breaks national security. The state government should start preparing a strategy directed towards confidence-building measures with various stakeholders.

For the Meghalaya Police and their leadership, a refreshing look would be Kishalay Bhattacharjee's book 'Blood on my Hands' on how extra-judicial killings undermine democracy and in order to gain public trust, police manuals and leadership, using 'carrot and stick' policy has to be back on the drawing board because Singham and Dabang look good in movies not in reality.

Yours etc.,
Cordelia Sawian
Via email

A Moment of madness!

Editor,
A tumultuous MDA at the moment looks far-fetched from the otherwise potent looking government at the helm just a month back. A 'moment of madness' is all it takes to throw the whole government off balance. A hurried press conference called by the CM immediately after his arrival from Delhi to clear the air on that uneventful August 13 encounter, provides us with more questions than answers. We have not seen

a more "bewildered face" from the CM than the one we saw in him facing the press that evening. It is one thing to come to the aid of your fellow ministers on the floor of the House, but a different ball game altogether to try fend off something that was as "inhumane" as that incident. What is even more embarrassing is the then Home Minister who claimed to be unaware of the whole exercise, considering that the Police department comes directly under him.

Further, a new advisor to him, who also happened to be an ex-cabinet minister seems to be harping more on his own government's failure than offering him any source of advice at all. Even more distressing, is that a major constituent in his coalition, is more content on distancing itself from the present pandemonium than acting like partners in tow. It is true when they say, "The position at the top is the loneliest place ever." Surely, how unpredictable our politics can get? Whatever the outcome we hope the common man will not be at the receiving end but rather when all else fail, may common sense prevail.

Yours etc.,
Lawrence Phierlain Sumer,
Via email

Will Police Dept answer?

Editor,
I would like to express two concise points through your esteemed daily. First, I would like an answer from the Police Department on whether they have the ability to safeguard the citizens of the state or do we have

to purchase bullet proof jackets. The episode showcasing how police personnel fled their vehicles leaving behind their arms in the safe hands of black masked goons has shaken the whole of Shillong. The general population is still in a confused state of mind on why there hasn't been any arrests of these militants. It's also infuriating to know that the Police haven't been able to recover the stolen guns till date. Will the Police be held responsible if someone gets shot at by those stolen rifle(s)?

Second, I wish to ask why the democratically elected Chief Minister of the State of Meghalaya has to request with folded hands to the dacoits to return the stolen rifle(s). Further, why should he state that the name of the dacoits would be kept anonymous and will also be exempted from any charges. Does this not betray the oath taken by him that ensured that he is to keep the constitutional and legal principles above everything else? Does this mean that if anyone loots a police rifle and returns it quietly, he/she will be exempted from any penalty?

If the Chief Minister lacks the courage and will to take strong action against the enemies of peace then he should definitely come out clearly and say that upfront.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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Lakshadweep: Where Blue Whales Sing

Scientists have recorded blue whale songs for the first time in Indian waters off the Lakshadweep islands in the Arabian Sea. Their presence in Lakshadweep demonstrates that the waters in this archipelago are rich and productive. Experts say whales singing is a likely signal that the area is their breeding ground for certain parts of the year. Mongabay India correspondent Sahana Ghosh reports

One hot 2019 afternoon in Lakshadweep, as marine mammal scientist Divya Panicker sat engrossed in listening to recordings retrieved from underwater sound recorders, she came across low blue whale moans, amid a cacophony of a rooster crow.

Panicker described the acoustic experience with the giants as "one of the most thrilling parts" of her study — the first to document blue whale songs in Indian waters in the Lakshadweep archipelago in the Arabian Sea.

She speculates that there were at least two blue whales singing at a time. "The song is made up of three notes and ranges between 30 and 100Hz. I sped up the songs several times to bring them within my hearing. It was quite wacky listening to low blue whale moans with a rooster crowing in the background," Panicker reminisced.

Analysis of recordings from late 2018 to early 2020 revealed that blue whales were present in Lakshadweep waters during April and May, just before the southwest monsoon season.

"Although we know blue whales occur and are singing in these waters, we do not know if they are travelling through or feeding in these waters. One of the next steps is to carry out dedicated visual surveys in April and May over the next few years to understand their behaviour and some prey sampling during this period," Panicker, a doctoral student in oceanography at the University of Washington, told Mongabay-India.

Because blue whales track productive waters, their presence in Lakshadweep, which is on the cusp of major tourism and infrastructure expansion, demonstrates that the waters in this archipelago are rich and productive.

"The reef, lagoon, island and open ocean are intricately linked and any development and infrastructure plans for the islands need to be carried out within the ecological limits of this fragile ecosystem. It is important to understand their ecology and distributions to draw up a science-based species-specific conservation or management strategy," adds Panicker.

Marine mammal expert Dipani Sutaria, who studies humpback whales in the Indian waters, said blue whale songs, belted out by males possibly for finding a mate, likely signal that the area is a breeding ground for whales during certain parts of the year.

"All cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) use sound to forage (find food), navigate and communicate. Sound travels a little over four times faster in seawater than it does in air, and in the absence of light, cetaceans have evolved perfectly to use sound as a way of seeing. Cetaceans are highly social and baleen whales such as blue whales and humpback whales produce different kinds of vocalisations, some of which can travel thousands of kilometres," Sutaria said.

"They make high-frequency sounds for locating prey and the other kind of vocalisation is a song; or a repetition of units. Only the males sing in both blues and humpbacks and are considered to be related to mate selection and increasing the opportunity to find mates, a sign of the breeding season.

"So if you have singing whales in an area at a certain time of the year, it means this area is likely a seasonal breeding ground," Sutaria told Mongabay-India.

Sutaria's team found a blue whale singing off the Kerala coast in the Arabian Sea in May 2021. "Our team is trying to explore the presence of humpback whales off the southwest coast of India using passive acoustic monitoring, and in May 2021 we found a blue whale singing (including some foraging calls) from the same 'acoustic' population in the Arabian Sea.

"Our finding fits in with the Lakshadweep observation that blue whales were present/move through the southwestern waters during April and May," Sutaria, member of the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group, added.

MELODIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus* spp.), are an endangered species globally. While Antarctic blue whales



(*B. m. intermedia*), reach up to 30 meters in length and weigh 200 tonnes (approximately 33 elephants), populations of smaller pygmy blue whales, growing up to about 24 metres and weighing roughly half of Antarctic blue whales, are known to occur in the Indian Ocean, the smallest of the major oceans on Earth, but the fastest-warming tropical ocean.

Pygmy blue whales (PBW) are found throughout the Indian Ocean, including the northern Indian Ocean (NIO) and the Arabian Sea.

Blue whale vocalisations offer clues to scientists about the identities of these mammals. Based on their distinct song types, scientists say four possible populations of pygmy blue whales, comprising one or two subspecies to date (*B. m. brevicauda* and *B. m. indica*), occur in the Indian Ocean.

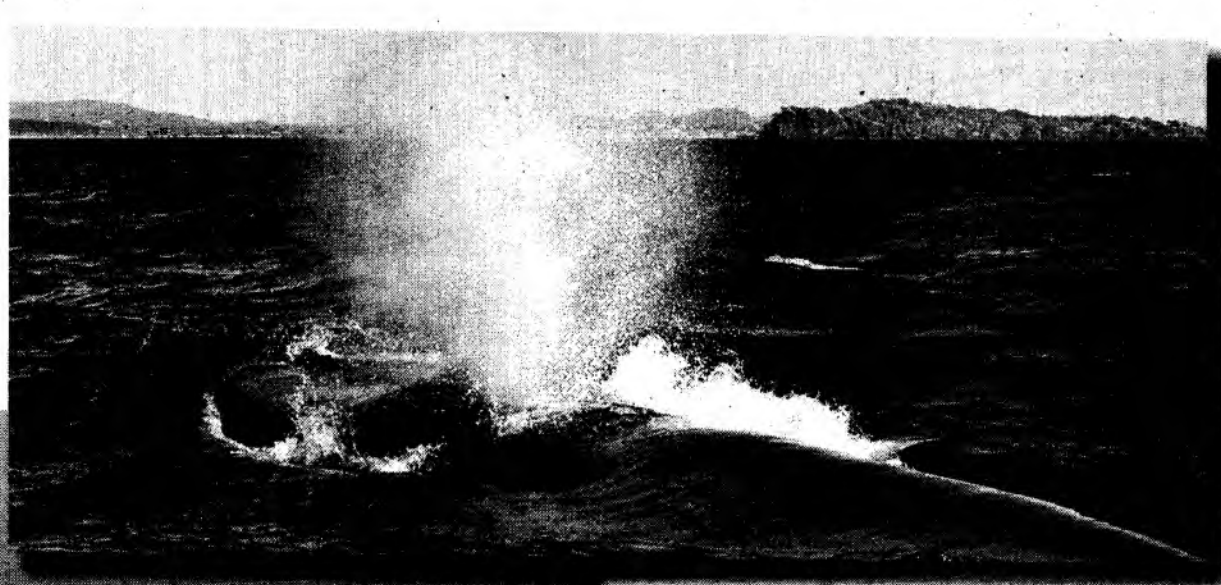
The so-called "acoustic populations" of pygmy blue whales (PBW) in the Indian Ocean include the NIO PBW (sometimes referred to as 'Sri Lanka song', likely *B. m. indica*); northwest Indian Ocean; southwest Indian Ocean (sometimes referred to as 'Australia song'); and southeast Indian Ocean PBW populations (sometimes referred to as 'Madagascar song').

The songs recorded in the Lakshadweep waters, says Panicker, were similar to those recorded by Abigail Alling in Sri Lanka in 1980, currently called the northern Indian Ocean blue whale song. These songs have also been heard off the Chagos archipelago (southern end of the mid-oceanic Laccadive-Maldivian-Chagos ridge).

"Usually, blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus* spp.), have very consistent song patterns but interestingly in some of our recordings, they were dropping the last unit. This has not been reported for this song type and for future work it would be cool to understand why they may be doing this," she shared.

The study extends the known range of this song type (northern Indian Ocean blue whale song) a further 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) northwest of Sri Lanka and is particularly significant because Indian waters are a habitat for blue whales but there is very little dedicated research on these animals.

The Lakshadweep research was carried out by the University of Washington in collaboration with the Wildlife Programme at the National Centre for Biological Sciences. On-field dive support was provided by



Tauktae were the most recent ones.

RESOLVING AMBIGUITIES TO CONSERVE CETACEANS

Sutaria points out that despite centrally-sponsored conservation plans and regulations that cover blue whales in the Indian waters, ambiguity on issues needs to be addressed for science-based conservation of cetaceans.

"There is ambiguity on issues such as habitat protection; mechanisms to mitigate mortality from sound pollution, habitat loss and entanglements. Also, marine tourism such as dolphin watching needs to follow national guidelines; protocols should also be included in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972."

"At the moment marine wildlife tourism is open to overexploitation and habitat loss. Would dolphin tourism, for example, come under the ambit of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), or the commerce or tourism ministry," Sutaria asked, adding that the WPA, 1972 also needs to be updated, along with the species lists under the schedules. All marine mammals are Schedule 1 species under the Act, receiving the highest protection.

She underscored the importance of more research to bridge the knowledge gap on cetaceans in India to effectively inform conservation efforts and policy. "The importance of detailed ecological research to inform conservation, and to increase opportunities for researchers to bridge the knowledge gap is vital in India.

"One area that can be of immediate use is setting up marine stranding networks and studying these strandings from biological and conservation contexts, to better understand the species biology, their life at sea and if possible the cause of death."

"There are protocols to follow in the case of dead animals (handling the carcass) and live animals. You can find out if an animal has got caught in a certain kind of fishing gear or if it has died naturally. There could be reasons such as anthropogenic causes (underwater noise), disease outbreaks or climate-related factors," said Sutaria who co-manages the scientific content of *Marine Mammals in India*, a cetacean sighting and stranding database that covers 1016 records from 1748 till the present.

For example, in Lakshadweep's remote islands with limited connectivity, consistent help from local fishermen, divers, the government administration and the people of Lakshadweep helped Divya Panicker in setting up her study. She believes that putting recorders and listening for whales in several areas across the Indian waters would reveal a lot more information on not just blue whales but also other whale species such as humpback and Bryde's whales.

Regional cooperation is key, especially to study and conserve marine mammal populations that range across different countries, says Panicker. The Arabian Sea Whale network and the marine mammal network of India are examples of such cooperative networks.

But countries like India are under intense pressure to extend protected area networks to meet biodiversity protection goals such as the proposal by global policymakers to extend protections to at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems around the world.

The ambition to scale up coverage and effectiveness of protected and conserved areas is expected to play a key role in discussions in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework due to be agreed upon at the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15) in Kunming, China, in May 2022. (Mongabay India)

Lakshadweep Scuba Adventures (Anwer Hussein, Syed Abdulla Koya, Amanullah VP, Abdul Raheem PP).

Acoustic recorders were deployed by divers on the reef flats near the underwater slope. Over 13 months, recorders were retrieved and redeployed every three months or so — retrieving the data, changing batteries, and analysing low-frequency bands to look for blue whale vocalisations.

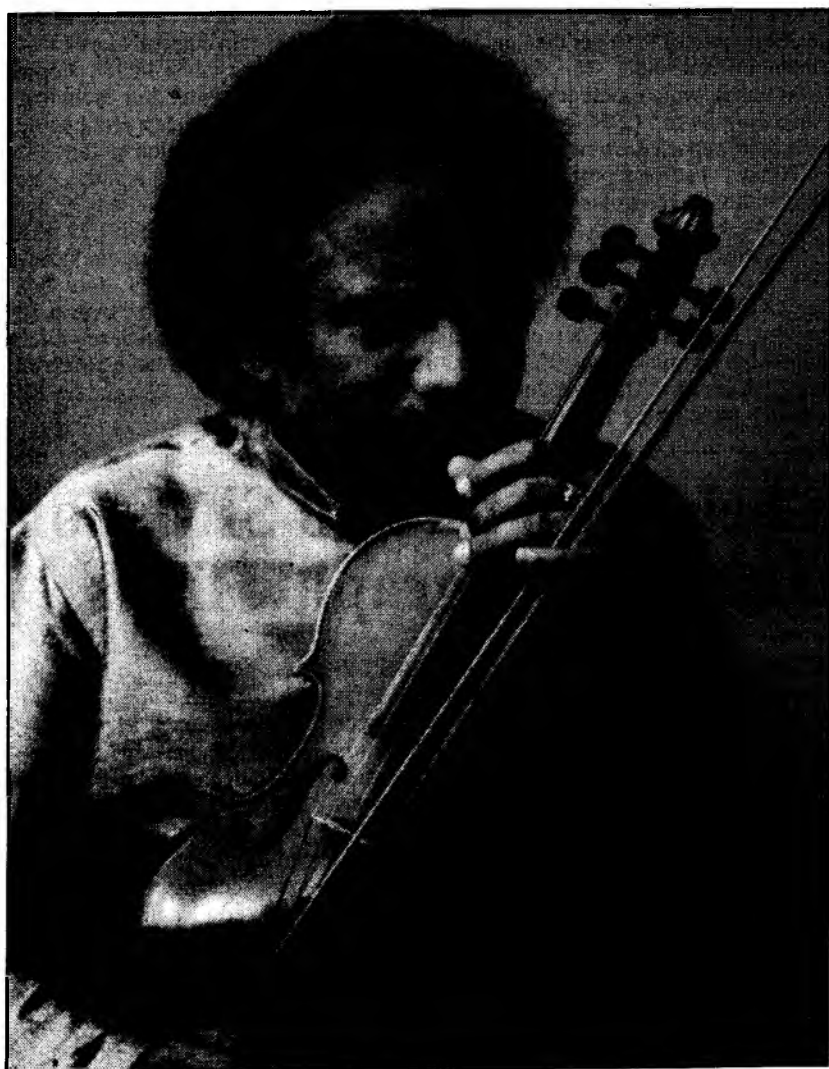
Panicker elaborates that blue whales consume dense patches of prey to grow to these large sizes. "They feed on some of the smallest animals in the ocean — zooplankton and shrimp — which are prey to a whole host of pelagic fishes and mammals. Therefore, studying blue whale distributions gives a glimpse into the most productive and rich habitats in the Arabian Sea that are heavily influenced by monsoonal cycles and a changing climate."

According to the latest report by the IPCC, the surface of the Indian Ocean has warmed faster than the global average. Globally, anthropogenic warming is very likely to further decrease ocean oxygen concentrations and this deoxygenation is projected to persist for thousands of years, the report warned.

Commercial whaling had nearly wiped out blue whale populations globally in the 20th century and they are only now slowly recovering from these impacts. They are long-lived animals, having one calf at a time with long gestation periods. "The populations in the Arabian Sea were persecuted by whaling ships in the 60s and 70s as well. Some other threats whales face in this densely populated region are ship strikes and a changing climate," explained Panicker.

For instance, an important blue whale feeding area near Sri Lanka is right next to a major global shipping lane. Deep-sea exploration and mining plans will generate constant noise across vast areas and can also impact blue whale populations.

"We also know from recent studies that there are changes in the monsoon patterns and an intensification of the frequency and duration of cyclones — this is likely to have major impacts on blue whale prey and in turn will affect whales as well," she said. Usually calmer than the Bay of Bengal, researchers caution the Arabian Sea is getting more active with the rapid intensification of cyclones due to climate change; cyclone Okchi and



'Music develops us emotionally, intellectually and spiritually'

By Sukant Deepak

Trained in classical Carnatic music tradition and Western classical music, violinist, composer and conductor Dr. L Subramaniam believes understanding other musical systems can be a great window to acquaint oneself to different cultures.

"And that goes a long way in ensuring mutual respect, harmony as well as happiness among people," he tells IANS.

The violin virtuoso, who gave his first public performance at the age of six, and has almost single-handedly introduced violin to Indian musical sensibilities has been since 1975 doing solos across the world.

The artist, who released two videos on August 15 - 'Youth Anthem', featuring Kavita Krishnamurti and Shaan, and the National Anthem for the Ministry of Culture, says, "I am also working on the Mahatma Symphony to celebrate the 75th year of India's Independence. It will

be performed with a symphony orchestra & choir."

A strong believer in introducing children to music early on, he believes that the same will always enrich young minds. "I have always felt that music is very essential for emotional, intellectual, spiritual and philosophical development of a person."

The artist, who started the Lakshminarayana Global Music Festival (LGMF) in 1992, to honour the memory of his father Professor V. Lakshminarayana, stresses that besides continuing the music festival globally, they are also planning to bring in more youngsters and give them a global platform to showcase their talent.

"LGMF is also involved in education through the Lakshminarayana Global Centre of Excellence to educate and provide recognized degrees to the students in BA, MA and Ph.D. programs focusing on a more practical approach to music. We have been a bridge between the gurukul

system and the university education system," says Subramaniam, who studied medicine at Madras Medical College.

Talk to him about his children Ambi and Bindu, who have a band that blends western components with Indian classical music, and he asserts, "It's always a pleasure to know your children are continuing the legacy of the family. I hope and pray Bindu & Ambi take both performance and music education to a higher level."

Subramaniam, who has also composed film scores for movies including 'Salaam Bombay', 'Mississippi Masala' besides being the featured violin soloist in 'Little Buddha' and 'Cotton Mary' was recently part of HCL Concerts' 'Transcendence: Music for the mind'.

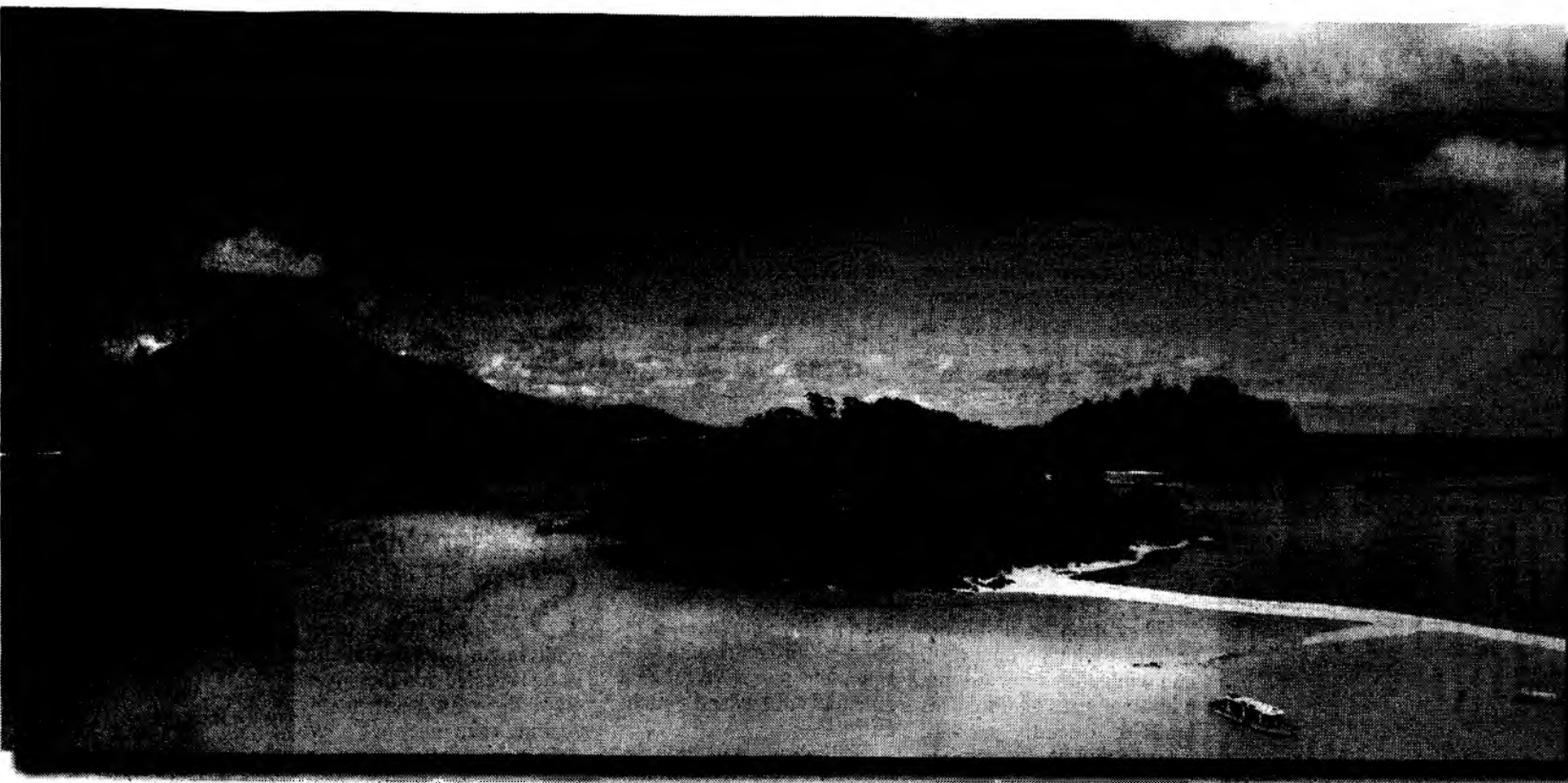
Stressing that Indian culture, one of the oldest in the world, must be preserved and promoted for the future generations to come, he says, "I hope more organisations like HCL come forward to promote our culture."

Talk to him about the lockdowns, and he says that the initial period proved to be quite sad as he lost a lot of friends and great musicians owing to the pandemic. He adds, "We took strength from music and created audio/video projects without going to the studio and by using the technology available to us at home. We managed to bring out a lot of videos with artists from different parts of the world. The first digital LGMF also took place in January 2021, which featured major artists from all over the world. I also managed to finish books which will be very useful for music education, especially for graduate and post-graduate students."

But is he missing live performances?

"Of course, live experience can never be replaced. When you perform in a major concert hall for different audiences, what you derive from the audience responses is indescribable. Not to mention the auditorium acoustics." (IANS)

Island hopping in Seychelles



With 115 islands, the Seychelles archipelago brags of postcard-perfect beaches that are sure to have visitors drift away to the paradise. But there's more to Seychelles than its many beaches; the nation sprinkled across the water off the coast of East Africa, conceals many surprises for its explorers. Here's a quick glance at what one can do:

UNLEASH YOUR WILD SIDE

Seychelles is inhabited by a unique ecosystem above and below its waters. Home to a range of lush rainforests and 250 bird and 2000 plant species. Seychelles' wildlife is as enchanting as its beaches. The nation's national bird, the black parrot, is also the rarest avian on the planet. This rare species can be spotted by those with a keen eye while exploring the Vallée de Mai Natural Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the island of Praslin. Besides, the Vallée is home to the world's largest population of endemic coco-de-mer, a flagship

species of global significance as the bearer of the largest seed in the plant kingdom.

Next, spot giant tortoises that roam freely around the sandy coves of Curieuse Island, where preserved wilderness and granite beaches set the right ambience for these gentle creatures.

