"America lives in the heart of every man everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses."

--- Sigmund Freud

The Shillong Times

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Of faith and law

RELIGIOUS faith is seen as being integral to human existence. It, however, is often that faith does not conform to the law of the land. Law, yet, is the last word. So too with the Supreme Court order on Friday allowing entry for women of all ages into the sanctified precincts of the Sabarimala Sree Ayyappa Temple in the southern state of Kerala. The apex court order delivered by a constitution bench, with one dissenting voice, might still not be the last word. Review petitions are likely to be filed by temple functionaries to restore status quo.Notably, the present legal battle over denial of entry to women in their menstrual age – age 10 to 50-- in the hilltop shrine premises for 'darshan' of Lord Ayyappa lasted 12 years. The issue got a new fillip after the Supreme Court lifted a ban in 2016 on entry of women to the Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai. Both the demands had a common strain – of assertion of equality of the sexes in matters of worship. While this equality was asserted both in principle and in practice by the apex court vide Haji Ali, there was no way it could turn its back on a similar demand in relation to Sabarimala, or other shrines for that matter.

Yet, issues remain. The arduous trek from the nearest base on the banks of River Pamba covers a distance of eight kilometres to reach up to the hilltop shrine. Toilet facilities are to the minimum for the pilgrims – an estimated 45 million pilgrims through seasons of a year – and the open forests provide the cover for most pilgrims as of now. Logistical as also law and order aspects will now be a huge challenge to the temple and district administrations. Notable also is the fact that, the so-far-banned sections of the women faithful are mostly not in a mood even now to visit the shrine for fear that the deity's wrath might befall them. This, despite the assertion of the legal right to do so. Little girls and elderly women have been a notable presence at the shrine, though their numbers were not high. This scenario might progressively change, but not in a massive way in the immediate future, despite the green signal from the apex court. Justice Indu Malhotra had a point when she stressed in a dissenting note, "Notions of rationality cannot be brought into matters of religion."

Ïawchibidi the Pan-Jaidbynriew Clan

By HH Mohrmen

To understand the Khasi-Pnar people one has to know their stories, for without the stories we would be like a tree without roots. Our stories which many a times have myths intertwined with reality are what define us and we are nothing without our stories. Like any other clan, the Ïawchibidi or Ïawchibijai clan also has its own story which was handed down from one generation to another or was passed on from the grandmother to her granddaughter or from a grand uncle to his nephews and nieces. These stories are invisible treasures that the members of the clan have stored in their memories from a long time ago.

It reminds me of my trip a few years back to Bangladesh where I visited Khasi-Pnars or, in particular the War Jaiñtia community who had lived in that part of the world since time immemorial. When I asked the Lamin I met how they know that they belong to the Lamin clan they started narrating the story of the Ïawchibidi which their elders or their grandmothers had told them. This is, in fact, how we learn about our origin and about the stories of our ancestors and the Ïawchibidi clan are no different. We are fortunate in the sense that this story is also part of a certain religious tradition performed by the maternal uncle in different rites and passages of the Niam Tynrai (Niamtre) religion.

In the case of the clans and sub-clans which descended from the great maternal grandmother (Ïawbei) known as ka Ïawchibidi, the work of documenting the story was first undertaken by Medro Singh Diengdoh which he started in 1968. He had untiringly travelled to every nook and corner of the Khasi and Jaiñtia hills and visited almost every household which belongs to the clan. At one point of time he had lost hope of publishing his work; because he did not have monetary resources to do it. That is until Donbok T. Laloo another elder of the clan took upon himself the responsibility to publish the book and MS Diengdoh's project saw the light of the day in the year 1975.

Generally the story that was passed down was that Ïawchibidi was a young woman who had to run from her native place to escape from the enemy who wanted to kill her. One version of the story says that Ïawchibidi originated from raid Ïapngar and moved from the area which is now in Assam on the Meghalaya Assam interstate border to these hills. She had some problems with the ruler in the area and had to run away from the area to escape from the enemy. MS Diengdoh's version of the story was Ïawchibidi migrated from Burma and stayed in the area we now know as Nagaland. She became orphaned and since she had nobody to look after her the tribe which were head hunters wanted to kill and devour her.

In her effort to escape from her enemy she ran from one place to another and at the same time the head hunters were hot on her trail. That was till she reached the area in the War Jaiñtia where she met Riang Bareh who took her into his household and protected her from the head hunter who came even to his house. Riang Bareh used all the tricks that he knew to fool the enemy and he was successful in his efforts. When the hunters left her poor Riang thought of ways to get back the money he spent protecting her so he decided to sell her in the market.

In the case of the clans and sub-clans which descended from the great maternal grandmother (Ïawbei) known as ka Ïawchibidi, the work of documenting the story was first undertaken by Medro Singh Diengdoh which he started in 1968.

He took her to the market and on the way he saw a deer and like any warrior Riang was also equipped with his weapon. He took his bow and arrows and aimed at the animal, but decided to give up since the animal was too far. But it was Ïawchibidi who insisted that he release the arrows and it hit the target. He reached the market and tried to sell the deer meat. The minister of the Jaintia king came around to inspect the market and asked Riang what he was selling. Riang told him about ka Ïawchibidi and said that he want to sell her so that it compensates for what he had spent protecting her. When the king's official asked him to name the price, he said chi-bidi. Chibidi or chibijai which is then a value equivalent to (five hali with one hali equal to four pieces). The story has it that when Riang counted the money he had earned from selling the meat he found that it was the exactly the same amount as the price he had offered to sell her to the myntri.

The official declined the offer so Riang had to take Ïawchibidi back to his place. On the next market day he took her again to market for the same purpose and on the way he saw the deer which was standing far away from him and he thought of not releasing the arrow till Ïawchibidi again insisted that he release the arrows. This time too it hit the bull's eye. The same thing happened even on the third time. Each time he tried to sell her in the market he found that the money he earned from selling the meat was exactly the same amount as the price he asked to sell Ïawchibidi.

On reaching home he was surprised at what had happened and finally he could not hold it anymore and asked her who she is? She in turn asked him why he wanted to sell her. He told her the truth and said that he had spent so much on protecting and keeping her so he would like to get back the money he had spent for her upkeep. She slowly unrolled her long hair which she tied on her head and lo and behold he was shocked to see that pieces of gold were hidden inside her hair.

To cut a long story short Riang married Iawchibidi after they were married for a few years they had kids. She then asked him to bring the ragged cloth (jaiñkup) which she wore when she first came to his house and when she removed the stitches there were again pieces of gold hidden in the cloth. Finally after many years had elapsed she reminded him of the shaft that she brought when she came and asked him to bring it to her. She broke the walking stick and again pieces of gold fell from the broken stick.

This in a nut shell is the story of ka Ïawchibidi and the following are the clans and sub clan's descended from her as found in different parts of Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep. In the War Jaiñtia area there are the Lamin, the Pohsnem, the Pohchen, the Paduna, Pohlynjar, Kasah/Gassah, Kashnga/Gashnga Kaïang/ Gayang, Kadew/Gadew, Kadiang/Gadiang and then there are also the Myrmen/ Mohrmen. Even within those who use Lamin as their clan name there are the Lamin Shngain, the Lamin Nai, Lamin Amdep, Lamin Amkoi, and others. They may have different clan names but they are the sub-clans of the grand Ïawchibidi clan.

Those were on the southern slopes of the state but over the hills in the area where the Pnar live they are known as the Laloo, the Pyrbod, the Nartiang/Nyrtiang, the Kjam/Ïongkjam, the ïongDoom, the Marong, the Katkeh and the Hek. While in the Khasi hills there are the Diengdoh and from the Diengdoh in the West Khasi hills we have the Pariong and the Syngngai. MS Diengdoh in his book said that the Pariong are but the Diengdoh who migrated to Pariong. He also mentioned in his book about certain Marngor sub clan that live in Myriaw and they are also from the Diengdoh clan. The reason is because initially their neighbours did not know of their antecedence or which clan they belonged, so they simply called them by the father's surname.

The above Kurs (clans) know that they are related because they share the same story that their great ancestral grandmother was ka Ïawchibidi who was sold in the market for chibidi. The Ïawchibidi clan is perhaps the biggest clan amongst the Khasi-Pnar people because one can find them almost everywhere in the land of the Hynniewtrep. But the most important point is that it proves that Khasi-Pnar is one jaidbynriew because the children of Ïawchibidi can be found in Jaintia hills, Khasi hills and West Khasi hills albeit with different clan names.

Imran Khan's foggy fault lines

Threat on financial front lingers on

By Sankar Ray

The post-Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) era, steered ahead by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, confronts an opaque nebula of uncertainties afflicting the polity of a troubled state. High expectations about the romantic Naya Pakistan, promised by PTI chairman Imran Khan are halted by fault lines of toughening realities within weeks of his taking over as prime minister.

Obviously, the imminent threat is on the financial front, precisely a bail-out programme to prevent a major balance-of-payment crisis. The monthly current account deficit rose to $2.2 billion in July, although it contracted to $600 million in August. Negotiations - Article IV consultations - with the International Monetary Fund began in Islamabad. The IMF staff team, led by Harald Finger, senior economist and advisor, confronts a group led by secretary, finance Arif Ahmed Khan, accompanied by the State Bank of Pakistan governor Tariq Bajwa. The estimated gross financing requirements for the ongoing fiscal year 2018-19, put forward by Islamabad, is somewhere between $26 billion and $29 billion. The perusal by the IMF team is scheduled to end by the next week. Pakistan is to place its financial papers for further talks before the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Bali, Indonesia, between 8 and 14 October.

The next important agenda is a path of solution of Afghan refugees, 'undocumented people' in the lexicon of demography. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Pakistan is home to the largest refugee population in the world, with more than 1.45 million, mostly from Afghanistan, residing in the country for over three decades.

The next important agenda is a path of solution of Afghan refugees, 'undocumented people' in the lexicon of demography. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Pakistan is home to the largest refugee population in the world, with more than 1.45 million, mostly from Afghanistan, residing in the country for over three decades. Those shelter-less people have been treated humanely even when the Afghan war was on its peak, in contrast to what is being witnessed in Assam in India. The UNHCR's high appreciation for Pakistan is well-known. This policy helped Islamabad succeed in voluntary repatriation of 4.1 million. Pakistan's minister for states and frontier regions Abdul Qadir Baloch told members of the Pak-Afghan Track II Dialogue in Islamabad, "The refugees have nothing to do with security situation. Also there is no serious law and order issue or conflict witnessed between the local communities in Pakistan and Afghan refugees," the minister said as Pakistani leaders routinely cite the longer stay of refugees as one of the security issues.

The PTI-led government that carries forward the tradition of treating the Afghan brethren well is committed to other refugees in an identical way, which is why a parliamentary committee, comprising representatives from all parties, is to be formed for working out a strategy to decide the fate of Afghans, Biharis and Bengalis residing in Pakistan. This was revealed by minister for human rights Shireen Mazari in the National Assembly on a calling attention notice from members of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

She assured that the Afghan refugees would be provided with security, food and shelter as they would be citizens of Pakistan but there are legal, political and other issues involved in the process of their citizenship and for that the parliamentary panel was suggested. Mazari added that although Pakistan was a signatory to the 1951 Refugees Convention, "it still can't banish the refugees from the country by force. But we need to know that the issue cannot linger on for long," very much in contrast to the present Indian government of the National Democratic Alliance.

But the tragedy lies in the sanguinary reality that even this humanitarian policy towards undocumented people will not help Pakistan improve relations with Afghanistan as the terrorists that have been waging war inside Afghanistan include Pakistanis hand in hand with Taliban combatants. According to a fairly recent report, "People from Pakistan, Chechnya, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are involved in the war in Ghazni." An Afghan lawmaker Erfanollah Erfan, referring to foreign fighters in Ghazni war, including Pakistani citizens, criticized Kabul's silence about this. "We ask the government to report this to the UN Security Council as soon as possible. It should share the evidences to the countries that have fighters in the Ghazni war as well," he said. Well-known Pakistani politician Afrasiab Khattak too sought an explanation from Islamabad to issue a clarification on Pakistani dead fighters in Ghazni war. "Pakistan government needs to explain reports about the dead bodies of Pakistani coming in from the war in Ghazni and Pakistani fighters getting arrested."

The new government in Islamabad, criticised by Pakistan Today as 'infantile' for different reasons, considers fighting terrorism less important than curbing corruption. And the Intelligence Bureau has been accordingly directed to re-prioritise its strategy, according to the Lahore-based weekly, The Friday Times. "There are other agencies and organisations which were trained for anti-corruption efforts. IB should not do this. Its expertise is in countering terrorism and its focus should not be redirected towards corruption," said Ehsan Ghani, a recently retired former chief of the IB. Chosen to head the IB by erstwhile Premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the days of Dr Khan, who proved his worth by energizing the Counter Terrorism Department to disempower the externally-nurtured extremists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seem numbered.

If Naya Pakistan remains a slogan only, it will not weaken PTI alone. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Time to act and save NEIGRIHMS

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the attention of all the student unions of the North Eastern Region regarding the ongoing controversy at NEIGRIHMS in relation to mismanagement of patient care, bungling in the examination of cardiology course and recruitment of faculty and staff. NEIGRIHMS All the eight states are beneficiaries of the NEIGRIHMS as the number of patients from all sister states are coming there for treatment and we should stand in solidarity at a time when this Institute is facing a grave leadership crisis. Through our union members, patients and sources we have verified some of the allegations and counter allegations made in the media. We have found that there is simmering discontent among doctors and patients which is a matter of grave concern. There is a long waiting list (some almost one year) of patients coming from far flung and remote hilly terrains of North East region posted for various operations. The reason cited for such delay is shortage of qualified manpower and infrastructure. This is something incomprehensible to us since the administration of NEIGRIHMS is terminating the ad-hoc appointments while being unable to recruit the faculty on a regular basis.

It is also learnt that court cases against the authorities of the Institute are rising due to growing frustration and helplessness among the inmates of NEIGRIHMS. Our team has also come to know that there are gross injustices against the students of Cardiology department in relation to their examination and accommodation. The approach of the present Director appears to be dictatorial and with a purpose to drive away the students of North East from NEIGRIHMS. The article published by Dr Synrang Batngen Warjri in your daily (ST Sep 20, 2018) is a telling story of the declining state of affairs of the NEIGRIHMS administration. An important institute like NEIGRIHMS needs a leader with vision, moral, character and minimum of administrative skills and ability to understand and appreciate the tribal milieu. I urge all student unions of the North East India to come forward to save this institute vide public campaigns and representations to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of India to take appropriate and timely action against the errant administration.

Yours etc.,
Kakyar Dulom
Advisor, Arunachal Students' Union of Shillong (ASUS)
Via email

Violation of consumer rights

Editor,

Customers of Merin's Royal Enfield have not been able to get their motorcycle even after 3 months of booking. Who is to blame here? After repeated enquiries from the dealer we are told that the Company is not supplying the required slot for Meghalaya. How can this happen when client have been promised delivery of the motorcycle after a period of 15 days before any booking is placed? This is a serious violation of consumer rights. It is high time for the Consumer Protection Forum to take suo-moto action in this and other cases of consumer harassment. Customers of Merin's Royal Enfield like myself who had booked a motorcycle for about 3 months after paying Rs 5200 should not face the agony of harassment and non-refund of the booking amount.

Yours etc.,
Pynshai M Syiem,
Via email

What about 'Consumer Protection Bill 2017'

Editor,

The Union Cabinet had given nod to new 'Consumer Protection Bill 2017' with stringent punishment and fines for misleading advertisements holding also celebrities promoting commodities accountable. But with the term of the present Lok Sabha ending soon the central government should take immediate necessary action to get the Bill passed by the two Houses of Parliament.

However some more features can and should be added in the Bill to safeguard interests of consumers. The Bill should include ban on levying service-charges in bills by hotels and restaurants. Promotional added quantities publicised free with original pack should be within the main pack only to avoid shopkeepers keeping free packs themselves without benefitting the customer.

The Bill should have provision to make it compulsory to pack all packaged commodities only in packs of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 gms-mltrs-kgs-ltrs only, to avoid gimmick packaging to befool consumers by manufacturers. Goods packed by numbers should be only in packs of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000 and similar multiples of 1000. Presently soap-manufacturers pack 75 gm soap-cakes to look like 100 gm packs and syrups in 750 litre packs to look alike 1 litre pack. Even medicines should be packed in similar system unless exemption is sought for units other than specified ones for dose-wise administration. It is ridiculous that even commonly advertised medicines like cough-lozenges are packed in strips of eight rather than normally ten because consumer judges the price per strip rather than lozenges.

Yours etc.,
Madhu Agrawal
(Guinness Record Holder for letters in newspapers)
Delhi - 6

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

" What everyone in the astronaut corps shares in common is not gender or ethnic background, but motivation, perseverance, and desire - the desire to participate in a voyage of discovery. "

-- Ellen Ochoa

The Shillong Times

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India at the United Nations

INDIA'S Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj made an impactful presence at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly. The less than 20-minute speech this weekend saw a presentation of the Indian government's social welfare and humanitarian schemes, an emphasis on environment protection, a frontal offensive against Pakistan for its 'blatant' support to terrorism and a plea for reforms for the world's premier umbrella organisation. In sum, India could be seen to have made a major impact on the world stage. Yet, an inescapable feeling is, why harp so much on Pakistan, not an equal to India by any yardstick.

Swaraj's specific mention of Pakistan's support to terrorism, the protection it gives to 26/11 Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed, and her rhetoric that Pakistan provided sanctuary to help Osama bin Laden escape Americas' long arm, are by now clichéd. Yet, there was a need to put Pakistan in a spot at the UN meet for the reason that Pakistan has a habit of attacking India at every UN fora. Pakistan might be doing so out of its weak positioning vis-à-vis India. But, a strong India need not be wary of Pakistan or its designs.

India would do well to rise about such tactics and present itself in the form of a future world leader by speaking from a position of strength. India could, as Swaraj rightly delved into, take up the need for UN reforms in a more forceful manner, propose ways to make the UN more robust and able to uplift the suffering millions from poverty and want, and seek to reshape the world body in more acceptable and pragmatic format. Swaraj's proposal to turn the world body into the form a global family along the lines of the celebrated Indian ethos of Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam has a familiar strain.

The precious time at the General Assembly year after year, for all and for India specifically, need not be wasted on Pakistan because this Islamic nation does not deserve as much attention - that too from the Indian side. Outside of the General Assembly, the world is fully familiar with the support Pakistan extends to terrorism. Rather, India's obsession with Pakistan at such fora could be interpreted to mean a weakness on the part of this country and an inability on our part to effectively neutralise the wayward and aggressive neighbour armed as it is with Chinese help.

A reformation is the need rather than an education policy

By Albert Thyrniang

In the recent past our public consciousness has been affected by certain happenings. The print, electronic and especially social media, for better or for worse, have helped our minds to hold sway to these goings-on. First, the May-June Punjabi Lane violence that attracted national glare surprised all of us, then came the bound to be failed Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second amendment) Bill, 2018 in July-August evoked a sharp debate between opposing sides. The Supreme Court decriminalising homosexuality and the LGBT rights in early September did draw our attention but it was cut short by the resignation of DD Lapang from the Congress and the attempt to make it sensational. By now, however, we have realised that no one is indispensable and the NPP, UDP and BJP who wanted to lure him to their fold have realised they can't afford to give in to what the five time CM seems to crave.

This article deals with none of the above issues but about the Education policy of Meghalaya which has found few takers.

On Sep 21st the Meghalaya Cabinet approved the Meghalaya State Education Policy 2018 that could provide a road map to raise the educational levels in the state. Though one doubts, the government claims that wide consultations and discussions with stakeholders was done before the Cabinet's final approval. As revealed by the Education Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui the constituted 24-member task force team met many times. But other than that when and where did the consultations and discussions take place? The minister also informed that only 230 representations from the whole state were received by the task force. The reason for the poor response is either because the Government did not make enough effort or simply because of the indifferent attitude of Meghalayans!

I tried to locate the policy online but I couldn't find it. A poor search engine! Till September 29, 2018 on the front page of the website of the Department of Education that also includes the Directorate of School Education and Literacy, Directorate of Higher and Technical Education and Directorate of Education and Training as hosts, still reads "The Final Draft Meghalaya Education Policy (2018) is published herewith for information of all concerned." Even after the approval of the Policy on Sep 21st the website is still appealing to interested individuals/associations to submit their representations to the Director, Educational Research & Training before 30th April, 2018.

Since the approved policy is not available to me, a comment will be unfair. However, a Policy can't be expected to work miracles to the ailing sector of the state. As stated the Policy is a general guideline that tries to address the main issues and concerns of the education sector covering broad areas of the different stages and types of education. Reportedly, the policy places the child as the focal point.

For me what we need is an educational revolution or reformation more than an education policy. Revolution and reformation are different but both seek drastic changes. A revolution or reformation is needed because the basics are not going right or the present practices do not yield the desired results. A revolution or reformation attacks the fundamentals and brings about a complete change whether political, religious, social or economic by going into the very roots of an organisation or a society.

Now, education in our State is in shambles. The basic practices are not right. Shillong may boast of being an educational hub of the North East but it is generally accepted that the overall education in the state is pathetic. This short column has no space to list and much less examine the ills of education in the Abode of Clouds but let me name a few common and well known faulty practices that have to be changed radically, reformed or even revolutionalized if we want to revamp this vital indicator of the state's progress.

Unpunctual and Irregular teachers

Last year a research group at Azim Premji Foundation found that teacher absenteeism in government schools is as low as just 2.5 per cent though the general perception ranges from 20 per cent to 50 per cent. This is however, a national figure. In Meghalaya irregularity of teachers is rampant especially in rural areas. In May this year it was reported that an organisation found that in many schools in the remote areas of Garo Hills teachers put their signatures in the attendance register although they are absent from duty.The NGO further established that the teachers are present in schools only twice in a year to conduct the half yearly and annual examinations. It February 2014 it was reported that in Gabil village, North Garo Hills, the Headmaster of the Government L.P. School was absent the whole year. In May this year the Deputy Commissioner visited a government school in Tura and found packed classrooms but no teachers. Teacher absenteeism is a widespread harmful practice throughout the state.

If irregularity is rampant unpunctuality is the most regular practice. Unpunctual teachers are not limited to village schools. They are common in district head quarters as well. Let me refer to the town this individual resides. Research scholars from different universities of the state come to Tura for data collection. They are stunned when they find that many teachers reach very late and leave school very early. A research scholar shockingly narrated that a Principal of a government institution reached his office at 12.30 pm. It is also quite normal to see children come out of the school by 1.30 pm/2pm whereas the school timing is 4 pm.

Principals in charge

Those in the know tell you that almost all the government schools in Garo Hills have no appointed principals/heads. There are only principals/heads in charge (acting heads). One is not sure why this trend persists. Why does the government not appoint full-fledged heads in its institutions? Are there no qualified candidates to fill up these vacancies? Many joke that the government saves money for its ministers. Whatever be the reasons this practice clearly shows the government's lukewarm attitude towards education. In spite of all rhetoric, education is not a priority for any government.

Under-utilised and non-productive teachers

If you visit government schools you are likely to encounter teachers chatting in the staffroom the whole time. Let me explain the reasons. In a higher secondary school for example, there are at least six teachers while there are only two classes (Class XI and XII). So these teachers have only two or at the most three classes a day. In the months from February to June (5 months) when there is no class XI these teachers have just one or two hours of class a day. So what else do they do except gossip the whole day?

These teachers turn out to be unproductive as well. The results of these institutions are poor and in some cases dismal. These teachers draw fat salaries. Many government schools have very low enrolment as well. The current Measles/Rubella campaign had stunning side effects - a revelation of ghost enrolments in schools. The number of students given to the district medical office is much smaller that the number available for mid-day meals. Medical staff will privately tell you that many government schools have as low an enrolment as 10 students. This is an unpardoned wastage of public money.

Untrained teachers

On the eve of Teachers' Day celebration this year educators and educationists observed with concern that untrained teachers in the State pose a huge challenge. In December last year NDTV reported that 11 lakh untrained teachers are in service, nationally. In our state hundreds of teachers, right from lower primary to college levels must be untrained.

In the state there are only four B. Ed colleges and seven District Institute of Education and Training (D.El.Ed) institutes. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has restricted the number of admissions in B. Ed colleges to 50 per institution which means only 200 teachers are trained every year. In D.El.Ed more or less the same number of teachers is trained every year. The Principals say those who seek admissions in each institute are around three to four hundred. Clearly these institutes are not able to absorb all aspiring teachers. Therefore, to clear the backlog will take years.

No doubt education in the state needs a revolution or a reformation. But who are the revolutionaries or reformers? Who will ensure that unpunctual and irregular teachers are taken to task? Who will take immediate steps to appoint full-fledged heads in educational institutions? Who will have the guts to utilise the under worked teachers? Who will fight for creating of one Teachers' Training Institute in each district? Who will dare to order a periodical auditing of the functioning of Government schools? Will it be the Government as a whole? Will it be the Chief Minister? Can we expect the Education Minister to do it? Will the job be given to the top level education officers? I sympathise with the Education Minister if he does not know from where to begin to improve education in the state. But one has to begin from somewhere. Perhaps reforming the teacher himself may be a good launching point. But the question remains: Who will be the Reformer?

The intergalactic freak show

Gender equality goes out of hand in Sabarimala

By Aditya Aamir

Can't get over the fact that Swami Ayyappa is no longer entitled to his brahmacharya; that the caveat 'celibate for 41 days' doesn't hold anymore for the Ayyappa devotee. The majority judgement that crucified Lord Ayyappan was a verdict on brahmacharya. The case before the top court was not of gender-inequality, it was about age-restrictions, which the wise justices chose to ignore.

It was as if Swami Ayyappan's unique persona did not count. After all, he is at best lore and at worst a statue in stone! If the plaintiff was Christian, he would have sighed, 'Oh! Lord, forgive them for their ignorance.' And that would have been the end of it. But how can anybody 'Swami Ayyappa' keep quiet when a tradition backed by a certain logic is murdered in broad daylight?

Most of our lives we're always trying to put back together humpty-dumpty and because mom swears by God and pop chooses not to laugh, we go to temples and with folded hands, eyes shut as if the sun was shining directly into them, pray to the Almighty with 'please god help put humpty-dumpty back together', please.

So it was with making the trip to Sabarimala, with caveats attached. Lay off the Gillette and don't think Anonymous salacious. Celebrate celibacy! Lord Ayyappa is a Brahmachari. Honour him for that. Give him the respect he deserves, his status kept in mind. Follow the rules and stick to the straight and narrow. Sabarimala is unique and like the Supreme Court Justice said for Aadhaar, "Unique is better than best." Isn't that true?

But why are you, you know, like THAT? Like what? Like you're doing a high-wire act. Like you don't know the world has gone wholly tribal. Turned everything into a Man versus Woman tussle, Mars versus Venus? But the question is: What's Ayyappa got to do with women? And what has the Constitution and gender got to do with Ayyappa?

Now, it's done and dusted. The top court has declared in the name of gender-equality that even menstruating women can trudge to Sabarimala and worship Ayyappa. Hey, what about Ayyappa. You just killed him, reduced him to a stone figure with no soul, no agency.

Trupti Desai, if she makes it to Sabarimala, will look at the corpse of the deity she helped put to the guillotine. For, the minute brahmacharya and celibacy were excised out of the equation, Ayyappa ceased to exist, his grand tradition went up in smoke, the aroma of incense swapped for the stench of death.

Except for the lone Nightingale, everyone other on the five-judge bench chose to be Grim Reaper. The temple on Sabarimala will be rendered soulless the minute Trupti Desai and her band of gender-benders set foot on the shining hill and she will forever be known as god-slayer. In fact, she sounds more and more like an atheist, the #RightToPray movement weaponized to foist Venus on Earth.

Let's get this clear, it's Ayyappan Swami who doesn't want menstruating women to fall at his feet. Ask the devi who has been waiting patiently for him to change his mind. She has a temple just outside his shrine - so close yet so far!

While lawyers of all parties to the conflict spoke, Lord Ayyappa found almost no advocacy. Let's get this clear, it's Ayyappan Swami who doesn't want menstruating women to fall at his feet. Ask the devi who has been waiting patiently for him to change his mind. She has a temple just outside his shrine - so close yet so far! Now, four men on a bench, feminists and TRP-hunting television media have banished her, too.

Those men who say quit bashing women because there are only select few with bad Ju Ju forget they proclaim themselves the ones speaking for the whole shebang; that they are engaged in reverse 'distributed denial of service.' DDOS is something kids do to knock people they don't care for out of the internet. It is politics of self-destruction.

Wise men and women will know celibacy is more a manthing than a womanly practice. It's in the subconscious that celibacy because of an unidentified quirk finds no currency with women. It has got to do with Yoga and Siddhasana, the eternal pose of Lord Ayyappa in his temple on Sabarimala.

The overwhelming belief is women and celibacy are strangers on the deck and that is neither slander nor slur. Celibacy is much more than abstinence. It's killing the sexual urge in its most primordial. And Lord Ayyappa knows there's a big difference between riding the tiger and mounting the tigress though there's one legend which says he brought home a tigress to milk.

It's a sad commentary that very soon all the Ayyappa legends will die their death. The Supreme Court has no inkling of the damage it has done to the Legend of Ayyappa. This whole shebang of gender-equality has got out of hand and it is so far out in space that it's an intergalactic freak show with the majority not even in a position to envision how bad it might all get to. ***(IPA Service)***

Those men who say quit bashing women because there are only select few with bad Ju Ju forget they proclaim themselves the ones speaking for the whole shebang; that they are engaged in reverse 'distributed denial of service.'

TO THE EDITOR

Agriculture Minister's fitting response

Editor,

It was both amusing and thought provoking when Mr HM Shangpliang, the MLA from Mawsynram raised a question regarding the incentives given by the government to the farmers in the state to embrace scientific farming. Although the reply by the Minister was inadequate but he did make a valid point when he told Mr Shangpliang to be specific in his question. Mr Shangpliang raised a very generic question which would have left even agricultural experts and scientists baffled and confused. Firstly the question should have been, "What are the steps taken by the government to promote scientific farming?" rather than the incentives given by the government to the farmers to take up scientific farming. Even if you give incentives to farmers to take up scientific farming, they would still be in the dark as to the actual steps needed for a switch-over from traditional farming to scientific farming. But the more pertinent question is whether we actually need scientific farming in the first place and if we do, what kind of scientific farming do we actually need?

There are various aspects to scientific farming. Some of its main aspects are(1)Use of Chemical fertilizers and pesticides(2)Use of machines(3)Use of high yielding varieties of seeds(4)irrigation(drip irrigation and sprinkler) (5) crop rotation and crop diversity. The majority of farmers in the state still practice traditional farming which basically is organic farming. States like Sikkim have managed to take organic farming to the next level and this has enabled them to reach a higher growth trajectory and speed up the pace of development. The main aspects of organic farming are use of farm yard manure which generally includes cow-dung in most cases and practicing crop rotation and crop diversity. The only aspect of scientific farming that overlaps with organic farming is irrigation (drip irrigation and sprinkler) and crop rotation and crop diversity. The small- sized land holding of majority of our farmers and their deteriorating economic condition does not make the use of machines in agriculture viable at the moment. States like Meghalaya need to promote organic farming in a big way. When I was working in Assam, I was pleasantly surprised to find tomatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers and other vegetables from our state finding their way even to the rural markets in Assam during the lean period. And the people of Assam can't seem to get enough of our organic produce. If we can capture even a tiny proportion of the vegetable market in Assam, it would definitely improve the wretched lives of farmers in our state.

We have a premier agricultural research institute in our backyard and this should be a reason good enough to spurt our policy makers to make our state a model organic farming state in the country. Distressed migration is happening at an alarming rate. Most of the rural folks at present migrate to the urban areas during the off season to work in the construction sector. And many of them would embrace an economic opportunity to give up farming. If we are to move up the ladder of development we do need to reduce our workforce in the agricultural sector but for this to take place we need to create good manufacturing jobs. Our manufacturing sector at the present moment is a total sham. Byrnihat, our so called industrial zone should be transformed into a hub for agro-based industries. We desperately need to scrap our outrageous Industrial Policy which squeezes our limited resources, destroys the environment and at the same time promotes jobless growth.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Wanted educated, effective politicians

Editor,

Recently, in a particular school the Principal asked students of Class X what they intend to become after completing their education. Out of 60 students, 55 of them intended to be doctors, engineers, pilots, lecturers, bureaucrats, lawyers and even astronauts. But the remaining five boys (back benchers) wanted to become MLAs/MDCs. Out of curiosity the principal ask them why they prefer politics. The first two boys replied that since their fathers were politicians hence they wanted to carry on that legacy. The other three boys said that since they are not good in their studies and therefore becoming doctors, engineers, bureaucrats etc is highly unlikely so aiming to become a politician is the best bet, The class burst into laughter. This may sound like a joke but these boys are speaking their minds and this is actually the trend in the political system of our country and our state. The brightest students are unlikely to choose politics as their careers. Why is it that we don't equate education with politics? Is it because we have accepted and adapted ourselves to the fact that politics is not the arena for the highly educated but only for people with a big fat bank balance? But there are many valuable things that money cannot buy. For instance in politics you can buy power but not knowledge. Recently in the Meghalaya Assembly an Opposition MLA asked the Agriculture Minister about incentives offered to farmers for scientific farming. From the answer given it appears that the concerned minister did not know anything about scientific farming and does not have a clue about the question, despite holding one of the most important departments of our state.

Our state is led by a young and vibrant Chief Minister but his cabinet members are under-qualified. This is one of the demerits of a coalition government whereby undeserving and irresponsible individuals are given important powers merely for the sake of political stability thereby compromising the whole governance of the state. As per sources received from myneta.info, six out of the twelve ministers of Meghalaya are undergraduates. Four ministers are Class XII passed, one is a matriculate and one is Class VIII passed. So we can imagine the kind of people governing us. Till January 2018, there have been 123 Amendment Bills and 101 Amendment acts to the Constitution of India since it was first enacted in 1950, but there is no amendment regarding the minimum educational qualification for our political leaders. What Meghalaya needs today are young, educated, well-read politicians who will bring efficiency to the political system. The scenario of 'dirty politics' will change and be eradicated if and only if educated youngsters jump into the system to change it. One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.

Yours etc
Manuel Carey Lymba
Shillong - 8

"I have always been of the mind that in a democracy manners are the only effective weapons against the bowie-knife."

--- Franklin D. Roosevelt

The Shillong Times

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SC takes enlightened step

THE Indian Penal Code has long been steeped in British imperial arrogance. What was legal for the white masters was not permissible for Indian subjects, especially Indian Women. The Supreme Court has ruled doing away with the colonial legacy. Gender inequality which was antagonistic to wives in the case of Triple Talaq appears to have vitiated Indian social mores as a whole under the Indian Penal Code. British scholars who glorified Indian literacy and mythological heritage could not strike at sexual discrimination in the case of adultery. Section 198 (2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure robbed women of agency and reduced them to chattel. The existing law allowed only men to have agency and could be the aggrieved party. The Apex Court should be congratulated for having struck at the section at a time when Indian Government and Civil Society are fighting for gender equality and women's empowerment. Section 497 reeks of musty feudal mentality and criminalized men who engaged in adultery with somebody else's wife without the knowledge or consent of the women's husband. This is preposterous. Otherwise the husband was considered the aggrieved party and the woman was not punishable as an abettor. Section 198 (2) clarified that only the woman's husband can be the aggrieved party if his wife willingly commits adultery. All this meant women were considered private property though the law seemed weighed against adulterous men. The eternal triangle appears to have created a legal muddle.

The Supreme Court now makes adultery a civil and not a criminal matter between husband and wife. The criminality of adultery has been nullified. The exception in the case of suicide is dicey as incitement to suicide or attempted suicides are no longer a crime. It is hoped that the suicide exception will be deleted from the Statute Book. Live-in-girls now have the status of wives and the right to inheritance. The ossified moral code in Indian society is breaking down. There is one hitch. Adultery justifies divorce and that can adversely affect the lives of children. Already there is news that a woman in Chennai died of suicide after her husband told her that he could live openly with his mistress. While the slew of judgments from the Supreme Court are progressive, they also require that the Indian mindset be ready to accept such judgments. For instance the reading down of Section 377 that criminalized sexual activities between individuals of the same sex pleased the LGBTQIA+ community but those outside the community cannot accept this new reading of the law.

Too much fuss about Lapang's resignation

By Dr Lakhon Kma

The resignation of Shri. D. D. Lapang from the Congress Party has been unnecessarily glorified, although it was supposed to be a matter between a party cadre and the party. In democracy, everyone is free to join or leave any party at any point of time. Sad part is that while Congress was in power in the Meghalaya, although sidelined, he never seemed to mind it. Now that the party is out of power, he tried to find an alibi in Rahul Gandhi or Congress Party's weakness, to leave the party. Instead, had he been in the party and revolted against what he described as 'whimsical actions' that would have been a true test of character and he would have been a hero for me. Looking at the timing of his resignation and the alibi, it appears to be an opportunistic action and the story of sour grapes. What is more amusing is that Nalin Kohli of the BJP is taking a high moral ground on this issue, ignoring the fact that while being in power, his own party, led by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah completely sidelined the likes of LK Advani, Arun Shourie, Yashwant Sinha, Jaswant Singh, Subramanian Swamy, etc. It only goes to prove that it is normal to replace seniors in any party as a cycle of change in consonance with time. The difference however, is that these leaders did not leave the party despite being suspended. They continue to fight against wrong or ill practices in the BJP and stand by what they believe is right. Their faith in the ideology of the party is stronger than individuals.

Except for the respect that I have for an elderly person, I am not enchanted or fancied by Mr Lapang in any way. I know that public memory is short-lived but I still remember a nasty incident few years ago when he was the Chief Minister and our women folk wanted to meet him in the secretariat. He disregarded the women folk and public in general who made him the MLA and the Chief Minister by saying that he cannot meet any Tom, Dick and Harry. After some time, those women and public were mercilessly sprayed with water cannons near the secretariat and DC's office. For me, that was a black day when defenceless women folk were water-cannoned for raising a public issue before the Government. Friends, Mr. Lapang is no saint to me.

There is an old saying- "Prosperity gains friends, adversity tries them," and this is aptly relevant to the Congress Party in the current scenario. This testing time for the party, is also an opportunity to use it as a sieve for refinement. Although I am not a Congressman, for once, I agree with Dr Mukul Sangma when he said 'people come and go but the party remains' and I believe that those who remain should work hard to make a come-back. What is unpalatable is the statement of Mr Lapang that Rahul Gandhi is not fit to be a leader or Prime Minister. Let me remind him that in the run-up to the 2014 General Election, the arrogance of Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar of the Congress Party who taunted Modi saying he is not fit even to sell chai/tea outside the Congress headquarters in Delhi, and the subsequent verdict of common citizen of this country, made Mr. Modi-the Prime Minister. History can repeat itself in different shades and colours.

It is absurd to say that a person who has been Chief Minister for 5-terms should have been treated differently when his party is out of power in the State and the Centre. Indeed for me, being 5-term or 10-term Chief Minister does not carry much meaning except for its numeric value or academic interest. What is valuable, however is, what has been achieved in each term as far as development of the State is concerned. For a person who has followed the State progress and politics closely for the last 15-20 years, I would put the lion's share of blame for our underdevelopment to Mr Lapang because he was at the helm of affairs during this time in the State, while his erstwhile Party ruled the Centre around the same time. Issues such as the border disputes with Assam in West Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills or Ri-Bhoi districts is still unresolved till date and hence it keeps flaring up every now and again. Other core issues such as infrastructure, health care, education, roads, etc. have been stunted for decades in our State.

A look at Crowborough hotel, started decades ago or the new 5-star Marriott hotel in Jail Road, now delayed by almost 5 years, makes us wonder the way our Government executes these deals with the implementing agencies such that they can default so easily, causing loss of crores of money over the years, thereby contributing to the status of 'eternally cash-starved Meghalaya'. Naturally, whoever was at the helm of affair including Mr Lapang has a lot to answer.

It is shameful that even after 46 years of statehood, we do not have an engineering or medical college of our own. The Shillong Airport which was constructed in mid-1960s and partly used by mid-1970s, is still not fully operational, to the extent that the honourable High Court of Meghalaya has to continuously intervene for our sake to make it fully operational. On the other hand, look at Sikkim, after just 9 years of laying the Foundation Stone, the New Greenfield Airport at Pakyong was inaugurated by the honourable Prime Minister on September 23 2018 and the first commercial flight will operate on October 4, 2018. The snail pace of development in Meghalaya speaks volume of our inability to carry our projects in a sustainable way and to enhance the process of development. A look at Crowborough hotel, started decades ago or the new 5-star Marriott hotel in Jail Road, now delayed by almost 5 years, makes us wonder the way our Government executes these deals with the implementing agencies such that they can default so easily, causing loss of crores of money over the years, thereby contributing to the status of 'eternally cash-starved Meghalaya'. Naturally, whoever was at the helm of affair including Mr Lapang has a lot to answer. Sorry to say, we only get veteran leaders like him by default from time to time, but very rarely, statesmen. These veterans have received immense love and support from common and innocent folks. Alas! they could not translate it into actions that could have brought everlasting changes in their lives and the state as a whole.

Nobody is indispensable in politics and therefore, the exit of Mr Lapang from the Congress Party should be seen as an opportunity for emergence of new leaders with newer and better ideas for the good of nooks and corners of our state. It is also true of any other party. Therefore, political parties and their leaders should stop making unnecessary fuss about Mr. Lapang's resignation, and in doing so, try to outsmart each other. It's a non-issue to most of us. Rather, the political leaders should be concerned with the grave issues of underdevelopment in all spheres of life plaguing our state.

There is no dearth of human resource to carry the state forward, provided we work on a mission mode with utmost sincerity and dedication and completely shun the flimsy issues like someone's resignation from his/her party. For once, I am emotionally compelled to bring in the National Service Scheme (NSS), which is so dear to me, in my discourse. Perhaps, understanding the motto of NSS "Not Me but You', which has become the guiding principle of my life and many others lives, might help our politicians as well.

(The writer teaches at NEHU)

Shillong an emerging city of drug peddlers

By Barnes Mawrie

"I thought marijuana was no big deal. ... I felt I could stand out if I did crazy things." That was before Kevin West put a bullet through his head.

What is most disturbing for society today is the growing menace of drugs which our city is not exempted from. In almost all localities of Shillong today, the headmen and the local authorities are tirelessly wrestling with this menace. It is a phenomenon that is threatening the very socio-cultural fabric of our society. It is an evil that is destroying the future of generations of youth. Ten years ago, drug trafficking and drug addiction were very rarely heard of, but today these things have penetrated into many families. There are many local youth who have become drugs sale agents and the number is growing day by day. These persons target the school and college going boys and girls. Not even small children are spared. It is discovered that they entice school children with soft drinks mixed with drugs. This malicious strategy is to trap children and youth into addiction. Once a boy or a girl gets addicted to such substance, they become the guaranteed customers of these drug peddlers. In this manner the number of drug users continue to grow and drug addiction becomes a societal problem. Perhaps some of the reasons for the growth of drug trafficking and drug usage in our city could be the following:

The rising number of unemployed youth: The number of youth who are educated and qualified keeps on growing while the job opportunities are scarce. There is a great disparity between the number of employable youth and the jobs available. Meghalaya due to the lack of foresight and vision of our leaders, is particularly deprived of industries and international institutes that could provide ample jobs for our youth.

The rising number of unemployed youth: The number of youth who are educated and qualified keeps on growing while the job opportunities are scarce. There is a great disparity between the number of employable youth and the jobs available. Meghalaya due to the lack of foresight and vision of our leaders, is particularly deprived of industries and international institutes that could provide ample jobs for our youth. Most of our youth who are in search of a job end up being disappointed and when easy-money making jobs like drug trafficking comes their way, they grab at it.

Growing number of migrants: Another reason for the rise in drug peddling in our city, is the growing number of migrants especially from states like Manipur and Mizoram where drugs are easily available due to their proximity to the Golden Triangle an area known for drug production. As everyone knows, North-east India is a strategic link in the chain of drug trafficking to the rest of the country. Among the North-eastern states, Manipur and Mizoram are the most strategic states. Many drug traffickers from these two states have infiltrated into Shillong and they easily get hold of some local unemployed youth to serve as dealers offering them big money. Recently, when a local youth who was supplying drugs was caught in Mawlai, it was discovered that he got his supplies from a Manipuri man staying in Madanrting.

Lure of easy money: Another possible reason for the growth of drug peddlers and drug users in our city, is perhaps the lure of easy big money. Considering that a kg of drug would fetch lakhs of rupees or even a crore, this is a big business and therefore a great temptation to our youth. The compulsions involved in drug addiction guarantees the suppliers with regular customers. As the number of addicts grows the shady business gets bigger and bigger.

Knowing what drugs can do to the youth, it is a real threat to the very survival of our society itself. Youth who take to drugs not only become susceptible to HIV/AIDS, but they also become a menace to their families and to society at large. Such youth destroy their own future and they are a great loss to the community. Drug addicts are easily prone to violence and not so rarely they are involved in robbery and homicides. Families who have children who are drug-addicts go through a nightmarish experience. They are disdained or looked upon with suspicion in the community.

Drug trafficking and drug addiction must be halted at all costs if we want to save our community. I do appreciate the efforts made by the various Dorbar Shnong of localities of Shillong to nip this problem in the bud. But this menace has grown so widespread and strong that it requires more collaborative efforts with the state authorities as well as with all NGOs. If there is an effective sharing of intelligence between these groups, many of these drug traffickers can be nabbed. At the same time, more mechanisms must be in place to help to cater to the need of the addicts so as to help them overcome this problem and join the mainstream society. The task is herculean and it requires a lot of planning and commitment from all sections of society. Awareness programmes regarding the negative impact of drugs should be organized in every school, college, village and community centre. This menace has to be rooted out by all means or else we run the risk of turning North-East India into another Colombia, Peru or Mexico where drug lords rule the roost. Such a situation should not be allowed to happen to our State and so we hope that the Government will consider this as an urgent issue to be resolved.

I do not know whether this issue has ever been brought up in the assembly; if not, it should be done. We have to save our young people or else we will pass on the buck to a depraved generation that would lack qualities of head and heart and that would mean the doom of a community.

TO THE EDITOR

NEHU fails it students yet again

Editor,

Under-graduate results 2018 had been released by NEHU recently. But the 'Merit List' has not yet been released till date. Now it's time for students to apply for book grants and merit scholarships but the dilemma before them is that they do not know where they stand in the merit list. Without that knowledge how will they know if they are eligible to apply for the same. The situation is problematic and confusing for the students who are entitled to apply for scholarship schemes sponsored by the state or central government. NEHU has been amiss in this and does not even seem to bother about this gross misdemeanour. Will the Vice Chancellor please explain these lapses?

Yours etc.,
SK Lyngdoh
Shillong- 2

Making a mark in the Assembly

Editor,

In the just concluded five day Autumn Session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly held from Sept. 21 - 27 (with a days' break) many MLAs took part in the proceedings of the House but those who were more active and who ultimately stole the show were the first timers - SK Sunn, H.M Shangpliang, George B. Lyngdoh and Maralbon Syiem. These members actively participated during question hour, motions and resolutions. Moreover, their performance was more than satisfactory and at times quite good if not excellent. They are adept with the businesses of the House. It is hoped that they will perform even better in the days to come. Other first timers who made their maiden attempts were Rakkam Sangma member from Siju-Rongara constituency and Pius Marwein, MLA from Ranikor constituency during call attention motions and question hour respectively. Another older member who was most active in the House was Process T. Sawkmie, MLA from Mawlai constituency. Every time he would rise up to raise questions or other issues. Among the ministers of this MDA Government, the performance of Banteidor Lyngdoh, MLA from Mawkynrew constituency and Samlin Malngiang, MLA from Sohiong constituency left much to be desired. Even Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma was found wanting as he stammered on several occasions. He needs to do a lot studies and homework to come out with flying colours in the future sessions.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Watering down Section 497

Editor,

The recent news on section 497 of the Indian Penal Code has created confusion among the people. Many have questioned the decision of the Supreme Court. The decision for striking down this Section is a very well thought-out one by the four Justices and Chief Justice of India, Deepak Mishra. However, Section 497 has not been struck down completely. While it is no longer a criminal offence it is still a civil offence which means a man committing adultery will no longer serve a prison term but will be liable to compensation only.

The law has been criticized for being unfair to men, as the woman who cheats on her husband does not fall under this Section and unfair to the wife who is cheated since she does not have the right to file for adultery under this Section against her husband. It is said to violate Article 14 - 'Right to Equality' a fundamental right of the Constitution. It has been seen that there is no more 'fear of punishment' in people but 'fear of money' still exists to some extent. A civil offence means that there is no limit as to how much compensation is to be paid by such husband to the aggrieved wife, which creates a fear of money in people.

Whether this decision is really helpful or not is hard to tell. Only time will show the results.

Yours etc.,
Reakor Shisha
Kharkrang,
Shillong,- 9

Tagore's poem resonates with Lennon

Editor,

Rabindranath Tagore's masterpiece ~ chhito jetha bhayshunyo ~ a poem written in Bengali in 1910 was translated into English ~ Where the mind is without fear ~ in 1912. The poem has made a profound impact on the freedom loving people all over the world. Interestingly, we have heard, as it were, the essence of this poem in the chart-topper song ~ Imagine. It was written and sung by John Lennon in 1971 ~ fifty-nine years after English rendering of chitto jetha bhayshunyo. Tagore imagined a world without boundaries ~ "Where the world has not been/ broken up into fragments/ By narrow domestic walls"

This has got, so to speak, a beautiful response in Lennon's song ~ "Imagine there's no country / It isn't hard to do/ Nothing to kill or die for/ And no religion, too"

The poem is totally against the falsehood of divide in the land ~ "Where words come out from the depths of truth/ Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection"

The song seems to have been responded with the lines ~ "Imagine no possessions/ I wonder if you can/ No need for greed or hunger/ A brotherhood of man"

The poem has described a land which is free from all forms of violence ~ "Where the mind is without/ fear and the head is held high" Whereas Lennon told us to ~ "Imagine all the people/ Living in peace... "

The poem cries for freedom from superstitions and mechanical rituals that distribute passports for a heaven of myths and prays for a land ~ "Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way/ Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit"

Whereas the song is also against religious ethics and myths ~ "Imagine there's no heaven/ It's easy if you try/ No hell below us/ Above us only sky/ Imagine all the people/ Living for today..."

In his song, John Lennon repeatedly said, ~ "You may say I'm a dreamer/ But I'm not the only one" Perhaps he meant Tagore as the other one! Some of us may say that John Lennon was a dreamer. But he was certainly not the only one.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

" Festivals promote diversity, they bring neighbors into dialogue, they increase creativity, they offer opportunities for civic pride, they improve our general psychological well-being. In short, they make cities better places to live. "

-- David Binder

The Shillong Times

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Culture of Festivals

MEGHALAYA has been known as a Festival State with festivals ranging from music to lifestyle events and fashion shows to youth leadership pow-wows. All these Festivals cost the exchequer and the Government of Meghalaya is not in a position to play around with funds, especially when its most critical section of the population - the teachers are not being paid on time for want of funds. Festivals have brought to Meghalaya the culture of vendors who sell their ideas to someone from the Government, preferably the Chief Minister. These vendors make a living out of event management and if they are young local entrepreneurs we should have no complaints. Sadly, most often these ideas and vendors come from outside the State and are in no way beneficial to our youth as they are all held in Shillong. The only beneficiaries are the Shillong-based elite. No one really plans a programme for the rural youth of Meghalaya.

Within the Government system there must be checks and balances. Every programme that Government spends money on has to have measurable outcomes. The last MUA Government held a slew of Festivals but their impact is not known. Those in Government don't often have the imagination or the creativity to think out of the box. They stick to clichéd ideas and familiar vendors and spend on the same events year after year. Officials don't seem to care how public funds are deployed.

The last Government passed the Social Audit Act which empowers people to keep track of Government spending and audit the efficacy of the schemes implemented. Somehow the Social Audit mechanism seems to have lost traction. There is no office currently that the public can access in order to take advantage of the Act. The Lokayukta too has not yet been notified despite the Governor's directives. The institution of Lokayukta is meant to check corruption and keep Government on track. Naturally there will not be much enthusiasm in having a Lokayukta, especially, if it is headed by a person of integrity. The Right to Information without the Lokayukta is a lame-duck exercise. At best the RTI activists can give their findings to the media and those will be published but what happens after that? There are too few whistle blowers to put pressure on the Government. Hence the MDA Government has the onus of making the Social Audit Act implemented in letter and spirit and also set up the office of the Lokayukta urgently.

Reclaiming India: A Gandhian imagery of world civilisation

By Saji Varghese

The first part of the title of this article brings to mind a process of struggle the nation underwent for the attainment of 'self rule.' It is used in a different connotation and in due course the description would become clear. The pre-colonised India, more genealogically ancient India is romantically, in Gandhi's anti-vanguardist vocabulary described as a site of 'innumerable moral values'. However, the advent of materialism which Gandhi claims as the cause for its erosion points to the ill effect of colonialism. In the first decade of the last century Gandhi wrote his remarkable work, Hind Swaraj and countless editorials in 'Young India' aimed at fortifying the vision he had of India, which was distinct from the popular vision of the larger section of what modern India should be.

Gandhi envisioned a cultural/moral space that extends beyond the bounds of India and permeates to the entire globe. There are instances where he wanted the rest of the world to learn and practice what India has been spontaneously nurturing for centuries - the age old traditions. Gandhi believed that we can identify a community with a particular moral outlook. Thus, more than physical features, what characterises a nation is its identity linked to a set of values associated with its cultural traditions. Both Plato and Gandhi are concerned with establishing a moral identity that prevails under any given condition among a people, but in a certain sense, it is cosmopolitan. The defence of an ancient cultural tradition is cosmopolitan as it aims at extending to the entire humanity. A similar line of argument is perceived in justifying the spread of British/western civilisation as being cosmopolitan. However, the apparent paradox here can be removed by viewing what is grounded on morality. There are reasons to show that the argument favours the former as it is based on moral claims which can be extended well beyond the borders of this country and throughout the globe.

Gandhi's thoughts are in a genealogical order, expression of his aversion towards the practice of colonialism and western civilisation in general. This is the historical background against which he endeavours to 'reclaim' the glorious tradition of 'ascetic India'. The term 'reclaim' conveys a sense of loss, since only what is lost is reclaimed. The erosion of a culturally rich tradition is implied here. The ethical ideals that Gandhi wished Indians to revisit and make their own yet again, are the best, in the entire globe. Gandhi's translation of Tolstoy's 'Letter to a Hindu' contains a view on the loss of freedom of Indians to the British where the fault lay with the Indians. The British could not have attained the political and economic control of India without the willing participation and concurrence of Indians. We have ceded to a foreign way of life, an ethical outlook that privileges material accumulation as the highest good. This aspect has affected the condition of the mind of Indians. True freedom, then, fundamentally lies in regaining the ethical outlook based on duty and service to humanity.