Get a glimpse into the rich marine life with a Semi-Submarine ride from Eden Island on Mahe. Cruise along the most spectacular underwater reefs of Seychelles and spot a variety of sea life swim alongside. From corals, colourful seaweed, sea meadows to schools of fish. We challenge you to keep count of the unique species you spot!

ADVENTURE, AHOY!

Along with its beaches, Seychelles holds many adventures and the best way to experience them is by enjoying a trek in the region. Nestled in Mahe, Morne Seychellois National Park, the largest national park, stretches across the mountain range Morne Seychel-

lois, the highest peak. Indeed, the reward of completing a hike is the panorama one enjoys from the top. The summit affords unparalleled views of the capital of Victoria.

The fourth largest island in the archipelago, La Digue is a haven for those seeking some time amid nature to unwind. Apart from exploring the island on a bicycle or an oxcart, diving and rock climbing are popular as well. Although, it is the La Pass to Grand Anse Trail, which emerge as a clear winner. The trail passes through French colonial houses, woodlands, marshy areas, finally leading to the Grand Anse Beach.

ENJOY A TRYST WITH CULTURE

The vibrant culture is a result of the many cultural influences. Meander through the markets in Mahe, or simply visit during the Creole Festival to soak up the flavours of the region. History buffs will love the quaint town of Baie Lazare, in Mahe. The 18th-century neo-gothic Baie Lazare Church is a

delight to behold. It also presents a serene panorama of the area. A visit to the National Museum of History is perfect for a time-travel expedition to understand the history while glancing through the paraphernalia on display.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Just as its culture, Seychelles' cuisine features a healthy amalgamation of flavours from its three adjoining continents to form its very own distinct palate. For a gourmand, a tour through the historical sites such as the Jardin du Roi offers an opportunity to sample homemade dishes at a quaint cafe enveloped by the buzz of a typical Seychellois life.

The stunning sunsets of Seychelles are undeniably its finest feature. And they are best enjoyed along a delicious Creole meal, which consists of preparations made with fish and shellfish, heightened with coconut, mangoes and breadfruit served with a bed of garden-fresh vegetables. (IANSlife)

The Fine Art Of Personal Branding



By Siddhi Jain

When COVID-19 struck in 2020 and the first national lockdown was announced, author Mainak Dhar says he observed so many people's careers get impacted - "losing jobs, feeling insecurity and sometimes, having offers rescinded".

As the author began to use his corporate sector experience to help people on LinkedIn, he found himself repeating common themes, such as doing what fits you, learning how to differentiate and how to be more intentional in showing up at key 'moments of truth'.

As he began to contemplate collating a book on this, especially for those early in their careers, the author realised how important it was to be more intentional about building an authentic, differentiated and compelling personal brand as a cornerstone of their career success.

"At that time I had been working on a thriller, the next instalment in my 'Sniper's Eye' series, but I decided to put that aside for a few months, realising that helping young people navigate their careers, especially at a time of uncertainty, was more important. That's how 'Brand New Start' was born," says the IIM-Ahmedabad alumnus about his latest book. Dhar is a self-described 'cubicle dweller by day and writer by

night', and is the author of over 15 books including the 'Alice in Deadland' series, '03:02' and 'Sniper's Eye'.

His most recent book 'Brand New Start: Fast-Start Your Career with the Power of Personal Branding' aims to teach you that a lot of success at the start of your career hinges on how well you understand, articulate and present the most important brand you can work on - 'You'.

"The experience of writing 'Brand New Start' and connecting with readers through it was a great one. It combined many things I enjoy - writing, connecting with people and making a positive impact to them. The most rewarding thing for me was hearing back from readers who found ideas and insights in the book to help them do better in their careers or make choices which better fit them. I do plan to write more books which aim to equip young managers to succeed in their careers."

"I have recently signed up with Bloomsbury for a title which aims to equip new leaders make a more positive impact to those they lead and to themselves as they grow in their leadership journey. That book is still work in progress and I expect it to release sometime in early 2022," he said.

Dhar also says that several more books are in the pipeline, across genres. (IANSlife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, AUGUST 22, 2021

Mars trine Uranus on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. The year will bring many achievements. There will be good progress made in your job. The doors of prosperity are opening for you. There will be continuous flow of money. Money will be received from many sources. You can also acquire movable and immovable property. You can buy land, flat, vehicle or jewelry. Everything that was struck up till now will gather momentum. But you need to take care of your health. Students will excel in studies and get admission in institutes/ courses of their choice. New job opportunities too will keep coming. You can get involved in new romantic ties leading to marriage. There will be peace and joy in family relations. You will share special bonding with your partner.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will earn lot of money. New job offer will come all of a sudden. It is going to be a week full of entertainment and prosperity in the family. You will progress in the right direction. You will be successful in acquiring the desired gains on account of your valor and dedication. Your days will pass well. Your enthusiasm will also increase. Your partner will prove to be the most special person in your life. You will also take care of your health. Some immediate medical attention may be required. Money will flow like water. You will purchase some luxurious items for your house hold needs. Do not trust strangers in financial dealings. Otherwise, you will be taken for a ride.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Some tension may arise in your married life but it will be timely resolved with the intervention of family members. Things will improve in the right direction. You could also fall in love with a person working in your office. You will also excel at your workplace. Futuristic plans and schemes will be put into practice. Your bosses will have lot of expectations from you. You will get encouragement too. Income will be good. You will also get rewarded for your loyalty. By the grace of God, you will be able to acquire accomplishments. You will also remain in the spot light. Hard work done now will pay rich dividends later on. You will also get cooperation of your friends and elders which will prove beneficial to you.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will remain peaceful. Your relations with family members will remain joyful. You will also see a major improvement in your life. New job opportunity will come all of a sudden. Your professional contacts will start paying dividends. Some work related trip will give you sudden gains. You will feel elated at getting a work order from abroad. It is also a good time for love matters. They will come closer. Students preparing for competitive exams will get success. Emotionally you will feel strong. You will also participate in a function. Your problems in personal and professional life will get resolved. Though some persons might be gentle towards you, your close one will trouble you. Keep a strict watch on their activities. You will also make a plan to visit a religious place.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It is a favorable week. You will feel a lot better now. Some works that had been struck for a while now and giving you sleepless nights will finish without any obstacles, much to your relief. Your confidence will also rise. You will take part in professional activities. Your popularity will also rise. Your communication skills will be second to none. Your perspective towards life will become more positive. You will also enjoy good bonding with your mate and will have some unforgettable moments. You will also get credit for your hard work. You will take steps towards in life. You will also help needy people a lot. You will prove to be a true friend in hour of need.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is a success granting week. You will manage your financial resources well. You will receive lot of money. You will get success in marriage, career and even studies. Your popularity will peak. Your peers and bosses will help you a lot. Your work will get finished on time. Some doubts that you have in your mind will get solved. A difficult situation will also get averted due to your timely action. You will also come closer to an influential person. He/she will get all the credit for change witnessed in you. You will also plan a change of job for better future prospects. You will fall in love with an ex-flame again when you will meet all of a sudden. You will revive your relationship in a big way. You will take full advantage of a favorable time period.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Destiny will support you in a big way. You will get umpteen opportunities to rise in your job/business. Your financial position is going to be strong. You will also finally look after your health and devote a lot of time to keep yourself fit and healthy. You will also develop interest in your meditation, prayers and exercise. You will surpass all difficulties in life with ease. You will also do some part time job to manage your rising expenses. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. Your mood will be good because of which your work will also be good. Your business will provide lots of profit. You will also go on a religious trip with family. And will receive a good news from somewhere.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

It is time to move ahead in life. You will enhance your skills and acquire new knowledge related to your job. Your work will also come in for lot of praise. If you are making plans to go abroad for job or higher studies, it is just the appropriate moment. You will also discover something new and exciting in your romantic life. Your work will get fulfilled. You will also have profits in your business. You will face fierce competition but will still achieve victory. You will be open for new business ventures in partnerships. Your financial position will be strong. If you are not let down by your own people you will achieve success in life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will get victory in your tasks. And will be successful from all sides. Your popularity will peak and you will earn lot of respect. You will also open up and meet lot of new persons. Your work will get done easily. Your interactions with a special person will increase. It is going to prove beneficial for you. Your family will also support you a lot. You will work less and earn more. It is going to be an ideal situation for you. You will spend some unforgettable moments with your spouse/partner. But avoid any discussions which may spoil the things.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is time to enjoy and have lots of fun with your loved ones. You will be busy at weddings and parties. Your income will increase. A job-change looks a possibility. You will also plan to take up your ambitious project and will receive the loan easily from banks. You will work overtime to realize your dreams. There will be an improvement in your attitude and you will be much loved. But some persons will be jealous of your success. You will also save yourself from a big problem. You will also share amazing bonding with your mate. Love birds will have a wonderful time. You will also get a wonderful news from somewhere. You will plan to go on a picnic with family. And will have mental peace.

Capricorn: (December 24 - January 20)

You will receive a pleasant news from a close friend of yours. It will lift your spirits and make you cheerful and happy. You will remain busy in your work. You will also get connected with people of your liking and tasks. You will also get full support of your spouse. You will also care a lot about your near and dear ones. You will get a good job offer. You will also earn lot of money and will try to improve your life status. Your attitude towards life in general will be positive. You will be much liked and loved. A new person is coming in your life to fill it with colors. You will exhibit a more principled and diverse perspective. Worries relating to children's studies, career and marriage will get resolved.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will make progress in your job. You will have monetary gains too. You will be empathetic and consider other's sorrow as your own. Your compassion and love for needy ones will come to the fore. People will be seeing a different side of your personality. You will be strongly attracted towards love and romance. You will purchase a new vehicle or electronic item. Success will be finally yours. You will manage to keep your family members happy. Your neat and clean image will win you new admirers. Achievements, aims and hopes which were a dream will now be realized. Students will get success in competitive exams. You will get peace of mind. There is no need to prove yourself before others. You will take important and tough decisions in business.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will be able to find a solution to a vexed issue with your wisdom. Time is very favorable and rewarding. You will be blessed with wonderful health. You will earn lot of money. New job opportunities will come. You will also get new responsibility at workplace which you will perform well. You will listen to other persons. Your friends will share their problems with you which you will solve with ease. Your popularity will rise and you will earn lot of respect. Your partner will remain a big source of strength. Elders will bless you. You will also begin construction of your house. An overseas trip is likely to take place. New projects are taking shape. You will also interact a lot and will meet some of your known acquaintance. You will feel happy after helping your people. Exercise caution in financial matters.

Career options in Health Sector

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the career opportunities for students is in the healthcare sector. Students who get good marks in secondary level examinations mostly choose science as many want to appear in medical entrances and become doctors. If we explore health sectors then we see many opportunities apart from being doctors.

Career options and opportunities in the health sector include degrees like MBBS, BDS or courses like Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Nursing, Lab Technicians, Pharmacists, Physiotherapist, Optometry, Audiologists, Speech Pathologist, etc.

Apart from these there are also options in animal health. Students studying science in senior secondary with biology are eligible to appear in different entrances or interviews for getting admissions in above mentioned courses.

Though we know about medical entrance in the country, still let me write a few lines about the main entrance which is being held in the country for selecting students for their admissions in medical colleges in the country. NEET stands for National Eligibility cum Entrance Test which is the single-level national exam carried out for medical aspirants enabling them to seek admissions to medical courses across different medical institutes of the country.

From the year 2020 onwards, the exam has emerged as the only medical entrance exam that has to be qualified to seek admission even to AIIMS and JIPMER institutes thereby scrapping the multiple entrance exams that were carried out previously at state levels. The National Testing Agency (NTA) will conduct the NEET exam on September 12, 2021. Though it was supposed to be held earlier but due to pandemic dates was postponed.

NEET is an offline test carried out in a pen-paper mode, standing as the only medical entrance exam at Under Graduate level. In order for students to be able to appear for NEET, the minimum educational requirement is clearing class 12 board examinations from a recognized institution from science stream. A minimum of 50% must be scored. One must mandatorily qualify the examination to take up a seat in medical institutes at the undergraduate level. NEET score is also needed to get admission into private medical colleges in the country though they may have other admission processes but appearing in NEET is important. Qualifying NEET enables one to take up a seat in MBBS/BDS/AYUSH courses and many other such related medical programmes.

As NEET is a national level entrance exam, aspirants need planning and preparation. Some may take admission in coaching centres but systematic studies and preparation is needed. Aspirants who are interested to join medical colleges like Armed Forces Medical College also need to appear in NEET.

As the seats in government colleges are limited, many private medical colleges in India and abroad try to get students by publishing advertisements. My request to all students and guardians to be careful before taking admission in private colleges as it involves a lot of money. One must get proper guidance before taking admission into private institutions.

ENTRANCE UPDATE

CDSE: A Combined Defence Services Examination will be conducted by the Union Public Service Commission on November 14, 2021 for admission to the courses at Indian Military Academy Dehradun ; Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala; Air Force Academy, Hyderabad ; Officers Training Academy, Chennai(Both male and female). The CDSE is conducted by the Union Public Service Commission and aspirants may apply on or before 24th August via online mode.

CAT: CAT (Common Admission Test) is conducted by IIMs (Indian Institute Of Managements) for its admission to Post Graduate (PG) Programmes and Fellow Programmes. Candidates aspiring to get admission to the Indian Institutes of Managements need to appear for the Common Admission Test. Apart from the IIMs, various other Management Institutes use the CAT score for shortlisting the candidates. Aspirants may apply till 15th September.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjank@gmail.com for any career related queries)

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity."
— Amelia Earhart

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIV No. 13 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 23, 2021

Bengal, bifurcation

The signs of a new push for bifurcation of West Bengal are evident. The demand from various activist groups in North Bengal districts got a fillip with the BJP state leadership "justifying" the demand two days ago. This could pose a new headache to the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government and to the Centre as well. The "justification" for the demand came from BJP state chief Dilip Ghosh who stated in Jalpaiguri that the "neglect" of the region and failure of the Trinamool Congress government to bring about development led to the revival of demands for bifurcation of the state. His allegation was also that successive governments neglected the developmental aspirations of the people of West Bengal and the northern region in the seven decades of Independence. The problem with West Bengal is the huge concentration of its growth in Kolkata, per se, which is making it difficult for other regions to develop. West Bengal, thus, is among the least urbanized states. Most of the industries and job-opportunities are Kolkata-specific.

The violent agitation by the Darjeeling Hill people for a Gorkhaland state in the 1980s ended up with the formation of an autonomous Hill Council there. It could not help meet the aspirations of the region's people. Yet, the movement led by Subhash Ghising eventually died down. Now, other players from the northern districts are also seeking a separate state with the inclusion of some districts of Assam. This is bound to raise problems for the central government and the BJP as well, as the party is ruling Assam too. At the same time, the BJP will be game targeting Mamata Banerjee and her highly successful Trinamool Congress after the major drubbing they gave to the saffron party in the state assembly polls. It is important that a nation must ensure development of all regions and states should do this as well. In the Indian context, the eastern region as a whole remains under-developed. There are some significant efforts at present to develop the North-East as in the attempt to spread the railway network and strengthen the national highways. Development is a long process and cannot be achieved in a short spell. At the same time, West Bengal and other states cannot escape from the responsibility of reaching out to various regions rather than concentrating fully on state capitals. In fact, in the new developmental mode, Tier-2 cities are favoured by entrepreneurs to set up units because of the relatively lower costs for land and other infrastructural requirements.

Letters to the Editor

Seeking calm amidst the chaos

Editor,
The events of the past few days have been a really difficult pill for us to swallow. No one can say for sure what has caused such chaos in our city. Yet we all know each conflict has its own roots. There is a school of thought which believes that the incidents of the 13-15 August might have been scripted. The point they raise is that we are possibly nothing but just victims of the 'destabilise North East' project. We are tribals and our reactions to situations are usually emotional, fiery, intense, passionate or angry on most issues. Hence the need of the hour is for us to remain calm, composed and most of all to remain peaceful. That is not to say that we should remain quiet and say nothing at all. We are a small community and we should all be together in any movement that matters to each one of us. However, to me our approach in all this should be serene and temperate and not to resort to violent means to achieve our goal.
We are all reminded of what happened to Jammu & Kashmir and how with a Resolution and a Bill the Government scripted a historical change in the status of Jammu & Kashmir two years ago. On August 5, 2019, the Union Home Minister introduced a proposal in Parliament for ending the

special status of Jammu and Kashmir and its bifurcation into two Union Territories. Jammu and Kashmir had a special status granted under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution which was immediately abrogated. We too are unique in the administrative structure among all Indian states. The entire state is covered by the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India under Article 244 of the Constitution. This provides us autonomy in the administration of these areas through Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) and the Regional Councils empowered to make laws in respect of areas under their jurisdiction, which cover land, forest, cultivation, inheritance, indigenous customs and traditions of tribals, etc. and also to collect land revenues and certain other taxes. The Sixth Schedule infringes upon rights of the non-autonomous residents no matter how long they have resided in the state. This has been a thorn in the side of many who are not in favour of the Sixth Schedule. Now that they are in power, are we giving them reasons to make Bills and Resolutions against the Sixth Schedule status to be passed in Parliament? This letter is a reminder to each one of us right including honourable representatives, the bureaucrats, the bourgeois, the NGOs not to fall into the trap of this destabilise North East project.
In the past we have seen a similar problems where

there were rumours of international support to disrupt the law and order situation in the North East. The same problem perhaps is looming large; not of international sponsorship of terror but of destabilising Governments in the North East. The recent border issues between North Eastern States causing instability are small examples. So the call for us is not to open the door to unwanted chaos allowing central forces to be deployed or to give the impression that there is instability in governance of the state. Let us resort to peaceful means of agitation. These types of agitations too can have positive results for us in our several demands not only from the state but from the central government too.
Our state historically also has the distinction of being politically unstable, so let us not allow the prevailing situation to turn into a blame game and to turn it into a means for more political power. No one wants central governance or President's Rule.
Let our leaders take responsible decisions not only for personal benefits but for the benefit of the general public, not decisions to cause anger but decisions that can unite a society. We should be very factual in our approach. The state needs the central government for various development projects but in the endeavour to appease the Centre let us not forget the sentiments of the autonomous people.
We are also reminded that

we are a very young community with very little history. It is difficult for us to compare ourselves with the intellect of mainland India which has a long history of civilizations - one of the oldest in the world. We have well educated leaders in our society from individuals to leaders in the Durbar Shnongs and NGOs, so let us think with our minds and not our hearts; let us not seek only media popularity but let us think of the future generations. Let the law take its own course; let us be patient no matter how displeased we are.
Yours etc.,
Wanjop Warbah,
Via email

Whither public safety

Editor,
The IED explosion at Laitumkhrah conspired and executed by the Hynniewtep National Liberal Council (HNLC) has brought about much unrest in the otherwise peace-loving city of Shillong. Since then, a lot has transpired, including the shocking gunning down of the former General Secretary of the militant group, Cheristerfield Thangkiew, in an operation carried out by the state police. Both the state government and police have drawn a lot of flak for the alleged killing. The event has paved the way for a series of violent protests across the city after the deceased was laid to rest. The Greater Shillong agglomera-

tion was then promptly put under curfew and internet ban to prevent matters from escalating further.
But the question that arises is - was the same degree of promptness and foolproof plan put in place to avoid the entire ordeal in the first place? At the centre of all this debacle is the Home Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui. His portfolio is far from being spick-and-span. He has had his fair share of shortcomings and political scandals. In addition, the Laitumkhrah IED blast does not stand out as an isolated event during his tenure. Rather, it is reminiscent of the IED blast that shook the Police Reserve in Khliehriat in July this year. Rymbui had then very strongly asserted that there had been no failure on the part of the intelligence agency, further attributing the swift arrest of those responsible for the blast to the efficiency of the intelligence unit.
One would assume that after such an incident the Minister would have deployed all possible measures to prevent the occurrence of another event with disastrous consequences. The Laitumkhrah blast, however, proves otherwise. It seems as though no stringent and foolproof strategies were laid out to prevent the unfortunate state of affairs that now cripple the capital city of Meghalaya.
While it is imperative to book the people who masterminded the blast, mortally injuring the former leader of the HNLC isn't the most vi-

able solution. It is no surprise that hundreds thronged the streets to protest the extreme step taken by the police. Many have deemed the killing of Thangkiew as an act of barbarism, with some even considering it an outright violation of human rights, requiring a fair and judicious trial. One cannot help but ask if the ordeal could have been avoided altogether in the first place had the Home Minister carried out his duties judiciously? And with word going around that Rymbui failed to prevent the blast despite adequate warning from intelligence further complicates the situation.
The Home Minister admitted to intelligence failure. In fact the manner in which the situation was handled was hasty. All the backlash has led Rymbui to offer to resign from his post. The Chief Minister, however, has thus far refused to accept the resignation. But the question remains - how do we trust a leader who has repeatedly landed himself in hot soup, and much worse, acknowledged a severe lapse in a system crucial to the safety of the subjects he vowed to serve?
Yours etc.,
Gunjan Dhar,
Via email

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

Reimagining the Police: Who's greasing palms in Meghalaya

By HH Mohrmen

more efforts were put in by the Police Departments in the different districts of the state such as opening up its own Facebook page to disseminate necessary information from the Department to the public. So much was done to improve the image and public relations but has the relationship actually improved?
From fear to distrust
No doubt the efforts are not wasted and there are improvements in police-public relations, but a lot more needs to be done by the Department to improve this one important aspect of their service. Police need to improve policing work from being someone who is waiting for the public to make mistake and then punish them, to being a friendly policeman in the neighbourhood, trying to prevent crime. Punishment and issuing of challan is not the only way to ensure that a citizen does not commit

"The Police Department is basking in false glory, believing in the wrong narrative that the HNLC is a spent force and the number of militants has dwindled. The outcome of the two incidents is more tragic when police personnel deserted their vehicle and even abandoned the arms that were in their custody."

the same mistake. The need of the hour is to instil in the public the need to respect the law.
However, the public also have learnt to distrust the police. Again this is inculcated in young minds in their growing up years. The challenge today for the police is that public don't trust the police and that makes policing a much more difficult task. If the people that the police are supposed to serve do not even trust them, then how can they even start serving? The police need immediate image rebuilding. They need to win over public trust. They need to improve their image in the public perception from being somebody that the citizen avoids meeting to being friendly police personnel. They need a paradigm shift in their approach. It is imperative for the Department to reinvent the image of its personnel from that of a fear-instilling and suspicious policeman to a friend of the public.

From suspicion of police to hatred
How has the image of a policeman fallen from someone that people cannot trust to being a target of hate? The Government is to blame for the fall from grace of the police. There are aspects of policing which make people hate the police. One such feature is when Government engages policemen to check overloaded trucks on the highway. Everyone knows that it is the place where money exchanges hands. Police stations, police outposts on the entire stretch of the highway have personnel and sometime even private citizens and Home Guards to collect money from passing trucks.
In fact, a posting in these locations is the dream job of every policeman, irrespective of rank. It seems like collecting money from the trucks has become part of police

work in these stations and outposts and the public too have learnt to live with it. The public too are now oblivious of what is happening. They turn a Nelson's eye to what is going on in these police stations and roadside check points. Neither do the media see the forceful collection of money from the trucks as an illegal act that needs to be challenged. It has reached a point where as the saying in Pnar parlance goes, 'de sarom da uwa peit ia uwa eit,' meaning that the person who sees someone defecating in the open is more ashamed than the one who does it.
That the Government allows this to happen in broad day light only emboldens the police to continue this daylight robbery. This has drastically eroded the public trust and respect for the police. That police regularly collect money from the trucks has showed the state police in a bad light. The police have themselves and the Government to blame for this loss of face.
From Police to Palm oil
Oiling or greasing the palm is associated with illegal exchange of cash. The Palm oil story in Meghalaya has raised many questions in the public mind. Why this sudden fascination for palm oil here? The State Government's pliant attitude to the central government dictate is a sign of weakness. Just because the central government has a scheme to promote Palm oil production does not mean that it is good for the State. There is only one reason to protest the proposed Palm tree plantation for Palm oil production. It will only encourage monoculture and monoculture kills biodiversity. Without biodiversity the future of the world is at stake.
hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

Munching more than one can chew !