Gandhi included the concept of Swadeshi as one of the eleven vows that he stipulated for his followers who lived in his ashrams. By highlighting this concept, Gandhi wanted to counteract some of the harmful consequences of globalization. The vow of Swadeshi means the spirit, which restricts persons to the use of services available in the immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. In other words, it implies production for neighbours. However, he was quick to add: "A votary of Swadeshi will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner; he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest Ahimsa, that is, love." His idea of Swadeshi if applied to the world at large with his theory of Antyodaya (the last man), which speaks of providing every individual with the basic necessities, can counteract the undesirable effects of globalization by ensuring that everyone benefits from the fruits of development.

Another aspect of Gandhi's criticism towards industrialisation was directed towards the preservation of India's rich natural resources. With the onslaught of globalization there is a tendency to exploit every possible resource in the country to increase the Gross Domestic Product. Rapid deforestation has occurred throughout the developing world and the most developing countries are facing serious environmental hazards today. Moreover, corporate power has undermined governmental efforts at curbing environmental loss, as seen from the way the United States of America withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol. However, conservation processes led by the United Nations and echoed at the national and even local levels, are gradually gathering speed in the second phase of globalization, wherein most of the evils of globalization are now being questioned and checked.

With the rapid progress in science and technology contributed largely by globalization, contemporary human beings claim that they have conquered nature. But sadly, the modern globalized world is in the throes of an ecological crisis - a tragedy inflicted by humans themselves when they deviated from nature and began to exploit it to the extent of disturbing its normal functioning. Nature manifests itself in various factors - sentient and insentient - that cooperate with one another to complete the cycle of life. Unfortunately, human intervention has broken this cycle and so we are in for a great environmental crisis. For Gandhi, the best possible way of restoring the balance in nature is by limiting human wants, which are unlimited in character. His call and example to return to nature has influenced a number of movements that aim at protecting the environment.

The development vision M.K. Gandhi envisaged for the emerging Indian nation in the first decades of the twentieth century, despite its several dilemmas and predicaments, must be seen as a radical historicization of the notion of development as modernization. Gandhi was pronouncedly against independent India following the economic development path of the West for two reasons: (i) the sheer non-sustainability of such a path to progress and, more importantly, (ii) the lack of conviction that such a way was indeed "progress." According to him competitive materialism was not the cultural ideal of India. For Gandhi, history is to be lived in the spirit of history's ideals, and not in merely recalling its past glory. "Instead of boasting of the glorious past, we [must] express the ancient moral glory in our own lives and let our lives bear witness to our past," Gandhi had said.

Certainly, Gandhi did not sufficiently historicize Indian cultural ideals but saw them too homogenously, and we might also say today that he too had an essentialist notion of Indian culture. However, in the context of the development narrative, his interrogation of the universal ideals of modernity should be seen as one of the earliest challenges to cultural imperialism. Much of the Gandhian development dream did not hold sway in the Nehruvian independent India. But, one might say something of the Gandhian political ethos survived too, for example, in the Indian interpretation of secular pluralism, which advocates respect and political provisions for every citizen's religion. In the precariously poised multi-religious modern India, born out of a bloody partition on religious grounds, it is unclear what other alternative would have served every Indian better, given the constraints of a functioning democratic polity. In any case, it would not be right to say that what survived of the Gandhian heritage in India's democratic political ethos was a less historicized account than the economic model India adopted, for the sense of history and context with which Gandhi worked on and literally constructed India's nationhood in the first half of the twentieth century .

Gandhi presents to the world through his principles of truth and nonviolence in order to fight for the civil rights of the people. In the face of oppressor nations, Gandhi exhorted the people to just withdraw cooperation with the conqueror, and accept the consequences. Though some will be butchered, they remain martyrs in the movement. He was able to organize truth and non-violence into a powerful movement, organised to withstand evils of hatred and violence. Gandhi named the movement Satyagraha. It was a powerful movement, a social weapon to inspire the masses with self-confidence in resisting all tyranny. While Gandhi aimed at fortifying and strengthening the age old cultural traditions of India as they were founded on moral ideals, the Nehruvian and subsequent ideologies with modernist perspective saw an opening of the 'doors of India' to the materialistic west and its civilisation.

(The writer teaches at Lady Keane College, Shillong)

Social reforms

Courts' indispensable share

By Dr. S Saraswathi

The Supreme Court has at last stepped in vigorously to introduce vitally significant social reforms to end centuries of injustice and inequality thriving in social life and relations. Late last week, two major verdicts were given -- one to decriminalize adultery and another to allow females of all ages to offer prayers at the famous Aiyappa Temple at Sabari Malai in Kerala. These are in quick succession to the earlier landmark judgment decriminalizing gay sex.

Apart from the significance of the contents of the judgments, they point to the important role the judiciary has come to play in our country, to cleanse the system of unwanted and archaic laws and the society of impure and prejudiced thoughts and lead the country towards a rational and equalitarian social order.

Critics are not wanting, who indulge still in archaic thinking that matters of worship and prayer, faith and beliefs, customs and rituals cannot be subjected to State regulation as they fall in the realm of religious faith and devotion, and cultural characteristics. But, nobody can knowingly violate basic freedom and equality enshrined in the Constitution, and claim immunity in the name of religion and culture.

Strong and true rationalists who question any blind faith are not likely to join the fight for equal rights in a matter like temple entry. Their object is to eradicate the hold of beliefs and rituals over everybody. This is conveniently overlooked in the present controversy.

While Parliament finds it difficult to push legislations due to party divisions on every issue, courts can come to the rescue by directing essential social reforms needed in the country. The present Chief Justice has succeeded in this endeavour to the extent possible in his tenure that came to an end on 2nd October.

Agreed, there may be differences of opinion even among staunch protagonists of freedom and equality as to the need for judicial intervention in recasting generations of social practices like prohibition of temple entry to women of a certain age-group or on certain days. Ideas of purity and impurity, however irrational, do not allow smooth changes for centuries not only in India, but all over the world. But, that cannot be the reason for statutory or customary discriminations to continue indefinitely in the fast changing material life and protected as personal law beyond State regulation.

The Supreme Court's readiness in social reforms may find both friends and foes. Questions involved are also subject to varied interpretations. To the devotees, an issue like entry into Sabari Malai Temple is not a question of equal rights to be asserted as a Constitutional right of gender equality, but a social convention inbuilt in our social and cultural life so deep as to make women themselves free and willing partners in the segregation.

Therefore, there remains the task of educating men and women devotees on the Court's decision if reform is intended to be absorbed by the society and not remain on paper. Our education and upbringing have to reflect court-directed reforms.

Another important reformative judgment was given on the question of adultery by deleting Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as "unconstitutional" and manifestly arbitrary. It subjugated a married woman entirely to the will of her spouse, as elucidated by Justice Chandrachud. It is a position akin to slavery. The court's verdict is likely to find popular support more easily. Doubtless it deals with equality and equal rights.

Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code written in the colonial era says: "Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both. In such a case, the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor".

The Section, as it is worded, grants the right of ownership of his wife to the husband especially her sex life. It also implies the right of the husband to lend or sell this right to another man; it is theft of a husband's property if his wife had relations with another man without his knowledge and consent.

According to the judges, marriage does not mean that a woman surrenders her autonomy totally to her husband. The concept of individual freedom is not known to majority of Indian men and women, who are taught the virtues of obedience and submission of wives to their husbands in all situations. That the woman loses her identity and legal right with marriage recognised under the doctrine of Coverture is not recognised in the Constitution, as pointed by one of the judges.

Adultery is a crime in many countries in Asia and Africa, and also in some States of the US. It is decriminalised in a number of countries like China, Japan, Brazil, Australia, and several European countries. In the ancient world, the offence was fit for severe punishment. Scrapping of the Indian law on adultery is a strong and progressive judicial decision, but it also needs to be taken to the people to become effective.

In the series of court directed reforms, the crowning glory may go to the abolition of Triple Talaq - a matter of rights of Muslim women. Last year, the Supreme Court had ruled by a majority that the law that allowed Muslim men to divorce their wives by simply uttering the word "talaq" three times was unconstitutional and un-Islamic. By this, it sent out an unambiguous message that personal law can no longer be privileged over fundamental rights. That case was initiated suo motu by the Supreme Court.

The opinion of the minority (of one judge) was based on the notion that triple talaq was a matter of personal law and therefore entitled to Constitutional protection. Some sections of people believe that practices under personal law of any religion have to be protected and cannot be annulled by legislation by Parliament or judicial verdict irrespective of the injustice or irrelevance perpetrated.

The Bill introduced by the Government sailed through the Lok Sabha, but was blocked in the Rajya Sabha. The Government has issued an ordinance making "triple talaq" a punishable offence after the Court had adjudicated on the interpretation of the Quran even while upholding the Indian Constitution. This ordinance, irrespective of its worldly or religious significance to the community concerned, introduces a vital social reform in which the judiciary has been the main supporter to the law maker. Indeed, no social reform relating to any particular community or to all citizens which involves changes in current practices is possible without Court's interpretation of Constitutional rights. Family law is no longer a matter restricted to families.

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

TO THE EDITOR

Need for CBI enquiry into the GSWSS project

Editor,

It was intriguing to read in your newspaper that the MLA Mawphlang Constituency has been giving lessons on water supply to the Minister PHE during the ongoing Assembly Session. It was intriguing because the person who is solely responsible for the total mess and derailment of the GSWSS Phase-III project has the audacity today of questioning a person who is a novice and has very recently taken over the Department. People are aware that this project which was prepared to bring about proper piped treated water to 3 new townships of Shillong Urban Agglomeration and also to streamline the existing water supply to Shillong Municipal area as well as 3 other townships of Shillong Urban Agglomeration got derailed completely and the Department ended up doing piecemeal work. The major part of the achievement reported is primarily due to the most lucrative work i.e. procurement of pipes and equipments. No wonder that the powers that be were merrily dancing in Pinewood in parties thrown by the pipe suppliers at the initiation of the project.

The MLA concerned should instead explain in the Assembly as to what is the status of laying the main distribution networks in the Shillong Municipal areas, Mawlai, Nongthymmai, Pynthorumkrah etc, reduction of the huge distribution losses, conversion of bunched connection into single distribution lines, household connections from ferrule points so as to do away with the small distribution tanks, improvement of water quality, the household meters which were to be installed.

None of these works were ever done and instead the blame game campaign was started against PWD, Govt. of India MUDA etc. for covering the misdeeds and failure of the Department which the MLA then headed. It is unfortunate and sad that almost Rs 150 crores of public money was wasted in the project and the outcome is for everyone to see. Even the High Court is rightly questioning about the quality of water being supplied in the city.

The Problem in our state is that nobody is held accountable for their misdeeds in Government and in case the stars, the projects and leaders favour you, you land up as MLA and Ministers. To be fair and to send a right message to the masses, the present Government should set up an enquiry to evaluate as to how the over Rs 150 crore was spent and what has been the benefit to the citizens. Fortunately, Congress has not come back to power otherwise the same person would have been the Minister of PHE. Believe me.

Yours etc.,
B. Mawlong
Shillong-3

Let's get serious about garbage

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Lack of waste management adds to Wahumkhrah woes" (ST Oct.3, 2018). On this I wish to comment that the dirt, filth and garbage of Shillong has been mounting on our heads since the last century, yet we are still discussing as to what to do with this problem. In fact too many rounds of discussions on the problem have been held in this city for last many years by officials as well as by non-officials but there is no solution in sight and no concrete and sustained action has been taken. In fact, so many awareness programmes, seminars and workshops were held on the subject yet no results were seen on the ground. Again so many academic discussions were held to surmount the problem yet this monster gets bigger and bigger.

Experts were called in to offer long lasting solutions but the problem persists. Many excellent suggestions were offered to solve the problem yet none were implemented. A similar exercise was undertaken on October 2 last at the conference Hall of Powergrid in the city with the hope that a solution can be arrived at regarding the problem of garbage in the city. Solutions defy us because we take great delight in discussion but we refuse to engage ourselves in concrete action which is the permanent solution to the problem. We feel that it is below our dignity to pull up our sleeves and our pants and to get into the thick of the garbage by cleaning with our hands our compounds, our neighbourhood and our Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyrpi rivers and their tributaries. And we keep on grumbling and blaming somebody else who pollutes these rivers. Rallies, seminars, workshops, debates, talks were held and will be held in future on how to overcome the problem yet these will boil down to nothing until and unless some concrete steps are taken on the ground. Solution can be found only by doing not by academic discussions. Discussions up to a certain level is required but that should start by taking action on the ground. The need of the hour is to initiate immediate action and the time is now. Let us all do it.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

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"Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours."

--- John Locke

The Shillong Times

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UP's encounter culture

A 38 year old sales executive, Vivek Tiwari was murdered in Lucknow recently. When the cop responsible for pulling the trigger was interviewed by television journalists he was nonchalant and said that Tiwari had refused to stop after he was flagged down at a 'nakabandi' (traffic check point). That was his only fault. The traffic constable, Prasant Chaudhary said that he fired in self-defense. This and similar incidents show how trigger happy the Uttar Pradesh police have become. And they appear to get away with murder. When Yogi Adityanath became Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh he vowed to restore law and order but at what cost. The Yogi seems to believe that giving the police a free hand will restore the rule of law. The cops have now gone berserk and seem to take their orders straight from the CM. In this particular case, Adityanath has stated that Tiwari was not a victim of encounter killing and Chaudhary and his colleague have been arrested.

It is good that the UP government has not defended the killer policeman and due compensation has been paid to the victim's family. But the state is still not in the clear. Tiwari's murder is not an isolated incident. The government has done justice to the Tiwari because of the high caste and professional status of the victim and his family. During Adityanath's regime, there have been 2, 300 shootouts and over 60 encounter killings. There is no denying that UP is overrun by hardened by criminals. But the FIRs lodged were identical. In many cases, families of victims were not given copies of FIRs. In some cases, families were not allowed to take the dead bodies of victims of encounter killings. The Chief Minister and others ministers have often whitewashed encounter killings. There is no reason to disagree with Adityanath when he says that criminals should get appropriate punishment. But encounter killing has to be condemned as has been done in several Bollywood films. Excesses cannot be justified in the name of maintaining law and order. After Adityanath became CM he also started the Romeo squad to keep an eye on young couples. Many of them were harassed or beaten up on the pretext that they should not be seen in parks and streets. This sort of state-sponsored vigilantism strikes at the roots of democracy. Violence and impunity stalk UP. Tiwari's murder and punishment of the guilty is not likely to stem the tide of police atrocities in UP.

Meghalaya: What are our priorities?

By Patricia Mukhim

The Health Sector

Those who read the daily newspapers cannot miss the reports from the 108 GVK EMRI ambulances. Almost every single day a child is born in these ambulances. What does this say about the state of our Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs)? Why are they not able to halt the number of expectant mothers from rushing to Shillong's Ganesh Das Hospital for delivery and that when are already in labour ? Health sub-centres in the distant villages are supposed to have at least a midwife that can help with normal delivery. PHCs are supposed to have a doctor, some nurses and attendants, proper labour room facilities and an operation theatre in case Caesarian Section is required to be performed. CHCs are supposed to have some specialist doctors and to be able to handle deliveries without any hassle. The truth is that most doctors do not reside in the living quarters provided near the PHCs and CHCs but prefer travel to and from their residences in Shillong, especially if a PHC is only a one or two hour drive away. Hence if a delivery case comes in late at night or at dawn the CHC/PHC is without a doctor. Women in labour know this too well hence they prefer to come to Ganesh Das, Shillong. As a result, the doctors and nurses at Ganesh Das are over-burdened and therefore on a short fuse. It is not easy to be kind and compassionate when you are stressed out and unable to meet the daily grind without sufficient human resource and adequate infrastructure. One wonders why the Health Minister does not take stock of the over-all situation. Why are PHCs and CHCs not functioning to their optimum? What is ailing Ganesh Das Hospital today and why is NEIGRIHMS unable to take some of the load as far as Gynaecology cases are concerned?

Without constant vigilance slackness creeps into the system and things can go awry for those looking at accessing health care from Government PHCs and CHCs. It is important to also remember that the Health Insurance provided by the Government is not a cure-all. There are ailments not covered under the scheme and if one is a chronic patient requiring sustained medical care the Health Insurance Scheme would not address the problem. It is critical that the health infrastructure functions and functions well right at the level of the Sub-Centres. A robust mechanism for checking the availability of doctors is important. In this connection the Dorbar Shnong should keep a vigilant eye and report to the proper authorities a doctor's absence from duty or his/her unwillingness to attend to a woman in labour. The 108 ambulances are not meant to serve as mobile labour rooms. Nor can they handle post delivery complications. That this is not taken seriously by those in Government should be a matter of public concern and we should be raising our voices against this.

And the worst case scenario is that in Meghalaya we don't even know how many mothers die at childbirth or immediately after that, due to complications. In 2015-16 there are no statistics on maternal mortality (MMR) in Meghalaya. Hence we don't know how many hundreds of mother's died of childbirth and post delivery complications every year. This is not acceptable. I wonder why the women MLAs including those who flaunt their PhDs inside the Assembly don't care about this issue of life and death? What's the point of a PhD if such grievous matters relating to helpless women don't shake them out of their urban complacency?

Assembly Affairs

Let's face facts. Not all our elected representatives can speak the Queen's English and they need not be apologetic about that or be made the laughing stock for failing to answer questions raised by their English speaking colleagues. In recent times there have been several public demonstrations about giving the much needed thrust to the Khasi and Garo languages so that they are included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and become recognised languages. If MLAs do not speak Khasi and Garo in the Assembly then how do they expect anyone to take them seriously about the resolution they passed for recognition of the two languages? And didn't the PhD holder also speak Khasi in the Assembly earlier this year? What the Assembly needs are interpreters who are fluent in three languages - Khasi, Garo and English.

It's good to aspire to have educated MLAs and MDCs, even educated Syiems and Rangbah Shnongs. But without a constitutional amendment, that aspiration is futile. As of today anyone can contest the elections to the State Assembly and District Councils. So let's get real. Moreover, villagers feel more free to interact with someone who can relate to their woes than representatives who have been suited and booted all their lives and enter the Assembly for purposes other than public service. An educated person does not necessarily deliver the goods. Nor are compassion and commitment to public service the attributes of the educated only. On the contrary we have witnessed how the educated have taken this state for a joyride for 46 years. Those who have ruled Meghalaya know that the State needs cogent policies and clearly stated goals in order to reach somewhere. And to repeat what was stated above, if we don't even have crucial statistics such as for MMR and IMR in the Health sector then we have not even begun to follow the path of human development.

Let's also face another truth: Some highly educated ministers have been running the Agriculture & Horticulture Department in the past but the only increase we have seen is not in the crop yield or remuneration of farmers. The increase is only in the number of vendors who have almost taken over the Departments. There are vendors for fertilisers, for pesticides, for seeds, for agricultural equipments and for every requirement under the Agricultural sun. With a change in government the vendors will be out in the cold hence all the scientific mumbo-jumbo that the farmers hardly understand will now be replaced by real agriculture as they understand it. Farmers need better wholesale and retail outlets, better soil health and what will address their problems to a large extent is if they are able to form Farmers' Producers Organisations (FPOs). If they can do this, the ugly phenomenon of the middleman will be eliminated. There's a huge gap between the rate at which farmers sell their produce and the rates at which we buy them from the market. This gap has to narrow down and the benefits ought to flow to the farmers. That is basically what the Agriculture Department needs to be doing instead of resorting to hi-fi scientific jargon.

Traffic Woes in Shillong and beyond:

Successive governments have failed to discipline the elite schools in the city which contribute the most to traffic jams and also add to the pollution levels (suspended particulate matter). This in turn affects all of us. More than one District Administrator has tried to engage the principals of these schools but they have rebuffed the idea of school buses on flimsy pretexts; the easiest one being that there is no parking space in the school campuses. But the schools refuse to open their eyes to the fact that cars for picking up their students take up public space by the roadside. This Government needs to come down heavily on schools that refuse to cooperate in trimming down the number of vehicles on the road. And as far as Traffic Policing is concerned the higher-ups are never seen on the streets because they are probably monitoring traffic on their display screens. Concealed policing is never a good idea. The Traffic Police Chief must be seen on the roads and highways. Policing is not about paper work and desk jobs. It's about making a difference in the real world. If the Conrad Government can streamline just this one pernicious problem then it would have made a lot of difference to our lives. Of course there may be other strategies for reducing wheels on the road but let's begin by illustrating that schools should conform to rules applicable across the country.

Tailpiece : Meghalaya is known as the Festival State. Can we find out what happens after the series of festivals are over? Is it all about short term ecstasy with vendors once again walking away with profits? Or is there any palpable change in youth behaviour? Is the state doing enough to fight drug addiction?

Two hands in the chop motion

'Raking up' memory lane is in, down is out

By Aditya Aamir

The Judge Brett Kavanaugh controversy in the United States may be coming to a closure but actor Nana Patekar's case will keep stewing for a time in the foreseeable future. The judge did not get what Patekar also cannot: A penile plythsmography or phallometry test, which is a measurement of blood flow to the male organ, typically used as a proxy for measurement of sexual arousal at the time of an alleged sexual incident.

That is because too much time elapsed, 36 years in the case of Judge Kavanaugh and a decade in that of Nana Patekar. Tanushree Dutta's "recall memory" is suddenly up to full-speed. She also remembers that filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri asked her "to strip" for a movie sequence. But that has led to a circling of the wagons: Bollywood is now threatened and the debate has shifted to the definition of "item song." An 'item song' involves touching and titillation and there is no running away from that fact.

It can be argued that women are always at a disadvantage and far removed from the set. That's how the cards are stacked. Fundamental fairness and due process were not given them throughout human history and now the tables are turning. But part of the resistance, call it backlash, comes from within the ranks. Like in what's unravelling in Kerala, where women - whose rights have been asserted by the apex court - in their multitudes are stepping outdoors to demand status quo.

Justice Chandrachud will have to go to his mother to unravel that quirk. Or have a chat with Justice Indu Malhotra who saw what was coming and voiced it in her dissent with appropriate words. It is another matter that the media gave due recognition to Justice Chandrachud's dissent in the Aadhaar case but did not give the same gravity to Justice Malhotra's dissent in the Sabarimala case. Now, that loss in faith has come back to hit.

Tanushree Dutta is not in the Sabarimala sort of grid to be locked out. She has fair support among Bollywood actors, both men and women, and has the backing of Women and Child Welfare Minister Maneka Gandhi. But it is when something like this is given full scrutiny that the 'evil is in the details' syndrome kicks in. Now, it is being said she did not lodge an FIR at the time of the incident in 2008, and that the only FIR was the one lodged by a media outlet against her.

'Going down memory lane' is a journalistic method to title a story with a different headline and always it's going down a happy feel-good memory lane, never the dark road ending in a box canyon. Most stories of the genre involve the memory of a known individual, a prominent public figure like an actor or a sports hero. More and more, however, going down memory lane is total recall of an alleged sexual infarction of a public figure.

In Nana Patekar's case, he's a folk hero; the actor who preceded Irfan Khan and Nawazuddin Siddique as the unlikely hero, different from the "chocolate-looks" who mostly belonged to star-families. They are the outliers who made it. Now, his supporters say Nana is being guillotined for being a 'made guy' of the Sicilian Mafia mould. That's because the only edge the #MeToo movement has is the sexual edge.

So, 'raking-up memories' has effectively replaced 'going down the memory lane' and there must be oldies (not old movies) in Bollywood who must be throbbing in their britches hoping and praying no one "Dutta remembers" recalls them. Shakti Kapoor, who must surely have several sorry skeletons to hide, reacted this way to the Tanushree-Nana faceoff: "I don't know; at that time I was just a kid!" That must have drawn some nervous chuckles in Pali Hill and Bandra.

It is not as if the police will find the lead pipe with the body, dried blood and fingerprints to match, to nail Nana. It happened so long ago and in front of "450 people". #MeToo is all about accusations and a prayer. So long as there is even one person accusing, with some sort of past link with the accused, the accusation is valid. In Tanushree's case, she had taken her grouse to the Cine and TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA) but did not go by advice and file an FIR.

Judge Kavanaugh may yet be confirmed to the United States Supreme Court but he will carry the scars of humiliation to his grave. The judge alleged a smear campaign with a #MeToo persistence to tarnish his image and reputation. The irony is Tanushree Dutta supported by #MeToo is alleging a similar smear campaign against her. Shows that #MeToo is yet to find traction in India, even in Bollywood.

It will take more than a Farhan Akhtar or a Raveena Tandon to take #MeToo to the heights or depths as seen in the West. But be sure that item songs will not be a suggestion that will find favour at 'film meetings' any longer. "Not a good idea, too many suggestive gestures," will be the verdict: Two hands in the chop motion! Butcher and be done with it. (IPA Service)

Tanushree Dutta is not in the Sabarimala sort of grid to be locked out. She has fair support among Bollywood actors, both men and women, and has the backing of Women and Child Welfare Minister Maneka Gandhi. But it is when something like this is given full scrutiny that the 'evil is in the details' syndrome kicks in. Now, it is being said she did not lodge an FIR at the time of the incident in 2008, and that the only FIR was the one lodged by a media outlet against her.

TO THE EDITOR

Section 377 does not redefine anyone

Editor,

This is a response I feel was long overdue to Ms Warjri's letter (ST Sep 24, 2018). At the outset, I would like to point out that I am justifiably aware of the baggage I carry and that is that English language. It is a burden and a boon which many of us have to submit to rather unwillingly and unwittingly at times. Your comment on building bridges seems redundant when enlightened souls of the society, so out-rightly denigrate their fellow beings. In leaving your arguments and findings to God, in my opinion, you have occupied the moral high ground or a safe neutral ground.

Furthermore, the partial striking down of #377does not mean that we are 'redefining' anything. We are merely acknowledging the fact that history has been unkind to a community of persons, and that it is time to reclaim ourselves, from the types of society and institutions which have bulldozed over us for many centuries. It's of course, again, your prerogative to talk about what you wish to. All I would have hoped for is a more scientific and rational conclusion to your findings and readings based on evidence you had given. Please continue to read and understand and when presenting an argument be aware and cautious of the position you locate yourself in the discourse.

Yours etc,
William Syiem,
Via email

Making a farce of Gandhi Jayanti

Editor,

Observance of Gandhi Jayanti is a commemoration of the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation. It is about emulating his daunting spirit of non-violence and Ahimsa. But today in India, people and political parties of different hues use the occasion to trumpet or exult themselves and to further their political or personal interests. We have witnessed this on October 2 when the Congress, BJP and others held gatherings, not so much to remember Mahatma Gandhi, his greatness and how to emulate him, but to publicly heighten the temperature for the 2019 General Elections to the Lok Sabha. This is appalling and unpardonable. Again, the occasion is observed by merely conducting cleaning drives or Swachhta Bharat programmes forgetting altogether what Gandhi embodies. Even here in Meghalaya we witnessed VVIPs , VIPs, NGOs and officials in different districts observing this day only by conducting cleaning drives without for a moment recalling the Mahatma. Community cleaning drives should be conducted on some other days and at regular intervals to ensure a clean environment. To use October 2 for cleaning drives takes away from the true substance of Gandhi Jayanti and this is totally wrong. I sincerely hope that this will not be repeated. Another important aspect is that conducting cleaning drives is not a one day exercise; it should be a daily routine in order to have clean and healthy surroundings. We cannot clean in just one day the dirt and garbage of the whole year. To attempt to remove the dirt and filth of a whole year in a single day is a farce we enact but we fool no one but ourselves. Let us not demean the idea of Gandhi Jayanti and use it to achieve political ends.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein

When food become poison

Editor,

Despite the fact that the fish is a source of protein and an item of food commonly served at lunches and dinners in the North East a ban on its import had to be imposed by the Government t as it was found to contain formaldehyde which on long term consumption could be carcinogenic (cancer forming). The timely action of our Health Department in this connection is worth appreciating.

Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the kind attention of the concerned authorities on the use of "carbide" to ripen fruits like bananas and mangoes. Fruits provide us essential vitamins and nutrients only if they ripen naturally. Unfortunately, the fruit vendors procure raw fruits at a cheaper rate and preserve them in carbide, which facilitates overnight ripening of the fruits, thereby enabling the vendors to sell them to the consumers at huge profit margins. Carbide is a chemical, which artificially ripens the fruits but in the process poisons them. It may cause respiratory as well as cardiac disorder.

The authorities of Government of Assam in the recent past had cracked down on the fruit vendors and after seizing the carbide infected mangoes had destroyed the same. Tonnes of mangoes were destroyed but it was a very important step towards protecting the health of the citizens. Yes, fruits worth lakhs of rupees were destroyed but that is nothing compared to the health of consumers. Will our Health Department spare a thought over this issue and chalk out an appropriate strategy to save our lives from the evil effects of carbide? Generally doctors advice the patients to eat fruits for early recovery from various ailments. In this case the doctor's advice could prove "Injurious to health."

Yours etc.,
Md Zakaria,
Shillong-2

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

"Doctor Who: You want weapons? We're in a library. Books are the best weapon in the world. This room's the greatest arsenal we could have. Arm yourself!

--- Russell T. Davies

The Shillong Times

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Maya jaal before polls

THE last word, perhaps, is not heard from BSP leader Mayawati. Her announcement in an emphatic manner about abandoning a planned alliance with the Congress for the 2019 General Elections -- as also for assembly polls before that in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh -- has understandably embarrassed the Congress party. The Mahagathbandhan dream, for now, has turned sour. Worse, it turned sour immediately after the Wardha bombast. Nurtured with great hope after the cobbling of the JDS-Congress alliance government in Karnataka in May this year, the grand alliance was aimed at a united fight against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP principally in ways as to grab power in New Delhi 2019. It would now appear that, Mayawati is hoping to take on both the Congress and the BJP by forming a third front, and project herself as the PM nominee. She's hoping to get a few regional parties to her side, but it's as yet premature to say who stands with whom as the election scenario unfolds – first for the few state assemblies and then for the Lok Sabha.

The Congress has apparently hurt her ego by offering as few as 10 to 12 seats in Rajasthan, a little more in MP and five in Chhattisgarh. Feelings are that the BSP is no great shakes in states outside of UP. Granted that there's a Dalit consolidation in her favour following the cases of attacks on them by cow vigilantes and others, she might still not be strong enough to demand too many seats in states other than UP. As Mayawati had proven time and again in the past, she's open to new propositions till the last minute. Likely, she's throwing a tantrum to win the maximum number of seats from the Congress. This is mainly because the Congress dream of defeating the BJP in the next Lok Sabha polls will be virtually difficult if Mayawati stood apart from the proposed grand anti-BJP alliance in one key state –UP-- that has as high as 80 Lok Sabha seats. The Congress might, thus, be willing to give the BSP more seats in various northern states where Mayawati claims to have commendable support. Either way, after the polls, what stand Mayawati would take is anybody's guess. She would, first and foremost, try to grab the PM chair if no single party has the majority to form a government. So with Mamata Banerjee too. That much is certain.

Profession- A virtue, not a status

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

In the Khasi-Pnar society, the traditional ethics for conducting oneself in a profession or occupation of any nature is based on the principle of 'Kamai ia ka hok' or 'earn honestly or righteously'. This indigenous principle is higher than any code of conduct of professional organizations because it directly deals with the conscience of a person. It is a self regulating mechanism even in the absence of any monitoring system to oversee employee performance. The primary objective is purely for workers or professionals to do justice to the service or jobs that have been entrusted to them because a service on earth, is also a service commissioned by the Creator who has created and allowed them to live and work in the planet. Likewise, it should be an individual responsibility and a mission driven by honesty and trustworthiness that conforms to divine characteristics.

In this context profession includes all categories of jobs and employment, public and civil servants, politicians, salaried employees, academicians, medical professionals, daily wage earners, farmers, etc. And in the context of Khasi thought and practice, 'kamai' means to earn as well as to gain something but not specifically money or wealth. And 'ka hok' mainly refers to honesty, justice, right or righteousness. This motto engulfs all aspects of human behaviour related to the nature of work or service. Literally, it also means to convey the idea of earning ones income in a correct and transparent manner no matter how little and insignificant it might be. As a matter of fact, bribery is a new concept which was alien to our forefathers. Therefore, the endeavor to do service with wholehearted commitment and honesty was in fact, at one time a religion of our Khasi-Pnar community. It does not matter whether one benefits from such work or job but the joy is derived from the fulfillment of one's duty honestly. This can also include a voluntary service of any kind.

Sadly these days things are just the opposite. In our effort to commercialize and commodify everything and to cope with the growing concern and of making ends meet the intrinsic value of the Khasi principle is at odds with the idea of profit-making. But profit making per se is not bad idea and it symbolizes a personal human aspiration of working hard and earning well. While profit-making is not a crime the obsession to make profit by dishonest deals has become the sine qua non of tribal society today. Our children no longer understand the meaning of "kamai ia ka hok." There is a need to revive this good practice in order to improve the morale of the society. And the only possible option is to inculcate these good habits right from early childhood and at school.

A profession or a service rendered in any manner is a virtue that originates from the true character and the kind of beliefs that a person has. But the reality today is that the moral principles in our society are rapidly dwindling. Its fallout is reflected in the fraudulent behavior of people who refuse to correct their misdemeanours but who invent new tricks and strategies to acquire a status in life. It is sad to see that the position and role that a person holds is not taken as a virtue but is seen merely as a social status. Hence when a profession becomes a status, it nullifies the virtue therein. And for this reason a person may go to any extent resulting in ugly confrontations and behaviours just for the sake of acquiring a chair or a position.

What Meghalaya lacks is not only skilled workers, but also committed workers in various professions. As it appears, the productivity of workers of different professions is much below the salary paid. I say this because it has been the attitude of the working class in our society and anyone can do a research on this to ascertain the hypothesis. Let me further illustrate this by a simple example. A school teacher will always put extra effort for students in his/her tuition class rather than in the classroom. This is the same spirit that drives employees of various fields as well. And for this reason entrepreneurs in the state always encounter shortage of output from the service of labours employed. The reason is purely because the profession is seen as a service to self rather than to further the cause of the organisation and its noble objectives. This is a major challenge experienced by entrepreneurs who create jobs. This also has created a huge backlog for developmental projects and proposals in the state. In advanced and industrialized communities where people's mindsets are different, work is treated as worship'. This implies that their entire commitment and devotion is to the job or employment they have acquired.

Few years ago I had the privilege to personally experience the growth of microfinance and to interact with the Nobel Laureate (Prof Yunus) from our neighbouring country at Grameen Head Office in Dhaka. In fact it is a great learning experience to witness how poor women were sincerely devoted to the cause of their mission without fear and favour and thus emerged a new model of banking system known as Grameen Bank that is owned solely by the poor people themselves.

The typical voluntary service of our 'Dorbar Shnong' is perhaps one of the outcomes of this concept but these days things have changed drastically and now is centered exclusively around personal benefit. No Rangbah Shnong will miss an opportunity to make a monetary gain from key areas such as sale of land, government schemes, etc. But no doubt there are still remnants here and there who feel that community service is strictly a voluntary contribution of free will. There are some individuals too who have also contributed immensely in many ways to the community or to the service they once belonged through their sincerity but such are rarely publicised. But much more than this is the challenge for every professional to test and measure their own conduct with relation to their job, their roles and responsibilities. Thus, the notion 'ieid ri' or patriotism, is meaningful only if we first embrace these indigenous principles sincerely.

The problem that we are facing today mostly is because we have lost track of the virtues that should define our individuality and personality. No worker would ever think about others first before thinking of the self. Whereas, virtue brings productivity and prosperity, status on the other hand categorises people and creates isolation and division. Some people need status to survive and retain their identity especially in our Indian context. Others need status to dominate over others to corner off opportunity and privileges over others. And the reality today is such that the ethos and morale of the Khasi work culture and ethics has diverted to a strange direction. And the famous aphorism cited above is now merely a part of history in Khasi society. Virtue strives for perfection and better connectivity, but status deviates and elevates oneself at the cost of others and therefore alienates people thereby creating a community chasm. Today employment or a profession is no longer a true service but a status to maintain one's life in a society.

This further reminds me of the following quotation by former President Late APJ Abdul Kalam in April 2007 delivered at the European Parliament on the occasion of the golden jubilee year of the European Union. He says, "Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world". This is very true. Everything whether good or bad originates in the heart of a person. A righteous heart can transform the entire world around us be it in the home, locality, in the village or town, the church and community.

Emerging farmers' movement throws a challenge

Agrarian sector in dire straits under BJP rule

By Arun Srivastava

It is too early to predict the nature and characteristics of the emerging new farmers' movement in India, but one thing is certain. The coming together of divergent forces and groups would invariably have a major impact on the politics of the country.

Four year ago, when Narendra Modi was moving around the country seeking the mandate of the people for his ascension to the office of the prime minister, he had promised to double the income of farmers within ten years and bring about fundamental change in the agrarian sector. But an insight into the developments taking place in the sector would make it clear that Modi has miserably failed to live up to his promise.

The government keeps mentioning doubling of farm incomes, but fails to clarify whether it is gross income or net income. Gross income can increase if a farmer grows a cash crop with high debt. But when the cost of taking care of the family's food and nutritional security is included, the net income will go down. The government has to ensure that farmers' net income increases if their welfare is to be taken care of. Net negative incomes are at the root of the debt crisis and farmer suicides. They must not be pushed into a debt trap by forcing costly inputs on them.

A large number of small farmers have been selling their tiny plots and making a living out of casual labour, working in villages as well as neighbouring towns.This has given rise to a new kind of farmer-owner.

BJP or RSS has never been committed to promote the interests of the farmers. There is no denying that the rot that has crept into agriculture for over four decades cannot be rectified within four years. But certainly a sincere effort to set things right should have been initiated. Unfortunately, that has not happened. What is worse is that during these years while productivity declined, employment in agriculture has also shrunk. While the last two Censuses show a rise of some 10 per cent in agricultural employment, the National Sample Survey shows a considerable fall.

The Modi government did not take the deterioration seriously and has been trying to hide behind statistics. Notwithstanding the government claims, the fact remains that the number of farmers has been falling. A large number of small farmers have been selling their tiny plots and making a living out of casual labour, working in villages as well as neighbouring towns. This has given rise to a new kind of farmer-owner.

During the last four years the farmers have been constantly raising their voice against discrimination perpetrated on them. But the Modi government has refused to pay serious attention. On October 2 thousands of farmers from Haryana, Rajasthan and Western UP marched to Delhi to voice their frustration. Initially they were not allowed to enter Delhi, but at the intervention of some senior BJP leaders, who perceived the march as a challenge to the party, intervened and sought permission to allow them to pay tribute to their leader late Chaudhary Charan Singh at his samadhi.

In protest against the government apathy, thousands of farmers under the banner of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) had begun their Kisan Kranti March in Hardwar on September 23 and reached Delhi on the Gandhi Jayanti day. The police had to resort to violent action to keep the agitating farmers under control.

This was the second long march of the farmers. Earlier, farmers from Maharashtra had organised a long march demanding loan waiver as they were unable to repay loans because of crop failures, droughts, floods, or low MSP, putting them under additional distress and many farmers committing suicide. The protesters have called for a one-time loan waiver and implementation of the Swaminathan committee recommendations. The committee had submitted five reports between 2004 and 2006 for "faster and more inclusive growth" for farmers. They have also been seeking uninterrupted power supply for at least six hours.

Also earlier in April 2017 thousands of farmers from Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu staged a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, with bones and skulls in their hands to highlight the problem of farmers suicides in the state. More than 106 farmers had committed suicide in one month because of the worst draught that hit the state in more than a century.

"Instead of providing relief to farmers, they are exacerbating the crisis. We haven't seen such an agrarian distress in India since independence," said CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury.

The rally of September 5 was significant for the reason that it brought together for the first time in post-Independence India three distinct classes: workers belonging to trade unions, peasants organized under the Kisan Sabha, and the agricultural workers. In the past hey used to hold separate rallies, which never included agricultural workers. The three sections came on single platform as they have come to realise that without unity they would not succeed in challenging the government's arbitrary action. Also conditions have now been created for such unity, which did not exist earlier

Traditionally, the interests of peasants, who want higher prices for their produce, are seen to go against the interests of workers, who get hurt by the higher prices. Under the neo-liberal regime of BJP there has been a persistent squeeze on peasant agriculture through a progressive withdrawal of state support from this sector. One manifestation of this squeeze is the suicide of more than three lakh peasants over the last two decades while 15 million peasants have left farming between the 1991 and the 2011 Censuses. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Why penalise the poor?

Editor,

A loan turns bad if the interest or instalment remains unpaid for a period of more than 90 days after the due date. I think bad loan is an appropriate term to describe it rather than the oft-repeated terminology "non-performing asset" (NPA). Be that as it may, such lost assets of Indian banks have crossed a whopping Rs. 87,300 crore in 2017-18 fiscal ~ topped by scam-tainted Punjab National Bank which is reeling under more than Rs. 14,000 crore scam allegedly perpetrated by Nirav Modi and associates. Just one bank, PNB has suffered a net loss of 12,283 crore last fiscal.

Unfortunately, while we let Vijay Mallyas and Nirav Modis go abroad after they had stolen a huge amount of tax payers money. Poor persons have been targeted for compensating the loot of those big thieves. It can easily be understood that it is mainly the poor persons who are made to pay through the nose in the name of penalty for keeping less than what a bank has marked as minimum balance. It is mainly economic constraints that makes people unable to keep minimum balance in their bank accounts. Huge amount of money has been sucked in from the purse of the poor people. It is reported that our banks have collected an astronomical Rs. 5,000 crore from customers for non-maintenance of minimum balance in their accounts in 2017 - 18. This consists mostly of, so to speak, the blood of the poor people.

It is the sheer lack of balance on the part of the administration which adopted a policy of letting Mallyas go abroad and penalizing the masses for the loss. Ironically, things have been going in such a way that it makes us believe that money power forces the masses to pay for the misdeeds of some macro defaulters. The policy of imposing penalty for keeping less than some thousands in a bank account is, as it were, an act of imposing double punishment. We are made to pay for the loss of our own public money!

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Resolve the Assam-Meghalaya border dispute

Editor,

The Shillong Times and other media have again highlighted the skirmishes taking place in Meghalaya-Assam borders especially in Jaintia Hills (Block-I), Ri Bhoi (Block-II) and West Khasi Hills sectors. Recently a Khasi from Khlieh Umwang area of Ri Bhoi bordering Assam was slaughtered by a person from the other side. Again just recently Assam made incursions into Malangkona (Huapara) and the nearby villages under West Khasi Hills District claiming that the area belongs to Assam. It was reported that the Assam police conducted combing operations to nab villagers who resisted the area expansion by the Assam Police. Similar things happened in many villages in the Block-I sector. Again, in 2010 four Khasis were shot dead by Assam Police at Langpih village which happened on market day at the village. Two rounds of talks between the government of Assam and Meghalaya took place following the shooting incident but nothing came of the talks to settle the boundaries between the two states. These skirmishes and border clashes will keep recurring from time to time if the boundaries between Meghalaya and Assam are not finally and clearly demarcated once and for all by both states. The people of Meghalaya demand that the present Government under MDA should immediately sit with its counterpart to settle the boundary dispute once and for all in all disputed sectors of the borders between Meghalaya and Assam.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Nagerbazar Blast- a terrorist trial run?

Editor,

A bomb explosion took place in the congested Kajipara area of bustling Nagerbazar under South Dum Dum Municipality at about 9 a.m. on Tuesday last outside a fruit shop on the ground floor of a five storied building resulting in the death of a nine year old boy and serious injury to ten other people. As reported by the media, Chairman of SDD Municipality, who is perhaps not a recognized technocrat or explosives expert, termed the blast as a socket bomb explosion. The Commissioner, Barrackpore Police Commissionerate also termed the explosion as a "low intensity socket bomb blast". The blast that took place in a most peaceful area of Kolkata is therefore a serious matter of concern for public security and safety on the eve of the greatest national festivity – the "Durga Puja".

According to CID sleuths as reported in the media, the JMB (Jamtul Mujahideen) of Bangladesh are experts in Socket Bomb Explosion and the districts of Murshidabad & Birbhum have been earmarked as the labour rooms for delivery of socket bombs. For quite some time the state of West Bengal has become a safe haven for terrorists, aided by Pakistan's ISI Pakistan which have infiltrated into the state through Nepal and Bangladesh routes. In those districts NIA has established the presence of JMB & Ansarullah team of Bangla during the course of investigation after Khagragarh Blast. It is high time to investigate, identify and unravel the existence of secret hide-outs of terrorist organizations in a populated area of mixed ethnic groups like Dum Dum. There is also a possibility that unidentified terrorist organizations/groups are engaged in the preparation of "Sleeper- Cells" in the entire state of West Bengal. The state government may, therefore, resort to an in-depth investigation on top priority basis by deployment of the State Police & CID and also taking necessary help from the Union Home Ministry as well for revealing the truth of the bomb blast of Kajipara and to bring the facts to the public domain.

As per report of a section of the CID investigators, as published in the newspapers, immediately after the explosion the site of blast witnessed continued visits and presence of heavy-weight leaders and ministers of the ruling party. It is however, not understood as to why there was a hurry on the part of Police administration and municipality administration of SDD, to term that the blast was a socket bomb blast, to wash the site with water even before the arrival of Forensic Experts for collection of evidence at the site and adjacent areas surrounding the site of the blast. Why there was an unusual delay in sending the Forensic experts to the site of explosion is also inexplicable.

Are we heading/ destined for a bigger blast, after a trial run in Kajipara, which aims at causing a mass casualty during the impending "Durga Puja Festival"?

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

Giving hope amid despair

Palliative Unit at NEIGRIHMS helps cancer patients cope with the trauma & fight depression, anxiety. ***Willie Gordon Suting*** *reports*

Anne (name changed) was only 16 when her father was diagnosed with lung cancer. A heavy smoker, the 50-year-old man was in the third stage and had a few summers to spend with the family. Ten years afrter his death, Anne remembers her father's helplessness and bouts of depression. "He would play with us siblings and though not an extrovert, he was always cheerful. He became frighteningly quiet in the last few years," she says and wonders whether her father had added a few more years to his life if he could have had mental peace.

Cancer is one of the most serious illnesses with debilitating effects on the body. But more than that, it causes depression and anxiety which further deteriorates the patient's health.

In order to address to this health issue, the Palliative Care Unit of NEIGRIHMS, Shillong provides free healthcare, OPD services and counselling.

Established in March 2014, the unit co-ordinates with various hospitals and NGOs like VHAM, WISE, Red Pine, Rotary Club and Lions Club. On March 28, 2016, Palliative Care started to function as a unit under Department of Anesthesiology and Critical Care. Jiv Daya Foundation, USA, sponsored two full time nurses, a doctor and medical social worker. Pallium India and UK provided the funds for purchasing a Hyundai Eon car for home care services.

Starting with 464 patients in 2016, the numbers grew to 6011 from 2017 to August 2018. The aim of the unit is to provide best supportive care for physical, psychological, social and spiritual problems of patients.

Dr Prithwir Bhattacharya, head of Pallitave Care, says, "Cancer ends lives. But we instruct the patient after diagnosis to remain calm. We deal with them in a composed manner".

Meghalaya has the highest number of head and neck cancer cases in the country.

Less than 1 per cent has access to healthcare. 7 per cent of the 8 Lakh new cancer cases per year are diagnosed at a very late stage, when treatment is unlikely in preventing disease progression. 1.6 million people per year experience cancer pain but less than 3% have access to adequate pain relief. In addition, lack of knowledge and access to essential pain medication along with paucity and high cost of healthcare facilities results in innumerable patients dying undignified deaths.

Bhattacharya says death is the surest thing after birth. "We are not afraid of death per se. We are afraid of what it means to us, as it has more to do with leaving responsibilities behind".

Due to fear and pessimism, depression and anxiety develops. But the unit helps curb these factors. "As social workers, I counsel and guide them towards positivity. We try to instill in them the fact that one can also die a peaceful death," says Bashisha Chyne, social worker.



The Palliative Care Unit members at NEIGRIHMS

The unit also sensitises patients on Government Flagship Programmes like the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhio Scheme, Health Minister's Discretionary Grant etc.

Palliative Care affirms life and regards dying as a normal process. It intends neither to hasten nor postpone death. It offers a support system that helps patients live as actively as possible until death. The family members of the patient are counselled to cope with the course of illness. Palliative Care is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes investigations needed to better manage distressing clinical complications.

Palliative Care has Dr Prithwir Bhattacharya, Dr Phibakordor Marbaniang, Dr Samarjit Dey, Dr Priyanka Dev and Dr Tridip J Bora as main doctors. And Anita Wann, Sandra Lywait, Monica Kharbudon and Billsheba Nengnong as main nurses. Bashisha Chyne is social worker. The nurses and social worker are trained by Pallium India.

For free home care, the unit embraces Shillong as well as the vicinity areas –currently limited to a radius extending 15km beyond Mylliem with NEIGRIHMS at the centre.

Anita Wann, speaking to *The Shillong Times*, says, "We want to make patients face problems with confidence. We have the best facilities. Cancer does not mean the end of life. It is just a millestone".

> Starting with 464 patients in 2016, the numbers grew to 6011 from 2017 to August 2018. The aim of the unit is to provide best supportive care for physical, psychological, social and spiritual problems of patients

Bhattacharya says the unit is requiring more volunteers. People can also donate money freely to the formal fund of the unit. An app for communication among the team members has also been developed. The unit also has a helpline.

"We want the state Government and corporates to sponsor and invest here for more doctors, nurses, social workers and a large vehicle. This way the unit can function well", says Bhattacharya.

The Shillong Times spoke to family members of patients in the unit. Jasmine Kharkongor, daughter, says "They helped my father till the end with home care. They were very hepful. Iam fully satisfied".

Daibianghun Kharwanlang, whose late uncle was taken care of by the unit, says, "The treatment and counseling was very helpful. There was strong support from everyone".

Gilly Burn, Director of Care Response International and Founder Director of Cancer Relief India, will visit Shillong from October 9 to 13 for teaching and training activities in Palliative Care Unit. The unit will also organise a poster competition and bike rally on October 13. Solace, a musical evening in aid of cancer patients, will take place on October 13 at NEIGRIHMS Indoor Stadium featuring Headingson Ryntathiang, Colors, 4th Element, Phom Lyttan, Halcom Tariang etc.

Women idol makers make a mark

By Binita Das

Walking cautiously along the narrow lanes of Kumartuli, the traditional sculpting hub and potters' lane in north Kolkata, one can easily locate the few women idol makers who have carved a niche for themselves in a world hitherto dominated by men.

Popular female idol-maker Chaina Pal (**in picture**), who had to tackle "sceptical customers" in the past, recently visited China to showcase her work (two of her idols are displayed in a Chinese museum). Mala Pal, who has a similar story, is now a favourite for her miniature idols.

"I loved visiting my father's studio as a child, but he never encouraged me as a female was rarely seen in Kumartuli. Later, when he fell ill I could actually fill the gap as my elder brothers were busy doing their jobs. At the age of 14, I took charge of the workshop after he passed away," Chaina, who now runs another studio in Baghbazar with eight helpers, said.

Explaining her initial hardship, she said, "It was difficult as I did not know the entire process of idol-making, but my sheer love for the art helped me to learn it quickly."

There has been no turning back for the little girl who took some time to win the confidence of customers.

Chaina has earned the title "Dashabhuja" (a reference to Goddess Durga, who has ten hands) for efficiently managing her workshop, cooking and taking care of her 95-year-old mother.

Sharing her experience of making her path-breaking work, the "Ardhanarishwar Durga idol", Chaina said, "I made it on request of the transgender community in 2015. A few people didn't like it, but I do not care. I believe everyone has the right to worship the goddess. I haven't heard about anyone else making such a figurine."



She upholds her family's tradition by only making the "sabeki ek-chala-thakur" (traditional Durga idols on a single platform) along with her family of Lord Ganesha, Kartikeya, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

Mala broke stereotypes by not paying heed to "what people said" and joined in 1985.

However, after her father's death, the 15-year-old girl was encouraged by her brother, Gobinda Pal.

Pointing to a golden polished idol, the specialist said, "I make detachable miniature idols of both types — traditional 'Banglar Mukh' with large drawn eyes and also the modern 'Art' patterns. They are popular in Europe, as also in Malaysia, Australia and Canada — and US cities like Chicago — where Pujas are held."

The lack of space is clearly evident in the studio, lined with small and medium sized idols.

Dreaming of better work conditions, Mala said, "Though I have received recognition and rewards, I have got no other assistance from the state government. On their request, I organise workshops in government colleges and earn some extra money. Students come here at times, but this place is not sufficient to accommodate them."

"Moreover, the toilets are not proper for them. A better space is definitely desirable," added the woman who also makes beautiful terracotta jewellery.

Shaping the clay and etching the shapes needs dexterous fingers, but creating the base of huge idols using wood and the basic structure with bamboo needs immense strength.

Mala's father did not want his daughter to join in due to this very reason.

Speaking on the same lines, Chaina, who rarely takes a break, said, "I wouldn't ask others to take up idol-making as it requires hard labour. It is true that for a woman it is too much, but if a person truly loves the art and is ready to sacrifice everything else, she can make a mark." *(IANS)*

Something crazy in your food

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Is someone known to you going "crazy"? Suspicious, swings from being extremely happy to morose, hyperactive, insomniac, angry without reason. Check to see how much meat he is eating. Specially pre-packaged or restaurant meat, like ham, sausages, hot dogs, dried beef or turkey jerky, salami.

Cohort studies follow groups of individuals over time to investigate the causes of disease, establishing links between risk factors and outcomes. Many major findings about the health effects of lifestyle come from cohort studies.

Johns Hopkins, founded in 1876 in Baltimore, is America's first research university and its research is considered world class. A detailed cohort study done by Johns Hopkins, evaluating diet in people with mania has been published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry.

Mania is a serious state of abnormally elevated arousal characterised by lack of inhibitions, racing thoughts, diminished need for sleep. It ranges from euphoric to irritable and as the mania intensifies, violence or extreme anxiety. Fancy, irrational ideas, delusions, disorientation, incoherence, catatonia and finally death.

What is it caused by? Genetics, drugs, certain diseases like multiple sclerosis, hormone imbalances, have been the standard diagnosis. But experts have veered to the opinion that it could also be food.

Johns Hopkins scientists studied diet and its role in a cohort of individuals with mania and other psychiatric disorders, as well as individuals without them. They found that a history of eating nitrated dry cured meat was strongly and independently associated with mania.

The study done by scientists at John Hopkins Medicine was led by Dr Robert Yolken, a professor of Neurovirology. Yolken was originally interested in studying the effect foods may have on mental illness, and conducted a demographic study of 1,101 people, both with and without mental disorders, from 2007 to 2017. It was from that pool of data that Yolken noticed the association between mania and nitrate consumption.

It was found that people who had been in hospital for mania were about 3.5 times as likely to have eaten nitrates, as people who were with no history of a serious mental disorder.

The addition of chemical nitrogen compounds in the form of sodium nitrite, or potassium nitrate, is used to preserve processed meats, preventing decay and bacterial growth, adding colour and reducing oxidation.