By Rudi Warjri

Double; double toil and trouble is Shakespeare's characterisation about the overweening ambition of Macbeth to become King of England. In Meghalaya and in particular Shillong it applies to the sufferings due to the corona virus pandemic; the fear due to the IED blasts and the obfuscation over the encounter killing of an ex-militant. All these have converged to produce a psychological virus of distrust and scepticism in the ruling dispensation. The biggest casualty here being the restoration of normalcy.
Health care even in normal times was a big challenge for the Government. The pandemic filled its plate of woes even more. The encounter killing enraged the public at large because the victim was ailing and done in the presence of the helpless family. The slain ex militant turned martyr overnight. The plate is overfilled.
Now public confidence and trust in the Government is at its nadir. Adding to the double trouble was the resorting to a curfew on top of a curfew and the internet ban. The question that arises foremost. When will the Government have the confidence and courage to lift the restrictions and restore normal life
India's leading journalist, Shekhar Gupta, in his latest cut the clutter has featured Shillong but for the wrong reasons. Among the videos which went viral about the violence and arson was the brandishing of rifles by a group of youngsters in a black Scorpio reportedly snatched from the police. The youngsters dramatized it like the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. And all this has come on the heels of the recent Assam-Mizoram border clashes which resulted in the death of six policemen from Assam. To the rest of India it is like the resurgence of insurgencies in the Northeast.
The turmoil in Shillong woke up the political rulers from their slumber. The sequel was a series of statements about a judicial inquiry, peace committees, appealing to the rifle-brandishing youngsters to return the rifles and go unpunished etc. In the drama was also the letter from the Minister in charge of Home (Police) addressed to the Chief Minister which says he should be relieved of the Home portfolio with immediate effect. Ludicrously, his sense of guilt was not large enough to resign as a Minister. And the Chief Minister as the lead dramatist chose to remain equivocal about relieving the Home portfolio from the erring Minister. The scenario resembles a comedy of errors in a Shakespearean play.
Compounding the intrigue is the notification from the Superintendent of Police (DSB) East Khasi Hills which reads, "It was learnt that there are some officers and constables who set their display profile and some posted on their WhatsApp status the black flag or comments against the Meghalaya Police showing sympathy to late Cheristerfield Thangkiew is uncalled for...." This circulated on social media.
The three topmost rulers of Meghalaya were away in Delhi when the killing took place. The Chief Minister, his sibling Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister were 'Partying' at the opening of the Delhi office of their party. Partying because it was a celebration! Partying because it was all about the Party and nothing to do with governance. No pun intended. I am curious to know what was served as beverages, drinks, snacks and cuisine normally done during any celebration. A bite of laddoos or who knows even toasting with champagne and caviar. I am even more curious to know who paid for the travel expenses, accommodation etc. Any claim as part of traveling allowance (TA) granted to Government officials needs investigation.
Partying in Delhi while Shillong was in turmoil

forces me to be quotidian. "Nero was fiddling while Rome was burning." Nero was also notorious for being a persecutor of Christians. And since Meghalaya is predominantly a Christian state, it is the fellow Christians who suffered the most while the partying was going on in Delhi.
For a political party from Northeast to achieve recognition as a national party is an attainment. Not an achievement though because it depends on how it benefits the people of Meghalaya. The other question is the attainment of national recognition, at what cost? The website of the party mentions nothing about financial resources. So it is natural to assume that the only source of funding for the party would be Meghalaya. Meghalaya because the party is heading the coalition in Meghalaya and most of the lucrative departments are with the Ministers from the party, even if it means squeezing blood from stone for the sake of expanding the party empire. It has also been like 'old wives tales' about illegal coal mining being the principal source of the party funding.
The hype about the only party from Northeast with national recognition is really going overboard. Mamata Banerjee started her politics from scratch. She formed her TMC party after enormous experience and exposure before going national. Similar is the case of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. In fact, Stalin of the DMK with all its history has been confined to Tamil Nadu. Similar is the Akali Dal from Punjab. Instead the young rulers of Meghalaya are desperate about being more of a Delhi politician than first taking care of Meghalaya. The unstoppable obsequious tweets to the Modi-Shah duo in particular says a lot about where the priority lies.
Professionally, it reminds me of the Peter's Principle. I am sure the Chief Minister who is supposed to be a product of a Management School knows more than me about the Peter's Principle which is that people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their "maximum level of incompetence." In the present context we are most concerned with the level of competence in the governance of Meghalaya.
The impact of the pandemic itself was more than enough to keep the Government on its toes. Yet there is so much apathy! There's no data yet on the catalogue of sufferings. Loss of income by farmers due to poor sale of produce; starving families of daily labourers who couldn't go to work; barbers who couldn't open their saloons; hawkers not able to sell their wares; loss in sale by shopkeepers and vendors; loss by cinema owners and entertainment groups; general unemployment caused to the youth etc. Caterers who supplied food to the Corona centres have not been paid and some are forced to close down. Think about the unquantifiable loss to children because schools are closed. Apathy also because of rumours about profligacy in the purchase of extravagant immovable and movable assets.
We have a leadership which munches more than it can chew. The psychological virus of distrust and scepticism is most palpable in Shillong which falls under the Hynniewtep entity. Besides, its own ministers belong to parties which are fragmented. Practicing the politics of survival and expediency at all cost becomes unavoidable. It affects the solidarity to stand together on any debatable issue. Ultimately, it is the Hynniewtep people who have to pay the price, be it in development or in getting undivided focus from the leadership in resolving a crisis with conviction. I don't want to sound proclai but truth must be told.

“Innocence is thought charming because it offers delightful possibilities for exploitation.”
— Mason Cooley

The Shillong Times

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From coal, coke to palm oil
ON August 9, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi announced a new national initiative on palm oil production to help increase farm incomes. The scheme named National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP), for self-reliance in edible oil involves investment of over Rs 11,000 crore. This scheme is essentially to incentivise production of palm oil to reduce dependence on imports and help farmers cash in on the huge market. An audacious plan except for the fact that the areas chosen for this scheme will be India's north-eastern states and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands due to the conducive weather conditions in the regions.

Earlier, palm oil plantations did not yield the kind of income that farmers expected. To alleviate this fear of price fluctuation the Centre says it will fix the cost of raw materials needed for palm oil production, along the lines of minimum support price. In case prices of the raw material drop, the Government will pay the differential amount to farmers through direct bank transfer. The assistance to oil palm growers for planting material has been increased from ₹12,000 per hectare to ₹29,000 per hectare. This all sounds good except that monoculture is deleterious to bio-diversity. It upsets the natural balance of soils. Too many of the same plant species in one field area rob the soil of its nutrients, resulting in decreasing varieties of bacteria and microorganisms needed to maintain soil fertility. At a time when climate change is threatening to derail our lives, palm oil plantations will only hasten that calamity. As is usual there is much hype that oil palm farmers will be provided financial assistance and will get remuneration under a price and viability formula. The north-eastern states will get 90% assistance from the Centre, hence the quick acceptance of the scheme by Meghalaya's Chief Minister.

The tall promises by the Centre might entice our farmers here to take to palm oil plantation since they might not be fully informed of the dangers that monoculture poses to this bio-diverse region where almost 65 % of India's forests reside. It is possible that forests might also be cleared for palm oil tree plantation. That would have disastrous consequences for Meghalaya and the region as a whole. What's surprising is that a Chief Minister who speaks of climate change and climate justice would readily agree to a disastrous form of agriculture. This may not impact those with plans to take up residence outside the state or abroad but it will have irreversible impacts on those whose lives and livelihoods are tied to this state. Moreover the environment actually encompasses all living beings and not just trees and forests.

The clandestine rise of oil palm plantation in Meghalaya

“Without environmental sustainability, economic stability and social cohesion cannot be achieved”

- Phil Harding (Archaeologist)

On 23rd July, 2020 Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the eight North-Eastern states to support the plan to expand palm oil plantations so that India can be self-sufficient in its palm oil needs, as the country's need for edible oil increases. On 3rd August, 2021, The Shillong Times reported that Baba Ramdev's Patanjali may develop an oil palm plantation in Meghalaya, "despite serious environmental threats." This raised alarms at a terrifying decibel across the state. Furthermore, Patanjali has plans to expand its oil palm plantations in Meghalaya and other North-Eastern states, through its daughter franchise, Ruchi Soya, and aims to do so, on a massive scale. According to Business North-East, the government is aggressively pushing for increased cultivation under the special program on Oil Palm Area Expansion (OPAE), and for the next five years, 12 other states, as well as the North-Eastern states, will see the expansion of oil palm cultivation supported by a budget of 300 crore rupees.

India is one of the biggest consumers of palm oil in the world and imports billions of rupees worth every year. These imports have a direct impact on the scale of the deforestation and habitat destruction, due to oil palm agriculture, in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

Over the past few years, India has been working towards boosting its own production in order to reduce its dependence on these imports. Factors such as India's water-dependent agricultural system, small landholdings and a long gestation period required for oil palms to fully mature, have been hindering progress. Yet, India is committed to the large-scale cultivation of oil palms, adding to the pre-existing issues of water scarcity and triggering mass conversion of bio-diverse forests into mono-cultures of oil palm plantations. No matter where the oil comes from, huge areas of forest cover will be sacrificed for it. Moreover, in an economy like India, whose majority depend solely on agriculture, either directly or indirectly, having mono-cultures of oil palms, which has a gestation period of 4-5 years, will have a huge impact on the

economic security of farmers and those dependent on them, along with the already persistent problem of water shortage and an observed persistent erratic monsoon.

Palm oil is pressed from the fleshy fruit of the oil palm tree, *Elaeis guineensis*, a species native to Africa that also thrives elsewhere in the humid tropics. Palm oil has been used since the 1990s in processed food industries due to its low costs and high yield. The fruit of the tree is harvested for its oil; the flesh of the fruit is pressed for oil for food production purposes and the core of the fruit is pressed separately and mainly used for soaps, industrial purposes as well as in processed food. The health benefits or drawbacks of the oil has been long debated, however there can be no debate that the development of palm oil plantations is a major driver of deforestation. This is affecting some of the world's most bio-diverse ecosystems, severely degrading the environment and depleting the carbon sinks of the world that has led to catastrophic impacts on forests, endangered animals and a major contributor to climate change.

North-East India is part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot which very much includes Meghalaya. National Geographic defines biodiversity hotspots as, "areas that are both rich with life and at high risk for destruction." This definition means that the majority of plants that exist in a biodiversity hotspot are endemic, that is, they do not exist anywhere else on Earth and whose very existence is at risk. National Geographic further states, "to be classified as a biodiversity hotspot, a region must have lost at least 70 percent of its original natural vegetation, usually due to human activity."

According to The Meghalaya Biodiversity Board's website, "the state (Meghalaya) also represents an important part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot which is one of the 4 bio-diversity hotspots present in India and 34 in the world. The state of Meghalaya has been identified as a key area for biodiversity conservation due to its high species diversity and high level of endemism."

The Meghalaya Forests and Environment department further states in its website that, "the forests are also home to rare and endemic plants and animals. The undisturbed primary forests are

botanically well known and extraordinarily rich. Forests of the state shelters more than 3500 flowering plants, 352 orchids, 40 bamboo species and about 800 medicinal plants resources. The state is part of the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot of the world. There are about 40 endemic plant species and 75 threatened plant species found in Meghalaya. Amongst its rare species are the insect eating Pitcher plant (Nepenthes khasiana), Wild citrus (Citrus indica) and Pygmy Lily (Nymphaea tetragona). The Rhododendron Forest at Shillong Peak is a major attraction for tourist during blooming period (February to April)."

We have all recently felt the hurt and loss due to the clearing of the great trees that flanked the roads of Upper Shillong, which were felled for road expansion. This garnered considerable media attention due to the visual impact and the loss of biodiversity and heritage. This is a foretaste of what we, as a community, will be faced with, if the plantation of oil palm trees should be allowed to proceed without opposition. Oil palm plantations require huge areas of forest and as tropical forests are cleared for oil palm plantation, carbon is released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is the greenhouse gas that is having the greatest contribution to global warming.

Climate change poses a threat to food production and quality, potential increases in diseases transmitted by insects (such as Lyme disease and malaria), air pollution and other public health issues. Evidence also suggests that rising temperatures and reduced air quality are also harmful to mental health. In 2016, the U.S. Global Change Research Program found evidence that extreme weather events have also been associated with increases in aggressive behavior.

Palm oil production also has the potential to devastate our rivers and other natural water systems. The process to produce palm oil requires significant amounts of chemical input, which if not treated appropriately will increase pollution, and especially water pollution. Furthermore, the waste produced from the processing of palm oil also poses a huge problem. For every 100 tonnes of oil palm fruit that gets processed, 22 tonnes of crude palm oil is produced but 67 tonnes of

waste remains. This waste is known as POME or palm oil mill effluent and consists of palm kernels and husks, as well as branches and wastewater. The waste effluent must be heavily and thoroughly treated before it can be released back into the water cycle. These impacts are in addition to the deforestation and loss of endemic species of plants and animals outlined earlier.

As per news reports, Ruchi Soya has already completed field surveys. Various MoUs have already been signed by some North-Eastern states with Ruchi Soya however, no public knowledge of a similar agreement has been signed with Meghalaya so far. Moreover, as per a tweet by the Chief Minister of the state, Conrad Sangma, the Union Cabinet, on Wednesday, 18th August, 2021, approved the implementation of National Mission on Edible Oils which is promising to promote oil palm cultivation with a focus on the North Eastern states and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. All this indicates that the wheels are in motion towards the development of significant oil palm plantations across Meghalaya.

If palm oil has to be produced in Meghalaya at all costs, the government must ensure that there is a commitment to a long-term sustained investment in proper waste treatment before permitting any oil palm plantation and processing in the state. Novel waste treatment technologies such as REGEN (Waste Recovery and Regeneration system) should be mandated, to convert all the solid and liquid bio-masses from the palm oil mill into valuable, reusable, eco-friendly products. Shortcuts and commercial interest-friendly approaches that neglect the developers' responsibilities with respect to the environment are not the way forward. If a similar approach to that taken in other projects in Meghalaya such as the illegal coke plants, the dumping of chemical waste into Ranikor river, the recent embarrassing garbage crisis in Jowai, is also expected to be taken for oil palm plantation, then the whole idea of allowing a multinational company to set foot on our only home must be stopped at all costs so that further environmental cataclysms in the state can be avoided.

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The sad side of Shillong's August 15, 2021 incident

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The police patrol vehicle being driven through a stretch of Shillong by some angry youth that led to its burning is an image that will live long in our minds. On that fateful day the vehicle was basically showcased as a trophy for all bystanders to see. It sent an unequivocal message that chaos and lawlessness has descended in Meghalaya's capital city. A youth from Shillong who currently works in Bengaluru did not believe in the first instance that the scene was from his hometown. It took some explaining for this person to be convinced. If there is a nadir for anarchy and brute force of the masses, this was it. That Mawlai locality had the courage and dared to direct the state government to not send cops in uniform on August 15 speaks a lot about the angst of the people. That the state government benignly accepted the direction speaks volumes about the helplessness of governance. On that day there was no government/governance. It is ironic that that day had to be Independence Day. The message and optics that had gone out to the other parts of the country is that we are a people who do not respect and revere the freedom struggles of our forefathers. It was difficult to explain to them that this is not true at all.

Well, how did it all come to this? When the news about the alleged fake encounter of Cheristerfield Thangkiew started circulating on August 13 morning, many found it difficult to believe. Some said that it might be another case of fake news. None of the print media had the story as they had already gone into print by the time the incident occurred. It was only as the day went by that the genuineness of the news started to creep in. Electronic media was full of it. The news provoked anger and fierce debates and discussions. We all know how social media works in such events. This created the fury and rage of the masses which ultimately culminated in a call for mass attendance at the funeral.

To call a spade a spade, social media did play its role in enraging the angst, leading the masses on and in fuelling the fire. Hence, the cases of clips on violence and sabotage that went viral! With such widespread resentment on the government, it is easy for things to spin out of control. It was a situation where the mob had taken over with all logical and rational thinking being disbanded. As 15th August went on, the day turned from bad to worst. Shillong's image had been tarnished. On hindsight, the move to curb internet connectivity from 6:00 PM of that day was a good one; else things would have spiralled totally out of control.

The internet curbs did help to stem the fury and rage from August 15 evening onwards. That is a plus. It was seemingly the only good move of the government during that day. However, the agitation and violence of the day has thrown into focus the same old point. That being that the leaders of the pressure groups have failed yet again to moderate and control their members. It is true that not all are trouble creators. Not all would let their blood boil over and convert anger into violence. The numbers of such are few. But, even the few are troublesome enough to throw a situation out of hand. The burning of the police patrol vehicle is a good example in this instance. In failing to moderate their members the pressures groups have completely failed in reigning in the boys and positioning themselves as responsible stakeholders in a social cause. Noteworthy and commendable is the appeal from the household of Cheristerfield Thangkiew

for the crowd to be calm and moderate. We must learn from this. It is important to learn because of the manner in which the socio-cultural issues are stacked up in Meghalaya. We are going to see more agitations and protests in the coming months. Keeping this in mind, it is better for the pressure groups to control their boys. Yes, it is understood that the pressure groups prefer to have some hot-headed youth in their midst to make their point. But enough of that; its time to abandon this failed strategy! No matter how we look at the alleged fake encounter, this disaster is the government's own creation. Talk about digging their own grave. Many have opined that had Cheristerfield Thangkiew been allowed to live in peace and died naturally, then the August 15 turmoil would not have happened. All the bad optics of Shillong during Independence Day would have been avoided and many would not have to indulge in long explanations to people from other parts of India. What happened to rounding up a suspect for the purpose of interrogation? What happened to a fair trial and the principle of a person being innocent until proven guilty? On the contrary, what we have now is the resurgence of the HNLC. People are openly supporting them. The militant group is making the most of this opportunity. In all likelihood, Meghalaya is going to face the brunt of this in the years to come. In that event how are we supposed to create a nurturing environment for progress? Even today corporate houses are not willing to set up shops in Shillong. Where will the employment opportunities come from? The outcome of August 15 is a spectacle triggering a string of hate posts against the Khasi community on social media. As it is, even during normal times there are enough posts questioning tribal rights and protections under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India. The recent event has only added fuel to the fire. The same will happen in future agitations. The others will poke the Khasis on social media. Plus, let us face it. They do have better connections in New Delhi. That's the irony. While social media works well in garnering support on social issues, it can also be counter-productive. The offer of resignation by Lakhmen Rymbui from the Home portfolio is an interesting development. We have seen the defence of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma that it would send a wrong signal. Well, we can all have our own interpretations. However, this development can be viewed in two ways. First, Conrad Sangma has not accepted the resignation as it would lead to pressure on his brother James Sangma's removal from the Power Department. Second, this is a well-thought out move by the UDP. If the resignation is accepted, would have they withdrawn from the ruling coalition? The UDP may have played its trump card. In the ultimate analysis the MDA government has failed its people. When it came to power in 2018 under an able and young Chief Minister, people had high hopes. Alas, everything has gone south and the events of August 15 might well be its nadir. However, people are faced with a conundrum. There seems to be no alternative. The Congress is seen as a sinking ship with its own leadership problems and continuous talk of desertion of its MLAs. The regional parties seem to be more interested in holding on to power and lack the will to work as a united force. We on you, oh Meghalaya! (Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

Letters to the Editor

Extra-judicial killing in a civil society

Editor,
Like many others we have been following media reports of the encounter death of the retired General Secretary of the HNLC, and the outpouring of grief of a family in trauma and the vocal solidarity of the people of Mawlai supported by mass community anger against excessive use of force by Meghalaya Police. We are compelled to write this letter at a time when the breach of peace requires to think beyond violence.

A single round fired from the weapon of a police official into the abdomen of (L) Bah Cheristerfield Thangkiew at about 3 am on Friday the 13th has changed the narrative on the law and order situation in the Khasi Hills and brought back the dark days of turbulent Shillong of the 90s.

We have heard from the DGP's press briefing that the police has incontrovertible evidence that the deceased was involved in the IED blasts at Khliehriat police market, and the police constable who discharged his firearm exerted his right to private defence of the body.

The Government has admitted from no less than the level of Chief Minister that

police were acting upon credible intelligence from agencies, and were detailed to make an arrest where timing was of essence, and that the killing was unfortunate and unintentional.

Yet the prime question that regular people like us in civil society are asking is what happens when the constitutional right to life of a person, irrespective of his antecedents as a surrendered militant leader or the incontrovertible evidence against him, gets trampled in police action?

Fueled with this curiosity we did a little study and found out that the National Human Rights Commission had in 2010 recommended a procedure to be followed in cases of encounter deaths, and these guidelines have got the Supreme Court's endorsement in 2014.

Both the DGP and the CM have touched upon reporting the incident to NHRC within 48 hours, and the CM has intimated that there will be a judicial inquiry by the Chairperson of the State Human Rights Commission. But there is more to the NHRC guidelines than just this. They include remedies open to the next of kin of (L) Bah Cheristerfield, whose right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution was not just infringed but ended by police action.

A specific complaint can be made against the police alleging commission of a

criminal act amounting to a case of culpable homicide, and the NHRC guidelines mandate that an FIR to this effect must be registered under IPC; and such case shall be investigated by Crime Branch of state police CID or a specialized investigating agency.

The first report to be sent to the Commission within 48 hours has little scope for examining the relatives of the deceased, eye witnesses, etc. but in the second report to be sent within 3 (three) months there is mandatory provision requiring such examination of witnesses and evidences.

In the second report, the findings of the magisterial inquiry shall have to disclose the name and designation of the police official if found responsible for the death in police action, and whether use of force was justified and action taken was lawful.

Hence the right of private defence under IPC cited in favour of the police official who shot (L) Bah Cheristerfield will have to stand four tests: a) whether he was free from fault in bringing about the encounter, b) whether an impending peril to his life was present, c) whether there was no safe or reasonable mode of escape by retreat, and d) whether there was any necessity in taking the life.

On the face of it, the right exerted by the trigger-happy police official does not fulfill an essential principle, as the

right of private defence is not applicable in a case where he himself is the aggressive party. From media reports we have enough information about details of the encounter to get a fair perspective.

There was no report of grievous injury to any of the personnel of the two police parties who came in the dead of the night to make the arrest, and so the second report will probably have nothing to say on the result of forensic examination of the deceased's hands to ascertain the presence of residue of gunpowder and the result of ballistic expert examination on weapons used by the deceased; both results being required to justify the exercise of right of self-defence.

It therefore comes as comforting news that the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission had on August 15 taken suo moto cognizance of gross human rights violation in the case and has directed the State Government to submit a detailed report of the incident within 15 days and if not found satisfactory the Commission will conduct its own investigation.

As a civil society we cannot afford to keep the extra-judicial killing of (L) Bah Cheristerfield in the realm of suspense and secrecy. People at large want to know and are demanding an answer so that proper closure may bring the peace once again.

The NHRC has said in no uncertain terms that the police does not have the right to take away the life of a person. So any attempt to cover up will only put the credibility and reputation of Meghalaya Police at stake. Perhaps the Minister who relinquished the Home portfolio understands this all too well, that killing without obtaining a conviction after a fair trial is illegal, and has accordingly stepped aside to allow the start of hopefully an uninfluenced probe.

Yours etc.,
Hamehi Syiem &
Niema Syiem
Shillong-12

Shillong deserves better

Editor,
The visuals of August 15 of the stolen police Scorpio and the rifle-brandishing person in the front seat have left a permanent mark on our minds. As a tribal but a non-Khasi born and brought up in Shillong I have been and still enjoy its pleasant weather and the warm company of its people. Over the decades, I have watched the steady regression of this city into something insidious; something I no longer recognise. Some might say that I should keep mum and refrain from commenting on recent events since I am not a "stakeholder" in this city but we are all stakeholders of the

place we reside in.

No sooner had I posted the great Tagore's poem "Where the Mind is Without Fear", than terrifying scenes unfolded miles away. It is further alarming that sections of people and even our educated lot glorified and lauded the masked youths for their vandalism. We used to roam about this city even after dark and now even the thought of day movement elicits hesitation. Has it really come to this? That we are willing to pit two wrongs against each other? In the presence of weak leadership and violation of due process of law, do we want to bank on masked vigilantes who have nothing to lose to save the day? I hope not. We are better than that. In a democracy, it is the people who create the kind of society they want to live in. We can appeal to the good in us to clarify our clouded notions. However bleak the outcome, we must seek accountability and justice, but lawfully, because, if we do not play by the rules it is only chaos that await us: Let us not throw Shillong to the wolves. This city deserves better.

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen
Name withheld on request

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"Wherever you have weakening states and turmoil, you will have a fertile petri dish for terrorism."

— Robert D. Kaplan

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Taliban and power play

THE picture in Afghanistan is getting clearer. The Taliban gains complete sway over the landlocked nation and the US has little choice but to evacuate its men and leave the nation it held in its pocket for 20 years. The Taliban has ruled that the US must stick to its deadline of leaving the country by August 31 and it will run the nation from September 1. The militants have the fire-power while the Resistance by anti-Taliban outfits cannot retain steam. What is also clear is that the Pakistani establishment including the military brass and its ISI intelligence as also the terrorist networks based in Pakistan are working along with the Taliban in planning the future regional strategies. The Taliban has called for unity of Islamic nations just as the countdown has begun for the emergence of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from next month.

President Joe Biden is duty-bound to honour the agreement signed between the US and the Taliban during the term of his predecessor Donald Trump. Without the US around, India has little relevance in Afghanistan as of now. China would be all too willing to help Afghanistan with funds and infrastructure support – something that India was doing alongside the US initiatives there to rebuild the war-torn nation. That experiment has collapsed. The warlords and militants will continue calling the shots there.

The good thing about India was that it had desisted from participating in military action against the Taliban or the other homegrown militants there. India ably helped build institutions and infrastructure there. Thanks must go more to Dr Manmohan Singh for adopting such a wise policy. India built the Parliament House there almost for free. It built roads and other infrastructure. In normal course, these should have enthused the Taliban. But, the Pakistani influence in the emerging power equations there will, first and foremost, mean a side-lining of India. India's place there will likely be taken over by a more resourceful China with Pakistani scheming. There are no indications that the Taliban will have a soft corner for India. However, it is likely that good sense would prevail on the militants and they would accord a respectable space to India too alongside China in the future scheme of things. Pakistan has little to offer in this context other than exporting its terrorists to Afghanistan. The Taliban could smell a rat in this and might keep Pakistan at a safe distance. This is what India can hope for, at best, in the present context.

Letters to the Editor

Women and palm oil cultivation

Editor,

The palm oil plantations have proved to be not only a major disadvantage for biodiversity, but also for women farmers as it has led to gender inequality as well as reducing their roles in farming. The voice of discontent began when the Central government decided to promote palm oil plantations extensively in North Eastern states of India and the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

The production of palm oil trees needs a lot of physical strength and force due to which it is considered to be a man's business. Hence, it discourages women from taking part in the cultivation. Women are instead assigned jobs like roasting the palm tree fruits that need to be done inside closed doors and on gas stoves. But this continuous exposure to smog and flames adversely impacts their health.

Another setback for women farmers has been the loss of their ownership rights in their own farms. Earlier, in shifting or jhum cultivation, women used to have a decisive say in choice of crops but with the onset of palm oil cultivation, many

big companies have taken over the land or ownership rights have been assigned to the senior most member of the family, usually a male member.

The North Eastern region has the largest number of working women farmers and with all the crippling problems of palm oil cultivation many women farmers may lose their jobs permanently. In fact, the women in Mizoram have already been facing these issues for a long time.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the social and gender inequity and inequality that cultivation of palm oil will bring in its wake. Along with deforestation there will be reduction in bird population, water scarcity etc. State governments of the North East should act cautiously and not disturb the socio-economy and rich biodiversity of the region.

Yours etc.,
Ritika Das
Guwahati

The garbage dilemma!

Editor,

With the Covid pandemic being somewhat under control, what if the MDA starts to focus on improving the quality of life of the citizens of the State. What bet-

The Shillong turmoil and leadership vacuum

By Albert Thyrniang

All eyes were on Afghanistan when the Taliban fighters walked into Kabul without firing a shot after encircling the national seat of power for a week. The ease with which the terrorists took over the city was because the political leaders, including president Ashraf Ghani left the scene in haste. As the Taliban advanced Ghani escaped to Tajikistan via Abu Dhabi, UAE. The armed forces too either surrendered or fled without a fight because their leaders had already struck a deal with the conquerors permitting the bearded and Salwar clad men to march unopposed. The streets were soon manned by gunmen. The next scene was the presidential palace where a commander sat on the ousted president's chair flanked by combatants posing for photographs. Playful 'javan' were seen enjoying at the president's gym and amusement park. The US president, Joe Biden had assured that the Afghan forces trained by his officers for 20 years would keep the Taliban at bay for a year at least, but within days the Taliban 2.0 regime had commenced to the complete humiliation of the US and NATO.

In the turmoil in Shillong recently leadership vacuum was more than visible. When the raid on the house of the retired HNLC General Secretary, Chesterfield Thangkiew took place, the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma was in Delhi to inaugurate the NPP's office at 75 North Avenue. Home Minister, Lahkmer Rymbui alleged ignorance of the alleged fake encounter that led to the death of the Khliehriat and Laitumkhrah blast suspect. The captain abandoned the ship. He did not stand up for the foot soldiers. The police force was left sans leadership. The subsequent statements on the tragic incident had to be issued by Director General of Police (DGP). Consider this conjecture. The Home Minister had given a free hand to the police to investigate the aforementioned blasts and found links to Thangkiew. Even in such a scenario it was the Home Minister who was ultimately responsible when the raid went wrong. Instead he put the blame, responsibility and accountability on someone else. Until the return of the Chief Minister from the national capital on August 14, the men in uniform had no political leadership. The under-fire Home Minister who once proclaimed he was made of sterner stuff chose to quit following the diktat of

party bosses rather face the challenge upfront.

While the all and sundry pressure group leaders were omnipresent, mouthing their rage, condemnation at the 'extra-judicial' killing before cameras that were beamed on televisions, Youtube, Facebook and the like, political leaders from the ruling MDA coalition were in hibernation. No minister appealed for calm. The opposition MLAs who did appear publicly pretty much reproduced the words of the pressure groups with one of them inflaming more passion rather than calming the volatile situation. The BJP which claims to deal with terror the harshest was the only political party to condole the death of the still 'active' militant. AL Hek, still angered by his removal, considered it apt to get back at the Chief Minister questioning his leadership qualities and spoke for the HNLC saying it won't trust the government easily again. Readers took Hek to be a critic of rather than the advisor to the Chief Minister. Meanwhile the Congress thought its better leadership could topple the MDA government but the regional parties' only objective is to complete the tenure no matter what.

With the political leadership almost leaving the police high and dry, large protests (assumedly without permission during the pandemic) were under little surveillance. With the police demoralised all hell broke loose. Diktats came from the 'voice' of a ghetto that resists even police patrols. Miscreants responded with stone pelting, arson and vandalism. The public obliged with the 'black day' observance. For the first time in the history of Meghalaya both the Chief Minister and the governor came under attack. The hijackers of the police SUV and INSAS rifles had a free run. They are still at large. Most shockingly, instead of hunting the black clad dacoity down to be punished the Chief Minister offered them amnesty. Jaw-dropping! Absolutely non-statesman like hip! Worse than a populist leadership!

The anonymous letter led to the recovery of the three guns. Now the identity of the gun-snatchers will be anonymous. If this bizarre decision stands it is contempt of the Constitution of India. Either the court takes suo moto cognizance or someone files a PIL demanding strict actions against the arm lifters.

Does the vacuum of leadership give way to admiration for the outlawed? What makes youths look up to militant leaders as heroes? Is it because of a crisis of leadership and dearth of role models? Why did the political and religious leaders not have a positive influence during a crisis? Have rebels been able to fill in the gap in the absence of credible leaders? The most visible reason for the fall of Afghanistan was because the political leadership fled the scene and the armed forces gave up the fight paving the way for Taliban to slip in unopposed. The likes of the Taliban, ISIS and other terrorist outfits have huge followings because American and NATO soldiers are seen as occupiers and abusers of human rights.

If the slain HNLC General Secretary was eliminated, the one who pulled the trigger and the one who ordered the shooting must pay the price. The police too have to be policed. 'Private defence' is ambiguous. Does it mean the trigger-puller acted on his own? If so he should be booked. But glamorizing the founder of an outfit which revolts against the state is misplaced. Thangkiew, once the most powerful in the HNLC's rank and file took Meghalaya to its darkest period through extortions, kidnaps and killings. He brought parts of the state under the insurgency map. Did Thangkiew ever apologise for the death of his men, security forces and civilians? Did he regret causing pain and suffering, grief and sorrow to the innocent? Was he remorseful? Was any criminal case slapped against him? Was any sort of reparation demanded of him? Was he made answerable for his 'misdeeds'? Does coming over-ground absolve an insurgent of all crimes? Then why the overwhelming sympathy and disproportionate honour? Why romanticise a person who rose against the state? Why give legendary status to the creator of a proscribed outfit? Why the slogan 'Long Live HNLC' when it terrorised the state in the past and is still out to bomb market places to harm commoners?

One of the common slogans in rallies and in pressure groups' assemblies is, "Ha Ri Lajong, Katba Mon" (In one's own country, (do) as one wills). Where on earth is one able to do as one likes. Not even in one's home! How can slogan shouters advocate that in our own

'country' we can behave as we please? How can one say 'in Khasi-Jaintia Hills we act as we wish? There is no place on earth without any restrictions. There is no laissez-faire country. We speak of laissez-faire leadership only when all employees in an organisation are trustworthy and responsible. Are we so?

Pressure groups often call for unity. One is amused because this appeal actually means a demand for acceptance of their ideas, worldviews, proposals and decisions. If anyone disagrees with them he/she is excluded. Concretely, if a group had suggested to the 'Voice of Mawlai People' not to declare 15 August a 'black day' that group would be shunted for sure. If a civil society submits that ILP is not required in Meghalaya that NGO would be rejected without a hearing. These pressure groups are all like-minded. One wonders why they don't merge into one. They don't because leaders want to outdo each other on the same issues.

But is the voice of these 'identical' groups the best for the state? Why is it that not making 15 August a 'black day' not in the best interest of the state? Why is the suggestion 'no ILP' not good for the state? Why are divergent views repulsive? Why are dissenting voices threatening? Unity of thought is detrimental to the development of a society? It is the greatest enemy to progress. It is more dangerous than the bullet. If not for diversity of thoughts there would have been no renaissance of art, architecture, politics, science and literature in the 14-16th centuries. Even the Taliban seems to have learned this fact, this time round. Initial statements are indicative of a more tolerant militia guaranteeing respect for the minorities, human rights and rights of women even ensuring freedom to the media to critique the new administration.

The scars of the August 15 unrest will remain long. Why did it happen? Whose was the more prominent voice? Whose voice did we listen to? Voice of pressure group leaders or other leaders? Were there other leaders? Is this the way the state has to be run? Have our leaders failed the state? As followers are the leaders worth following? Would the series of shameful acts on Independence Day unfold had our leaders not gone 'missing' in times of crisis? We are staring at a leadership crisis and crisis of governance.

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Two ideas of Shillong

By Avner Pariat

It should be obvious to people now that politics in Shillong is drawn along two hard lines - that of the Liberals and on the other side are the Conservatives. This is a simplistic generalisation, of course. We all have streaks of both sides in us. On some issues we might be Liberal while on others we might be deeply and rigidly Conservative. For instance, when it comes to enjoying vast quantities of alcohol we happily submit to it but we might be more Conservative to calls for democratic reforms within our respective churches. Such is society, a maelstrom of contentions and power dynamics, a mix of Right and Left. However in light of the latest disruptions to Law & Order, Peace & (occasional) Prosperity in our beloved capital I think it is important to take this time to ask the question - why do these things keep happening time and time again?

To this end I would like to propose an admittedly simple analysis regarding the dominant philosophical outlooks of the people here as I have encountered them thus far. In brief, these antagonisms manifest themselves into the real world because there is a wide and seemingly insurmountable ideological rift between the aforementioned groups. It would be useful if we attempted to characterize who are the Liberals and who are the Conservatives that I speak of. Again I concede that my analysis would be a non-exhaustive simplification so bear with me.

The readers of 'The Shillong Times' for the most part would fall into the Liberal camp. The types of opinions expressed herein, harping as they do on ideals of tolerance, humanism, personal liberty and individualism qualify the readership and contributors as such. This is also to a considerable extent a well-off set of people steeped in privilege and/or wealth. Most would have been educated in English medium schools (usually situated in the Laitumkhrah area) and many hold important government rank in addition. They are usually what we would call upper and upper-middle classes. They are at the vanguard of societal shift and they decide the nature of development in the state. And the place that all Liberals of Shillong throng to, the place most talked about - and disliked by the Conservatives - is Laitumkhrah. Or Laimu as it is affectionately called.

The antithesis of the Liberals are people of limited means, people whose first language is a vernacular dialect, people educated in (underfunded) local language schools and who are almost entirely dependent on their physical labour to be it in contract-work, farming and other non-specialised and "unskilled" occupations. They have no political offices, they barely have any political agency, and they are still largely unaware of the vast political power they have, unlike the Liberal class. By popular depictions, it would seem all "Westside people" (especially from Mawlai) are herded into this category.

Liberals can't seem to "get" these guys; they can't seem to understand their motivations. Often times they cannot even engage nor interact with them directly in the local language and this has led to more gaps in communication; which in turn has sown seeds of enmity and friction! They are oftentimes referenced with disdain, derision, contempt. Their anger and complaints never seriously assessed and certainly never given the time and energy they deserve. As a child of both worlds - birthed and raised by both "West" and "East" (Mawlai and Laban & Laitumkhrah) - I would like to warn my beloved Liberals about one thing: a tsunami is coming and it will destroy our world. And, to be very honest, for most part we will deserve it.

We should never have attempted to defend the

indefensible. For a very long time, we ignored the elitism and blatant corruption within our society. We justified it always in some way or form even if we did not profit from it ourselves. Here I want to say that I do not believe that the majority of our state's people are corrupt but that we have let the corrupt minority dictate terms to us. We have been deafeningly silent on the rotten and unjust economic system which has been perpetuated on the overwhelming majority, which are the Conservatives. And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is time to pay the piper!

The day we tolerated and normalized corruption is the day we allowed inequality to blossom. The rubbish - Liberals like to spout - about Meghalaya being an Egalitarian society, is no longer even remotely true. The Liberal propensity for self-delusion, for comfort over Truth was never ever what the Conservatives felt. They never believed it - never in its entirety - because it was at odds with their lived experience.

The systematic, ongoing theft perpetuated by the Liberal elites in the government - or those associated with it - have finally drained Meghalaya of its life. Come to Mawlai as my guest, go to Nongmynsong, go to Jhalupara, go anywhere! See how many people are struggling to make ends meet after decades of robbery and bankrupt governance. Please do not blame the Pandemic - it was a catalyst - but it was certainly not the root cause of their poverty and misery. For this, we must blame both Congress AND NPP governments. They are two sides of the same coin. And we bloody need a new coin.

When powerful Liberals kept shut because they did not want to stir trouble or to confront the crimes of their own class, they fostered economic disparity. Instead of asking legislators, and public figures, the difficult questions about accountability and transparency, about systemic overhauls, about how they planned to bring about economic justice, they chose to wait and watch for a magical Messiah to descend from the High Heavens to save them. Now that faithful decision - or faithless depending on how you see it - has in turn allowed numerous banned (and unbanned) extremist outfits to catapult themselves into the Conservative imagination. They have come in with the solutions which Liberals refused to give. And those solutions are quick-fix, violent and dangerous for everyone in our society. Including for the Conservatives themselves!

What is to be done then? It is clear that simply having peace meetings and conflict resolution seminars cannot be the only solution. We consistently need to perform such activities. We must engage and ask people to come forward. We must bring all sections together. Liberal and Conservative, tribal and non-tribal, Christian and non-Christian alike. We will never have a perfect solution but we can all agree, that peace is what we all desire. Once that is decided on, we must then turn our attentions to the real issue underpinning the strife, hatred and violence in our society and that is the lack of Justice, in particular Economic Justice.

We can no longer look away from what refuses to go away. We cannot pretend to not be aware of it for it is stinking up the air; it is poisoning us. To continue to be spineless to the issues of poverty, inequality and lack of Economic Justice is to tempt Fate. And Fate is very much at the ends of its patience with regards to Meghalaya. In closing, I want to remind you all of this (tragically) relevant quote by George Bernard Shaw from Major Barbara -

"The greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty"

(The writer is Spokesperson, New Dawn a recently launched political party)

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

"It is a quality of revolutions not to go by old lines or old laws, but to break up both and make new ones."

—Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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Why mock the Opposition Congress?

THE NPP State President and Rajya Sabha member who has so far not raised a single question in the Upper House since his oath taking in September 2020, has yet again taken a swipe at the Congress. He has done it in the past and will perhaps continue his tirade. Such behaviour reeks of petty politics and shows a lack of understanding of how parliamentary democracy works. As the NPP State President, it is the brief of WR Kharlukhi not to mock the Opposition for pointing to the poor governance demonstrated by the MDA Government but to take stock of the rapidly degenerating situation and get his Party to get its act together. On Wednesday the effigies of the State Chief Minister, his Deputy and the Home Minister and also of the police chief and the two police officials that ordered the shooting of Cherister Thangkhiew, the former general secretary of the outlawed HNLC, on Friday 13 August, were burnt by a crowd at Mawlai. All Covid protocols were violated thereby proving yet again that the application of the rule of law is arbitrary and subjective.

The Congress Party as the main Opposition party is duty bound to point out the lapses of the ruling party and those lapses are far too many to be listed. The 17 MLA of the Congress are representing their constituents. They are not speaking for themselves. So, in mocking the Congress, the NPP State President is also being contemptuous of the electorate that voted these MLAs. As a Rajya Sabha member it is rather unfortunate that Kharlukhi does not even understand these basic principles of democracy. The Congress has the locus-standi to take the Government to task and no one can fault them for that. They are performing a public duty for which they would have to give an account to their constituents, come election time. Democracy is successful only to the extent that the Opposition party/parties keep the excesses of the ruling government in check. Otherwise, we would have runaway democracy where legislations would be bulldozed by the ruling party without being discussed and debated in the State Assembly or in Parliament. The opposition parties have the right to audit the government's spending and to talk to the media about the government's lapses. The NPP did a lot of that when it was in the Opposition and no one mocked it for doing so because it was discharging its duty. Hence to belittle the Opposition constantly, merely because it is performing its duty shows that the NPP leadership is politically immature.

Oil Palm plantation: An over-zealous CM & the vulnerable farmer

By Toki Blah

The Shillong Times Friday August 20, 2021 carried a front-page news item wherein the Union Minister for DoNER, G Kishan Reddy had claimed that the Central Government's approval for large scale plantation of oil palm in the North Eastern (NE) region will transform the economy of the entire region. Hip Hip Hurray! for the NDA and its promises for the people of this remote region, but the fact is, we have heard too many such tall claims from New Delhi for the last 70 years, with pretty little to show for them, that there is now ample justification for us to consider such statements as mere political rhetoric rather than the well intended and sensible announcements that they ought to be. This DoNER statement came close on the heels of the Union Cabinet decision of August 18 to implement the National Mission on edible oils – Oil Palm.

So far so good, but what's contentious is that Baba Ramdev's Patanjali group led Ruchi Soya had already declared its plans to set up and expand its business for massive oil palm plantations in the NE days before this Cabinet decision! A private Company foreseeing and anticipating Union Cabinet decisions; announcing huge investments based on such predictions; announcement made by a God-man with business ambitions and a reputation for close connections to the PMO! This is all too much of a coincidence even for simple minded NE folks to swallow. It smacks of sleazy outsider fore-knowledge or even influence on sensitive Government policy decisions even before they are made. The NE palm oil mission is already beginning to stink of being driven by greedy non-caring agribusiness vested interests rather than the Centre's noble and pious declaration of this being done for the betterment of the economy of the region and its people. These are the instances when we miss the sensible and well thought out knowledge of the erstwhile Planning Commission.

Ever since the central intention of encouraging oil palm cultivation in North East India and the Andaman islands became public knowledge, there has been a spate of public concern verging from scepticism to downright consternation on the suitability, dependability and trustworthiness of the

plan for the region and its people. These concerns range from economic issues to environmental anxiety to apprehensions over loss of cultural diversity of the people of the region and the adverse impact such plantations will have on the rich bio diversity of the North East.

People with knowledge and ground experience on the type and unique style of agriculture carried out in the upland areas of the NE are aghast at the prospects of introducing mass mono palm oil cultivation in these hills. There are concerns that the promised economic benefits the palm oil industry would bring to the region are illusory and that ground reality is just the opposite. It will instead introduce misery, pain and loss of livelihood to our small and marginal farmers. Environmentally it would result in the disappearance of large tracts of our indigenous forests.

Interestingly, the only persons who seem least bothered about these apprehensions are our elected representatives. They just don't care and apparently all of them would prefer to remain silent spectators. The only politician who has welcomed the proposal is the Chief Minister of Meghalaya. The reason for his enthusiasm is not known but it would be worth his while to look at the havoc such plantations have caused in other places. In Mizoram where experimental plantations had taken place, people are uprooting their palm oil trees and replacing them with other cash crops. Sri Lanka has outright banned palm oil cultivation. I do request our CM to first study the hazards posed by this Central policy before he takes the leap of faith just to please Baba Ramdev and his corny political patrons in the BJP.

Bhaktis who read this write-up will immediately brush it off as another anti-Modi rant that springs more from a dislike of the BJP rather than facts as they prevail. So, let's try and justify what we have said. Let's try and analyse if palm oil will really bring in the promised manna for our small upland farmers. The tree loves the warm moist tropical conditions of the East Indies and in Indonesia the yield is up to 3 to 4 tonnes of oil per hectare per year. This happens in Indonesian or

Malaysian conditions where it rains throughout the year. In the NE where the rainfall might be heavy but falls only for about 6 months in a year with dry chilly winter conditions, the output of oil might drastically drop to only 1 or 2 tonnes per hectare.

In such cases the break-even with the high investments made might just not be there. Trials conducted in all 7 states of the NE have resulted in scientists not recommending oil palm plantation as an alternative plantation for the region. As such it is not a viable cash crop for the NE that is expected to bring in wealth riches for our farmers. Small holdings, a low yield crop, gruelling transportation costs and contract farming for the oil palm is instead beautifully orchestrated for a big profit driven corporation to monopolise the market and squeeze our small farmers. In the beginning Government subsidies and other Government support might lure the farmer into investing through more loans and mortgages, but the low yield and the monopoly market will only result in a debt trap he will never get out of. We might just end up turning our small agriculturists into bondage labourers for some mainland corporate entity.

Let's take the trial plantations and processing units for palm oil done in Mizoram. In the beginning it began with a strong Government initiative to replace jhum cultivation with some permanent cash crop so as to bring in more income to the farmers. The Mizoram Agriculture Department, the farmers and the processing units all invested heavily in the programme. It soon became apparent from the long gestation period of the crop, 9 to 12 years because of the agro-climatic conditions of the region mentioned above, and the break-even point of more than 15 years, that its cultivation was only meant for big farmers with large holdings. Rich tribals rushed in to invest in land to reap the rich bonanza expected. The traditional land tenure holding system disappeared overnight. The small marginal farmer was squeezed out. Jhum cultivation which the small farmer had traditionally depended for his food security vanished in the blind unrealistic

tic bureaucratic rush of the Government to introduce income generation through monoculture cropping.

Today everyone involved in the experiment in Mizoram is on the lookout for alternate cash crops such as oranges and avocado. The experiment failed. Meghalaya must learn from the bitter experience of the Mizos. There is absolutely no need to rush into this crazy madcap proposal of the Centre. Not at the cost to our farmers and our land tenure system simply to appease some greedy businessman from the mainland whose only interest is profit. Our Autonomous District Councils, with the vast powers they are endowed with through the 6th Schedule must step in to protect our land and its future from such monopolistic land grab attempts.

In conclusion one must also point out the adverse environmental impact Palm oil plantations will have on our fragile eco-system. It is a water guzzling monster which will greatly affect not only the underground water table of our state but the soil nutrients too. The economic life span of a palm oil tree is 25 years and after that the land becomes totally barren and unfit for other cultivation unless heavy investment is made to replenish it. Viable plantations will need thousands of hectares and this same acreage will be turned into a waste land after 25 years. Is this a viable proposition? It is a proposition for a high volume and low value crop, with all its adverse impacts on our fragile ecosystem, that only a top-down insensitive bureaucratic mind can find any merit in.

What Meghalaya really needs are more low volume high value agriculture products. We have our black pepper, pan oil, cinnamon, cardamoms, strawberries, passion fruits and a mix of other agro-forestry based agro-products. These are the rural agro-based products small farmers are comfortable with. Give them more support, easy access to credit, marketing, packaging and value addition. They will form the mainstay for our small landless farmers. They will bring in more sustainable returns without harming the soil, its economic stability and its water level even after several decades of steady yield. I fail to see why we should be so eager to give up our future for the likes of Baba Ramdev and his Patanjali Company.

Policing: Protecting or damaging

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

After reading HH Mohrmann's article 'Reimagining the police: Who's greasing palms in Meghalaya', it reminds me of Charlie Chaplin's movie 'The Police Story' (1916). In this comedy movie the main character (Charlie Chaplin) played the role of a prisoner who had served his term in jail and was released but found himself on the footpath. The hard life on the street and joblessness forced him to live life on the run especially on seeing a policeman. The movie portrayed a situation of an undeveloped country where policemen were deployed to look for suspicious individuals who were none other than petty thieves and trouble makers inflicted by poverty.