This is called "curing" meats. They are commonly found in processed meat products such as hot dogs, beef jerky, ham, sausages and salami. Nitrates have been linked to cancer and neurodegenerative disease as well.

Once the scientists had isolated nitrates, they experimented on rats. They found that the feeding of meat preparations with added nitrate to rats resulted in hyperactivity and irregular sleep, reminiscent of human mania, within two weeks. These rats also showed changes in their intestinal microbiota, as well as changes in their brain pathways, similar to what is seen in humans with bipolar disorder. These changes were not seen in the group of rats whose food did not contain any nitrates.

The rats which were fed the meat daily, were given an amount equivalent of what a typical person would eat: one hot dog per day. "We tried to make sure the amount of nitrate used in the experiment was in the range of what people might reasonably be eating," says Yolken.

Experts are increasingly of the belief that, in addition to genetic circumstances, diet plays a role in causing mental health issues. The theory, according to Johns Hopkins researchers, is that gut bacteria may be one contributing cause to mania and other brain disorders – which would mean that people with mania could reduce their problem by changing their diet. Dr Yolkien surmises that the reason is probably inflammation of the gut.

Nitrates in food are linked with cancer, which is in turn linked with inflammation. Other studies have shown that people who have manic episodes show signs of inflammation in their bodies.

A previous study from Yolken's group showed that mania patients are less likely to be re-hospitalized if they are given probiotics, which can affect gut bacteria. "There's growing evidence that germs in the intestines can influence the brain," Yolken said. That evidence includes a 2016 study which found that people with migraine headaches have higher levels of a bacterium that causes the absorption of nitrates. Nitrogen compounds affect the bacteria in the gut. The changed bacteria now allows for a larger amount of nitrates to be digested, causing their blood vessels to dilate more than usual and cause intense pain in the form of a migraine.

In another study done, by Djordjevic VV, Stojanovic et al (2010), on plasma nitrite/nitrate concentrations in 40 patients with schizophrenia and 36 persons without it, it was discovered that the schizophrenics had a significantly higher concentration, almost double. And women had higher levels than men.

Another study, done by Dr Valerie Taylor of the Women's College Hospital in Toronto, showed that people with severe bipolar problems improved after antibiotics were given to flush out their gut bacteria — a clear connection between gut bacteria and mental health issues

What Johns Hopkins has proven through science, a parent instinctively knows — that food can impact on their child's behaviour and mood. Sugar can cause bouts of hyperactivity, depression, cognitive delay and sleep problems. Any form of milk can make a child irritable, cranky or aggressive.

Artificial colouring has been linked to ADHD, anxiety, hyperactivity, and headaches in children. Because artificial colouring is found in many sugary foods, parents often blame behavioural changes on sugar. Artificial colouring is also often hidden in unexpected foods, like bread and yogurt.

Avoid products with yellow No. 5, red No. 40, and blue No. 1 if you're concerned about your child's mood swings. Preservatives like nitrates, nitrites, sodium benzoate (found in children's juice products) cause behavioural problems in children. Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavour enhancer that also causes mood and behaviour changes, including headaches and hyperactivity. If you notice behaviour changes, or mood swings, in your child, consider keeping a food journal. Track what they eat and when they exhibit "bad" behaviour.

Preventing mania could be as simple as not eating processed meat — or any meat at all.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)



Pexel

Life as an illusion

By Imtitoshi Ao

Many of us have sometime or the other experienced that life is just like an illusion especially for the people who are going through a hard time in life or people who have gone through it and have been successful. You would know and understand what I mean. Today I want to talk about one person who has influenced our lives in so many ways and that is Albert Einstein.

When he was a child he was a dumbo (as we say in today's world) and he was rejected from society, friends and family. He was lonely and even rejected the woman he loved but he had something else in mind. That is to do great things in Life and today he is known as a genius. I wanted to share this today with all of you so that we understand that no matter what, we have a quality in every one of us that God has given. Whatever our childhood may have been, whatever we have gone through in life, have the courage to stand up and fight again and again.

No matter what everyone says, you know your qualities, explore it and make that your forte. Believe in yourself, believe that you can make it happen and you will see how everything changes and never ever give up on what you believe. We have many situations where we believe that we have lost the fight in life but at the end of the day it is how we stand up and fight those situations to become the best.

"Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving" — Albert Einstein had said.

What I mean to say is that keep that target in life and keep moving forward always inching towards your goal and that's how you will succeed in life. No matter what people may say, keep that focus and always remember that whatever happens, it happens for the best. Keep that positive mindset and carry-on to achieve the best in life.

Remember that life is beautiful. You need to notice the small things in life to achieve the greatest things, like smell the rain as it drops to the ground or before the rain falls when the wind blows. These are things which many people would not notice because we are too busy to think of these things, but if you think or look back, these bring happiness and in turn this happiness will make you succeed in life. Live your life to the fullest and always remember to fight for your dreams. We do not know what will happen tomorrow so live today and achieve what you have to today for life is really crazy and nothing is guaranteed.

Do not stop fighting for what you believe is true and aim to achieve your goals and in the process gain knowledge, experience and work hard, work smart. Many of us set out to do a lot of things but all of us do not achieve it and the reason is because we do not believe in ourselves for we fear what others would think or say about our achievements and that's what makes our dream impossible.

"Life is one big road with lots of signs. So when you riding through the ruts, don't complicate your mind. Flee from hate, mischief and jealousy. Don't bury your thoughts; put your vision to reality. Wake Up and Live" – Bob Marley.

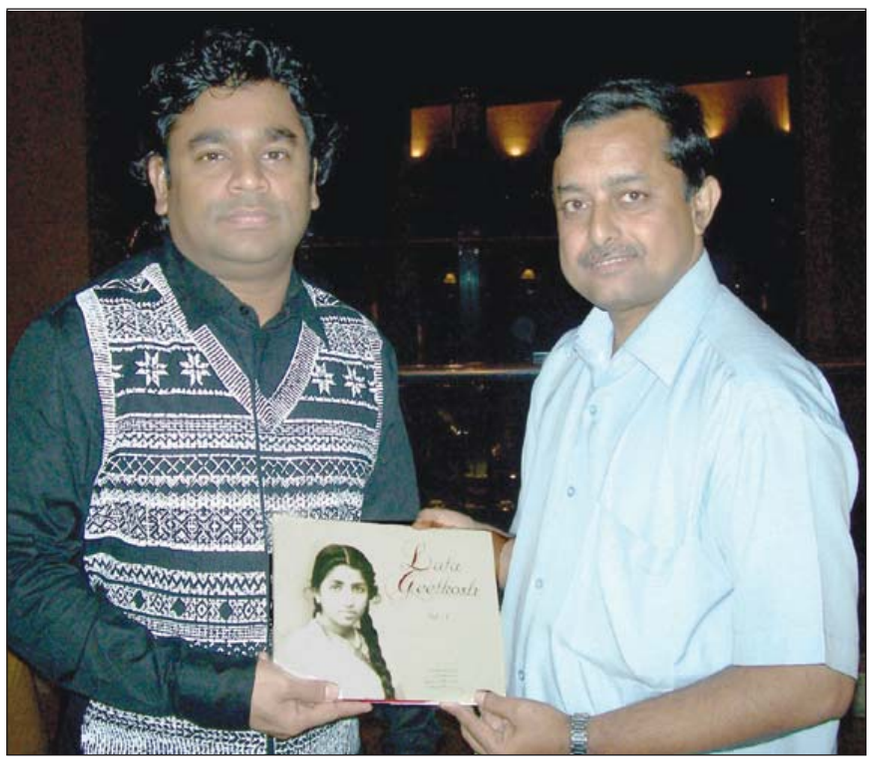
Today, I hope that I have motivated you enough so that you would achieve something more in life and that you would look at life in a different perspective of not fearing to achieve your goals and become successful. The choice is yours.

(The author is a motivational speaker)

Fitting bouquet to a legend

The nightingale of India, Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar, needs no introduction. Her fan following is legendary. Even then it needs an obsessed admirer like **Snehashish Chatterjee**, *a singer himself, to compile 19 volumes titled Lata Geetkosh containing all the songs sung by her. In a tete a tete with* **Shoma A. Chatterji**, *he talks about his journey:*





(Top) Lata Mangeshkar and Snehashish Chatterjee with AR Rahman in Kolkata in 2009 with a volume of Lata Geetkosh

You are now famous as a walking-talking encyclopedia on Lata Mangeshkar. How did it all begin?

Being a music teacher myself and a practising vocalist, I was worried about the lack of access to details about the long musical journey of one of the greatest musicians and vocalists India has ever produced. She is our national pride and many of us worship her as Goddess Saraswati in human form. Instead of complaining about what has not happened, I decided to do something about this myself.

What is this "something" that changed the direction of your life and work?

When I was a student at Rampurhat College in Nalhati much before we shifted to Serampore, a suburban town in West Bengal, I had a dream. To compile a database that would contain every single song Lataji has sung and be available to music lovers and practitioners across the world and would keep her work alive for the future generation. So I began the work in-between college lectures. But at that time, I wasn't very serious and didn't imagine that this would lead to something as big as this.

When did you take it seriously?

After graduating in 1990, I came to Kolkata and got introduced to a noted music archivist Surajlal Mukhopadhyay. We discussed every piece of music Lataji had sung. I consider him my mentor because he taught me how to go about collecting and creating a database on Lataji's songs in a scientific and methodical manner.

You are considered the greatest living expert on Lataji's music.

I don't know whether I am the greatest living expert on her songs and music today. But I was convinced a long time ago that her innings cannot be measured in terms of quantity alone; her versatility as a singer is without parallel. I have not only collected her music in the form of records, cassettes, lyric notes and so on but also other items since 1990. She is a great musical polymath who could sing in multiple languages, in different genres and different moods, score soulful tunes, pen her own lyrics at times and lend her voice to message-driven dance dramas. I humbly feel that it is my moral duty to conserve and also restore some of her 'lost' music and that is how Lata Geetkosh was born.

What does Lata Geetkosh comprise of?

I have aspirations to bring out 19 volumes of Lata Geetkosh over the next few years. I knew what a Herculean task it would be. Imagine compiling volumes of all her songs sung in 34-36 languages with lyrics and as I went on about this work, I realised it would run into at least 19 volumes. Most of us are not aware that Lataji has also sung in languages like Malaysian, Swahili, Russian, English and other languages from abroad. Voume I, brought out after a long struggle in 1997, covers almost all the Bengali songs including lyrics in Bengali and Devanagari scripts. Acording to me, she has sung 224 Bengali songs so far. The sixth volume of the Geetkosh was published in May this year.

How much have you covered till now?

From Volume II to Volume VI, I have collected all her songs in Hindi and other Indian languages. As of now, I have a collection of 6000 songs sung by Lataji. I still don't know how many songs she has sung through her life, but media reports say that she has lent her voice to around 72,000 songs. According to my knowledge, she has sung in 35 languages. I am now searching for the songs she sang in Russian and Latin.

How do you go on collecting other collectibles related to Lataji?

Earlier, procuring souvenirs and testimonials was really quite tough because when I began, there was no Internet and social network sites. In the early 1990s, even courier service was not there. I would assemble a lot of the stuff from the Kolkata's Wellington Square and Sealdah Market and also from other cities like Mumbai, Hyderabad, some shops in Puri. Two songs from Odiya films Arundhati and Surjamukhi were accessed from Bhuvaneshwar. I even collected material from overseas like California and Sharjah. Slowly, friends and well-wishers began to pitch in with pictorial and textual data, letters and parcels via the postal department and so on.

Have you met Lataji in person and what was the feeling like?

I had written to her while working on Voume I of Lata Geetkosh. There was a brief response but the dream meeting was yet to happen. In 1993, there was a programme to be attended by Lataji at the Salt Lake Stadium. I smuggled myself somehow to the backstage. Latajit was taking a short break between recitals. Hridaynath Mangeshkar's son Aditnath introduced us. But I was speechless for the first few seconds. Meeting her in flesh and blood was beyond my dreams. She said "Namaste" and I touched her feet. Later, I met her several times. Every year, on Lataji's birthday, I prepare a DVD of select songs of hers and send it to her.

Have you ever been to her residence?

Yes. In 2006. That has been one of the best days in my life. After a little talk about music and my love, I requested to get a glimpse of her room. She was surprised.

"There is nothing in my room," she said. She was right. It was a simple room, a single bed with drawers, a dressing table, and a small wardrobe. What was interesting was a big poster of a little child with fingers on its lips and the word "silence" in bold letters written across the face. Beneath this was written "Genius Inside." Can you beat that? *(TWF)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, OCTOBER 07, 2018***

Moon trine Pluto on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. The year promises to bring you physical as well as financial benefits. Your energy will be high and will bring you immense gains. Speculation in real estate will yield handsome returns. Distant travel will be undertaken for business purpose as well as pleasure. Children need to concentrate more on their career. Health despite some initial hiccups will be more or less fine. You need to spend time on meditation and yoga for remarkable gains.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



The planetary configuration indicates some unexpected profits in profession and career. You will enjoy good health. Education and study matters will be highlighted. Family life and relations with friends will be better. Take care in regards to matters of conflict so that it may not interfere in deals in business or profession. Glamour and charm in your personality prove to be very fruitful in dealing with people; you will make new contacts in public. You will be creative and able to change your imagination to reality. Avoid being angry and be peaceful in order to have success in every field.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



You should remain caring regarding the health of a family member. Professional and career also need your attention. In business or profession be careful that someone should not betray you. So go slow in matters related to your work and do the needful with a strict watch over circumstances. Financial problems will be dealt with patience and bearing a peace of mind. Take care in travel. Imaginative power of mind will prove to be beneficial in dealing with clients. Keep away from conflicts which may arise due to misunderstanding in communication.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



At this time, combination of stars will give you mixed results. You may enjoy with family, friends and loved ones and spend some time full of entertainment. It will be advisable to take care of your health. You may get some uneasiness in family life too. Your monetary matters and matters of finance will be solved now. Do not take part in any debate or conflict related to matters which involve dealing with property. Invest wisely in some of the long term beneficial plans. Take a timely step to rule out ill relations and keep away from bad company. Spouse may need some help in emotional matters and help wisely and in a positive way. Utilize money wisely and economically.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



You may have chances of finalizing marriage in your favour which will prove to be long lasting and joyful. The position of stars indicates a good time to have a romance or love affair. Health of self or a relative may need some attention. You have good chances of promotion of spouse if due. Take care of luggage and belongings in travel. Your health will remain stable. Money may come suddenly while some expenditure may occur in household or in the purchase of luxury items. Family and relations with friends need some attention. Think positive and do not indulge in making contacts with people of a negative image.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



You may make up your mind for a career in education or research work. You are courageous and full of vitality at work. Take advantage of this good time to improve your position. You may have contacts with good friends which will be profitable for you to extend relations with influential people. Amidst your powerful imagination and creative power, you may be able to start a new venture of profit making deals and you may fetch new contracts. Monetary profits are at your door step. Your family and children may need some help. Health may have some minor problems but soon get rectified.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



This is a time of mixed results as predicted from your stars position. This period concerns may arise over health, diet and nutrition. You should keep some changes or modifications in mind for better care and for good health. Spend more time with children and family to have peace of mind and stability in thoughts. Good time for educational work to be carried out. To start a profitable profession in a field like computer software, cosmetics and jewelry may be beneficial. Take care of your old hidden enemies. Your mind may be crowded with some unhappy thoughts. Deal wisely and with patience to resolve these matters. Avoid rash decisions related to friends and family.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



The position of stars in this phase indicates some mixed results. You may face some unexpected expenditure which may disturb your budget. There is a scope of a new property or investment in real estate. If you pay timely attention to your business, you may get good returns. Health may create some problems in the coming days. You would be much loved in your family. Children need attention in their educational matters. You will have plenty of work to be disposed off. So think and work with patience and the results will bear sweet fruits. Your intellect and creative thoughts will give you courage and vitality in achieving your goal.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Your attention towards personality development will prove to be helpful in giving a boost to your career. Money matters will be solved if you try for some advances or loan; and it will be granted. Some religious plans are at your disposal so take them up and the desire will be fulfilled. It is a time for good earnings in long term investments. Your family members may need some attention in health related matters. You will be making quick decisions and it will prove to be beneficial in matter regarding your career. Some of the family members will help you whenever needed.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



It is a time to be punctual and stick to your daily routine. You will have to work hard to achieve your goals in respect of matters related to your profession and career. You may get proper guidance from elders in monetary matters. Take care of your health problem even when they are minor ones. Your influence among people at your work place will be remarkable. You may seek guidance for starting a new project from someone who is intimate to you. Awareness in the paper work and early planning is needed to make progress in money matters. Family health and happy environment will help to refresh you; so make the most of it.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



There will be mixed results in this period. Achievements in career and profession may be good but with this some hurdles will disturb the momentum. You will have to spend more than anticipated. Education of children may need some extra attention. Keep away from any conflict and avoid getting entangled in some anti social work. There may be a chance for a tour or outing but keep yourself in tune with your family. In order to have affection and love among family members keep calm. Meditation will help you.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



Your general image in public will improve. Now it is time to examine and watch your investments and money related matters. You must incorporate some regular exercises to maintain and have good health. Sources of entertainment within your family members and loved ones will open new avenues to improve your relations with them. Your friends will admire you as you make strides in furthering your public relations. The company of friends will help keep away stress. Spend quality time with children as they need more attention.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



It is a good time to go ahead in your chosen profession and career. You will be satisfied at your work place or in business. Stress should be avoided in matters related to family matters. Be aware of rival and competitor activities to counter any of their activities and plans. Avoid any collaborations or partnership with unknown people. Expenditure should be watched properly and think before you buy a luxury item. Health will be good and you will enjoy taking part in sporting activities.

It takes courage & skills to be a legal eagle

By Ranjan K Baruah

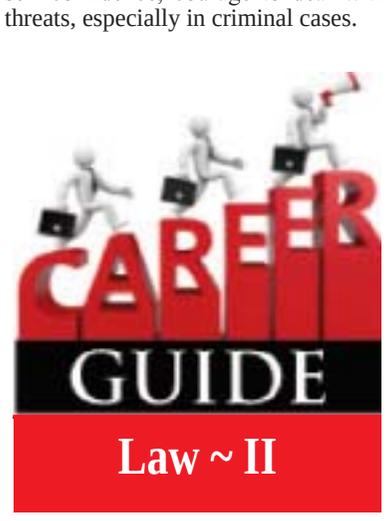
After passing the law course, aspirants may become magistrate, public prosecutor, judges, attorney general, solicitor general, advocate general, notary, etc. Selection or appointment is from government side and for some, selection tests are being conducted by the Public Service Commission.

There are also opportunities in the defence forces for lawyers to join as Judge Advocate General Branch. Both male and female may become officers in the defence forces after passing law and appearing for interview of the defence forces. Many lawyers join non-governmental organisations and different civil society groups which work for the rights and justice of the poor and marginalised people of the country. Lawyers do get a chance to work for international organisations like the United Nations or Amnesty International if they have skill and knowledge.

Some may also join teaching profession and become teachers while many choose to become journalists or writers. Some of the students take admission in courses like Chartered Accountancy or Company Secretaryship and practice as CA or CS. Some may also join in legal outsourcing as this has demand. In legal profession one may specialise in these or more to become an expert and build a strong career. Some of the field of specialisations are as follows and most of these are important in India like Civil/Criminal Law, Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, Human Rights Law, Family Law, Taxation, Corporate Law, Business Law, International Law, Labour Law, Real Estate Law, Intellectual property /Patent Law, etc.

One of the common and important entrances related to law admission is CLAT which is known as Common Law Admission Test. CLAT is an all India entrance examination, conducted on rotation by National Law Universities (NLUs) for admissions to their Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate degree programmes.

Having a degree in law does not make someone employable. There are skills and attributes needed to be successful in legal profession. One must have good oral and written communication skills, logical reasoning, power of concentration, patience, good memory to relate and quote past cases to prove your point, ability to argue and discuss matters with a variety of people, self confidence, courage to deal with threats, especially in criminal cases.



One needs to have patience and strong networking skills to get clients. Mere wearing the black coat does not guarantee getting clients but one must have good reputation and credibility and for fresher they have to work hard to make them credible. Students while studying law may start to make networks with different agencies or law firm to get more exposure. Many students join different rights based organisation who work for the rights and justice of the people. Student may make best use of technology like internet to explore more. Command over different languages is another added point for all those who want to practice as lawyer. In the initial stage many lawyers work under seniors and experts but some may work independently depending on their skills and ideas. Remuneration would be small in the initial stage but later one may earn good amount of money along with name and fame. In the present day situation one can think of becoming a legal entrepreneur and innovate in the profession.

Updates:

INSPIRE Fellowship 2018 implemented by the Ministry of Science & Technology, Department of Science & Technology (DST) aims to attract, retain and nurture scientific talents in the country, and thus promote scientific research. The Innovation in Scientific Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) scheme aims to strengthen the R&D foundation by offering fellowship. Last date for applying is 10th October

AICTE-Saksham Scholarship Scheme 2018-19 invites applications from differently-abled students who have taken admission in the first year of technical diploma/degree course at an institution recognised by AICTE. Apply before 10th October

AICTE Pragati Scholarship for Girls 2018-19 invites applications from girl students studying in 1st-year technical diploma/degree programme from an AICTE approved college/institution in the current academic year. Apply before 10th October.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

"Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."

--- Isaac Asimov

The Shillong Times

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Politics of Opportunism

MUCH has been written about the resignation of former Chief Minister DD Lapang from the Congress Party to which he has been aligned to for over four decades. Astute political observers are, however, not surprised by the developments. Political opportunists show their true colours when the Party they belong to is out of power and is unable to provide them the perks of office. Now that the Congress Party is in the doghouse in Meghalaya, those of its members who are used to the power and pelf are discomfited by the sudden loss of power and authority. It is of course naive to expect voluntarism from members of political parties. But it is precisely this absence of voluntarism that sucks at the lifeblood of the country. DD Lapang is an octogenarian who has gained much more from being in the Congress Party than it is the other way round. There is nothing much to list by way of achievements of this octogenarian politician as Chief Minister of Meghalaya. All that he can be credited for is that of upgrading his own region - Ri Bhoi - to a district. On the contrary he is known to have given a free license for cement companies to set up shop in Meghalaya without observing the basic environmental norms. In that sense he has done singular damage to the environment of Meghalaya.

The term "political opportunism," implies, amongst other things, abandoning one's loyalties to an ideology for selfish ends. While in politics there are no permanent loyalties but such a radical shift is expected from younger politicians who are still raring to fight the elections; not in someone who is no longer in a physical and mental state to contribute to the health of the State. And while politics has earned the sobriquet of, "the art of the possible," and hence we should not be surprised at the turn of events but the fact that in Meghalaya the average age of the Conrad Sangma cabinet is roughly 45 years, even political expedience would demand better sense. An advisor who is incapable of understanding what a young Meghalaya needs is a huge liability. As far as the Congress Party is concerned DD Lapang is no longer an asset. Hence his exit is not going to create a vacuum in the Party. Rather it is the MDA Government that is inheriting this liability from the Congress.

Water water everywhere but for how long?

By HH Mohrmen

October 2 every year has become a day where we symbolically remind ourselves of the need to keep our localities and cities clean. It matters not even if a moment after the locality is cleaned, irresponsible elements in the society would carelessly litter the place again. Yet one must appreciate the good intentions of all concerned. Unfortunately this time around no one dared to even try and clean the Wah Umkhrah. People still continue to organise cleanliness drive in different localities of Shillong but Wah Umkhrah is now becoming a touch-me-not project.

The reason is because all efforts to clean Wah Umkhrah which were organised by the State Government or the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council became futile exercises. Are we all tired of trying to save Wah Umkhrah? Has Wah Umkhrah reached the point of no return where it is now impossible to reclaim the river? Is Wah Umkhrah going to suffer the same fate that the holy river Ganga had met where even after more than several hundred crore rupees were spent to clean it, its waters continue to be a polluted?

The Wah Myntdu which surrounds Jowai too would have suffered the same fate had it not been for the efforts made by the Jaintia Fishing and Environment Protection Society and the National Green Tribunal order on a petition filed by Saje Laloo. JFEPS which is an organisation of anglers in Jaintia Hills is instrumental in protecting the aquatic lives all along the river Myntdu vide the order passed on the petition filed by Saje Laloo. The NGT has prohibited construction of any structure 500 meters from its banks on both sides, all along the river. It also prohibits washing of vehicles on both sides of the rivers and closed all car washing units which do not treat the polluted water they generate.

At least the portion of Myntdu around Jowai will not suffer the same fate like the Wah Umkhrah if the District Administration is serious about implementing the order in letter and spirit. But the question is what about the other rivers in the State?

Reports on the release of the book Meghalaya Rivers by the two brothers Joe and Dan Rea-Dickens and Zorba Laloo had illustrated the potential of water sports in the state. It is also known to all in Meghalaya and in Jaintia hills in particular that rivers are the mainstay of our tourism be it in Shnongpdeng, Darang, Krangshuri or Sua ladong. The rivers therefore are not only our lifelines but they could also be sources of sustainable livelihoods if we only treat them properly.

As reported in the media a video shown before the release of the book has confirmed what has been highlighted earlier that most of the rivers in the area are acidic. And the condition of the rivers in the District which is now bifurcated into East and West would have improved after the NGT ban on illegal mining, but unfortunately coal mining still continues even now without regulations. The most important question is whether we will ever see our dead river coming to live again?

What have the Autonomous District Councils in the state done to protect these rivers? After all rivers fall within the ambit of the District Councils. The Jaiñtia Hills Autonomous District Council is only interested in leasing the river for mass fishing to the highest bidder even if it had done nothing to protect the same. Now this raises a very important question which is - why there was a need for NGT to intervene? It is because of the failure of our very own ADCs to protect the river. And thankfully in Jowai; the NGT has helped save river Myntdu from becoming another Wah Umkhrah.

The ADC has not only failed to protect our rivers but questions can also be asked as to what they have done to protect the forests particularly those which are in private lands? This is because the forests in the private land are under the purview of the ADCs as per the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. An elderly man I travelled with to Nartiang some days ago, while crossing the river Myntang, pointed out that the river has already become shallow even if it is only early October. The reason, according to the man, is because the forest cover along the river has dwindled.

So why did the ADCs not come up with rules to protect our forests? And we all know rivers and forests (particularly in the catchment areas) and the rivers are like two sides of the same coin; one cannot exist without the other. Alas coming up with these rules will not help make the Chief Executive Member popular or he will not be extolled as the protector of the Jaidbynriew. Or are we seeing CEMs taking up issues that will only arouse the emotions of the people which will also help propel them further in their political careers?

At one time when the present incumbent of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council was the CEM, a scheme which encouraged families to give birth to more children was introduced. The scheme also undertakes that the Council would provide such family with rice. When this writer rephrased the saying that man does not live by food alone and questioned if the KHADC will also provide the children education and their other daily needs, the scheme died a death.

The point is - how are we going to live in this beautiful land if all the rivers are either dry or polluted? What is there for our children to enjoy if our entire forests are gone and our hills are barren? This is not exaggeration; we are seeing this happen with our own eyes and on a daily basis. Our rivers and our forests particularly those owned by the community, the clan or individuals are continuously being plundered by certain elements.

The urgent need of the hour is to protect our forest and by protecting our forests we also ensure water flows on the rivers. And as mentioned the District Councils have done precious little on this front. In fact it was the Community Reserve Forests - a state government scheme which encourages the community to protect their sacred groves or community forests. Now many of these forests are registered as community reserved forest and the community took the responsibility to protect the same.