With regards to policing theory and concept, there are two interesting theories brought forward by social scientists James Q Wilson and George L Kelling in 1982 entitled 'The broken windows' which is more like a criminological theory which states that the visible signs of crime, anti-social behavior, and civil disorder create an environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes. The writers argue that if one window pane of a building is broken and left unattended, it signals that no one cares and breaking more windows will cost nothing. The theory was further popularised in the 1990s by New York City Police. Critics used the term 'Zero tolerance' to describe the theory of broken windows policing that it is a form of 'zealotry'. The theory became a subject of great debate both within the social sciences and the public sphere. Broken windows policing has become associated with controversial police practices, such as the high use of stop-and-frisk in New York City in the decades up to 2013. However, Kelling argued that 'Broken Windows' involves a highly discretionary police activity that requires careful training, guidelines, and supervision, as well as an ongoing dialogue with neighborhoods and communities to ensure a positive relationship with the society.

On the contrary, in 1850 a French economist, Frederic Bastiat introduced the Parable of the broken window in an essay 'Ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on ne voit pas' ("That Which We See and That Which We Do Not See"). The essay states that when a child accidentally smashes a window, and then it has to be replaced, does this accident constitute a benefit to the society, due to the economic activity of repairing and replacing the window? In the parable the shopkeeper was very angry at his son's carelessness because he had to shell out his hard earned money to compensate for the broken glass. He had to call the glazier to do the job and paid him the full cost. The glazier was happy because of the trade and blessed the careless boy. Bastiat said if it costs six francs for a single window pane, this unseen cost could have been prevented or invested elsewhere to create more assets.

Bastiat further explained that if it was discovered that the child was hired by the glazier and paid a franc for every pane broken then the act would be considered a theft. The glazier was breaking windows in order to force people to hire his services. The facts observed by people remain the same - that the glazier benefited from the business at the expense of the shopkeeper. Bastiat argued that societies endorse activities that are equivalent to the glazier hiring a boy to break windows for him. Bastiat concluded that society loses the value of things which are uselessly destroyed and we must assent to a maxim which will make the hair of protectionists stand on end - To break, to spoil, to waste, is not to encourage national workmanship or, more briefly, "destruction is

not profit." It is ironic on the other hand to see that institutions like the police or the industries (glazier) sometimes brag that in the name of protection and promotion they cause unnecessary hardship to common citizens. Today industries no longer hire a third party to promote their products or services but adopt a much simpler route by engaging in a deal with those at the helm of power such as the palm oil plantation business. This careless venture that is detrimental to the environment will definitely provoke public resentment and in some cases may lead to protest and agitation as in the illegal coke factories and coal mining or in the attempt to convert government land in prime location into a private commercial hub. But interestingly, when the going gets tough, these tough institutions will hire and press into action the policing service available in the land. This situation is what we call the 'nexus' or a string of connecting deals between functionaries and other institutions.

It is here that we the public must understand that protection to lives, property and cultures comes from nobody and not from these institutions in question but from the Constitution of the country. The Government and its functionaries as important organs of the Constitution are mandated by the same Constitution to ensure that citizens of the country are well protected. And in the context of protection there is no reason that I can see to kill any person merely on suspicion. Here we see the greatness of the Constitution of India that even a terrorist like Ajmal Kasab who had taken many innocent lives in Taj hotel Mumbai was not killed in the spot but was given a lengthy hearing. Similar is the case with the perpetrators in Nirbhaya case. When we have a Constitution that is inclusive, why should we resort to a different strategy. There is much damage to the polity when people and institutions forget the principles of the Constitution but focus only on the law. They have forgotten that the source of law is the Constitution and when the law and act is unconstitutional then it is the job of every citizen to raise their voice. Much damage is also done because zealotry or preemptive actions and greed guides the sense and attitude of law enforcers.

The desire to rank above everyone else in wealth, position, etc. are unconstitutional because that degrades the basic spirit of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution which says, 'and to promote among them all fraternity and dignity of the individual'. India can become a developed nation only when each and every individual is able to live with dignity. Perhaps that dignity will give them the reason to live in a country where farmers no longer resort to suicide due to loan traps and monsoon failure. It is here that the keepers of the law should frequently acquaint themselves with the ethos enshrined in the constitution and to work toward that constitutional goal.

The recent uprising in Shillong due to the killing by the State police is a result of that complete damage to the Constitution. It is pathetic to see headmen (Rangbah Shnong) making a humble and fervent appeal to the Government to do something constructive for the community and to shun rampant corruption. Never in the history of the state has inefficiency become so glaring even while Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma looks like a one man army shouldering every responsibility, simply because he has a team who I doubt can be called co-workers to simplify his burden and contribute meaningfully to the task of governance.

Letters to the Editor

Meanwhile kids IQ is falling

Editor, The government and citizenry have been distracted in the last few weeks with dramatic events in Meghalaya. Even Covid has been relegated to the backburner. Children are all but forgotten. Several states all over the country have opened or will soon be opening educational institutions, including Tripura from August 23 and Assam from September 1. But Meghalaya, who knows when?

The first few years of a child's life are critical for their cognitive development. Insufficient mental stimulation during this formative stage will handicap a child for life. Covid has had a direct effect because of closure of schools, nurseries, and playgrounds depriving young brains of the social and psychological development that is so important for success in later life.

A recent study from the US shows that children affected by the pandemic have significantly reduced verbal and coordination skills, and overall lower intelligence. Apart from missing out on the learning at school, the home environment not only provides insufficient stimulation but there is also heightened stress because of the pandemic. Children in well-off families who have learning devices and internet

connectivity may not lose much. It is children in poor families that will severely lag behind in their development. In the study conducted by Brown University, a top Ivy League institution, the IQ of young children tumbled from 100 to 78, with children from lower socio-economic groups showing the greatest fall.

An open letter from IIT professors, pediatricians, public health specialists, lawyers and economists to the chief ministers of three states: Karnataka, Delhi and Maharashtra, was published in many newspapers and news magazines. The letter urged the opening of schools and included the following quote: "Scientific evidence indicates that reopening with safeguards is possible. Schools are open in 170 countries. In July 2021, UNICEF and UNESCO stated that schools should be the last to close and the first to open. There is evidence that pre-primary and primary schools are at the lowest risk and should be prioritised before schools for older age groups." The eminent virologist, Dr Gagandeep Kang of CMC, Vellore declared in an interview with India Today, that it is time to open schools.

I am happy that our education minister has advised the opening of educational institutions. But decision-making in Meghalaya is slow as usual.

Yours etc., Glenn C. Kharkongor, Via email

On easing COVID restrictions

Editor, This time we know about life more clearly than ever before. Death is just one step away from healthy respiration. If our lungs and hearts cannot inhale the fresh air from outside, we are gone! What we must understand is that our life on earth is vulnerable to various external forces over and above the internal biology. Sickness itself is "impermanent." COVID 19 has emerged to ram home this very point.

True, the Wuhan virus has virtually broken the back of the global economy. It has also given a big jolt to civilization. Not just that, it has virtually deflated our egos; it has shrunked our arrogance! Have our modern technologies not completely failed to save our beloved relatives and friends during this pandemic? Of course, the government left no stone unturned to keep each citizen as safe and healthy as possible. It consistently reminds us through phone messages that we must follow all COVID protocols with maximum alertness, though many of us don't heed these warnings.

At times I feel these dictats are only for the common people. Don't we see some state governments holding public events every now and again. Some public leaders are moving around without masks. How do we describe

this? Those who make the laws should not be the first to break them.

One wonders why it is so "very essential" to celebrate Independence Day, as we are most likely to get infected with the virulent virus. Our achieved freedom cannot now be taken away by the British. But if I may say so the "social gatherings" are more dangerous. Why don't we put off all kinds of gatherings, social festivities, and celebrations until we are fully able to defeat the virus? The ways people went around on Independence Days in some states sends a chill down the spine. Thank God, in Meghalaya, we had a very subdued Independence Day celebration. More lockdown relaxation means more vulnerability to the virus variants. So extra caution must be taken even if we have taken the both COVID vaccine doses.

Of course, we can no longer ignore the essential business activities ---- particularly that involve the weaker sections of people. The Government has taken the right decision by easing restrictions in the city. The continuous lockdowns have caused tremendous hardship to underprivileged communities. For them, the government needs to lift the restriction/lockdown but not for the celebration of festivals or social and religious events. God will continue to shower His blessings even if we abstain from participating in religious gatherings. God

may not help those who sing hollow prayers by risking their lives. What has come down now may go up again if we do not learn from our past mistakes.

Yours etc., Salil Gwalli, Shillong

Army becomes gender-sensitive

Editor, The Indian Army recently approved the promotion of five women officers to the rank of colonel. The decision to grant permanent commission to women officers from different branches of the Indian Army expounds the Indian Army's approach towards a gender-neutral army. The Indian Army was compelled to consider a permanent commission for women officers in the military. It had to increase the gender inclusivity of the armed forces as well. As a result, 147 more women were granted permanent commission this year. Earlier, another 277 had been selected.

Efforts to increase the representation of women in the armed forces of India have been ongoing for a long time. This development heralds a change in the Indian Army's views on women's capability for doing tasks in the armed forces. India is a nation with 1.3 million active troops and another 960,000 reserve troops in the armed forces. However, there are only 1672 women officers in the armed forces. It must be noted that

none of these women officers were given commission in any combat corps. It is a fact that women are not allowed any combat roles in the Indian Army. Combat roles and command positions are denied to women on the grounds that women and society are not ready for such a development. Further, women's body structure, male soldiers' objection to women officers in command positions, challenges of motherhood and childcare are some arguments against allowing women officers combat roles.

We must get rid of our misconceptions and deep-rooted stereotypes about the capabilities and expertise of women, especially women officers in the army. The Indian Army must acknowledge the need to give women more representation. Women must be accepted as women and they must never be expected to behave like men. Although they have their own limitations, they have their own capabilities and skills. Women can demonstrate their competence in doing different tasks in the armed forces. On the other hand, they cannot control and lead men. Societal attitudes, in particular, the army's attitude to women must change.

Yours etc., Venu GS, Kollam

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"In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of."
— Confucius

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Rudderless nation
INDIA'S dreams for future 'super power' status took a new hit when the fourth edition of the world's 'top and safest cities index' from the global Economic Intelligence Unit was out this week. Two Indian cities, Mumbai and New Delhi, figured at slots 49 and 50 respectively on a scale of 60 cities, with the Danish city of Copenhagen topping the chart. Notably and predictably, Toronto in Canada took the second rank and tiny Singapore in our neighbourhood the third top slot.

The index ranked 60 top cities on the yardsticks of 76 indicators across five pillars -- personal, health, infrastructure, digital, and environmental security. These are supplementary and complementary to each other. For instance, if there is better infrastructure, the rest is assured. It must be understood that old cities have their inherent problems, be it London or New York. Yet Sydney and Tokyo, among old cities, retained top slots at fourth and fifth place. Among the two Indian cities, Mumbai's life overall is chaotic, and so with Bengaluru, the IT city that developed in a haphazard manner. Both suffered due to lack of political will. New Delhi developed by leaps and bounds, but traffic and several other scenarios are unbearable there. The less said the better about other Indian cities, or state capitals. Successive governments failed to plan urban growth in impressive ways. Private entities developed residential and commercial spaces in their own ways while governments sat back and played the fiddle. Result is lack of proper infrastructure like roads, drains, recreational facilities etc. The flooding of cars worsened the communications crisis and lack of drains added to the mosquito menace. While the first Metro mass transport system was introduced in Kolkata in the 1980s, the next was rolled out in Delhi 20 years later. Mumbai took 10 more years to launch a project. So did Bengaluru.

With a population of 1.35 billion, India's problem in sum is its lack of effective leadership. Desi leaders, after the Nehru term, let the nation down. A few gains here and there kept the show going in the years thereafter. What Singapore or Shanghai achieved in recent decades was due to effective leadership. So too with Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia courtesy Mahathir Mohamad. Big talk from the pulpit is what the Indian leaders excel at. Fact is, this produces no result. The other way forward is to give doles or food kits to the poor and win their votes to continue in power for a longer term. India suffers from a leadership crisis. Leadership should pass on to able hands.

Letters to the Editor

School reopening

Editor,
The decision of many states to reopen schools after a gap of nearly 18 months has created mixed feelings. Students who were forced to stay home due to the Covid-19 pandemic are eager to return to classrooms. Parents, on the other hand, are anxious and apprehensive. As for teachers, they have to balance teaching with Covid-appropriate behaviour. Reports about the likelihood of a third wave of Covid-19 add to the uncertainty of the situation. Experts are of the view that closure of schools for a long time has adversely affected students' learning abilities. The shift from real classroom teaching-learning to online mode could not cater to the needs of all students. It is worrisome to learn that small children have forgotten basics like writing simple words, do calculations, recognising

colours and so on. Thousands of students who do not have digital devices have no access to education. Prolonged digital education has adversely affected the personality of children. Also, it leads to psychological problems. A large number of them are fed up with online classes on devices. A large number of children have left education to do different jobs to help parents. A large number of children have no access to nutritious meals that used to be served in schools. While there is an urgent need to reopen schools, all measures must be taken to prevent transmission of Covid-19. Reopening of schools must be guided by careful risk analysis and epidemiological factors. All schools in a state or district need not be opened in one go. A large number of parents support reopening of schools but a lot of parents are opposed to the idea. School committees must be formed to oversee reopening and decision making.

Schools must devise special time tables. If possible classes must be conducted in open places instead of cramped places. Healthcare workers could be appointed at schools. Covid-19 symptoms must be monitored and antigen tests must be conducted at schools. Yours etc., Venu GS, Kollam

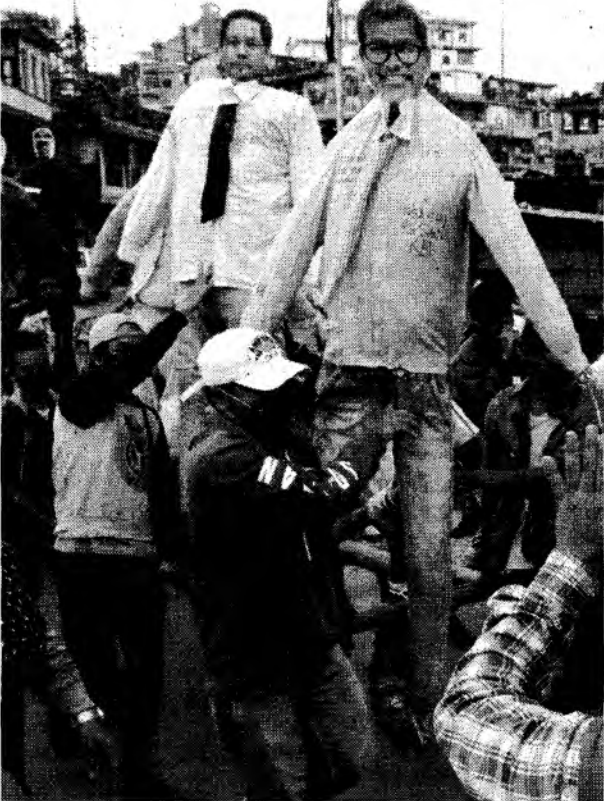
Congress on revival path?

Editor,
It is with great delight that we heard of the appointment of Mr Vincent Pala, Lok Sabha MP as the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress President. The Congress party has been without a leader for a long time now and is beginning to lose its moorings. Party workers too have been waiting eagerly for someone to be appointed so that they can start the membership drive and strengthen the Party at the primary unit. Party workers need to be

The times they are a changin'

By Patricia Mukhim

There is a coming of age in the manner in which the convergence of pressure groups happened so seamlessly on August 15. Barring that rifle-snatching incident and stoning of vehicles -- a natural reaction of anger and frustration from a youth population already suffering from the corrosive spirit of resentment and victimhood that is spreading across the peri-urban and rural landscapes of Meghalaya -- nothing noteworthy happened. So Cherister Thangkiew's funeral procession and the last rites passed off peacefully. And if truth be told, the curfew and internet ban were hyperbolic. The youth are conscious that any disruption of law and order at this juncture would deal a body blow to the poorest. And they are among those poorest! From my humble perspective the youth seem to have graduated from the lynch mentality to common morality and that's one huge mountain they have scaled.



Meghalaya today is a disparate state where a large section of youth carries an intellectual inferiority complex combined with a moral superiority complex. These two complexities pull them apart but they also wish to change things. Only they don't know how. There isn't a ready-made road map or a credible leader without any ambition to ride the political bandwagon, who can take the lead. This is the vacuum that's crying out to be filled. Contrary to what we believe, many of our young people are not just thinking but thinking hard. However, that thinking is no longer about understanding but about belonging. The young are not sure where they belong. The system we have in place called the 'government' seems to have abandoned them to their fates. All around they see a culture of exclusion of non-belongingness and they don't know how to get inside the charmed circles since they were born poor. As Eli Khamarov the Russian born English writer rightly said, "Poverty is like a punishment for a crime you didn't commit."

On Saturday August 21, the rifle-snatching youth who were probably paranoid about where to keep the weapons went and threw them in the Umkhrah River but not before informing the Rangbah Shnong of the area and a section of the media about this shrewd strategy. On Monday August 24 the rifles were found! We could take a harsh view of these events or see them as pranks. But there's also a certain innocence in the act. Many will not agree with my analysis and a few would even berate me for my lack of prescience but that hardly matters, now that one sordid part of August 15 is given a decent burial. Of course, the Scorpio will have to be paid for from the public

purse. But things could have been worse. Then comes August 25 and the public display of anger against the three musketeers in the Government was given full play. In Meghalaya, politics assigns a certain pedigree to the ruling class. They suddenly forget where they come from and where they actually belong. You can't blame them for that. They are ensconced in the secretariat for several hours and then return to the comfort of their homes with little interface with the rude realities of life on the ground. A video of that wrinkled old soul who continues to slog and strain to earn her daily upkeep is Meghalaya's reality today. That video has gone viral. When she was offered some money by a kind soul she was hesitant to accept the money and had to be coaxed to keep it. What a wretched life when seen from the prism

future -- that community asks for and gets chaos. I can't agree more with Moynihan. The tragedy is that no university in the NE Region has till date studied the impact of single-motherhood on the larger thread of society and also why this issue has never figured as an election agenda. This is not something that can be resolved by pushing under the carpet. It has already blown up on our faces! Much of the belligerence of youth comes from an inferiority complex of not having a father to look up to and to confide in man-to-man. With all the courage that women can muster to bring up their kids single-handedly, sons do need a father for physical and emotional security. Several studies on the topic of why a father is important to a child, have shown that when fathers are affectionate and supportive, it greatly affects the child's cognitive and social development. It also instills an overall sense of well-being and self-confidence.

The genesis of Meghalaya's problems are teenage pregnancies which arises from the fact that the school drop-out rate is very high. According to data from Basic Statistics, North Eastern Region (2015) which is the only available data, the drop-out rate at Class 1-5 is 61.0 % male 55.7 female, Class 1-8 is 72.5 % male and 68.3 % female and Class 1-10 is 78.0 % male and 76.7 % female. With such a high school drop-out rate and mostly because the family needs working members, poverty just reinvents itself. Girls marry/cohabit early without fully understanding what they are getting into. It's the same with the male. Very soon the bond fritters and the man moves away to another woman; so too the woman or sometimes she decides to remain alone with her child/children but we can imagine the difficulties of bringing up children in such a situation. Poverty just replicates but gets worse with each generation. The large number of youth who are listless and desperate; are already out of school but are unwilling to labour, are often enrolled into pressure groups. That's how you can have huge numbers turning up at any event. Those that are serious about their studies or have parents that are strict with their movements -- their coming and going can never really give their time and energy to being in a pressure group. But there are other reasons too. These pressure groups are socially muscular bodies that wield a lot of clout with the government of the day. It gives the youth who join these groups a sense of importance -- something they never enjoyed in their homes where they are perennially insecure. An essay by Sara McLanahan, Princeton University and Christopher Jencks of Harvard finds that a father's absence increases anti-social behaviour such as aggression, rule-breaking, delinquency and illegal drug use. The effects they found are greater on boys than on girls. This article is not about morality but of a vicious social problem that has been part of the Khasi society and one which neither church nor other social institutions have cared to deeply understand and to heal so that the next generation does not need to go through this cycle of dystopia. Khasi society today is haunted by the drugs menace amongst other social problems. We truly need to take time off to introspect on these issues rather than being obsessed with the kind of politics we have spawned where the corruption of mind and soul is complete. We have bred politicians with no moral fiber to address these painful, excruciating issues that many single parents are dealing with on a daily basis.

As Eli Khamarov the Russian born English writer rightly said, "Poverty is like a punishment for a crime you didn't commit."

responsibility to the people of Meghalaya. They had elected 19 MLAs in 2018. This is not a small number. They must safeguard this state from all the corruption that is being perpetrated in the present government. They must raise their voices against the coke units in Jaintia Hills in the constituency of their MLA Shitlang Pale. If the Congress keeps quiet now it will lose its legitimacy in the 2023 election. Now that the Party has a President, they must have an action plan for 2023. Times flies and before long it will be time to vote in and vote out people. As a well-wisher of the Congress may I also suggest that the Party should stop paying money for votes. This is what is destroying Meghalaya. Yours etc., KT Sawkmie, Via email

where everyone is on the take. At no time in Meghalaya's history have we had so many pending enquiries. There is the enquiry into the MeECL Saubhagya scam; there is pending enquiry into the Rice scam and now the judicial enquiry into the Cheristerfield Thangkiew killing. Public memory is short and it seems the memory of the Congress MLAs too is short. They have stopped talking about the enquiry into the Power department scam. It is the media that is continually reminding the government about whether the enquiry committee has been set up and when it will start its work. What about the enquiry into the Thangkiew encounter killing? When will it start? Already 13 days have passed but we have not heard the Justice Vaiphei Commission starting its work? By the time the Commission starts working many would have forgotten the exact details of the day. After all human memory is very short. The Congress has a huge

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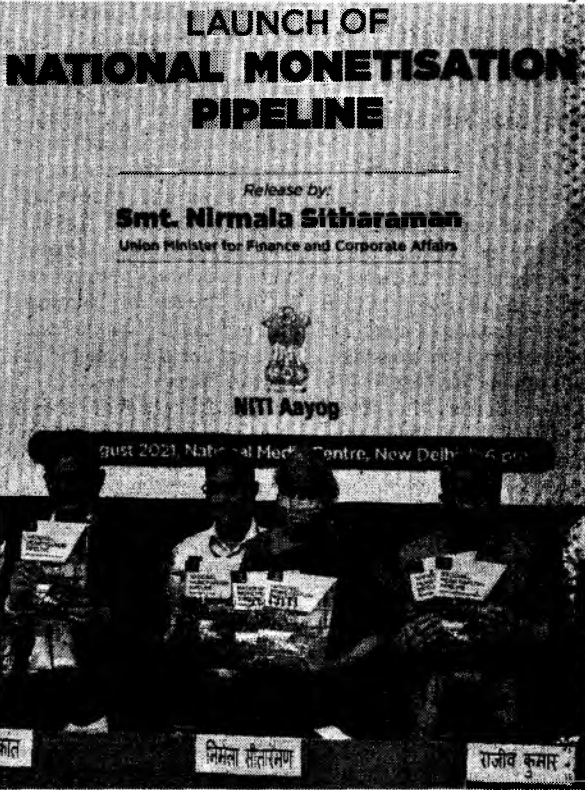
Monetisation plan is handing over public wealth to big business
Stop the sell-out of national assets of the country

By Prof. C P Chandrasekhar

Camouflaged in jargon that speaks of 'monetisation of de-risked assets', the BJP-led NDA government has announced its plan to sell out India's public sector. In that plan, assets ranging from roads, ports, airports and railway track and stations, through fuel pipelines, telecom towers, optical fibre cabling, warehouses, and stadia, are to be handed over to big private investors in return for upfront or staggered payments of around Rs 6 lakh crore over a four year period ending financial year 2025. That sum, the government promises, would be used to create new infrastructural facilities. This is not privatisation argues the finance minister, but only a temporary transfer of rights to revenue streams from existing and functional public sector projects in the infrastructural area to private investors for specified periods of time. Ownership remains with the government, but user rights and revenues would be farmed out to investors for a fee. There are four issues that are conveniently side-stepped here. The first is that, since the plan is to 'unlock the value of idle assets' in the hands of the government, when once-monetised assets return to the government

either higher user charges for consumers or transfers from the government to fund the gap. In instances where the revenue stream is non-existent or limited, the government's contribution will have to be substantial. A process that is to help mobilise resources for the government can suck in large sums. The third is that the private sector would demand freedom to reduce costs to ensure adequate returns. Among those costs would be labour costs, reduction of which can involve wage cuts, retrenchment or both. The role that the public sector has played as a standard setter for organised labour markets is likely to be undermined. Finally, there is little clarity on how the government would ensure that private

managers of assets would provide services of acceptable quality. Putting in place a regulatory regime for the purpose can be costly and time consuming, leading to neglect and a decline in the quality of more expensive services. In sum monetisation, while justified as a process through which resources for investment in greenfield infrastructure projects is to be



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"Government may think itself owner, but it would never manage these assets and provide the services they deliver. It would merely be encashing the presumed value of those assets, which if past experience is an indicator would be kept low to attract investors."

they would be sent back to market for further rounds of monetisation. Government may think itself owner, but it would never manage these assets and provide the services they deliver. It would merely be encashing the presumed value of those assets, which if past experience is an indicator would be kept low to attract investors. And since expected upfront payments have been announced before the bidding starts, the actual sale prices are unlikely to be very much higher. The second, is that the private sector would need a guarantee that during the period it holds, manages and operates infrastructural assets, receipts from the sale of services would be adequate to recoup its investment as well as earn a return which is lucrative enough to attract that investment in the first place. Even if the government is still owner, pricing would have to be commercial and returns attractive. This can be a problem. In areas that can indeed yield a positive net revenue stream, it may not match private sector expectations requiring

mobilised, is nothing but a scheme to expand the terrain of operation of big business, so that the latter can earn high returns either at the expense of the consumer or the State exchequer. It is a scheme to engineer a transfer of income and wealth to those at the apex of the wealth pyramid. Shockingly, this scandalous scheme of mortgaging public wealth to fatten the bottom line of chosen business houses would not contribute significantly to the creation of new assets. The government claims that Rs 111 lakh crore will be invested over five years in projects included in the so-called National Infrastructure Pipeline. The Rs 6 lakh crore to be realised from asset monetisation is only about five per cent of that. The Modi government is justifying handing over wealth created with public money over decades to big business to get itself five per cent of the planned investment in infrastructure over the coming five years. This is nothing but a scam parading as a plan. (IPA Service)

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"The power which establishes a state is violence; the power which maintains it is violence; the power which eventually overthrows it is violence."

— Kenneth Kaunda

The Shillong Times

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Sixth Schedule Amendment proposals

THE District Councils in Meghalaya seem fixated only on the increase in the number of elected members from 30 to 40 for the Khasi and Garo Hills District Councils and 34 for the Jaintia Hills District Council. But the amended Bill provides for Village and Municipal Councils in addition to the District and Regional Councils. Village Councils will be established for villages or groups of villages in rural areas, and Municipal Councils will be established in urban areas of each district. Further, the District Councils may make laws on various issues, including: (i) number of Village and Municipal Councils to be formed, and their composition, (ii) delimitation of constituencies for election to the Village and Municipal Councils, (iii) powers and functions of Village and Municipal Councils.

The Bill also states that the Governor may make rules for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Village and Municipal Councils. Such rules may be framed in relation to: (i) preparation of plans for economic development, (ii) implementation of land reforms, (iii) urban and town planning, and (iv) regulation of land-use, among other functions. What is also of significance is that the Bill provides for the appointment of a Finance Commission for these states which are under the purview of the Sixth Schedule in order to review the financial position of the District, Village, and Municipal Councils. The Commission will make recommendations regarding: (i) distribution of taxes between states and District Councils, (ii) grants-in-aid to District, Village, and Municipal Councils from the Consolidated Fund of the state, (iii) and measures to improve the financial position of District, Village, and Municipal Councils. This is what is much needed in Meghalaya as the funds will devolve to the lowest rung of governance – the Dorbar Shnong etc.

The amendment also seeks to empower the Finance Commission to make recommendations on measures to augment the Consolidated Fund of a state to provide resources to District Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils in tribal areas in the four Sixth Schedule states. Another important aspect is that elections to the District Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils will be conducted by the State Election Commission appointed by the Governor. And last but not least what will stabilise the Councils is the disqualification of their members on grounds of defection. This has in fact been the bane of all the Councils in Meghalaya where MDCs migrate en-masse to the ruling party in the State Government immediately after they are elected from a particular party and hence deceive the people who elected them on the basis of their faith in a particular party.

Will the past be repeated?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

It was the late 1990's and I was in high school. Every day I would take the stairs which passed through my locality on the way to school. One day coming back home, I saw a couple of youths dashing down the stairs. I sidestepped so that they didn't barge into me. Right after they ran across me, another group of youths carrying clubs were chasing after them. Up ahead there was a commotion. Apparently, the group who ran ahead had shot the owner of a restaurant. I made my way to the spot where the shooting took place. Lying unconscious on the ground was the owner, a lady in her forties, with blood streaming from the top of her head. There were two versions that were floating

similar experiences. When he was young he remembered seeing a body being stuffed into a drain in his locality. The victim was an alleged homosexual. It seems that the perpetrators were well aware of his identity. Lipstick was violently rubbed across the face and the victim was dressed in women's clothing after he was killed. Was it a victim of another extortion gone wrong? Or was it a hate crime which took advantage of the prevailing law and order situation? For the person who lost his life and the family who has to grieve for it doesn't matter. The dead are not going to come back. But it wasn't only the

The driver lost control of the vehicle and it met with an accident which proved fatal for one of the occupants.

As the new millennium dawned upon the State, militancy started waning and the law and order situation improved. In the meantime I had entered University. There were people from different parts of the region and I made good friends especially with those coming from Manipur, a State torn by many decades of violence. In school I remembered reading about the violence in Nagaland and Manipur in the papers. Now I was getting to hear a firsthand account of the senselessness of it all.

is seen running towards the direction where the bomb had been planted. Fortunately the child stopped. What would have happened if the child had been closer to the bomb? Maybe we would be reading about a casualty then. The incident was particularly chilling because I used to frequent the place. If things had been different I could have been the victim. In fact anyone who is reading this piece could have been a victim had fate been any different.

The aftermath of the bomb blast brought about the encounter of former HNLC leader Cheristerfield Thangkiew. Whether it is a planned encounter or an operation gone wrong is something only the deceased or the people



around. The youths who had killed her had refused to pay money for the food they had eaten. In the argument one of them took out a gun and shot her. Another version was that this was an extortion attempt gone wrong. Whatever it was, for a young boy like me seeing someone I knew being shot and lying in a pool of blood was traumatic.

This was the time when militancy in Meghalaya was at its peak. Every now and then you hear such stories coming out on a regular basis. All are tragic stories but one was a particularly distressing one. This was about a shopkeeper whose daughter had been kidnapped for ransom. Rumours were floating around that she had been taken across the border. Whether he paid the ransom is not known but she never came back. Even now the father can be seen sitting in his shop. Sometimes I try to imagine his emotional state and try to put myself in his situation. The pain however is too much. But then he was not alone in it. The times were such that such stories were quite common.

A couple of weeks ago when I was discussing the deteriorating situation in the State and sharing some of my memories, my friend revealed

common people who were losing their lives. Apart from the police who were fighting the militants, the militants themselves took casualties. There were many encounters and one whose outcome I saw with my own eyes.

I had this habit of going to the forest to read. The quietness helped me concentrate. It was a forest on top of a hill below which the Wah Umkhar flows. Now the forest is gone and the river is polluted beyond recognition. In later years I would regularly cross the river and come upon the road which would take me to my college. One day I heard a loud noise. In the distance across the river I saw black smoke rise. Making my way across the river I reached the spot from where the smoke originated. On the spot was a charred body lying on the bonnet of a vehicle covered with blood in areas which had not been burned by the fire. Around it there were policemen establishing a perimeter. The papers later reported that the deceased had gone for extortion but was confronted by the police. A chase ensued. The roads are quite narrow and there are some sharp turns which if not careful could lead to a fatal accident. This seems to have happened.

There was a joke about Manipur in my friend circle. There were three ways in which a Manipuri could die: being killed by the Indian armed forces, killed by militants or dying of drug overdose. All three were related. Being killed by militants either on suspicion of being an informant or a rival was quite common. At the same time, fake encounters were endemic. Prominent among them was the Manorama Devi Case who was tortured and killed by the Indian armed forces. The incident made national headlines prompting Meitei women to strip down in protest. Then there was the fake encounter exposed by Tehelka magazine. These were of course the tip of the iceberg. The fragile law and order allowed illegal activities to flourish chief among them being the drug trade. Violence and death inevitably followed. The crux of all is that the genesis of violence does not matter. Once it becomes endemic there is no distinction between those who deserve it and those who don't. Innocent bystanders always get caught in it.

When I saw the visual of the bomb blast in Laitumkhray I was horrified. In the video of the blast a child involved know. An inquiry has been set up which will try to find out the truth. Whatever might be the truth, once the cycle of violence begins there will be casualties on all sides, those who are involved in it and those who have nothing to do with it.

What will happen now? What will the future hold for the State and its people? How do we prevent reliving the past? One way is not to forget the past and remind those around us about what had happened. The state of affairs in which we find ourselves right out, even if the violence of the last few weeks, is ignored is not perfect. The common people were left to fend for themselves during the pandemic. In the state border we have problems with a recalcitrant neighbour. Now with the announcement of the palm oil plantations our indigenous land rights are also in danger of being taken away. There is a need for people to raise their voice against all that is wrong but that cannot be allowed to descend into violence. If that happens there will be no solutions to any of the problems, except the destruction of lives which will never be recovered.

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The quirky politics of development in Meghalaya

By Dominic Stadlin Wankhar

21st century, Meghalaya finds itself at the crossroads in the process of globalization, susceptible to changes and demands to keep pace with the entire region and nation. Coming to achievements and goals, however, much has been left undone and unresolved. The attainment of statehood has not helped in resolving major faults thereby hindering the pace of social stability, peace and development of Meghalaya. Inter-state and international border matters are unresolved agenda. Land reforms that could usher in a degree of economic development are still complicated to settle; we also have a host of other issues like unemployment, inflation, food and water insecurity, rights of women and the disabled, environmental dangers, a flawed industrial policy that gives license to companies to destroy our forests etc.

Every individual who has been born and lived in this state ponders this question, 'Why are we lagging behind in every sphere?' Should we blame this on the attitude of politicians, bureaucrats, social pressure groups or our peculiar system of having too many administrative authorities or even the mindset of common individuals? Probably, it would or could include all the above rather than just some actors in the system since we all live under the same system of interdependence. For the moment let us stop and question ourselves. How much have we achieved in the past 49 years? This can be gauged from the way numerous central and state schemes have been utilized or have been actually allowed to go waste due to such prevailing selfish attitudes. The reality here is that in every planning and implementation, there exists a particular group that hints at benefitting for itself rather than for the entire state; one that looks at the entire concept through a narrow view instead of a holistic one. We must realize that we do not have community responsibility and ownership towards any positive initiative that aims at uplifting those below.

Take the case of how the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has progressed benefitting our rural folks but not before much of the funds are siphoned off either at the village level or at the official level. The progress of the various road infrastructural projects or even the railroad for goods and essential commodities reveal that we are way behind. And if we were to take a microscopic look at the status between targets achieved and targets pending in various government departments, the story of 49 years will tell us a tale of their own. The saddest part here though is that everything is done with a 'good' motive, but then the 'goodness' gets entangled in scams and scandals leaving everyone high and dry.

I was not surprised to read in an online magazine that the health situation here is 'very poor' in terms of infrastructure and delivery mechanism of the health department. But will those in power listen to us? If yes, then a few noble ones would be prepared to find solutions and maybe address them at the nick of time. The unfortunate part in the entire history of Meghalaya is that corruption is committed with impunity; and all this after being called a 'Christian' state where deeds and words don't match. Examples where public money is spent without accountability speaks volumes of the mismanagement, instability and failing governance. Incidentally organizations that proclaim to uphold social values and protect the 'Jaid-bynriew' from transgression and oppression, rarely come out openly against such exploitive attitude by a 'para Khasi' upon another 'para Khasi'. Sadly, this term has been overused for various political and communal propaganda and continues to be used till today. During election time we tend to forgive and forget the past vote back the same people who failed

us in the past five years. The reason is that 'personal' relationships are more important especially in times of death or illness. Such is the 'bond' of politics in Meghalaya.

Coming to our politicians we often hear them going abroad to 'promote' and 'learn' innovative ways of governance and development. They should in fact learn from non-Congress ruled states where the real beneficiaries are the people. Experts from the Centre and elsewhere who come to our state are not impressed since they know everything first hand.

In reality 49 years of statehood has been marked not by progress or development but by political instability and incompetence. This is reflected in the way the Assembly sessions are conducted to failed and unresolved issues. MLAs are elected by the people to legislate and govern not to hand out 'doles'. Donating blankets, shawls, umbrellas, cooking wares, tubs to even opening a cow shed et al portrays a comical picture to the outside world. In fact, such 'generosity' is the work of charitable organizations. If politicians were to indulge in such professions then they should be running charity homes instead of joining politics. The notoriety of this is that they would add such acts as a 'developmental' achievement of their constituency in the government's report. Can we take this as a development package? How sad that we have to swallow everything forced down our throats even when we know its taste. The need of the hour is for the state government to rev up its entire platform of experts and planners and start revitalizing the rural sector which is abundant in resources but untapped due to factors best known to the respective departments.

The State Planning Board (SPB) should have experts and economists rather than accommodating every ex-MLA. The SPB is a classic example of another hibernation hub. Do we really need a Planning Board which is toothless in ensuring that the government implements its recommendations. Politically, I would agree with what a senior Congress leader, Luizinho Faleiro had stated - that our state politicians should start thinking of developing and changing the face of the state, instead of thinking for their chair, and who should or should not lead the government. Very rightly said! Every right-thinking person would agree with this view of a senior politician who knows that under-development lies not in lack of central funds but in instability, unaccountability and restless politics amongst various political members.

As long as our society has narrow inhibitions and self-centeredness the future will continue to inherit the past while others have progressed. The scale of progress was somewhat visible under the political leadership of Dr. Mukul Sangma with the Congress Party in full authority despite the ups and downs in governance. Dr Sangma stands out from all the other CM's because he is in a hurry to deliver, unlike his predecessors. The speedy delivery mechanism envisaged by the Congress government has seen some positive results like the Shillong Bye-pass, four lane outlay of the national highway, conceiving of a medical college, expansion and upgradation of the Umroi airport and development and research in horticulture. Today, we stand at the crossroads whether to accept systemic changes coming into our 'tribal' social fabric or to wait and watch till a certain period for things to happen while other communities have overtaken us and are on their way to economic prosperity and development. It is for us to decide where we want see our state a decade from now.

(The writer was a recipient of the *Avenues Youth Icon Award 2012* and is also a Resource Expert with an organization based in Meghalaya Email: dwankhar78@gmail.com)

The Mawlai episodes

Editor,

By no stretch of imagination can the Mawlai rally of August 25 be compared to the failed Tiananmen Square uprising in China. While the Chinese protest, initiated by a few freedom and democracy-loving youth, which was promptly put down by the army killing them all on the spot, the Mawlai protest was democratic, peaceful and a non-violent public outrage against cold blooded murder by police. The Mawlai rally where men, women, old and young participated, stands out for two reasons: The choice of location and expression of open solidarity with the slain leader Cheristerfield Thangkiew and the banned organisation HNLC. By doing so, the people of Mawlai have sent a couple of messages to the government. First, it was a well thought out stratagem

to have organised the rally at the national highway which brought vehicular traffic movement to a grinding halt, and kept the commercial areas in town on tenterhooks. According to me, the message is: In Mawlai, our wishes will prevail and do not try to rub us on the wrong side. The second message is: We are brave enough to defy the consequences, if any, of siding with the banned outfit.

The fact that there was no police posting at Mawlai since August 14 tells its own story of how the Government has chickened out. The Government has no moral strength to stand up after the killing of Bah Che. When the Home Minister first resigns and then reneges under pressure, it sends conflicting messages to one and all. If he had stuck to his decision, he would have salvaged some face. Be that as it may, the most disturbing trend is that law and order machinery has collapsed in Mawlai as was

reflected in the rifle snatching incident and the shameful act of police running for their lives. By all means the black flag and brandishing of snatched firearms was a one-off innocuous incident. Some journalists and one political leader have seen in these developments a shadow of Kashmir. They are wide off the mark. By doing what they did, the people of Mawlai (read Meghalaya) have not necessarily endorsed HNLC's policies and objectives. They are merely conveying to the government of the day to bring the culprits to justice or else face the Mawlai music. The bottom line is that if the policemen who led the raid are not subjected to disciplinary action for overstepping their brief, there is going to be heightened pressure in the coming days. As a peace-loving citizen, I therefore urge the Government to act tactfully and act fast and not subject the common people to further sufferings.

Yours etc.,
BR Lyngdoh,
Via email

It's a let down by politicians

Editor,

Apropos of the report, "Move no-trust motion: Cong to NPP allies" (ST Aug 26, 2021), as a keen political observer, I am at a loss for words to express my amusement at the desperate attempt of the Congress to return to power. Yes, nobody wants to sit in the cold Opposition. It is also conceded that the Opposition should cash in on every little opportunity to catch the ruling side on the wrong foot. But I think, not being able to force the issue sums up the rudderless state of the opposition.

I have no qualms about conceding that the ruling coalition has plenty of blemishes, some quite unheard of even by Meghalaya stan-

dards. The unbelievable coal racket involving a cabinet minister and his office assistants leading to the Police Department being rid of the minister. That was a first for the State and the Opposition did not raise a heckle as was required. Later, when the Power scam broke out or the Rice scam was exposed by the media, there was no hard push for cornering the MDA Government. Why the Opposition could not press home the coal racket for making it a public issue is simply incomprehensible. Maybe, because the Opposition Congress has skeletons in its own cupboards. Those living in glass houses pelt at their own peril, don't they?

It doesn't surprise anyone that the Congress, instead of moving the no-trust motion themselves, is asking the ruling coalition partners to do so. That's because Congress cannot move another no-confidence motion during the ensuing autumn session of the Assembly as the rules

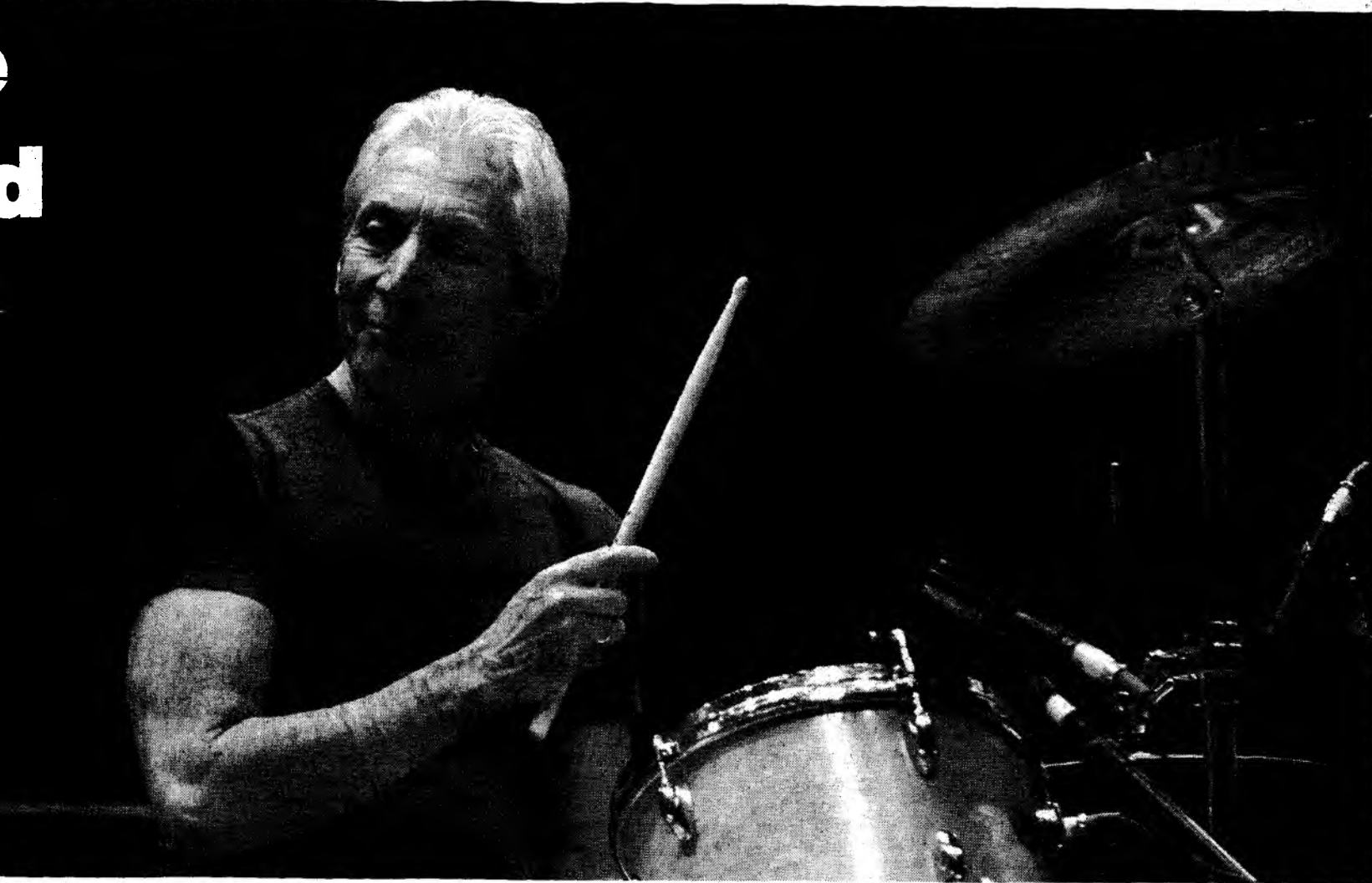
do not permit moving such a motion twice in six months. Congress having exercised that right in the March session has no other option but to let the coalition partners take the lead.

Yes, the MDA is on a sticky wicket over corruption and governance failure, but the alternative hardly inspires confidence. Who wants the same set of corruption-ridden political class? They say, if you shuffle the same pack of cards again and again, you will get the same results. The State actually needs a new breed of politicians willing to break the shackles of stereotypes. The million-dollar question is: Where are they?

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email

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

How Charlie Watts infused one of the greatest rock 'n' roll bands with a little jazz



In an era when rock drummers were larger-than-life showmen with big kits and egos to match, Charlie Watts remained the quiet man behind a modest drum set.

But Watts wasn't your typical rock drummer.

Part of the Rolling Stones setup from 1963 until his death on Aug. 24, 2021, Watts provided the back-beat to their greatest hits by injecting jazz sensibilities – and swing – into the Stones' sound.

As a musicologist and co-editor of the Cambridge Companion to the Rolling Stones – as well as a fan who has seen the Stones live more than 20 times over the past five decades – I see Watts as being integral to the band's success.

Like Ringo Starr and other drummers who emerged during the 1960s British pop explosion, Watts was influenced by the swing and big band sound that was hugely popular in the U.K. in the 1940s and 1950s.

MODEST WITH THE STICKS

Watts wasn't formally trained as a jazz drummer, but jazz musicians like Jelly Roll Morton, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk were early influences.

In a 2012 interview with the New Yorker, he recalled how their recordings informed his playing style.

"I bought a banjo, and I didn't like the dots on the neck," Watts said.

"So I took the neck off, and at the same time I heard a drummer called Chico Hamilton, who played with Gerry Mulligan, and I wanted to play like that, with brushes. I didn't have a snare drum, so I put the banjo head on a stand."

Watts' first group, the Jo Jones All Stars, were a jazz band.

And elements of jazz remained throughout his Stones career, providing Watts with a wide stylistic versatility that was critical to the Stones' forays beyond blues and rock to country, reggae, disco, funk and even punk.

There was a modesty in his playing that came from his jazz learning. There are no big rock drum solos. He made sure the attention was never on him or his drumming – his role was keeping the songs going forward, giving them movement.

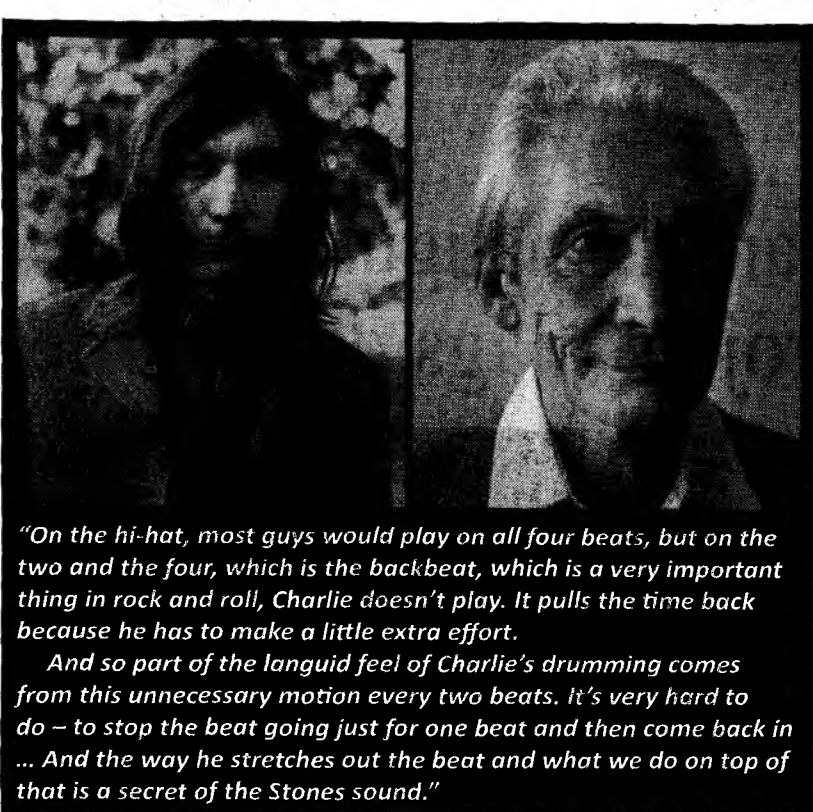
He also didn't use a big kit – no gongs, no scaffolding. He kept a modest one more typically found in jazz quartets and quintets.