My humble experience of working with the communities on different issues, be it environment conservation or livelihoods has taught me one very important lesson - it will be difficult to reclaim that which has been lost. Or even if we are able to reclaim it; it will not be the same again and Wah Umkhrah is one classic case in point. Though we earnestly hope that we will one day be able to save Wah Umkhrah but the fact remains that even if we can do so it will never be the same again.

The takeaway from this is that we need to protect and conserve as much forests, rivers and water sources as we can before it is too late. We are fortunate that we still have some of these rivers which are still good and we have enough forest cover to provide water to sustain these rivers. There are communities which are doing just that, and only this will ensure that Meghalaya remains a liveable land in the future.

Otherwise where is the need to have Inner Line Permits to protect our land, or what is the need of maintaining the lineage from pure blood only if your land is dry and the air that blows on the hills are no longer good for breathing. We can't live without water and air and we don't want to breathe poisonous air and use polluted water. And the only answer to that is more forests produce more water.

The unsung laureate of Khasi literature

By Barnes Mawrie

"Rev. Fr. H. Elias SDB is the most versatile and towering genius…He is one of the greatest poets, essayists, story writers and thinkers among the Khasis" (Dr. R. S. Lyngdoh)

Perhaps not many people in Meghalaya will have heard of the name of H. Elias Sohliya (Kharïong). But for those who study Khasi literature, he is a prominent poet and essayist of the Khasi people. In 2016 we celebrated his 50th death anniversary and some programmes were held in his honour. However, it is quite disappointing to see how this stalwart of the Khasis is being ignored to a great extent by the Khasi literary society. Great pioneers of Khasi literature like Soso Tham, John Roberts and Thomas Jones are sufficiently honoured and their contributions duly recognized. Unfortunately H. Elias on the other hand has not received his due. Let me list down the undeniable great contributions of this literary giant to Khasi literature and to Khasi society at large.

H. Elias is one of the two greatest poets of Khasi literature, the other being Soso Tham. Elias' classical poems are found in his well known collection *Ka Hamsaïa ki Por.* In this collection we have his masterpieces in poetry. He has given some of the most recognizable historical poems in Khasi literature. They are not only valuable as poetical masterpieces but they give us historical clues into the ancient Khasi society.

H. Elias has also produced some of the best Khasi essays. He was not merely a poet like Soso Tham, but he was also a qualified prose writer. Many of his essays are found in the many Khasi readers that he had authored. His essay on the Theory of Poetry in Khasi is much richer and more comprehensive than that given by Soso Tham. This particular contribution is very important to the Khasi students of literature to be able to understand the origin, nature and characteristics of poetry.

H. Elias has also done a commendable job of coining Khasi words for the many technical terms in literature. Khasi literature would have remained poor had he not given us these indigenous terminologies. Today Khasi scholars can with pride use our own Khasi words for different literary terminologies. We should never underestimate this contribution because it is highly significant for a community that is evolving its own literature.

H. Elias should be considered a true educationist. He was perhaps one of the most educated Khasi writers in those days. His lifelong involvement in education helped him realize the necessity of promoting education in the vernacular. For this reason, he set himself to the serious task of preparing a great number of Khasi readers and primers for the Khasi students from the primary to the higher classes. He has to his credit 12 such text books published between 1936-1964. These books have served the Khasi people in the process of educating them. They are of perennial value and relevance.

H. Elias is also the only Khasi poet who could be considered a freedom fighter. While studying at St. Xavier's College in Kolkata, he witnessed the great freedom struggle in that city. As a true Indian, he sympathized with the freedom fighters. Although he did not participate physically in the freedom struggle, he was imbued with the patriotic spirit. He has demonstrated this spirit in his poem entitled *Hail Mother India* written in 1947. Shri Madhukar Dighe, then Governor of Meghalaya has this to say about H. Elias: "as a patriot, Elias' idea of a country is not confined to Ri Khasi Jaiñtia, as most of our poets and writers professed. When India emerged as an independent nation in August 1947, he composed a beautiful poem Hail Mother India. Poems having national outlook are rare even today. Elias is perhaps the first among the Khasi poets to have sung a patriotic song and thus to have brought to the general mass of Khasi society an awareness of what a nation is and stands for…" (October 28, 1991).

From all these facts, it is evident that H. Elias deserves more than what he has received till date. He should be considered one of the three cornerstones of Khasi literature (beside Thomas Jones and Soso Tham). Undoubtedly, he is the central corner stone by virtue of his gigantic contribution in comparison to the other two. I would not be wrong to say that "study of Khasi language or Khasi literature will never be complete or licit without touching the vast portions of H. Elias' writings." I hope that the *Khasi Authors' Society* will soon give due recognition to this great son of the soil. It is my humble suggestion that the Khasi Department in NEHU is the right forum where the literary contributions of H. Elias are to be critically studied, researched and disseminated to the rest of society. More students should be encouraged to undertake post-graduation and doctoral research of the works of this poet. I hope that MBOSE and NEHU will not commit the blunder of withdrawing H. Elias' text books from the school and college syllabi. That would be the greatest act of disrespect and ingratitude to the Khasi genius who has influenced Khasi education in the last five decades or so.

In fact, the State itself should implement something tangible to honour this poet laureate and patriot of our society. Installing a bust or a statue of H. Elias somewhere in the public area, would be the most appropriate thing to do. Do we not have statues of Tirot Sing, Soso Tham and Thomas Jones in our city? Why then do we grudge giving due honour to this unsung hero of our community? Let us get out of any sectarian feeling and show our magnanimity in recognizing talents wherever they come from. As a community, every Khasi should be proud of an eminent personality like H. Elias and we should showcase to the world the rich literary legacy that he has left behind him.

Perhaps not many people in Meghalaya will have heard of the name of H. Elias Sohliya (Kharïong). But for those who study Khasi literature, he is a prominent poet and essayist of the Khasi people.

TO THE EDITOR

Concern about oily film in tap water!

Editor,

We have all detected the presence of some strange oily film on the surface of our tap water supplied by the Shillong Municipal Board and the Public Health Engineering Department. This has caused serious concern amongst the urban populace, who are mostly worried whether this oily content will cause any damage and affect our health and those of our loved ones. A quick check from any source will show that there are two main causes of oily film on the water, that is hydrogen sulphide and iron bacteria, which I believe the experts and officials of the Municipal Board and the PHE know best and have possibly taken some protective measures. There is however one concern that I would like to mention here, which I believe is also the concern of all those people who regularly travel along the Mylliem – Umtyngngar road.

The question that we would like the officials of these two very important departments to investigate and clarify is whether or not the rampant washing of vehicles along the banks in the upstream of the river that flows towards the reservoir contributes to this menace. As ignorant and uneducated citizens on the matter, we request the concerned authority to take serious steps in clearing all these doubts from the minds of the frightened people and to assure that it will not be dangerously hazardous to the public.

Yours etc.,
Wanshan.B.Khardewsaw
Shillong -2

The answer is blowing in the wind

Editor,

For the past one week, in almost every issue of the local papers, there is a picture of the man in his white hair, grey kurta pajamas and black waist coat. The first thought that came to mind was "Good Lord the Kabuliwallahs (pathan money lenders) are back in town!" On closer scrutiny it turns out that it's just good old DD Lapang, holding court and entertaining one and all with his, tongue in cheek, explanations as to why he walked away from the Congress party. From reports so far received, grocery stores all over town are running short of salt, as people are trying to swallow the DD story with fistfuls of the stuff.

Yet there's more to come. The excitement refuses to die down and the mystery continues to deepen. It is a cultural truth that the indigenous people of these hills have a high regard for the maternal uncle (U Kni). With the Khasis he is the epitome of virtue, experience, wisdom and good sense. The NPP and the MDA to their utter and pleasant surprise suddenly found a 'big uncle' on the loose, roaming aimlessly in their own backyard. With elections so close and Christmas only two months away, this was a gift from heaven too good to be ignored. They grabbed Ma Heh!

The final curtain however has yet to fall. God only knows how this episode will eventually end but, by Jove, another twist to the story has already started to unfold. Ma Heh now denies all claims that he has joined the NPP. He says he is there simply as Advisor to the Govt only because it allows him the platform to continue to serve the people he loves. By Jupiter, that's another jolly good one, but why does he make this claim with the impish smile of Aite the Greek God of mischief? Some knis carry the reputation of being very slippery when they want to. Big Uncle is already displaying the slippery nature of the legendry doh thli (an eel like fish) Bhoi. He is proving very difficult to pin down and the plot thickens with his threat that soon, in the near future, he will make his pilgrimage to Delhi to pay his respects to Sonai Ji. For those seeking an answer, the answer is blowing in the wind but Ma Heh the actor seems to have finally found his true vocation.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Misplaced Priorities!

Editor,

Apropos the article "Meghalaya: What are our priorities" (ST Oct 5, 2018) by Patricia Mukhim, I would like to add that the State of Meghalaya is indeed a state with many misplaced priorities. Successive governments have come and gone but they seem to be least interested in addressing those policies which negatively impact and affect the citizens of the state. Sadly, the Opposition (which was in power the last term) also seems to be engrossed in its own game of 'toppling down' the present Government and couldn't care less about the welfare of the common citizens. They have achieved very little when they were in power and what we remembered instead was just a spate of ceremonial laying of foundation stones with the sounding of the bugle (pun intended). Again, now they are always after petty things (such as the resignation of Dr. Lapang or claiming that the CM is a BJP nominee) and they forget the real concerns of the state and its citizens, their constituents, the common man. In this game of political one-upmanship, it is the much-needed priorities that are being neglected and the common man who suffers. Different sectors such as healthcare, education etc. and important issues such as the vexed boundary problem with Assam have all taken a back seat. The hapless villagers of Block-I and Block-II are at the receiving end because of the lackadaisical attitude of successive governments. Why is there so much hue and cry over the resignation of Dr. Lapang and I wonder why his resignation or his joining another political party is receiving so much media attention; what difference will it really make to the state or its citizens if he chooses to join any political party for that matter? I think the media need to rather focus on all the important priorities to constantly serve as a reminder to the powers that be lest they forget. I can see a flicker of hope, though, with the present government after it has delivered on the much needed and long pending Education Policy, but that's not enough! As rightly pointed out by Albert Thyrniang in his article (ST Oct 2, 2018), it is reformation or revolution that is the need of the hour and not just an Education Policy; in fact, the entire education system in the state needs to be revamped! However, one cannot simply undermine the steps taken by this government and it's is a positive step taken in the right direction to start with. And let us not be quick to judge this cabinet. After all, many of them are first-timers and even the leader himself had a very brief stint as a minister during the last formation. They may still be unripe and may take some time to mature and gain the necessary skills but again, time itself will tell how efficient and more importantly how dedicated they are or will be. In the meantime, let us keep our fingers crossed and sincerely hope that the one progressive step taken will be followed by many more steps and not the other way around. Until then, it's just hope and hopefully, I'm or w e're not disappointed.

Yours etc.
Aibor Dkhar,
Shillong-2

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

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

-- Timothy Murphy

The Shillong Times

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All eyes on 2019

WITH the Election Commission sounding the assembly poll bugle for five states, the dress-rehearsal for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls has just about started. Intricately tied to this set of polls is the political future of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling BJP on the one side, and the Congress hoping for a revival of its fortunes on the other.

The BJP being the ruling party in three out of the five states, there's a likelihood of it facing the anti-incumbency factor. By-elections in Rajasthan in recent months have been a washout for the BJP, while a rare sense of unity in the Congress camp in Madhya Pradesh, of late, might work more to the disadvantage of the ruling party there. What the BJP might bank on to craft an electoral success in these two states would be the pro-poor image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is despite the groundswell of disenchantment in urban areas over issues like the rise in fuel prices, the problems caused by the demonetisation, and the hitches in the GST roll-out to the large numbers of the trading community. The attacks on Dalits by cow vigilantes too could work to the disadvantage of the BJP, if the Gujarat assembly poll results are any hint. Farmers are a distressed lot, too.

What however might have come as a blessing for the BJP could be the failure on the part of the Congress party to keep the BSP of Mayawati to its side. The BSP did not have substantial strength in Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan – the two key states in the present fight. Yet, to dare a strong entity like the BJP, the Congress needed even a fig-leaf by way of consolidation of the Opposition votes. Electoral arithmetic dictates as much. For now, polls are too close that a rethinking by Mayawati is unlikely.

In Mizoram, it's worth a watch as to whether the Congress can retain power. Given the fluid nature of politics in some of the north-eastern states, nothing could be taken for granted before the polls. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP looks more confident about retaining power as compared to MP and Rajasthan. In Telangana, chief minister Chandrasekhar Rao seems to be calling all the shots by himself and is sure of victory – reason why he sought to advance the polls there and favoured dissolution of the assembly before the end of its term. The political scene indeed is hotting up.

The nowhere people

Belling the illegal cat

By Poonam I Kaushish

How would you feel if one fine morning you are persecuted and thrown out of your country, take shelter in another only to be deported back? This innocuous question came up during arguments to stop deportation of seven Rohingya immigrants back to Myanmar in the Supreme Court last week. But to no avail as the illegal migrants detained since 2012 in Assam's jail for violating the Foreigners Act were shipped back. Their tragedy is they are seven of a three million minority Muslim community which is the largest Stateless population in the world. The nowhere people.

Predictably, with elections to five Assemblies round the corner and thanks to identity politics, the issue of illegal migrants is a hot potato for all Parties. Already, BJP's Amit Shah sounded the bugle asserting "each illegal immigrant will be taken out of voters list and the process of sending them back has already started," at a public meeting in Rajasthan recently.

Last September over 164,000 Rohingyas (Muslims) fled violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State in fishing boats and sought asylum in India and Bangladesh. Today, there are over 40,000 Rohingyas living here and are all over the place: Jammu, Hyderabad, Delhi and Mewat.

Kudos to the Modi Sarkar for taking the first step towards identifying and throwing the Royingyas out, as they were a time bomb waiting to explode. The Government made plain they are a national security threat and must be deported to Myanmar, notwithstanding criticism by human rights activists and UN which argued they were the most victimized ethnic group in the world.

More so, against the backdrop of the ugly reality that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh have completely changed North East's demographic landscape, threatened the livelihood and identity of indigenous people. Thanks to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) which has sifted through 3.29 crore people who had applied for recognition as Indian citizens, of these 2.89 crores made it to the second and final draft of the NRC while the fate of 40 lakhs hangs in the balance.

Shockingly, already, 9 of Assam's 27 districts have a Muslim majority population and hold the key for 60 of its 126 Assembly constituencies. Over 85% of the total encroached forest land is with the Bangladeshis. According to intelligence reports, "In the last 70 years Assam's population increased from 3.29 million to 14.6 million – a 343.77 % increase" over a period when the population of India went up by only about 150%!

Seven districts of Bihar, Bangla, North East and Rajasthan have been affected as a result of large-scale illegal migration. Even the Union Capital has over 10 lakhs and Maharashtra over 100,000 illegal Bangladeshi migrants. In Mizoram the anti-outsider feeling vents itself in frequent volatile student's stir. In Nagaland, the population of illegal migrants from Bangladesh has more than trebled in the past two decades --- rising from 20,000 in 1991 to over 75,000 in 2001. Tripura is a tragic example of the obliteration of the local identity.

In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh too, illegal Bangladeshis have taken full advantage of lax laws to secure ration cards. From rag pickers to domestic help, agriculture workers to rickshaw-pullers et al are mostly illegal migrants and are taking jobs away from legitimate citizens.

Where do we go from here? Pander to rabid rabble rousers? Pander to the politics of vote banks? Allow the Push and Pull theory of illegality to continue. The Push back to poverty vs the Pull of India's rich pastures. The option is narrow. The solution must be clearly dictated by India's primary interest: its integrity and stability.

With human rights activists and Opposition Parties trying their damnedest to ensure the Government to take a humane and holistic view it's not going to be a cake walk. The UN Special Rapporteur on racism said India risked breaching its international legal obligations by returning the men to possible harm. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the world is witnessing the highest level of displacement on record with 22.5 million refugees, over half of them under 18, languishing in different parts of the world in search of a normal life.

Yet, security experts are unanimous that Rohingya refugees are adding to the security threat to the region. The Chittagong area, bordering Myanmar, where the Rohingyas refugees are camped has been a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism and provide shelter to the secessionist forces in the North East.

With the Bangladesh Government failing to keep up with the pressure, Islamists are enjoying a free run under the garb of NGO activities. "Almost all the NGOs working in Rohingya camps have strong terror links," opined a North East security expert. This is bad news for all.

With the Bangladesh Government failing to keep up with the pressure, Islamists are enjoying a free run under the garb of NGO activities. "Almost all the NGOs working in Rohingya camps have strong terror links," opined a North East security expert. This is bad news for all. Bangladesh is afraid that disturbance in Chittagong might impact its growth potential as it is the country's only sea port and a major destination of investments from India, Japan and China.

Given China's influence in Bangladesh and Myanmar; the stakes are high for India. While China is keen to keep international forces out of the Rakhine dispute; India is trying to walk the tightrope of taking along both Bangladesh and Myanmar Governments towards a viable solution for the Rohingya crisis.

Alongside, New Delhi in conjunction with its "Act East" policy to grow its influence in South East Asian countries and counter China's increasing presence in the region is actively pursuing good relations with Myanmar's army officials in the hope that it can enlist their help in acting against militants in the North East, many of whom are based in Myanmar's Sagaing jungles. In a further sign of warming ties, India is building a port and waterways project at Sittwe in Rakhine State. Work will also soon start on connecting Sittwe to Mizoram's Zirinpui by road.

Human rights activist decry New Delhi's action as India has a fair reputation on the refugee issue having taken in Sri Lankans, Tamils, Afghans, Tibetans and Myanmaris. This is why its reaction on the Rohingya issue doesn't add up. Apart from being wrong on law, it creates an impossible situation and tarnishes India's image abroad, they argue.

In practical terms, strict policing and border management is needed. Local people need to be recruited for policing. Certainly, if one cannot stop infiltrators at the border then there is no way one can push them back. Given that the issue is no longer a humanitarian issue dictated by the theory of needs or economy driven. It is a grave demographic, economic and national security problem. To keep a strict vigil against the Rohingyas' influx, the Indian Government has specially stationed 6,000 soldiers on the India-Bangladesh border.

India also needs a humane approach now because the problem is only likely to get bigger in future. Half of South Asia's population lives in areas that are projected to become moderate to severe climate hotspots by 2050. If a large chunk of people in vulnerable areas are displaced, this will lead to further waves of emigration. In Bangladesh alone, 15 million people alone are expected to displaced due to environmental degradation.

Clearly, history has come a full circle for the illegal immigrants from Myanmar. The NDA Government has cast the first stone, the need of the hour is to continue dealing assertively with illegal migrants issue and set up time-bound measures. It needs to remember, disasters of history are the result of a Government's folly and perverse persistence in pursuing the policies contrary to national interests. ---- INFA

Dollar and gold smuggling up

More trouble for shaky rupee

By Nantoo Banerjee

The rising incidents of gold and US$ smuggling in and out of the country, following the downward exchange value of Indian Rupee, have become a source of major economic concern. They are threatening to further weaken the Indian currency. Recent reports from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) suggest that the greenback outflow through illegal channels is growing on account of smuggling. In fact, DRI has launched a nationwide crackdown on foreign exchange smuggling, particularly of US$. For long, legal gold inflow occupied an important position, after petroleum and natural gas, in the country's total import basket. Weakening Rupee seems to have further pushed the domestic demand for gold, especially among the rich, to protect their wealth against the depreciating value of Rupee. This comes after high-value Rupee demonetisation in November 2016. Recent interceptions and seizures indicate gold smuggling has significantly gone up. How the government handles the new challenge to the currency stability is not clear. The latest government measure to partially raise import duties on certain products to reduce current account deficit (CAD) seems to have been done rather in a half-hearted manner. This is unlikely to stabilise Rupee.

"The customs department and DRI are working overtime to contain smuggling which has been rising since last year as Rupee's stability started becoming uncertain."

The customs department and DRI are working overtime to contain smuggling which has been rising since last year as Rupee's stability started becoming uncertain. According to reports, the customs and DRI together seized large amounts of foreign currencies, mainly dollars, since April 2017 in 584 interceptions at major international airports. The illicit outflow of foreign exchange doesn't include hawala transactions. Official estimates say gold worth Rs. 10,000 crore is being annually smuggled into the country. The smuggling-out of foreign exchange is linked with the smuggling-in of gold and other items. Between April 2017 and March 2018, the customs and DRI seized 3.1 tonnes of smuggled gold worth around Rs.1,000 crore. This is considered only five to ten percent of the actual illegal trade. Illicit gold consignments are said to be coming from Bangkok, Dubai and Hong Kong through land, air and sea routes while foreign exchange is illegally taken out of the country through international airports in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Kochi.

Officials are also said to be looking at busting international syndicates which may have created "assets" at major international airports in India leading to large scale physical smuggling of foreign exchange. The government has booked as many as 167 cases of foreign exchange smuggling across the country between April-July 2018 alone. During the entire last financial year, the total seizures of foreign exchange, mostly US dollars, were close to Rs.90 crore in as many as 417 cases of interceptions. Recently, revenue department sleuths trapped seven Chinese nationals at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport as they were trying to smuggle out foreign currency worth $890,000. They were set to take off by a Cathay Pacific flight. The US dollars were found tightly wrapped in towels inside their luggage so as to escape detection by security and custom checks at the airport, officials said.

In the last six months, gold smuggling has reportedly shot up by 250 per cent. The customs air intelligence unit says there have been a difference of Rs 3000-4000 per 10 grams gold between the foreign markets such as Dubai and Hong Kong and India. The high price differential may have additionally encouraged higher smuggled gold transportation into India. Many say that the government's earlier decision revoking notification of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against gold and jewellery dealers not only boosted the bullion market, but also helped gold smugglers. Lately, the owner of a jewellery shop in Dubai was arrested in Mumbai for allegedly smuggling 50 kgs of gold into India with the help of his businessman brother. The shipment, which contained 20 disc-shaped pieces of gold each weighing 2.5 kg, was headed for Gujarat. DRI officials said the brothers were trying to pass off the shipment as a metal consignment.

Basically, this is to give an example of how the rising gold and foreign exchange smuggling, predominantly US$, have added to the challenge of stabilising Rupee. The customs and DRI are doing their job. Nothing much is reported about large smuggling of other commodities into the country. The government urgently needs to take some hard decisions to stem the rot. The smuggling-in of gold and other items and smuggling-out of foreign currency, mostly US$, are not the only illegal activities that threaten to destabilise the country's economy at a time when it is poised for a high growth. Smuggling challenges the very concept of 'mercantilism' under which a nation's wealth is based on selling more than it buys. Smuggling thrives on illegal transportation of goods across an international border. It not only causes revenue loss to a country by evading duties and taxes, but smuggling promotes crime, hurts domestic industry, chokes employment, creates economic and political instability.

The government recently hiked import duty on 19 'non-essential items' ranging from air-conditioners to aviation fuel. The total value of imports of these items in the last fiscal was about Rs 86,000 crore. This is a minuscule sum that covered only about 2.5 percent of the total import, last year. During 2017-18, India's imports increased by 19.59 percent to $459.67 billion. The trade deficit during the fiscal was $156.83 billion. The duty hike may not necessarily lead to compress imports. In many cases, it may only increase their smuggling into the country. Asia's third largest economy urgently needs to have a highly coordinated economic policy that focuses on large domestic production, export, strengthening the hands of the revenue intelligence department and providing exemplary punishment for smuggling. Unfortunately, at this stage, India's economy is facing a barrage of bad news, including elevating oil prices, fiscal concerns, debt crisis and large outflows of US$, legally and illegally. The government must act fast. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Why discrimination against LGBTQ

Editor,

For scientists each new day is filled with wonder. It's no amazement therefore that their pace of understanding a species is way behind with the new creature they encounter. Some creatures have eyes on the tail while some breathe through their skin. Some never die even if you cut them into half, rather they become two and four! Their behaviours, their survival adventures and their innate instincts are amazingly diversified.

Hence one is surprised why it took us until the 21st century to decriminalize the LGBTQ behaviour. How do we have authority and competency to see flaws in God's creation? Frankly speaking, we have not "fully" understood even one petal of a flower and how and why it comes into being with such beauty, fragrance, shape and size. Therefore, it's always good on our part to just practice to say "wow" in amazement because we individuals have not even been able to understand our own bodies and the incredible structures and endless functions that help keep us hale and hearty.

Therefore, it's foolishness to expect others to fit in with our line of thought, and behavioral orientation. Due to the dogmatic rigidity to accept LGBTQ, who are creations of God, we have clearly committed a great sin. We have hurt them all through. Not just that, we have belittled their existence on this planet. Ethically, there will not be a greater offence than this. This way we have only challenged the creation of God. One wonders how we shall make up to our marginalized LGBTQ folks now!

Yes, what happens within the four-wall is none of our business. Sex is always a private affair and the culmination of love with mutual submission. True, love has made this world beautiful, nay, liveable. Of course, what is unacceptable is if those private activities are brought to the open for our selfish ends. On the other hand, if the current media is to be believed then, with LGBTQ decriminalization, it seems, the court has also given the license to trade on it! In a couple of years we are likely to see movies/features on LGBTQ flooding the society which would be portrayed in such ways that encourage one to indulge in "unhealthy" acts and thoughts. This is not in the best interests of society.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

Of political Pokemons

Editor,

The AICC initiated a positive move by showing the door to well-entrenched senior political leaders of the Party who have not only benefitted but also enjoyed their heydays during it's rule. The BJP has taken the opportunity to gain from the exit of many senior leaders of the Congress. Here in Meghalaya the exit of a number of Congress MLAs and recently of former MPCC President D D Lapang had not gone down well within the party owing to failures of not one but many. Though D D Lapang is a shrewd, politician but his achievements have not been upto the mark except in appointing an endless string of unproductive advisers and consultants, whereas as a leader of Ri Bhoi district he could not resolve the inter-state border dispute. Neither was there much change in the development of the district he represented nor the overall development of the State. It is unfortunate that the NPP latched on to this kind of political Pokemon instead of focussing on critical issues left over by the previous MUA government. The NPP's denial that the former CM is not yet part of its fold is absolutely a joke and is aimed at discrediting the Congress but which would one day backfire and hurt it's image and electoral prospects.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-3

Nurturing a monster

Editor,

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's famous novel Frankenstein or Modern Proetheus was published on March 11, 1818. In the novel, Shelly tells an interesting story that gives its readers an insight into the danger of pampering a monster. The story shows how a monster who was created by Dr. Victor Frankenstein at the university of Ingolstadt, took revenge against his creator after facing rejection by the society. Just like Frankenstein's monster that took revenge even against his own maker, the mob if pampered can go even against those who have been pampering it. The danger of going soft against cow vigilantism is that the mob after tasting blood and power out on the streets dares go wild and tries to run a parallel government.

The first casualty in that case will be the law of the land. The lynching of an ASI Dev Chand Nagle in MP's Chhindwara district is a harbinger of that reality. It is reported that the 53-year-old assistant sub-inspector was hacked to death by an alleged criminal and his associates in Jamunia village under Umreth Police Station of Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh when the ASI went there to arrest him. There must be a strong public opinion against any kind of lynching as it throws down the gauntlet to the law of the land. Lynching is done after giving a victim a bad name like child lifter, cannibal, witch, dacoit, love jihadi, cattle smuggler etc. But it poses a serious challenge to the government as the lynching brigades want to run a parallel one. As a matter of fact, lynching monsters always want to be a law unto themselves. Moreover such mobs wants to establish a jungle raj where only might is the right and creates a laboratory for human beings for turning themselves into brute murderers. The need of the hour is a stringent law against the lynching mob and more importantly a quick justice delivery mechanism.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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

"I mean, you could claim that anything's real if the only basis for believing in it is that nobody's proved it doesn't exist!"
--- J.K. Rowling

The Shillong Times
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Indo-Russian Missile Deal

INDIA and Russia have concluded a contract for this supply of S400 Missile systems. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited New Delhi recently. The S400 deal is expected to fulfil India's defence needs and the NDA government claims to have taken the decision in national interest. The deal value is over USD 5 billion. Beijing had signed a deal with Moscow in 2015 for 6 battalions of the S400 system. Washington has threatened New Delhi and other partners with sanctions if their defence deals with Moscow go through. The CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions) was passed by the US Congress. But Congress has now passed a waiver to some countries including India but that awaits Trump's certification. US sources have, however, stated that CAATSA is not intended to do damage to the military capabilities of allies and partners. India has signed a defence deal with the US. And the Russian missile deal is expected to end terrorism in which India and the US are equally involved. So the threat of US sanctions may not be real and New Delhi is aware of it.