Likewise, Watts' occasional use of brushes over sticks – such as in "Melody" from 1976's "Black and Blue" – more explicitly shows his debt to jazz drummers.

But he didn't come in with one style. Watts was trained to adapt, while keeping elements of jazz. You can hear it in the R'n'B of "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," to the infernal samba-like rhythm of "Sympathy For The Devil" – two songs in which Watts' contribution is central.

And a song like "Can't You Hear Me Knocking" from 1971's "Sticky Fingers" develops from one of Keith Richards' highest caliber riffs into a long concluding instrumental section, unique in the Stones' song catalog, of Santana-esque Latin jazz, containing some great syncopated rhythmic shots and tasteful hi-hat playing through which Watts drives the different musical sections.

You hear similar elements in "Gimme Shelter" and other classic Rolling Stones songs – it is perfectly placed drum fills and gestures that make the song and surprise you, always in the background and never dominating.



A JAZZ SENSIBILITY IN A ROCK FORMAT

While the Stones' most obvious musical inspiration was the blues, Watts' drumming had the fluid yet disciplined tendencies of jazz. Few would say he pulled the Stones in an overtly jazzy direction – this would be something he would explore more fully later through side-projects in the 90s, including a big-band and a jazz quintet. But his jazz underpinning would help the band incorporate other genres into their repertoire, from reggae to funk, which helped expand what a rock sound was.

One such sound was the Afro-Cuban mambo groove, which he became familiar with via big band music. This allowed him, as drumkit historian Matt Brennan

points out, to play seamlessly alongside conga player Kwasi Dzidzornu on Sympathy for the Devil, which opened the landmark Beggars Banquet album when the Stones sought to broaden their palette in the late 60s.

While he was able to stretch out across genres, Watts' playing was uncharacteristically unflashy for a drummer in a rock band. Brennan identifies a set of traits that, in the popular consciousness anyway, are associated with rock drummers – being primal, powerful, virtuosic and exhibitionist. On the face of it, Watts displayed none of these.

Unlike Led Zeppelin's John Bonham, he was not an especially powerful hitter. He lacked the quixotic flair of The Who's

Keith Moon, and his playing was far removed from the complex virtuosity of the prog-rock and fusion players who emerged in the 1970s, or indeed, his jazz influences like Roach.

Self-effacing as well as self-taught, for Watts, serving the song was key.

"I try to help them get what they want", he said of Jagger and Richards. "I don't think what I do is particularly difficult. What is good, though, is that people look at me and say, 'Well, I can do that'". But doing what he did is not as easy as he made it sound.

MODESTY AND DISTINCTIVE SIMPLICITY

Watts' hallmarks were simplicity and a feel that provided both space and a solid base for Keith Richards' open-tuned swagger on guitar. The Stones groove derived from how Watts played infinitesimally behind the beat, which Richards has attributed to his distinctive style, and credited as foundational to the Stones' sound.

The Stones, then, relied almost as much on what he didn't play – on the space he left – as on what he did. Watts himself said, "there are a million kids who can play like me". But it was his deceptively difficult and idiosyncratic playing that propelled hits such as Honky Tonk Women and Start Me Up.

In Honky Tonk Women, this can be heard in the slight mismatch between the cowbell and his drums. Then again in the way he subtly pushes the tempo as the song nears its conclusion, which makes it simultaneously a standard rock beat with a tinge of funkiness – without overt syncopation.

"No Charlie, no Stones", Keith Richards has repeatedly stated.

His passing will surely test that claim to its limits. Ultimately, he shaped rock and roll by ignoring its expectations. "Charlie's good tonight, innit", said Jagger on the live 1970 album Get Yer Ya Ya's Out. This was both true, and beside the point. Modest, understated and reliable in a musical world characterised by volume, extravagance and mercurial personalities, Charlie was always good on the night.

POWERING THE 'ENGINE ROOM'

So central was Watts to the Stones that when bassist Bill Wyman retired from the band after the 1989 "Steel Wheels" tour, it was Watts who was tasked with picking his replacement.

He needed a bass player that would fit his style. But his choice of Darryl Jones as Wyman's replacement was not the only key partnership for Watts. He played off the beat, complementing Richards' very syncopated, riff-driven guitar style. Watts and Richards set the groove for so many Stones songs, such as "Honky Tonk Women" or "Start Me Up." If you watched them live, you'd notice Richards looking at Watts at all times – his eyes fixated on the drummer, searching for where the musical accents are, and matching their rhythmic "shots" and off-beats.

Watts did not aspire to be a virtuoso like John Bonham of Led Zeppelin or The Who's Keith Moon – there was no drumming excess. From that initial jazz training, he kept his distance from outward gestures.

But for nearly six decades, he was the main occupant, as Richards put it, of the Rolling Stones' legendary "engine room."

(Courtesy: The Conversation)

Many factors can contribute to your high stress levels, lack of sleep, and getting sick. But did you know that all three of these actually go hand-in-hand? Here's how stress, sleep, and immunity are linked when considering one's general well-being.

"Stress, sleep and immunity are closely linked. When you miss out on sleep, you miss out on time for your body to recharge and prepare for the next day. In fact, sleep is quite vital for our cardiovascular and immune systems to function properly, as well as our ability to think clearly, learn and retain new information, and manage our emotions. If an individual continuously deprives themselves of getting enough sleep each night, they create more stress on their bodies physically and mentally, which in turn affects the immune system, and essentially creates a negative downward spiral," says Nora Tobin, performance enhancement and executive coach, nutrition specialist, and CEO of Nora's Naturals Coffee.

How can optimising stress, sleep and immunity improve your professional performance? Here's what she has to say:

"Other than a strong work ethic and a high level of drive, your professional performance too, is connected to your overall health and well-being. Practicing healthy habits such as getting consistent sleep and managing your stress, can help you stay healthy and maintain a strong immune system. When you get into a healthy routine you will feel more productive and ready to produce high-quality results that you wish to see in your professional life."

Here are Tobin's top 3 tips for optimising stress, sleep, and immunity

STRESS RESILIENCE: When the body is under chronic mental or physical stress, the production of cortisol becomes unbalanced. This leads to excessive fatigue, brain fog, and the storage of fat in the abdominal region. In order to produce enough cortisol to keep going throughout the day, the body pulls from the thyroid (lowered metabolism).

Guided breathing, vitamin D and adaptogenic herbs

balance cortisol (stress hormone) as well as regulates the amygdala — part of your brain that controls anxiety. Try to incorporate one or all of the below daily.

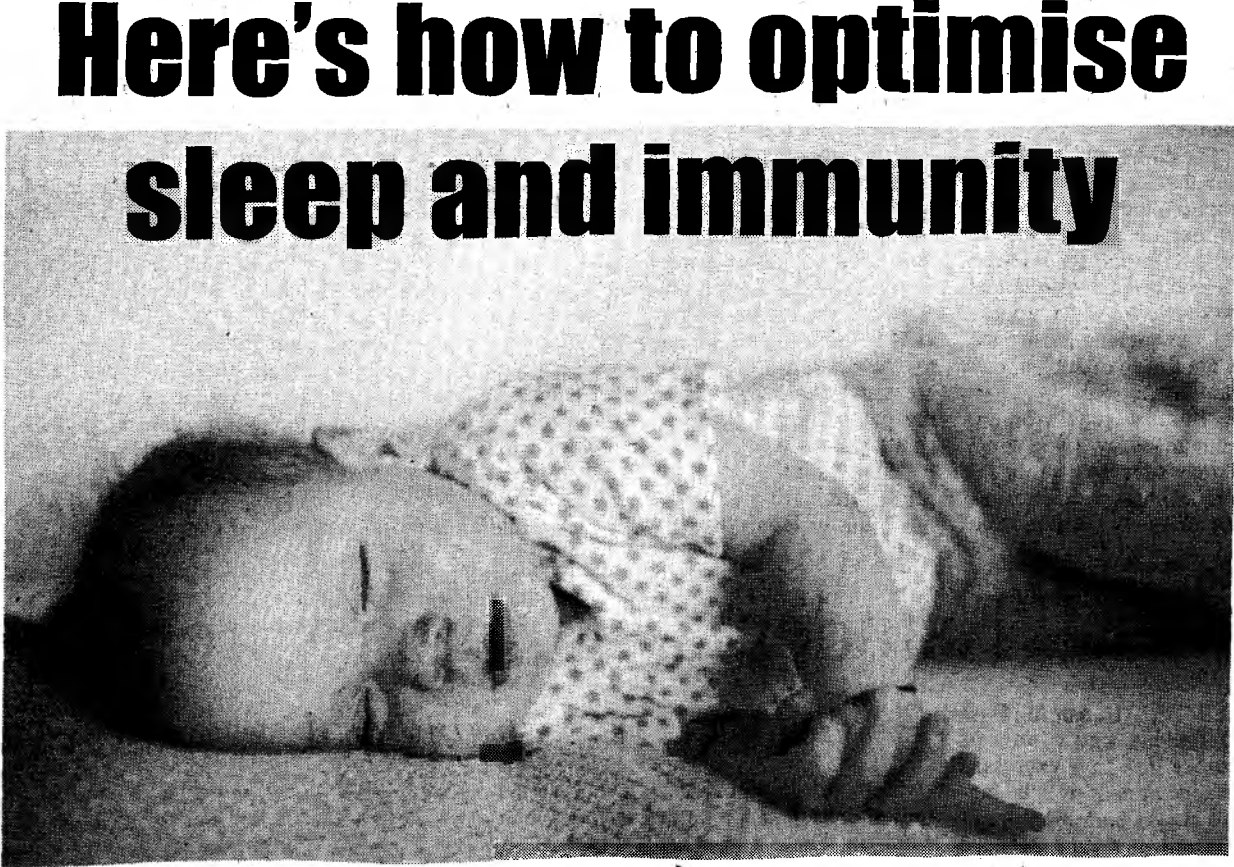
1-minute Meditation: take an inhale for 3 counts, hold your breath at the top for 3 and exhale for 3. Repeat for 1-minute.

Vitamin D: The precursor to serotonin (a feel-good hormone) and strong immune defence for the body. Get outside for 10 minutes without sunglasses or try this quality source of Vitamin D daily.

Herbs: Adaptogenic Herbs have been utilised in India for thousands of years and help support the body's energy and naturally protect against cellular

stress. The top two herbs to utilise to lower stress and anxiety are Reishi and Ashwagandha. Mix into tea or water before bed.

SLEEP ENHANCEMENTS: During sleep, cerebral spinal fluid runs through the brain to clear toxins and create new neural connections crucial for retaining information and slowing down aging. This process is called glymphatic drainage. The lymphatic system primarily works during sleep so to successfully create new cerebral pathways and clear waste products, it is essential to get at least six hours of sleep.



Legs up the wall, temperature changes and minerals help the body shift into a parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest) and out of flight or fight mode.

Lying for 5-10 minutes with legs up the wall will reset circadian rhythm and improve the body's ability to drop into deep REM sleep. Simply lie with legs resting on the wall with feet above hips taking deep breaths.

Alternating between hot water and cold in the shower (20 seconds hot, 10 cold) for two minutes before bed will greatly improve the body's natural ability to regulate its own production of melatonin.

ENERGY IMPROVEMENTS: The body has two forms of energy-burning — glucose and ketones. When the body is primarily burning glucose, it goes through rapid spikes in blood sugar, leading to cravings, energy crashes and weight gain. When the body is burning ketones, it's receiving steady-state energy while burning its own fat stores.

Interval workouts, whole foods and eating healthy fat allow the body to burn more ketones for energy without feeling deprived. This leads to rapid cellular turnover, efficient weight loss/management, and high energy levels all day long.

Raises post workout oxygen consumption, elevating metabolism for 24 hours post-workout. The form of training is suitable for all levels, takes less than 20 minutes, and requires no equipment. This allows the body to burn fat much more efficiently and supply adequate energy to the brain. Alternate with days of low-intensity training like yoga or walking.

Lowering inflammation in the body will optimise and help sustain energy throughout the day, help fight off pathogens and generate rapid cellular turnover. Pick any foods from the attached list to incorporate daily as well as spices and herbs (the more the better).

Shortening the time window of our meals increases autophagy and allows the body to burn ketones (fat stores) for fuel instead of glucose. Eating in this window a few days per week will rapidly increase cellular turnover, boost irisin and enhance cognitive function. (LANSlife)

The September Reading List

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranj-an@gmail.com for any career related queries)

"It's not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required."

— Sir Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

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NMP and uncertain times

THE National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), a four-year plan introduced recently by the NDA Government involving a huge sum of Rs 6 lakh crore involves taking calculated risks. The idea, it is stated, is to "unlock the value in brownfield projects" by engaging the private sector through transferring to them the rights -- not the ownership -- in various projects and using the funds that accrue for strengthening the national infrastructure. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode in investments is being tried on a larger scale. Roads, railways and the power sector assets constitute over 66 per cent of the total estimated value of the assets to be monetized. The balance 34 per cent would involve telecom, mining, aviation, ports, natural gas and petroleum product pipelines etc. The PPP system has proven to be better compared to the misrule of PSUs by politicians and bureaucracy because there are better checks and balances.

The claim by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is that the revenues that would accrue from this initiative will give a big boost to the economy. She claimed that it would add value in terms of infrastructure build-up and explore innovative ways of private participation without a transfer of the government's ownership of these entities. She stressed no land is involved in this initiative, and that the reference is to brownfield projects where investments have been made but the assets thereof are languishing or under-utilized. Optimum utilization is envisaged. The claim from the government is also that this is a globally tested model for development and that these assets will be offered as "concessions, as rights to operate and returned to the state after a given period." This is easier said than done.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's eminent response was that the Modi government is selling off India's strategic assets built over the past 70 years to the present dispensation's cronies. Governments come and go every five years. The commitments that the present government makes in respect of these deals could, in the end result in advantaging the private sector. Those holding power are, admittedly, less smart than the business sharks. See the way they looted banks and scooted from the scene and kept cocking a snook at the government from safe havens abroad. Cases go on and on in courts, and dragging is the name of the game. The nation is into uncertain times. There is a sense that the government is taking extreme measures to raise funds and adopting shortcuts because it is not able to manage the national economy which is already battered by the pandemic.

Buckwheat – where bucks can begin!

By KN Kumar

People of the state – especially those from the Khasi & Jaintia Hills are aware of the commonly found plant Jarain. Most consider this plant to be an invasive weed, while some use its sour leaves in the local cuisine. Prima facie the utility of the plant seems to end there. But there is a lot more to learn about this family of plants, botanically known as Fagopyrum species under the family Polygonaceae. Of particular interest to us in Meghalaya is a sister plant of Jarain – scientifically Fagopyrum esculentum, and commonly known as Buckwheat. This article seeks to create public awareness about the commercial and nutritional potential of Buckwheat for undertaking cultivation in Meghalaya.

Buckwheat is neither native to, nor found in the wild in Meghalaya. Since the ecology of the K&J Hills seems to favour Jarain (F. cymosum) extensively, it is reasonable to assume that the other members of the family should also grow well in our state. Even as we are testing out this assumption in a few farmers' fields in East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi districts even as I write this article, I think the time to elaborate the reasons as to why we should look at Buckwheat more seriously is now. Hence, this effort.

To begin with, Buckwheat is a pseudo cereal, somewhat like Quinoa. While it is a good source of carbohydrates like Rice and Wheat, it has more protein than both, and has no gluten at all. Since it has a low-medium Glycemic Index (55) as compared to Wheat (75) and Rice (73), the benefits of Buckwheat with respect to maintaining the blood sugar levels are now widely known and thus it becomes a good option for people with type 2 diabetes. Its amino acids are very balanced, it is rich in minerals, vitamins and other bio-active compounds and is increasingly being deemed as a superfood by the global dietitians.

From a farmer's perspective, the advantages of cultivating the Buckwheat are manifold. It is a short-duration crop, (about 3 months), rain-fed, and suitable for marginal and low-fertile soils of Meghalaya. Most importantly, the cost of cultivation is low because no chemical inputs are required. The plant is suitable for pollinators like honey-bees because of its copious flowering. Buck-

wheat honey is rare to get and is very expensive, so an additional source of income can be created to Buckwheat farmers by making some small additional investments in skilling them in apiculture. That is what we are attempting through the KVK, East Khasi Hills district.

As is always the case, whenever we seek to introduce a new crop, we ought to be very certain about the market for the fresh produce and the potential for processing opportunities. Such a market survey helps us in deciding where we should pitch ourselves as a state, to avoid any potential farm distress. Our study reveals that India is a net importer of Buckwheat. India imports about 628 metric tonnes of Buckwheat every year, mostly as finished products. Russia, with an annual production of about 80000 M.T is the largest producer in the world, while Japan is the largest importer and imports more than 42000



M.T. annually. The made-in-Japan Buckwheat Soba noodles are a hot global product. Buckwheat is marketed as grain (whole seed), the dehulled groats (the kernel), flour, bran and the husk. Even the husk is used for stuffing pillows. Nothing goes waste because the potential of the plant as animal fodder is also sufficiently researched upon. Considering that India is an importer of Buckwheat, we may be in a position to do some import substitution while parallelly exporting to countries like Japan, whose demand, we learn, is insatiable.

Meghalaya can emerge as a leading buckwheat producer of the country if we look at the crop seriously, in part because only two states Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are currently cultivating Buckwheat and on the other, Meghalaya's tem-

peratures of below 30 degrees centigrade are highly conducive for the plant growth and flowering. The plant can tolerate the acidic conditions of our soils while also being cold and drought tolerant. Therefore, it may be suitable for the transition stage planting beginning late August and can continue till February/March. If systematically planted, two crop cycles can be taken up between August and May. Also, buckwheat can be grown in abandoned soils due to mining, and therefore, useful for phytoremediation. We have all the critical ingredients necessary for cultivating Buckwheat, so, the idea of growing the crop as a component of sustainable agriculture in an ecologically fragile state like Meghalaya is worthy of exploration.

Now, let me update you about the trials conducted at the KVK, East Khasi Hills. We learnt a few lessons through these trails – chief

among them being that the plant cannot tolerate heavy rainfall. So, no plantation should be done during Kharif season. We can safely recommend that the farmers may begin planting post the harvest of the Kharif crop or during the transition between Kharif and Rabi. Based on the trials conducted during the Rabi season the crop planted during the first week of February gave us a yield of about 300 Kgs/acre while in the second trial that was started in the first week of March the yield almost doubled to about 590 Kg/acre. The KVK has now commenced the next round of trials in the farmers' fields with planting done in the last week of August, to study if the plant can do just as well, during the transition between Kharif and Rabi. Even as the trials are going on, the Farmers' Commission assured the farmers that it will buy-back whatever

quantities of Buckwheat they produce to insulate them from the market risks. Besides, we will need the seed for area expansion. Buckwheat seed is not that easy to get in large quantities. Even the initial Buckwheat seed of the variety VL-Ugal-7 was given to us gratis by a very committed ICAR scientist Dr. Arun Pattnayak, from Almora, which we are now multiplying through the KVK.

Before I conclude, I want to flag the various entrepreneurial opportunities in buckwheat. While there are several products that can be made and marketed with Buckwheat, I will just pick one product viz., the Buckwheat noodles, for discussion. The noodles made out of Buckwheat flour can be a very good alternative to the conventional noodles that are made with maida (refined wheat flour). Wheat flour loses fibre, Vitamin B, and Iron in the refining process. Worse, obesity, type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance and elevated cholesterol are attributable to the regular and high consumption of maida.

The noodles market in India is a Rs.10,000 crore business and is said to be expanding at a compounded annual growth rate of 5.6%. Wai Wai, the popular brand based out of Assam and Uttarakhand, has established a very wide consumer base in the North-eastern states, and according to one report it earns 50 per cent of its total revenues from the region. The noodles business in the North-east is on a high growth mode. To my mind, this growth is coming at a cost to the health of the people. We can easily substitute the maida based noodles to buckwheat-centric noodles – a much healthier option for the people of the region. And, Meghalaya can be central to this because we have a head-start and commercial production can start very soon if the market for the value-added products is also tied-up. There are other products, viz., buckwheat husk stuffed pillows which are highly valued in Japan, for their healing properties, the buckwheat bread, bakery items, buckwheat honey, etc. The list is pretty long for a curious mind intent on entrepreneurship. And, our farmers will benefit immensely when local entrepreneurship joins hands with us. If you can forgive my rhetoric a bit, bucks can actually begin with the Buckwheat. Any takers?

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

Wickliffe Syiem must be remembered, not derided

By Gary Marbaniang

I asked five Khasi woman recently: my mother, my sister, my niece and two of my colleagues about Wickliffe Syiem. No one had any idea whatsoever about who he was. My niece said that he was a former Chief Minister and my sister said that he was one of the leaders of the Hill State movement. My mother and my two colleagues bluntly replied that they have no idea.

I wrote a snapshot about him but I didn't mention who he was. Wickliffe Syiem was the heir to the chieftainship of Hima Nongstoin. After he completed his education he came back to his chieftainship and he co-ruled Nongstoin as deputy chieftain (Syiem Khynnah) with his Uncle, Sib Singh Syiem as the chieftain. At the time of India's Independence, the Indian leaders came up with a plan to integrate the princely states into the Indian Union. There were 562 princely states in India at the time of its independence. The Indian leaders mooted the idea of categorising the Khasi chieftainships as princely states and they did that. There were 25 Khasi States at the time of India's Independence. So began the process of integration. The then Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari acting as a Crown representative convinced the Khasi Chiefs to signed the Standstill Agreement on July 16, 1947 in which a period of two years was given to the

IoA the envoy issued an order prohibiting Wickliffe Syiem from entering Nongstoin and upon hearing the news that his uncle had relented and signed the IoA, Wickliffe Syiem immediately wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru urging him to instruct the Regional Assam government to stop their illegal activities in his chieftainship but all his peaceful efforts to regain back rulership of his kingdom came to naught. When all his peaceful efforts failed, he vowed to never set foot again in his Hima. He eventually made East Pakistan later turned Bangladesh his home and he never returned to Nongstoin until his death.

His tragic life story deserves to be made into a movie. It would be cinematically beautiful and tragic at the same time if displayed on the silver screen. If Hollywood can make a movie about William Wallace, the famous Scottish knight then why can't Bollywood or the Khasi film Industry make a movie about Wickliffe Syiem. Wickliffe did not try to adopt guerrilla warfare to fight a bloody war against India; for this reason alone he must be applauded. It would have ended in bloodshed and suffering for the Khasi people. He tried to fight with his beautiful mind and the pen but it was fruitless. He accepted his fate and the fate of his people and died a peaceful death.

"Wickliffe Syiem passed out with a degree in engineering from then Bombay University in the 1930's. It's unconfirmed but it was said that he even completed his post engineering degree from London."

Khasi Chiefs to work out a viable plan for formulating the terms and conditions for the Khasi States to accede to India. Then without warning and like a bolt from the blue, Akbar Hydari acting as a representative of the Indian government came back within a period of four months and he made the Khasi Chiefs signed the Instrument of Accession (IoA) on 15th December, 1947 supposedly with a veiled threat of the consequences of not signing the IoA. The two-year time period agreed upon in the Standstill Agreement was therefore not respected.

Six Khasi chieftainships refused to sign the IoA and Nongstoin was one of them. Then under the rulership of Wickliffe Syiem and Sib Singh Syiem, Nongstoin declared independence from India on 13 January, 1948. On March 7, 1948 Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam sent an envoy named G P Jarman, Dominion Agent with a platoon of Assam rifles personnel to Nongstoin to convince Sib Singh Syiem, Wickliffe Syiem's Uncle and ruler of Nongstoin to sign the Instrument of Accession. Wickliffe Syiem was out of station when this envoy entered Nongstoin. Sib Singh Syiem refused to budge for a while. Seeing his resistance the envoy decided to threaten him. He also issued an order prohibiting him from leaving Nongstoin until a final settlement is reached. Sib Singh Syiem was a dedicated member of the Presbyterian Church. At that time Sib Singh Syiem was duty bound to attend a church meeting as a faithful member of the church in the village of Rikhen in present day Nongkhaw. Upon hearing of the news that Sib Singh Syiem had left Nongstoin, GP Jarman took it as a sign of rebellion and sent the Assam rifles platoon to arrest him. Sib Singh was captured and brought back to Nongstoin. Sib Singh Syiem finally relented. He signed the Instrument of Accession on March 19, 1948. His ministers urged him to sign it because they feared for his life and they didn't want their chief to die unignified.