There are other factors too. Despite occasional friction, relations between the US and Russia are reported to be very amicable especially in their confrontation with NATO. That may be reassuring to India about the Russian missile deal as far as US sanctions are concerned. Questions may be raised, however, about the need for India arming itself to the teeth to fight international terrorism. The money invested in the deals could perhaps be better utilised in developing the economy of the country and eradicating poverty. India is not actually engaged in a battle with international terrorism. There are more powerful countries committed to it. India would be happy to put down cross border terrorism across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir and enlist the support of Pakistan in achieving it. In the North Eastern region, where earlier insurgency/militancy required deployment of more boots on the ground the situation today is largely under control. In fact India needs to pump in more resources towards creating better communication facilities between the peripheries along the international borders for easy movement of troops and equipment. That is essential defence preparedness and not just investment in missiles that may not be used in a long time. India suffers because large parts of its regions are under-developed in terms of connectivity, health care, education, manufacturing and job creation. These are priority areas; not missiles.

Agrarian Crisis

Farm Diversification Vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The recent farmers' protest march by the Bharatiya Kisan Union, stopped at the UP-Delhi border, was eventually withdrawn after the Government 'conceded' a few demands. However, the knee jerk reaction without any tangible intervention, suggests the agrarian crisis is far from over. With their two key demands -- loan waiver and enhanced minimum support price (MSP) -- not being resolved, the small and medium farmers will continue to suffer as productivity hasn't increased substantially. In such a scenario, it's quite discernible that promises of doubling farmers' income, as envisaged by 2022, shall remain an illusion.

Unfortunately, policy makers at both the Centre and States are ensconced in their cherished dream of percentage of growth from the secondary and tertiary sectors with agricultural development considered a 'desirable' platitude. Most political leaders betray a dual personality to calculations of GDP growth vis-à-vis the imperative for upgrading the living standards of the rural people and providing them productive employment for the young generation.

Thus, modernisation and diversification of agriculture has taken a back seat, primarily due to the lack of government investment in this sector. The reality that the country, in spite of large geographical area, has an extremely high population level compounded by a very low man-land ratio and high levels of pollution, makes it imperative to find ways and means to deal with the compulsion of feeding over a billion mouths.

As per a study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development with the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, the country's agricultural growth in the past two decades has not been particularly rapid, as compared to Vietnam and China, amongst our Asian neighbours. But its composition has been changing from agriculture towards meat, eggs and milk and from wheat and rice towards fruit, vegetables and maize.

However, it cannot be denied that India has extremely fertile alluvial Indo-Ganga-Brahmaputra basin within its domain, besides excellent soil endowments for dryland farming. And though the country has ensured self-sufficiency to a great extent, it has the potential of becoming a global food supplier. But a large section of agricultural scientists feel that it is criminal to divert farmlands, even those that are two crops, for other uses.

Added to this, scant regard for basic terrain has rendered major chunks of various types of farmlands irreversibly degraded. Excessive irrigation in Narmada, Tapti and Chambal and other major projects in the arid and semi-arid zones have led to land degradation by salt infestation of soils, thereby destroying the invaluable dryland farming zones. The other problem of going for hybrid cultivation caused water logging and alkalinisation. Moreover, excessive use of pesticides and chemicals, essential for such exotic hybrids and mostly promoted aggressively by MNCs has been steadily destroying farmlands.

Integration of horticultural plants with field crops like rice and also pulses become extremely important to achieve inclusive growth so that together it can boost up production of the agriculture sector.

The situation is thus a cause of serious concern, more so because to gear up growth there is scant concern for agricultural transformation. This has led to conditions of the peasantry not improving at all, in spite of increase in production. And this is because they are unable to get the requisite MSP, to ensure survival.

If farmers' income were to double, it should have grown by around 30-32% in the past three years but thus hasn't happened. In fact, such income were to be doubled in a decade, it should involve rising at 7.1% a year on average. Even if this had happened, the problem would have been conserving the agricultural products, which would have necessitated construction of more warehouses and cold storages. Moreover, the demand for such products grows at a very slow pace.

Though India grows 10% of the world's onions, 23% of bananas and around 40% of mangoes, these rot unless they are eaten up quickly as cold storage capacity is below 15% and refrigerated transport just one% of the fruit and vegetable production.

As regards employment, the National Sample Survey shows a fall. There are smaller agricultural holdings and many have become so small that their owners have sold their tiny plots and are making a living out of casual labour. There is no plan or initiative to develop cooperative farms by taking land from 6-8 owners and carrying out modern farming for higher yields.

Almost half the years since 2000 have been abnormal -- five saw droughts and three saw abnormal wetness. Plus, local rains fluctuate enormously more. The effect of climate change has led to erratic rainfall with some regions witnessing over-flooding while others are subjected to drought.

The obvious answer lies in diversification. For example, experts are of the opinion the crop diversification in rice fields increases the cropping intensity with additional returns and generates more employment opportunities. It is particularly relevant to the rice fields of Assam as rice is the major crop which occupies 2.5 million hectares of land area.

Integration of horticultural plants with field crops like rice and also pulses become extremely important to achieve inclusive growth so that together it can boost up production of the agriculture sector. The main objective for this combination is to grow rice, pulse, kharif and rabi vegetables on the same field during the same period of time, contributing towards nutritional security and ensure soil sustainability in the long run.

The main advantage is that vegetable crops, grown on the soil columns, can make effective use of the resources applied on rice fields with less requirement of irrigation, which makes it cost effective. Thus, the horticulture sector being an important component of high value agriculture, the economic importance of such produce, though increasing over the years, has to be further boosted and considered an important area of exports. Demonstration farms with active support from ICAR would bring in more efficacies in helping increase output.

Another aspect of gearing up productivity is the need for agri-mechanisation that has recently emerged as a strong driver of this sector. The sale of tractors has increased significantly in the last few years while power tillers are widely used since they are effective in smaller areas and reduce field levelling time considerably. The demand for rice transplanters and laser land levellers are also expected to increase in the coming years.

Thus, diversification of the agri sector with value addition in horticulture, floriculture and spices and on-farm processing for production of various types of oil, both for domestic and export markets, is the need of the day so as to ensure higher incomes on a sustained basis. Besides, oil seeds production of the country is way below world average and needs to be boosted with proper usage of micronutrients and mechanisation apart from increasing processing centres with latest technology.

To sum up, following steps need to considered urgently for any success: Rejuvenation of soil, healthy for sustainable agriculture through introduction of products and mode of application that leads to high nutrient use efficiency; Promotion of balanced and integrated nutrient management through awareness programmes; Scaling up activities in various areas like 'On Farm' production of organic manure, drip irrigation, watershed development, dryland farming etc; Sensitising farmers to make optimum use of farm inputs like fertilizer, pesticides etc. along with efficient use of natural resources like soil and water;

Introduction of cooperative farming with modern technology; Transfer of technology and more emphasis on R&D; and Reducing wastage, improving marketing strategies for export and exploring the use of products for higher prices through cold storage facilities.

The government would do well to take a holistic view, rather than deal with farmers' protests piecemeal and miss the woods for the trees.---INFA

Urban Ayyappas file 'commonsense' petition

Jallikattu-type movement gains momentum

By Aditya Aamir

Your flaws are what make you perfect. You can say that of most everything, too. Like review petitions in the Supreme Court, which point to flaws in otherwise thought to be 'perfect judgments'. But that's okay because in many cases, dissenting justices underline the 'flaw' in the majority judgment. But dissents such as those, however brilliant, don't matter, till a review petition is filed.

The Sabarimala verdict has been up for scrutiny from word go. While it was landmark, it's been criticized for going out of bounds of the earmarked. There's also the 'Right to Practice Religion', say detractors of the four justices who gave the majority judgment.

The opposition to the SC ruling is that the dispute is not about gender and 'women's entry' because "women under 10 and over 50" have always been visiting Sabarimala. The court thought otherwise and ruled that devotion cannot be subjected to discrimination and patriarchal notions cannot be allowed to trump equality in devotion.

That was on September 28 and much water has flown down the Pamba since then. A Jallikattu-like movement has started and fiery debates on television have spurred people to spontaneously come out on to the streets.

NADA in its petition claims the top court's verdict "shocked millions of devotees" and the decision should be overturned. "The petitioners believe that no legal luminary, not even the greatest of jurists or a judge, can be a match to the commonsense and wisdom of the masses.

NADA was not party to the original case. "The judgement on Sabarimala is "absolutely untenable and irrational if not perverse," says NADA. Lakhs of people in Kerala second the opinion. Thousands of Ayyappa devotees have been taking to the streets across Kerala and are led by a fiery and irreverent character going by the name of Rahul Easwar, a maverick who's probably a bigger threat to the CPM-led state government on this particular issue than the Congress and the BJP/RSS combine.

Last week an anchor of a television news channel told a Doubting Thomas CPM spokesperson to be wise and not take Rahul Easwar lightly just because he shouts and rants. "You're making a mistake and you'll regret, but by then things will have got out of hand," the anchor told the CPM representative minutes after Easwar left the show after giving more than an inkling of where he was heading, which was only to another TV studio!

One word Easwar never fails to inject into his "rants" is "humbly". He is always "humbly" requesting "sisters like Trupti Desai" to reconsider because otherwise with "all due respect" she will be made to "step over our chests" to get anywhere near the Sabarimala shrine. Claiming that the Ayyappa Dharma Sena he heads is strapped of funds, he says he will be in Delhi "this week" to hold a protest event at Jantar Mantar.

But the Pinarayi Vijayan government doesn't need anchor-advice. Unconfirmed reports say there are plans to scupper Rahul Easwar including his "house arrest", the 'Urban Ayyappas' are a clear threat to left plans which go beyond respect for women's rights. Apart from corralling Easwar, there is also a plan to chopper-lift 40 Kerala Police women constables and a "group of 12 Ayyappa women devotees – Hindu, Christian and Muslim" to the Sabarimala shrine on October 16 and "enter" them, come what may.

This move, if it is part of the state government's plan to defeat the "Constitution-breakers", lends credence to the protestors' accusation that the state government is "cheating devotees", something which has become the lexicon of the opposition – the Congress and the BJP, both of which want the Pinarayi Vijayan regime to wait for the review petition to be heard.

The "commonsense of the masses" NADA speaks about in the review petition must be striking a chord in the politicians and humour has injected into the debate, a down to earth chuckle shift. Asked at a presser at the Trivandrum Press Club to make a stand on the issue with a clear and unequivocal "Yes or No", a Congress politician quipped with a straight face, "Or!" (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGHRIMS-A patient's perspective

Editor,

As a resident of Shillong whose family have benefited so much from NEIGRIHMS, I am forever grateful and indebted to this hospital that helped my sister, recover from a life endangering ailment. We are especially grateful to the staff and doctors of Urology department including Dr Sailo, Dr Lakiang and Dr Alkesh for their relentless hard work and selfless dedication to give the best possible care to my sister. It is because of them that my sister is alive and well today. Our family has been struggling to find the best Urology and Nephrology care for our dearest sister for a long time and we had gone hopping from one hospital to another, including hospitals in Guwahati, but to no avail. Her situation worsened and we had lost all hope; drained physically, emotionally and financially. It was at this hopes' end that we decided to consult Dr Sailo from the Urology department in NEIGRIHMS. My sister having been admitted in NEIGRIHMS for more than 8 months began to show progress steadily. Now my sister is completely healed and is eagerly fulfilling her life's ambitions and dreams all thanks to NEIGRIHMS.

NEIGRIHMS is a premier Institute housing the best facilities and staff that are dedicated to serve, ready to give their best and are well educated with loads of experience. This Institution was specifically set up to help residents in the region get the best of specialised care nearer home instead of wasting time, energy and money in getting their loved ones treated outside the region which as we all know can be excruciatingly exhausting in every aspect.

Against this backdrop, it saddens me to hear about the mismanagement and administrative failures of NEIGRIHMS. The concerned Ministry in the Central Government should intervene to save the Institute and if there is genuinely a leadership issue as portrayed, then necessary steps should be taken so that the growth of the Institute as a super speciality care destination is not compromised. There is an increasing rush of patients coming from outside the state to NEIGRIHMS primarily to seek the services of the super speciality departments such as Urology, Oncology, Cardiology etc. Sadly, however, the trend among the local people in Meghalaya is to rush outside the state for the same services that NEIGRHMS has to offer. We are yet to understand its true value and potential and most lack good faith in its progress and capabilities. Such administrative failures and mismanagements will further dent the confidence of the local population in the Institute. Also, there is a small percentage of privileged locals, who have the means to seek specialised medical care outside the state, who are discouraging and bad mouthing NEIGRIHMS to the less fortunate and taking away their trust in an Institute that could possibly be their best option given their financial status. Our family believes in this Institution and without a doubt it did not disappoint us. We will constantly rally around the benefits of having this leading medical institution at our hometown and at this time of crisis it needs our support in keeping it up and running for generations to come.

The construction work for the proposed AIIMS, Guwahati has already begun and I fear that the best bunch of medical experts from NEIGRIHMS will prefer to relocate away from our State and provide their services elsewhere, where their expertise and decisions are better recognised and better accepted. With good administration and recognition, I am sure NEIGHRIMS will scale new heights so as to be able to provide the best health care to people of this region at affordable prices.

Yours etc.,
Neeva B.Mawlong
Shillong 8

Personal versus public interests

Editor,

Reading the caption "MDA appoints 5 advisors in six months," (ST Oct 5, 2018) one would like to begin by asking the question: Will the Conrad led government be different from its predecessors? Well we had great expectations that it would. We had hopes that the people of Meghalaya will be ushered into something new and positively different. But on reading that the NPP-led MDA government has even superseded the previous Congress led MUA – II in appointing 5 advisors to the Government in six months our hope and faith are shaken and may be belied. Alas! For s State that faces financial crunch to pay the teachers their salaries, are these political appointees really needed? The saying "Too many cooks spoil the broth" does not seem to fit the bill here because it is a case of "The more the merrier" that works. While things cannot change overnight with the coming of a new government, one fears that things may never change (for the better) at all. After all, besides a few new players, the present government has old and seasoned players who are well versed with the game of politics and what a life of luxury and power mean. Certainly, its a herculean task that the Conrad government has to address. Them Iew Mawlong, Health and Sanitation, Roads, Education, Traffic, Youth and Unemployment, unfinished Projects, and lots more! Sadly, the trend seems to be the same - personal interests first; public interest last.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Kudos Dr Donkupar Roy

Editor,

The media has highlighted the visit of Meghalaya Assembly Speaker, Dr. Donkupar Roy to Ranikor Constituency on October 6, 2018. The report said he was accompanied by the local MLA, Pius Marwein, Health Secretary,Pravin Bakshi, Secretary PWD, Paul Marwein and other officials. He inspected the road from Balat Bifurcation-Umpung-Panchiring-Ranikor-Rajaju-Nonghyllam-Nongjri-Khonjoy up to Moheskola, Ranikor CHC, Khonjoy PHC and Moheskola IB which are in shambles. Dr Roy has issued strong instructions to the officers of the respective departments to immediately take corrective measures so that the whole stretch of the road should be set right by necessary repairs, metalling and blacktopping; that the CHC. PHC and the Health Sub-Centres should be made functional and repaired wherever required. The other good outcome of the inspection was the decision to post doctors and para-medical staff at the health institutions, particularly at the Khonjoy PHC which remained without doctors and staffs for several years, and that the Sub-Centres at Moheskola and Giligora be made functional. Again he has instructed the PWD to immediately repair or reconstruct the Inspection Bungalow at Moheskola.

The Officers of the concerned departments have assured the Speaker in the presence of the local MLA that they would carry out the tasks at hand. Not only that, the Speaker and the MLA, while addressing the local people there, have assured them that the roads and health delivery system would be taken care of expeditiously. From what I can judge, the visit of the Speaker, the MLA and the officials was a huge blessing to the people of the constituency if the assurance is fructified. I request the Speaker to make such visits to constituencies of the State which are still backward in many respects, including his own.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
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.

" Remove all the traffic lights, yellow lines, one-way systems and road markings, and let blissful anarchy prevail. I imagine it would produce a kind of harmony."

-- Sadie Jones

The Shillong Times

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INDIA 'SHINING'

THE World Economic Outlook, released by International Monetary Fund (IMF) this week in Bali, has India smiling even though most Indians might not be in a mood to share this enthusiasm. The annual report has forecast a growth rate of 7.3 per cent for India this fiscal and slightly higher growth –7.4 per cent – for financial year 2019. This is laudable, more so when noting the projections for the US and China. The report says growth for China is down from 6.9 per cent last year to 6.6 per cent this fiscal and could go further down to 6.2 per cent in 2019. As for the US, the growth rate for this fiscal is placed at 2.9 per cent and for the next fiscal 2.5 per cent. Overall, the Asian region ably backed by India and China remains as the centre of global economic growth in the first quarter of the present century, edging past heavyweights Europe and the US.

The Indian growth story has been impressive since the 1990s, after a period of chaos, though neighbouring China registered a much faster growth. At the same time, China is in for shocks following the new round of imposition of trade tariffs on Chinese imports by the Trump administration. Hope is that India would further hasten its growth rate, and more importantly make sure that the suffering multitudes across the country, a billion or more, are uplifted from poverty and deprivation sooner than later. They have little to feel happy about, as joblessness is at its peak and farm distress and financial worries are leading to suicides. The child mortality rate is worse than that of Africa and health care remains highly expensive for the common folks.

The good tidings are there for all to see, as well. The IMF report has praised India for the reforms that it has been undertaking in recent years, including the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax. Yet, a close look at the markets show tax evasion is still high and receipts are hard to come by for purchases made thereby defeating the very purpose of the reform. Another area of concern is the inflationary trends. The IMF report notes that inflation is on the rise, of the order of 3.6 % this past fiscal and heading to 4.7 % the present fiscal. The steady rise in fuel prices might add to this problem, and the Modi government can ill afford having such shocks in the run-up to Parliamentary polls.

Easing traffic congestion in Shillong

By K.L.Tariang

The Shillong Times recently reported of a traffic snarl in the city which hit a 108 ambulance service carrying a seriously ill patient. There could be other such instances which might not have been reported. While it would be fortunate when with police assistance one can maneuver through the dense traffic jams during emergency situations of whatever sort but at times traffic is completely clogged for a long time much beyond the ability of the traffic personnel to promptly clear the jam; an indication that the traffic congestion is about to reach that stage where it can take away precious time and which could lead to unfortunate or tragic consequences.

The city traffic congestion is an accrual problem partially or insignificantly resolved for a number of years now and the Government's holistic approach towards resolving the problem substantially is still vague and incomprehensible. If there are talks of flyovers or underground routes as likely long term solutions then this could be easier said than done given the existing complexities within the city. However , if properly explored and if every square inch of land available is utilized then it might be possible to widen roads at certain points soon. There is a hint that the government may develop the state Public Works Department land at Barik Point, if available, into a protest park area and for parking. While the idea of a protest park here is contentious with the Civil Hospital, the State library and the Government Secretariats nearby, the idea for a parking area to come along with road widening around the area could be a plausible one if the government gives serious thought to it. There was a suggestion that some portion of land from the huge plot housing the Governor's official residence be made available for road width expansion around that area and for a parking lot and this could be another possibility. Likewise there could be extra land available in any other state or central government premises within the city for road widening or parking purposes if diligently explored. On the other hand if a resolution has been passed in the State Assembly to impress upon the Central Government to exempt Meghalaya from the Central Mining laws then likewise a resolution may perhaps be passed to impress upon the Central Government to hand over portions of Defence land within the city to the State government for road widening purposes or possibly for opening lateral roads. There could be a favorable response from the Centre on this since it would benefit the general public at large after all and provided the demand does not exceed more than for the purpose required .

There are a number of pedestrian pavements of sufficient width within the city which are not intensively used while some are intermittently used for purposes not originally intended. The spaces these pavements occupy may be available for road width expansion for maneuvering of vehicles within a short distance especially during emergency situations provided such expansion is not close to shops establishments or residences. Alternatively short length skywalks for pedestrians above these available spaces may be constructed. One also hopes that the land at Them Mawlong would be used for constructing a multi tier parking lot and not a commercial complex if the present residents are shifted from the location.

In the meantime , the government could initiate preventive or restrictive measures which in any case has to constantly go side by side with infrastructure built up to prevent recurrence of traffic congestion in no time. For a start the introduction of school buses may be made compulsory especially for big schools to alleviate the traffic congestion in the morning and afternoon hours .Some schools in the city have already introduced school buses; other schools should follow suit if the modalities relating to parking of these school buses ,the safety and security of the students etc are work out amongst the school authorities ,the parents/ guardians and the local durbars with the government leading the initiative. If, as reported, the State Government intends to dispose off a number of Shillong Transport Public Service (SPTS) buses through a tender process then the Schools could perhaps be encouraged instead to take over the maintainable buses with a less demanding settlement where those schools which might want to add more buses to their fleet and those with the intention of operating school buses would be benefited .

When the carrying capacity of the main roads within the city may not be able to take more load soon then it is time perhaps for the Government to limit the number of new vehicles that can be registered for a defined period . This may disappoint prospective buyers , financiers and vehicles dealers but then it cannot be expected that the Government can please everybody all the time if the situation does not allow it . Many may not opt for public transports nor will walking be a feasible option when it is easy to own a private vehicle with the desire to often use it. The Singapore Government regulates the total number of vehicles to keep traffic congestion at manageable levels and to encourage use of public transport where besides effective controlling measures to reduce vehicle movement during peak traffic hours it also makes it a very expensive endeavor to own a vehicle through steep taxes while a substantial amount has also to be paid to the government to obtain a Certificate of Entitlement (COE) or the right to purchase a vehicle. While the Meghalaya government may not replicate the Singapore model here as of now but it perhaps could at least insist that new vehicle owners produce a Certificate of Availability of individual parking space certified by designated authorities with spot verification before the registration of the new vehicle is considered . This will deter those who intend to use a portion of public roads as day or overnight parking space from acquiring a vehicle and it would also reduce the number of vehicles in the city to a reasonable extent.

The suggestion that government could come up with plans to establish parking space or terminals at certain entry points for vehicles coming from different sources towards the city is worthy of consideration as it will reduce inflow of vehicles into the city while public transports can thereafter ferry passengers from these terminals towards and inside the city. Government may however strictly regulate the issuance of public transport permits to avoid overspills which could again lead to traffic congestion .

Desperate times call for desperate measures and pending quick suitable interventions it may be necessary for the government to apply the odd and even formula to regulate flow of vehicles within the city . Perhaps it is too pessimistic for one to think that such an eventuality might arise but the public may have to brace themselves for it unless the government takes bold or even courageous decisions to alleviate the traffic congestion soon and for our other leaders to support such decisions and subsequently be cooperative and equally for the citizens to participate without grudge. Finally and hopefully suggestions or ideas on possible solutions to ease the city traffic congestion which are publicly brought forward by the people of Shillong calls for public interactions and for the Government to take note of and possibly consider.

Modi govt still silent on Akbar

More MJ predatory stories emerge

By Aditya Aamir

The lesser known 'MJ' has quit his job post-#MeToo accusations, but the more famous 'MJ' continues to maintain a wall of silence to multiple accusations of #MeToo surfacing against him online. Maybe, it's because journalist Mayank Jain's employer Business Standard decided to act, set a standard, while the other MJ's employer, the Modi government, believes MJ Akbar and his "bottles of wine" are stories with no legs to stand on.

Minister of State for External Affairs MJ Akbar, when he was editor-Mighty apparently, was always ready to launch into affairs with nubile young aspiring journalists. Some of the advances he held forth must have fetched cooperation but the ones who are speaking up against him are those who "felt uncomfortable" in his "predatory presence", those who were invited to his hotel room, the bed made just perfect to jump in, the music playing and the champagne bubbling.

But it was wine 'Great Editor' MJ preferred, say his accusers, to ply in his five-star hotel rooms. Grapevine and other vines say MJ is protected. Till the other day he was in Nigeria, attending to diplomacy. Around the same time, senior ministers in the BJP government were told to stay mum, especially EAM Sushma Swaraj, who diplomatically walked on like she had her earpiece home. Her minister-colleague Maneka Gandhi extended support to #MeToo but stopped short of naming Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Silence cannot be a way out. It's an extremely serious matter and should be investigated."

Tuesday, 'top journalist-turned-politician/MP whom everyone is scared to name' was trending on Social Media and "so many of us have an MJ story" was quoted ad infinitum by women launched into successful careers by MJ, who referred to him as "brilliant, flamboyant". Some women named hotels, others quipped about "rattling" experiences.

But, mind you, nothing like he groped or pushed them on to a "bed already made up." One journalist said "Akbar would try his luck with anything that moved" but was not particularly vindictive. "I think Akbar is slimy in many ways. There was a clear category of successful male behaviour that he fell within — this wouldn't let him in, felt the singe thereafter in office when he allegedly made "life hell for her".

EAM Sushma Swaraj, asked if there will be an "internal investigation" into the allegations against Akbar, reminding her that she is a "woman minister" and therefore with more responsibility, chose to remain silent, which is the better part of cowardice. Talking of 'silence', Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari said the cases dated back to when Akbar was a journalist and not a political leader; that MJ should "come up and speak", and so should

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MJ Akbar's picks for jobs, where he headed the newsroom, began to "share their encounters with Akbar" after journalist Priya Ramani reiterated an allegation going back to October 2017 when she wrote, without naming MJ, he invited her to a hotel room in Mumbai for her job interview and made "uncomfortable advances".

'Akbar the Great.'

MJ Akbar's picks for jobs, where he headed the newsroom, began to "share their encounters with Akbar" after journalist Priya Ramani reiterated an allegation going back to October 2017 when she wrote, without naming MJ, he invited her to a hotel room in Mumbai for her job interview and made "uncomfortable advances". They were 20 years apart in age!

At the time nothing much happened but after the latest and current #MeToo surge in India, Ramani "named" MJ and since then it's a deluge of "MJ predator stories" one after the other. All of them from women who Akbar invited to his hotel room for interviews and made them feel "uncomfortable". He also "invited himself" to the homes of female recruits with a bottle of wine in hand or "for a coffee!" One single mother, who kept him standing on the door and was the trouble. People didn't even realise or think that there is anything wrong with this behaviour."

And with Akbar at the helm "there were always more young women than men in office, and it used to be called Akbar's harem" with Akbar allegedly trying to "manipulate young, impressionable women." The majority accused Akbar of "obscenity" with one coming to his defence, saying Akbar had been "one of the best bosses" she ever had and she at least "never felt uncomfortable" around him.