After the signing of the

on October 21, 1988 in the plains of Bangladesh.

What makes Wickliffe Syiem stand out from the crowd is that he didn't have blood in his hands. He was the most peaceful of all the rebels who fought against the Indian State. I think this can be attributed to him being the son of a pastor and secondly because he was highly educated. After his uncle, Sib Singh Syiem signed the IoA he sent a telegram to the Secretary General of the United Nations on March 24, 1948 informing him about the unfortunate developments in his Hima and urged the United Nations to liberate his people from Indian rule. He even went to the United Nations headquarters in New York to plead his case as the rightful ruler of Hima Nongstoin but he didn't succeed. Later on in his life I think he accepted the fate of his Hima and his people and was resigned to the fact that there was no point in fighting a losing battle.

While living in Bangladesh he worked as an engineer. Initially I thought his engineering degree went to waste. The saddest part about his life was the phase where he went through an existential crisis. My father's uncle passed out from Scottish Church College in Kolkata with a BA degree in the 1950's and when he returned home to his village, everyone was in awe of him. Wickliffe Syiem passed out with a degree in engineering from then Bombay University in the 1930's. It's unconfirmed but it was said that he even completed his post engineering degree from London. One can only imagine the reception he got in Nongstoin when their bright and brilliant future ruler finally returned home. Any person is bound to go through an existential crisis if one goes through such highs and lows in life. He gave it all up (fame, money, position) because he never budged from his principles. There has never been a Khasi leader ever since and there probably never will be again.

Trivia: Wickliffe Syiem was also a football and a hockey player par excellence.

Letters to the Editor

Misogynistic view of women

Editor,
In the recent weeks, the state especially the capital city Shillong has seen a lot of protest against the alleged fake encounter against the former General Secretary of the banned HNLC. While many comments have been made on the said police action. I however, would like to draw the attention of the readers to the statement made by Donbok Kharlyngdoh in the protest at Mawlai where the speaker had stated that if the Home Minister does not suspend the cops involved in the alleged fake encounter, the people of Mawlai have prepared a 'Skirt' for the Home Minister. What on earth does the speaker mean to convey by such sexist and misogynistic statement? As a Khasi woman I am appalled by such a statement. A simple understanding of this statement would convey that the speaker means to say that if the Home Minister does not dare to suspend the cops, he is weak and therefore they have prepared a skirt ready for him; which implies that the speaker thinks that skirt wearing people (women folk) are according to him weak (Kaei phi mut ban ong bah Donbok Kharlyngdoh, ba ki kynthei Khasi ki dei kiba tlot bor?). This, I feel is a despicable statement that should be condemned by all Khasi women. Is not this

akin to a Taliban mentality where women are regarded as weaker and lesser people compared to their male counterparts? I wonder if he holds the same view towards his mother, wife, daughter, sisters, aunts etc.

Women in our society and elsewhere have to work hard to be where they are, to allow such people with such cowardly, misogynistic mentality to get away with making such abhorrent statements against women of our society and women in general. This should be condemned by one and all.

Yours etc
I.Rapsang
Shillong – 8

Oil palm will upset the environment

Editor,
The past 100 years have witnessed the major injuries being inflicted upon the most beautiful planet in the solar system. We have in fact senselessly punctured mother earth in pursuit of our selfish ambition. We only felt important to respond to our base impulses of greed. We never gave a second thought to the consequences of our ceaseless exploitation of the earth's crust. Has the deep rat-hole mining not already disfigured many parts of Jaintia Hills resulting in a number of tragedies in the recent past? It calls for sin-

cere soul-searching. Since prudence and greed are inversely proportional, we have totally lost our own sanity in the process. Are we — the so-called academically qualified people, not fully responsible for all the ecological mess and the change of climate now? We hardly can discriminate right from wrong. This present controversial plan of oil palm "monoculture" in the Northeast could be another recipe for disaster. It may go against the natural rhythm of biodiversity.

Let me draw an analogy for a layman's understanding. What if we start eating "ghee only" as our principal food for a longer period of time? What will be its impact upon our bodies though it's one of the very rich and nutritious milk products? It will certainly lead to various health complications, apart from indigestion. Even if we would be able to digest the ghee, the body will still be lacking many other minerals and vitamins leading to various malfunctions in our internal system. Nature requires us that we take varieties of "locally" produced vegetables, fruits, cereals as our balanced food for healthy living. Perhaps that is why bio-diversity is the fundamental characteristic in the "body of creation". We have honeybees, we have butterflies but we also have pesky houseflies, cockroaches and mosquitos. If the honeybees are so useful then why are

there less or not apparently useful insects, some are very poisonous? Yes, there are a lot many complex things around than that meet our eyes.

The widespread plantation of oil palm at a whim will surely invite various natural catastrophes as pointed by scholars such as Toki Blah, Patricia Mukhim and others. A NEHU research scholar Clarissa Giri deeply laments how the extensive monoculture might upset the ecological balance. I daresay, the infinite creation of God cannot be understood by our finite minds. However, we can have a sigh of relief now that our Member of Parliament, Agatha Sangma has sent a letter to the Hon'ble Prime Minister citing grave environmental fallout due to the extensive monoculture of palm oil in the Northeast. In one chorus all should lend support to Ms Sangma. Moreover, this oil palm is not endemic to Northeast India either as tea to Assam and Darjeeling. Unlike anything, it is going to adversely affect the terrestrial ecosystem, wildlife integrity and much more.

Here one strongly feels that we should not turn deaf ears to what has been warned by our learned environmentalists. Let's listen to the siren of climate change with utmost seriousness. Our sincere efforts in adopting every possible measure to chill down the surging heat of

global warming will be the "greatest gift to our kids". We should learn to make peace with the ecosystem, not with the wallet.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gevali,
Shillong

Conflicting court verdicts

Editor,
The latest verdict of the Chhattisgarh High Court that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife is not rape even if it is by force or against her wish has sparked off an intense debate over the legality of marital rape. Section 375 of the IPC defines rape as, "non-consensual sexual intercourse with a woman". However, in India the husband is exempted from any penal consequences if he forces intercourse on his wife without her consent.

Different views of High Courts in India on the legality of marital rape have often confused people. Recently, the Kerala High Court ruled that marital rape could be considered grounds for divorce. The Chhattisgarh High Court, on the other hand, does not presume that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife using force or against her will is not rape. In 2018, the Gujarat High Court observed that non-consensual intercourse by a husband was not rape. The Delhi High Court observed in the same year that marriage did not

mean consent and that both men and women had the right to say "no." People look to the Supreme Court for protecting the rights of women. Sadly, the Supreme Court failed miserably to do so. What the judiciary has done to protect women's rights in relation to marital rape is raise the age of marriage to 18.

It is ironic that in India, where women's rights and gender equality are burning issues in all domains, marital rape is not criminalised. It must be understood that the governments and the judiciary in the countries where marital rape is criminalised have more sensitivity towards women's problems and their rights. Successive governments have shown no will or interest in women's right to their bodies after marriage. Our law makers must understand that a marriage is not a licence for the husband to rape his wife. In fact, forced sexual intercourse by a husband is an offence just like any other physical violence by a man against his wife. Although the Constitution guarantees equality to all, Indian criminal law discriminates against women.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

— Malcolm Forbes

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MDA Govt playing mind games

THERE are three judicial inquiries instituted by the Government of Meghalaya on (a) the MeECL Saubhagya scam (b) the Rice scam and (c) the encounter killing of former HNLC General Secretary, Cheristerfield Thangkhiw on August 13 last. Other than the media, no political party, is keen to follow up on these inquiries and to find out their outcomes. It's normal for the coalition partners in the present MDA Government to want to give all three inquiries a decent burial. But what about the Congress - the main opposition party? The Congress attacks the MDA Government in fits and starts which is both inconsistent and unsystematic. If the Congress was serious about safeguarding the interests of the state and people, it would have used its resources to ferret out the truth in these various scams. Politicians in the Opposition know the modus operandi of those in the ruling conglomerate and it's not difficult for them to track the rot in the system. The new Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Chief and Shillong MP, Vincent Pala, had told the media that coal bearing trucks are paying Rs 1.20 lakh each for free and safe passage from Meghalaya to Assam and beyond. They were earlier paying Rs 60,000 for the same service. The higher the payment the more coal the trucks carry. They are now carrying upwards of 40 tonnes per truck. No wonder the Bailey bridge at Dwar-U-Ksuid, Umroi is constantly breaking down.

The Government will continue to play mind games with the public which has a short memory. But the media has to keep reminding the Government that it cannot manipulate peoples' minds through the most used mind-game tactic - that of diverting their minds to other issues so that they will forget the core issues. On August 5 last the Government announced that a retired judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court would inquire into the Rice scam. It is not known if this one-man Inquiry Commission has since proceeded with the formalities and started its investigation and whether those involved have been questioned. In the interests of transparency it is the Government's responsibility to inform the public on the status of these inquiry Committees/Commissions.

On the Cherister Thangkhiw killing case Retired Justice, T Vaiphei who heads both the Meghalaya and Assam Human Rights Commissions, was appointed by the Government of Meghalaya on August 20 last to head the independent Judicial Inquiry into the matter but here too the public is in the dark as to whether the Commission has begun its work and questioning of witnesses has started. Why this aversion for transparency?

They 'can' or 'cannot' occur concurrently

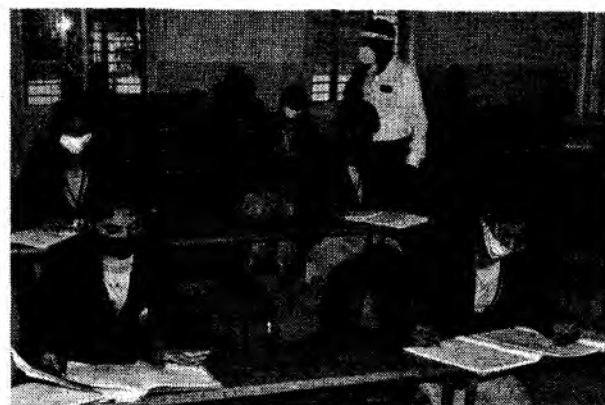
Resuscitating education and protecting population

By TFL Mawlong

work cultures in the colleges. Therefore, one would expect breaches at various points.

Second, when colleges reopened last year, ephemeral emotions drove a significant number of students to classes. The attendance then dropped to a paltry 15% (approx) on

sons taught online. And the pro-offline group would be familiar only with the topics covered offline. Of course, some students attended both online and offline classes. Again, a significant number of students attended neither. This is, to me, an issue we



average. Colleges, understandably, have no control over this. In such cases, we require some innovations to ensure the access to lessons is fair. Unfortunately, none of our colleges have a proclivity to innovation.

Evidence suggests our colleges have only a rudimentary understanding of what blended learning is. Most principals appear to understand and accept blended learning as a process in which some classes are offline and others online. While there is nothing seriously wrong with that, there is a catch! When colleges reopened last year, some of those who attended offline classes rarely attended online classes. And many of those who attended the on-line classes were outstation students and few Shillong residents, most of whom did not attend offline classes. Of course, there was some overlapping.

So an offline class would typically comprise 'some' students from among those who 'rarely' attend offline classes plus 'some' students from among those who 'rarely' attend offline classes. Therefore, mixing online and offline lessons for every unit taught (as colleges did last year) would cause a peculiar 'fairness issue'. You end up teaching different lessons for two almost different groups belonging to the same class. The pro-offline group would learn only topics/les-

sons taught online. And the pro-offline group would be familiar only with the topics covered offline. Of course, some students attended both online and offline classes. Again, a significant number of students attended neither. This is, to me, an issue we

must not overlook. Vulnerable students should stay at home. So it appears we are in a catch-22 situation - damned if I do, damned if I don't. On the one hand, we want to revive regular classes and ensure good attendance, on the other hand, we want to protect the vulnerable population. They are mutually exclusive events if the approach is tactless and the same as last year i.e. if colleges continue to adopt a very shallow, lazy, laughable, incorrect adoption of blended learning.

The solution is to implement 'true' blended learning, as required by the UGC. True blended learning is a learning approach that combines face-to-face and online learning experiences. That is not to say that a teacher can simply upload lecture videos of some topics, discuss the rest in offline classes, and claim to be leading blended learning.

In the current situation, colleges should implement a 'remote' version of blended learning. And I sincerely wish their methods would supplement in-class lectures, and effectively 'accelerate' learning. Since the need to avoid overcrowding would mean a reduction in the number of offline classes, one should improvise and adapt. Just a thought: perhaps one could expertly break down the one-hour class into chunks of 15-25 minutes micro-lectures, allowing for two or

three topics to be discussed while reserving 10-15 minutes for worksheet discussion. It is possible to do it without sacrificing depth. You could then supplement the lectures with expertly designed 'worksheets' both as hard copy and online. Notes for rote learning are not important. I am sure this will allow teachers to cover more topics, and help students learn more quickly, retain more information, and avoid the usual 'crash' lecture. I know because I have successfully done it myself, and that too in complex, highly conceptually, mathematically dense topics of Quantum Mechanics. Teachers, of course, should develop the innovative methods that suit them. One can then deliver the recorded videos of these micro-lectures via an e-learning portal for those who cannot attend if live-streaming the class is difficult.

But then again, none of the colleges I am aware of, have a good e-learning solutions. Some colleges do have a free version of WordPress LMS Plugin, like 'Tutor LMS', installed on their websites. However, such an e-learning platform has so little to offer. If you can have a sneak peek at these e-learning portals through any student account, you will see only a swarm of pdf/photo notes. Also, being a free version, a WordPress Plugin, and using a low-cost server, such an e-learning solution is useless because it is too slow and lacks capabilities. It can barely handle 10 concurrent users at a normal speed. Hence, on the scale of a college, such e-learning is merely a 'show'.

We have done our best to protect the students up to this point. I hope we don't throw that away. Many people have been fully/partially vaccinated, so new confidence emerges, luring us into a false sense of invincibility. But we must not forget we are still in the grip of fear; our vulnerability remains high. I hope principals will enthusiastically embrace true blended learning and faithfully enforce protocols everywhere in their campuses. May you find the fortitude and adaptability to deal with these challenges.

(The author can be reached at tfmawlong@gmail.com)

National Monetisation Pipeline: Pipedream or bold reform?

By Ajit Ranade

India is struggling with a large fiscal deficit. This was expected due to two reasons. Large spending commitments due to Covid and falling tax revenue. Last year the finance minister had budgeted the deficit to be 3.5 percent of the GDP for the fiscal year 2020-21. The actual deficit turned out to be 9.3 percent. In rupee terms the slippage of actual over budgeted was Rs 10 lakh crore. This shortfall has to be made up by fresh borrowing. For the present fiscal year, i.e. 2021-22, the budgeted deficit is 6.8 percent of GDP or Rs 15 lakh crore. This too will be made up mostly by fresh borrowing. The plan is to borrow 12 lakh crore, which makes up more than three fourth of all the financial savings of the households in India. The fresh borrowing keeps adding to the debt mountain of the Central government, which is now at 60 percent of the GDP. This is the highest it has been in 14 years.

The N.K. Singh-led expert committee on fiscal responsibility had recommended a debt to GDP ratio of 40 percent. So, the current indebtedness levels are dangerous and could be unsustainable. Also, it is worth a reminder that today's borrowing is nothing but a tax on future unborn generations. The more reckless the spending today, the less is the fiscal space available tomorrow. Unless of course growth picks up very strongly.

It is in this context that the government has to seriously think about other avenues of raising revenue or reducing spending, without sacrificing its core responsibility of governance, social and national security. It is true that seen purely in terms of fund flows, the deficit situation is worrisome. But seen from a balance sheet perspective, it is much better. The government may have a lot of unfunded spending obligations, but it also has assets on its balance sheet which can be "monetised". Of course, we are not talking about selling off the Taj Mahal or the Gateway of India. But there is a philosophical case to be made to divest assets in areas where a private party might function more efficiently and generate more value from the same asset than the government.

The revolution in telecom or cable TV has shown to what heights privatisation can take a sector, which languished under a state monopoly for decades. The same is true for private courier services, or airlines and hotels. But successive governments have found it difficult even to mention the taboo word of "privatisation". That Lakshman Rekha was crossed in this year's budget speech. Will that ambition be translated into reality? The record is not inspiring. For the last seven years the privatisation (or disinvestment) targets have been consistently missed by a wide margin. For instance, last year the target was 2.1 lakh crore, and not even 10 percent was realised. Even in years when the target was achieved it was because one PSU was asked to buy the shares of another PSU, which is like the left pocket paying the right pocket. Remember that this is a ruling party which has promised minimum government and maximum governance.

Seen in the light of an acute fiscal crunch, the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) is an ambitious idea. It aims to transfer (not sell) operating assets to private parties, and encash the value up front as a lump sum payment from an auction. The finance minister had announced this idea in her budget speech, and the details

were unveiled on August 23. The proposals are very ambitious, and go beyond sectors like power, roads and railway assets as mentioned in the budget speech, to a total of 14 sectors, including telecom towers, gas pipelines, warehouses, solar projects and even stadiums. Many of these assets don't belong to the government per se, but rather different corporate entities, such as the National Highway Authority of India, or Power Grid Corporation. The resources raised will not wholly go to plug only the fiscal deficit, but to those respective corporate bodies. In the next four years the government estimates raising 6 trillion rupees from the NMP, of which 0.88 trillion is to be realised this year itself.

Given its record on privatisation these numbers are very ambitious and unrealistic. Also, the risk perception varies from sector to sector. The cleanest case is of toll highways, which the NHAI has anyway been monetising. The private party that wins the bidding, signs a "concession" agreement to collect toll revenues for the next 15 or 20 years. The value of the bid is obviously the discounted present value of all the tolls that would be collected in the future. Note that the toll cannot be fixed by the toll operator. It is to be notified by the government. What if there is political agitation to make the road toll free? This indeed has happened in the case of the Noida toll bridge which went toll free in 2016. Or the Mumbai Pune expressway which has fought a battle to make it toll free. Indeed, that expressway is the oldest (since 2004) and most successful example of a monetised asset, but has not been without its own controversies. What if traffic drops to zero due to a pandemic-induced lockdown? Who will bear that risk?

There are also other risks of abrupt cancellations of long-term contracts. The Power Purchase Agreements in Andhra Pradesh where the present government cancelled PPAs by the previous one led by the Telugu Desam Party, are a case in point. These are the kind of contingencies that the NMP agreements have to specify. In essence the private operator gets the monopoly right to collect the toll for a long period in exchange for the upfront value. How is the quality of service to be ensured? Will there be a regulator? Not all private entrepreneurs would be willing to take on such risks of political upheavals. Such a political minefield is not easy to navigate. So does this mean that only "cronies" will bid, as they are better at "managing risks" or due to an implied quid pro quo? These are the uncertainties plaguing the NMP. Due to such factors, detractors will surely accuse the government of selling assets ("family silver") cheaply or only to cronies.

Another important question is how is the money going to be raised by the private parties? If the bulk of the 6 trillion rupees to be earned from bidders is to be borrowed from banks, are the banks willing to take this risk? And who bears the risk of bad loans? Will it fall on taxpayers?

The NMP is a fresh approach to Public Private Partnership. Its success will depend on the devil which is in the details. And the risks of capture, by potential private monopolies, of public assets are real and need to be addressed.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@the-billionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Appointment of Head of the Judicial Inquiry - Some questions

Editor,

The 'encounter killing' of ex-militant Cheristerfield Thangkhiw on August 13, 2021 compelled the Government of Meghalaya to announce the setting up of an Independent Judicial Inquiry. Subsequently, the Government also announced that it would be headed by the Chairman of the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission (MHRC). Earlier, MHRC had on its own announced that it had taken suo - moto cognition of the incident. Few probing questions have arisen.

An Independent Judicial Inquiry means independent of the Government and intended for a specific purpose and for a specified period. Its report is expected to be totally independent. Its terms and conditions like monetary remuneration, allowances, secretarial support, perks etc., are separate and framed for a specific purpose and a specified period. MHRC is a quasi - judicial body and a regular institution established by an act of Parliament. The entitlements and terms and conditions of the Head of MHRC are similar to that of the High Court which is a regular body.

An Independent Judicial Inquiry is expected to come out with a report and findings of its own. MHRC will also come out with a separate report on its suo - moto cognition of the case. The Independent Judicial Inquiry being headed by the Chairman of the MHRC means expecting two reports from the same person performing dual charges. It doesn't make sense.

Financially, the Chairman of MHRC enjoys the salary, leave, allowances, perks etc which equal to the Chief Justice of the High Court. He also draws a pension as a retired Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court. Over and above that he will be getting the remuneration, perks, etc., as Head of the Independent Judicial Inquiry. What a job!

I leave to the readers to draw the conclusion about the independence of the report - one from the Independent Judicial Inquiry and another from the MHRC, effectively being submitted by the same person!

Government may like to clarify in case the stated facts are incorrect.

Yours etc.,
Rudi Warji,
Via email

Who will save us from ourselves?

Editor,
A news item which ap-

peared in your newspaper dated August 28, 2021 under the heading, "HSPDP for government resolution" reveals once again that all political parties are on a race to outdo each other to fulfil the wishes of vested interests who control our government and are out to destroy our state. This time, it is the HSPDP which has petitioned the Government to send an Assembly Resolution that would urge the Government of India to amend Para 12A(b) of the Sixth Schedule by replacing the word "President" with "Governor" so that it will be easier for Meghalaya to obtain exemption from the applicability of the MMDR Act, 1957 and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. The HSPDP also lamented that the earlier Assembly Resolution to exempt applicability of the above Central Acts in the state had been turned down by the President of India. In this regard, we should thank the President for turning down the above proposal. His rejection amounts to a great benevolent act of Saving Us From Ourselves. Had the President given his assent, more forests would have been destroyed, more rivers poisoned and more mountains hollowed out for the greed of a few. Funnily, the HSPDP stated that the proposal has been made to "protect and preserve the unique identity, land tenure system and cultural and demographic structure of the state." Very pious words

indeed!

Not to be left behind, the UDP too wrote to the Chief Minister endorsing the suggestions made by the Autonomous District Councils to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Amendment of the 6th Schedule which sought exemption from the establishment of Municipal Councils and Village Councils in Meghalaya. For any average person, this proposal ostensibly to "continue with the age old customary laws and practices in matters of governance....." is an attempt to continue to arrogate all the power and resources meant for the people by entrenched interests because the 125th Amendment Bill, 2019 seeks to create grassroots democratic institutions under the Constitution and bestow them with direct funding from the Central Government.

Hence, for us the helpless and disempowered lot, we hope that the President of India will once again Save Us From Ourselves by rejecting both the above proposals.

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett,
Shillong - 2.

UDP looking at washout in 2023

Editor,
Of the MDA coalition partners the UDP is the most talkative (without saying

anything) and the most self-righteous too (always ducking from any charges of corruption). It orchestrated a drama after the August 13 killing of Cheris Thangkhiw by asking the Home Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui to resign, so as to dodge the blame and to prove his innocence. When things quieted down Lakhmen Rymbui was back to being Home Minister. No one knew this was a well written script to befuddle the public which anyway has too many things on its plate. But the UDP can fool some of the people some of the time and all the people some of the time but not all the people, all the time. Political chicanery can only travel so much and no further.

The UDP talks a lot about ethics in politics as if it's a knight in shining armour but look at how they violate parliamentary democracy by remaining silent spectators when their Party MLA and also Party President is also the Speaker of the House. The Speaker is not supposed to belong to any Political Party because only then can he be fair and free from partisan considerations. But the UDP does not even have the backbone to ensure that legislative ethics are followed. So let not the UDP speak of clean politics. Now this Party is as bad as the NPP and we hope that in the next election its number is reduced to a cipher from the present 7 MLAs. For too long this Party has taken

people for a ride by pretending to be the avant-garde of the tribal people as opposed to the national parties which carry everyone along with them and do not pretend to cater to only ethnic minorities.

The UDP continues to support the NPP because the latter keeps it in good humour. Why do we think Mairang has been made a district if not to humour the UDP President and Speaker? When the NPP is eager to bend over backwards to please the UDP why would this Party leave the coalition? So the self-justification offered by Jemino Mawthoh the UDP general secretary on the Congress's allegations of the UDP betraying the trust of the people just does not wash. And what does Mr Paul Lyngdoh have to say about his Party which is daily losing the peoples' trust? Why is he so silent when he used to be the most vocal on so many issues as the leader of a students' union? Like they say the UDP is everything to everyone - its ideology all but washed down the drain of indifference.

Yours etc.,
Khrav Sohtum,
Via email

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