According to a report, the Ministry of External Affairs is "in the know" of the allegations of Akbar's "unsolicited advances" towards women journalists but instructions have percolated down right from the top that MJ be left alone. Apparently, PM Modi has confidence in MJ's sterling qualities and the rest will have to "assume". (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Rivalry at our cost

Editor,

Apropos the article "Shylla to meet Tynsong over Wahkaji road" (ST Oct 10, 2018), as son of the soil, hailing from one of those most neglected villages of that area, it's with deepest angst and anguish that I pen down these few lines. I would like to question the State Government and the KHADC as to why their inability to agree on an issue should be at the cost of the common people? Why this blame game? Why can't they sit across the table and resolve their differences?

For me these differences are just scapegoats to cover up their failure to carry out their public responsibility. The Nongstoin-Wahkaji road was sanctioned many years ago. If there are differences should they take so long to resolve? This is sheer callousness, impractical, a time wasting strategy and insensitivity to the plight of the poor, ignorant and voiceless. How long will Mr. Shylla and the Government play this dirty old game? How long will this step-motherly treatment go on? Or is it because it is none of their constituencies?

While I appreciate the CM for contributing his salary for a school in Shohphria and the speaker Dr. Donkupar Roy with some MLAs who visited Ranikor I am surprised as to why they can't also visit other most dilapidated roads of West and South West Khasi Hills? I plead with the CM and other MLAs to visit also the Nongstoin-Maweit road, the Nongstoin – Kynroh road, the Nongstoin-Rambrai road to name a few. Now that the Nongstoin MLA is from the ruling party we have high hopes in you Sir. But our hope is turning bitter. Enough is enough. May I ask the CM to personally drive on the Nongstoin-Wahkaji road and see that the area which has contributed so much to the State economy gets its due.

Yours etc.,,
Gervasius Nongkseh
West Khasi Hills

Inconvenienced for how much longer

Editor,

With the recent inauguration of the 100th functional airport at Pakyong , Sikkim which was earlier a landlocked State it has now become connected by air to the rest of the country. Earlier residents of Sikkim had to travel all the way to Bagdogra to catch a flight, but now all thanks to the cutting edge technology and brilliant engineering, Sikkim a much more hilly place than Shillong has received a fully functional airport. The irony of the situation is that the runway of Pakyong airport was made on a hill which was cut flat, using geotechnical 'cut and fill' and slope stabilisation techniques, whereas Shillong Airport's runway is made on the plains of Umroi . The tourism sector of Sikkim will get further boost especially with the international flights starting soon. On the other hand we have Shillong airport, built in the 1960s - over 50 years ago which remains as it is with the exception of the new terminal building. The new terminal is one of the most beautiful airports in the North East but then again what's the point of having a book with a fancy cover with blank pages. Tons of money has been poured into the development of the airport over the years but none have paid off. For decades the residents of Meghalaya have depended on Guwahati airport which includes a tiresome 3 hour journey; harassment and nuisance at the airport premises. The question is for how many more years are we going to depend on Guwahati? On an average day the number of passengers from across Meghalaya is between 200-300 not to forget innumerable tourists who flock to the state in search of scenic beauty. Everyday patients, students ,businesspersons have to travel 118 Km in order to catch a flight, despite having an airport just 30 Km away from the city. I thank the honourable High Court of Meghalaya for taking steps to ensure the airport is functional, but I urge the Government to connect Shillong with other major cities once its operational, as many students are studying in the Southern and Northern part of the country and not just Kolkata. Also several patients undergo treatment in these regions. Finally, I would like to point out the constant harassment of Meghalaya residents by the Assam drivers on arrival at the Guwahati airport. The touts start grabbing your bags the moment you leave the building. I urge the appropriate authority to take stern action against this harassment and bullying. We should not let them take advantage of our predicament. I sincerely hope that Shillong Airport will be functional soon and that the people of the state will be able to take off from Umroi soon.

Yours etc.,
Avishaan Sarkar,
Via email

Modesty outraged

Editor,

Former Miss India and Bollywood actor Tanushree Dutta alleged sexual harassment against Nana Patekar on the sets of a 2008 film 'Horn Ok Pleassss'. She also claimed that after the incident when she left the sets, Patekar involved the workers of political party Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) to threaten her and who mobbed her and smashed the window panes of her car while she along with her mother was inside the car.

Now several notable personalities from Bollywood have come in support of Tanushree Dutta. By lodging an FIR with the Oshiwara Mumbai police station of late, Ms Dutta has also answered and silenced the voice of the film director Rakesh Sarang who questioned why Tanushree was "shouting" and not going to the police. Raza Murad, who was not on the spot, dismissed Tanushree's trauma as an over-reaction. At the same time it is ridiculous that he certified Nana as a sweet-talker when Patekar had already touched Tanushree inappropriately while shooting on the sets? Birds of a feather flock together. This is a case of desperate, deliberate and chauvinistic male oppression on women-folk.

Samee Siddiqui, producer of the film, admitted that he was not there on the sets and didn't know what had exactly happened and then how could he tell the truth? Such comment tantamount to an attempt to hide "truth" and give publicity to falsehood. Siddiqui's purported lewd comment that 'she was menstruating is a heinous humiliation to global Womanhood/Motherhood. Doesn't Samee also have a family with a mother, sister, wife and daughter? If good sense prevail Samee Siddiqui should tender due apology for his slanderous remark.It is expected that the National Commission for Women would enquire into the incident and render justice to the afflicted Tanushree and expose the accused. After all victims suffer a disadvantage in their careers, physical or mental trauma as a result of any sexual harassment..

However it is reassuring that on the current issue Maneka Gandhi , Union Cabinet Minister for Women & Child Development, said a lot of steps have been taken to empower women to speak up, and she is happy that the #MeToo campaign has begun in the country. As reported by ANI she has also said that complaints can now be registered even 10 to 15 years after the incident. But she has expressed hope and, of course, cautioned that "it won't go out of control, in the sense that we target people who've offended us in some way".

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay,
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

"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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Gadkari's Attack

UNION Minister Nitin Gadkari, initially a contender for the Prime Ministership, put his government in a spot. He said that his government had come to power in 2014 with absurd promises. He thought that the BJP would be on a sticky wicket in the 2019 elections and so made tall promises at the time of the poll. Gadkari is known to be a candid critic of his own government. Last August, he had embarrassed the NDA saying reservations will not generate employment. Jobs are shrinking in the country. Joblessness is a key political issue in 2018-19. Gadkari is not alone in making such an observation. BJP President Amit Shah also admitted that the 2014 poll promise of Rs. 15 lakh in every bank account proved illusory. The minimum government, maximum governance slogan also faded into an unrealistic promise. The government belied the promise by making Aadhaar mandatory for a large number of basic services.

'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas' also turned into a pious noise especially as cow vigilante groups went on the rampage in BJP ruled states. A healthy environment for business also proved impracticable. It was claimed that monetisation would unearth black-money stashed aboard to the tune of Rs 15 lakh per Indian. But demonetisation on the contrary caused immense sufferings to ordinary tax-paying Indians. Some lost their lives waiting at long queues at ATMs a fact we seem to have conveniently forgotten. The Government has of course promoted Yoga which is decidedly good for body and mind. But Government health services have hardly shown any improvement despite the many names that have been constructed while launching different health schemes. If the BJP rides to power again in 2019, it will only be because of the disunity of the opposition and the over-ambitiousness of leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav and his son Akhilesh Yadav, not to forget Rahul Gandhi the Congress President who seems determined to grasp the seat of power in 2019 althoiugh how that will come about is still unclear. Gadkari's honesty is about the only thing that goes in favour of the BJP today. It is pointless trying to defend the indefensible. And the voter is likely to reward honesty rather than euphemisms for a failed gambit of the NDA Government. Perhaps Modi meant well when he tried demonetization but it back-fired. As everyone says, the intent was good but the implementation lacked acumen.

Meghalaya's cup of woes: No control over private land

By Patricia Mukhim

The easiest thing to do is play the blame game and the Government is our favourite bashing board, often deservedly but at times because we think government is the only stakeholder in the system, quite forgetting that as citizens we have responsibilities too in setting things right. By castigating the Government for all the ills in the system we believe we have done our duties and can sit back and watch the fun. After all we have found a scapegoat. But let me tell you dear readers that the more you understand the system the better you realise that Government is for the most part hamstrung by societal laws.

Many have expressed scepticism about the recent meeting chaired by Dr Jemino Mawthoh on October 2, to yet again discuss the possibility of cleaning up the Wah Umkhrah. It is easy to be sceptical when one is not in the thick of things but the meeting held at the office of Power Grid Corporation threw up several challenges, many of which would require collective decision-making not just by Government but by communities and civil societies too. Dr Mawthoh in his opening remarks stated that the meeting would decide whether we can still save the Wahl Umkhrah or decide once and for all to declare it a public drain.

The Wah Umkhrah issue is a conundrum to say the least. It originates near the Power Grid establishment in Nongrah. It is learnt that the area in which Power Grid stands today was and still is a veritable catchment area and should never have been built on. How a catchment area which is supposed to be a community asset was sold to a Corporation is another story that dogs the Khasi community and will continue to be the bane of this society. Similar catchments around the same area owned by a particular clan have been parcelled off or tuned into private properties where the owners have become water merchants. Imagine a tribal community which waxes eloquent about Ri Raij or community land suddenly realising that the community also consists of land owning clans over whom the traditional institutions such as the Syiems and Myntris or Rangbah Shnong have no control whatsoever other than pleading before them to not destroy the aquifers through construction activities.

The Wah Umkhrah passes through several localities - Nongrah, Lapalang, Umpling, Umkaliar Nongmynsong, Demseiniong, Pynthor, Jaiaw, and Mawlai onwards until it meets the Umiam River. The word Um-iam means the crying river and the Umiam must indeed be crying over its fate of having to carry the load of garbage and faecal matter from the entire population of Greater Shillong. But then who cares? Our garbage management systems are decrepit. Listening to the Rangbah Shnong (headman) of Nongrah - a very articulate and progressive person, we learned just how resistant people are towards paying for civic management. He had to adopt so many inventive strategies to get people to pay for garbage collection. This must be a common problem faced by many Rangbah Shnongs. Residents somehow feel that it is the state and local authorities that should keep their villages clean and do it pro-bono. Somehow we are used to free-loading and believe all civic services should be free. Hence the resistance to extending the boundaries of the Shillong Municipality! People don't realise that governance at any level requires human resource that must be paid and that the state can no longer subsidise all services.

And then there are governance issues as well. Under the different schemes of the Government and Asian Development Bank tie-up for civic management, blue and green bins have been distributed to households. The blue one is for non-biodegradable waste and the green for organic waste. But when people dutifully segregate the waste at home and take that to the collection point, the garbage collectors mix up both dry and wet garbage and that the garbage that finds its way to Marten. So evidently there is a problem at the end point. It means that garbage emptied at Marten is all mixed and one wonders what the treatment plant there is actually doing. Trying to enter the place to investigate is fraught with dangers of ingesting toxic fumes and more. Hence one has to rely on information from the waste disposers. And they just laugh off such silly questions. The Wahl Umkhrah therefore suffers from clear lack of enforcement by waste managers. There is as yet no penalty for polluters unless they are seen by the police. But the police are no ubiquitous. Those who don't pay for civic services must be disposing off their waste somewhere. And our guess is that such waste finds its way into the Wah Umkhrah.

Then there is the problem of sewage which, despite several directives to households located by the edge of the river, is still being emptied into the Wah Umkhrah. The Government's efforts some 20 years ago cleanse the area of encroachers comprising elite tribals and non-tribal claimants, met with a rebuttal from the Gauhati High Court. Would the Meghalaya High Court be more amenable in delivering justice on this front? It's unthinkable that a water front which is part of revenue land has so insidiously been turned into private property. The irony is that at least two Ministers in the present Government own properties along the Umkhrah River Front. It's always been like that for Meghalaya. Vested interests have always won the day even while society shies away from taking them on.

The reason why Meghalaya is a decrepit city today is also because there is no Land Use and Sale Policy. An official from the State Pollution Control Board said there should be regulations as to how much land is suitable for a residential building. An 800 sq ft plot for instance is not enough for a building and a sanitary latrine which includes a septic tank and soak pit. But there are many individuals in this city who construct their homes on such tiny plots and release their sewage into the Wahl Umkhrah or into the public drains, much to the chagrin of the entire locality as the foul smell that emanates every time the residents release their septic tanks spreads far and wide.

The garbage dump at Marten has reached saturation point and the possibilities of getting a sanitary land fill away from the city seems bleak. Environmental scientists have demonstrated that big landfills are not sustainable and instead every Shnong should actually find its own landfill for converting garbage into manure. The overload of plastic waste across the state is what could turn things awry for us. I was at Mumbai recently and found that plastic carry bags are no longer in use. Plastic bottles and other plastic utilities too will soon be phased out since such waste finds its way into the sea and is the cause of floods everywhere. Meghalaya needs to take this decision and not make it a half-hearted one of defining the microns. It does not work. All plastic carry bags should be banned. Period.

When it comes to cleaning the Wah Umkhrah there can be no success without convergence. The stakeholders must include the Dorbar Shnong, the KHADC, State Government, NGOs and pressure groups, the public institutions (banks, public sector undertakings, shop owners etc) the Police Department, State Pollution Control Board etc. We have to learn to work in tandem rather than at cross purposes, and that means that we have to surmount our egos As long as ego dominates the Wahl Umkhrah will continue to suffer.

One of the points raised by an environment scientist from NEHU is that the Umkhrah is fed by rain water and also spring water. It was found that our springs are drying up and we have not even tried to rejuvenate them. Perhaps we are unsure how to do it. Rain water harvesting could be one means of rejuvenating ground/spring water.

It is time the State Government takes the bull by the horns. We need strict regulations on quarrying and sand mining both of which have killed many of our vibrant rivers. We can no longer have, "free for all" governance on the pretext that, "land belongs to us and hence we can do whatever we wish with it even if it becomes a public nuisance." This is where the NGT comes in and more PILs need to be filed on gross violation of environmental norms.

Temple Entry

Secularisation vs Biogtry?

By Dr S Saraswathi

Right of entry to Sabarimalai Ayyappa Temple in Kerala to women of all age-groups allowed by the Supreme Court order in a litigation is now hitting headlines like crucial election results. It is a head on collision between rights groups and uncompromising traditionalists. The Court has also rejected urgent hearing of the review pleas and declined to issue stay order on the judgment.

The annual season for worship at the temple starting shortly, there is urgency to take stern measures to prevent disturbances to peace and order in the holy shrine if not to find a permanent solution to the conflict between religious and secular forces -- the sacred and the profane of Durkheim.

A rare agreement is seen in the stand of the BJP and Congress asking the Government of Kerala to file a review petition. But, the Left Front government in the State and the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) in charge of the management of temples in the State do not want a review.

For those seeking review, it is a question of protecting traditions and beliefs associated with this temple, and for others, a question of gender equality and equal rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The verdict was given by 4:1 majority of a 5-member Constitution Bench. The minority view was interestingly that of a woman judge.

The Government of Kerala is not likely to hold talks with the BJP or the Congress, but sought a meeting with the Tantri (chief priest) and Pandalam royal family that is safeguarding the rituals, customs, and beliefs at the shrine to discuss and to clarify its stand on court verdict. This is clearly an administrative strategy to counter eruption of violent protests by orthodox sections of people who find support from some political parties.

Neither family may see any purpose in meeting government officials. Meanwhile, the Nair Service Society, the National Ayyappa Devotees Association, and the Chetna Conscience of Women have separately filed a petition for revision of the judgement. They have questioned the right of a third party which does not comprise devotees of Ayyappa to file the PIL in the first place and intervene in the worship of the deity.

The dispute is a typical clash between the process of secularisation of places of worship which is part of the democratic process and the stranglehold of customary restrictions and bigotry reigning supreme especially with the rituals connected with Sabarimalai. The constitutional right to equality conflicts with another constitutional right of religious institutions.

One can notice some extraordinary discipline associated with the worship of Ayyappa at Sabarimalai believed to be a "Naishtika Brahmachari", meaning one who is always a celibate and remains with his "guru". That deity requires to be away from any contact -- even visual -- with any woman in the menstruating age between 10 and 50 years. The dissenting judge pointed out that exclusion of women in this age-group is not out of the concept of social exclusion, but because of the unique character of the deity. It is unlike the exclusion of some castes, which resulted from the practice of social exclusion and inadmissible.

The dissenting verdict has brought forward the right of the deity to be worshipped in the form He is manifested. Religion, temple, worship, and devotees have become parties in this dispute heard by a secular institution which is guardian of the Constitution. The issue sharply dividing people with no scope for a middle or neutral position, the role of politics and electoral calculations cannot be absent.Thousands of devout Hindus, mostly women, upset over the court's direction on temple worship are protesting on the streets. Several local NGOs are organising protests. The issue is not confined to Kerala as the temple is visited by devotees from all parts of India in groups. The Sabarimalai Protection Council (SPC) has launched a sit-in protest to block entry of women on the hill.

Such is the hold of tradition and patriarchal ideas and fear of consequences of violating age-old customs in the mode of worship that restricted admission has found supporters from cross sections of people who do not feel any sense of degradation in the practice of exclusion. Secularism finds a big road block in this direct confrontation with bigotry that is reigning supreme.

Justice Chandrachud said that the ban on women's entry into the temple was a smear on their dignity and the consequence of a hegemonic patriarchy. Superstitious beliefs which are extraneous and unnecessary accretions to religion cannot be considered essential parts of religion to be given constitutional protection, according to the judges.

The minority judgment held that the court could not impose its morality or rationality on the form of worship of the deity. Such restrictions would nullify the freedom to practise one's religion according to one's faith and beliefs.

The CPM-led Government of Kerala seems to be unusually fast in taking steps to implement the court order and to make arrangements for female pilgrims to this temple situated in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the Western Ghats amidst 18 hills on top of a hill in a forest area. The location cannot be cited as the cause for bar on women's entry, but relevant for making arrangements for sudden explosion in the number of devotees to the temple.

Caught between commitment to equal rights and commitment to protect traditional life, the neutral observers cannot but watch the ramifications of the crucial step of secularising worship at Sabarimalai. Several temples in various States have now to get ready for rights-based changes in the modes of worship. Already, the CPM has asked for opening mosques for women in all places where they are prohibited.

The AICC was initially in favour of court verdict, but the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee supports the existing ban. The DK, DMK, and the Left parties have welcomed the judgement. The verdict may open a bigger movement against gender discriminations in the name of customs and traditions or lead to a conservative uprising to protect cultural discipline.

No doubt, changes in religious beliefs and practices are going on silently. Even devotees visiting Sabarimalai have relaxed many of the old time rules to suit their convenience. The job of priests in temples in Tamil Nadu is open to people of all castes. Entry into the sanctum sanctorum is prohibited for all except the priests to avoid exclusive entry of Brahmin devotees as a right.

The impact of secularisation on religion is tremendous. At the societal level, secularisation refers to a general decline in religious authority over other social institutions. Religion becomes one institution among many in the society.

Sociologists are of the view that women in general are more active than men in religion and their beliefs are stronger. Religious practices all over the world accord to women a status inferior to that of men, but still women's commitment to religious practices is strong. Women are indeed so active in protecting religious beliefs that women devotees are on the streets protesting against the court verdict - a scene perplexing in the age of feminist movements for rights. The movement has to go a long way to awaken women.----INFA

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

TO THE EDITOR

Giving honour where due

Editor,

I fully endorse what Barnes Mawrie has stated in his short write- up on the non-recognition of the contributions made by (Late) Rev. Fr. Elias Hopewell Sohlia Kharïong. This piece of writing has correctly raked up an important issue. Fr. Elias was indeed a Khasi literary giant and judging from his style of writing and literary gern no Khasi writer can be compared to him. He has contributed immensely to enriching Khasi poetry and literature although he has written only twelve books. Fr Elias was a prose writer, essayist and a poet laureate. His translation into the Khasi language from Latin or English was par excellence and was more original and with a richer meaning then the original. The society in general and the Khasi society in particular should have in fact duly recognised and honoured him in a special way for his rich contributions to Khasi literature. I wish that those who can read, write and understand Khasi should read the books written by Fr Elias including his translation works to understand and properly fathom the richness and depth of his contributions. I also propose that his death anniversary be annually observed in a befitting manner not only by the Khasi Author's Society(KAS) but by the public in general and to set up a permanent library in his honour by naming it " H.Elias Memorial Library" either by the Government or by any private initiative but to be financially assisted by the Government through the Arts and Culture Department.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein
Via email

Failure on all fronts

Editor,

Through the letters to the editor many people have expressed their grievances and yet time seems to stand still. At the expense of being labeled a pessimist here I go again. Whether its traffic management, waste management, the Umroi Airport, condition of roads, buildings with no parking space, schools with no playground and no regulation on fees etc., the state is amiss. One therefore has to question the

capability of our elected representatives to deliver and their intent because at the onset of their political careers their speeches seemed to be all about how they are going to deliver the public goods and implement schemes and policies which are for the benefit of the public. But once elected all of them are busy managing their own careers and many have commercial interests rather than public interest at heart. And the result of poor governance is there for all to see. We continue to be disappointed.

Yours etc.,
Christine Nonghulo ,
Via email

Vacancies in Education Dept

Editor,

The launch of the New Education Policy by the Government is much appreciated. I hope that our educational institutions will receive a fillip to raise the academic standards to a higher level. The report, 'Teachers barred from political activities' (ST Oct 1, 2018) seems appropriate and it is up to Government to take that hard decision. However what is a matter of concern is that there are many vacant posts which are left unfilled by the Education Department. For instance there are no full-fledged SDSEOs in Jaiñtia Hills. No full-fledged Principals, Vice Principals in both Govt. Girls & Govt. Boys Higher Secondary Schools in Jowai Town. These acting Principals and Vice Principals are expected to take on heavy workload which consists of both teaching and administration. I am sure that in the budget all posts in the Government schools are sanctioned posts. So where does the salary of these vacant posts disappear? The election propaganda to raise the standard of education would go in vain unless there is adequate human resource. The Education Minister has pointed out that private schools always produce better results than Government schools. How does he expect Government institutions with huge enrolments but with no full- fledged heads to do better? In fact I would applauded the Government schools for producing many star students in the HSSLC, HSLC results in spite of all the hardships.

Now most of the Cabinet ministers are young and dynamic I hope that the Education Department will take due cognizance of the flaws that exist in Government run institutions and not leave them orphaned. Again with so many elementary and upper primary schools in the state how do we expect regular inspection when there are not enough Sub-Inspectors of Schools as well as no full-time SDSEOs. It bears mention here that there is not a single Sub- Inspector of Schools at Amlarem Sub-Division. Even in Garo Hills there are no full-time principals as pointed out in an article by Albert Thyrniang in his article (ST 2, October 2018) Meanwhile there are senior teachers who deserve to be promoted but they stagnate in the same post.

Again the B.Ed College in Jowai Town which is under construction and not yet fully functioning already has a Principal and teaching faculties who have already been appointed. This is a lopsided policy when many of the aforesaid posts have not been filled. The concerned authority may kindly look into the matter in the interests of education in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Omarga Laloo.
Mynthong, Jowai.

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

"Write what you know. That should leave you with a lot of free time."
--- Howard Nemerov

The Shillong Times
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PHED - Department of scams

SCAMS are not new to Meghalaya. The first major scam in Meghalaya happened in the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of Meghalaya in 1985 where against a Departmental allocation of Rs 40 lakhs the Executive Engineer placed orders for materials worth Rs 13.27 crore and had even managed to pay a bunch of high flying contractors Rs 4.63 crore. This was a huge amount at the time and one contractor even purchased a Mercedes Benz at a time when many did not even know how to spell the word. Interestingly the Executive Engineer, RB Giri's antecedents are quite astounding. He started his career as a member of road maintenance gangs and had not even passed his Matriculation. He was promoted to the rank of an overseer and later promoted in quick succession and made Executive Engineer in August 1983. Giri held three other posts while he was Executive Engineer, Jowai in the PHE Department's Jowai division. Following the outrageous scam an enquiry commission was set up by Chief Minister WA Sangma but the politicians involved escaped punishment. RB Giri was arrested but released on bail. There was no system of checks and balances then. There isn't any such system now if we go by the annual CAG reports.

The PHED whose nomenclature entails looking after public health has done everything but that. Ironically, the man most talked about even today and the longest serving electrical engineer heading the PHED and also the money-spinning Greater Shillong Water Supply System (GSWSS), is alleged to have siphoned off money at the cost of public health. He has now succeeded in getting himself elected to the State Assembly. In 2016 three persons from Sohra, Umroi Madan and Jowai had accused the then Chief Engineer, PHED of sanctioning huge funds under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for a few villages under Mawphlang constituency "for political gains" as he wished to contest the 2018 Assembly elections. The Organisation even wrote to the Prime Minister asking for investigation into PHE schemes in rural Meghalaya but nothing came of this complaint. In March 2017 several leading NGOs had dared the then MUA Government to institute a CBI enquiry into the GSWSS since after spending over Rs 130 crore on the Shillong scheme, most households continue to suffer water scarcity. As can be expected nothing was done and Sunn is sitting pretty today lecturing the PHE Minister on how to do his job. What travesty is this!

British Indians face a full-blown brexit crisis

India needs to redraw priorities in UK ties

By Arun Srivastava

Brexit with an uncertain future is not a politically and economically correct proposition for India. In the wake of David coming out with the proposal of holding a referendum, apprehensions were expressed on the future of Indians living and working in Britain and the relation between the UK and India. While a section of the Indians welcomed the move, others are of the view that it would endanger India's interests.

But so far, such situation has not emerged, although the manner in which UK Prime Minister Theresa May has been handling the matter clearly indicates that all is not well for the British Indians or job seekers. The debate raging in the political establishment of Britain provides an insight into the confusion that prevails over the issue. There is no surety as to how the interests of the Britons themselves will be protected and preserved, forget about the citizens of other countries.

This is the state of affairs when a significant number of Indians or Brits of Indian origin are associated with the decision making apparatus. According to a survey carried out by a business news agency, Britain faces the danger of losing around 10,000 finance sector-related jobs to neighbouring EU countries if it fails to be a part of the EU's single market. Most of the major business institutions are seriously contemplating to move out of Britain. This is the primary reason that Theresa May is working on the proposition of no-deal Brexit.

To maintain its trade in a competitive and healthy state, UK is also contemplating to have CHOGM on board. AS of now, EU is the UK's largest trading partner. What has made CHOGM look profitable is the trade between Commonwealth members, which was pegged at around $592 billion in 2016, is expected to go up to $1 trillion by 2020. Among the Commonwealth nations, it is India that Britain has pinned high hopes on. With migration of EU skilled labour decreasing, the English-speaking Indian talent pool is definitely going to benefit. Indian students should be able to secure more financing for their college degree, as preferential scholarships to EU countries will reduce.

In such a situation India could be seen exporting more talent than the current levels. However, we ought not to forget that one of the reasons for Brexit is the large number of European migrants coming into Britain. At present it is not clear as to what would be the nature of working relation UK would have with India. However, India may have to rework its strategy in aligning with some other key EU nations. Some of the projects and negotiations will go on hold as firms would want to wait and watch before implications of Brexit are clearer.

The UK government's latest blueprint for Brexit threatens to derail plans for closer trade ties with India as it would prevent Britain from making the kind of concessions on trade in goods that New Delhi seeks. According to details of a confidential joint UK-India Trade Review released to 'Greenpeace Unearthed', it would appear that India would be among the countries unlikely to reap many post-Brexit benefits.

UK statistics indicate that there are 100,000 Indian illegal immigrants in the country, the largest representation of illegal immigrants from any nationality in the UK. Despite numerous attempts to enter into a bilateral agreement with India to facilitate the deportation of illegal Indian immigrants in Britain, India continues to resist any agreement, stating that a bilateral agreement will only be considered if the UK relaxes its stance on visas for Indians.

Nevertheless, a survey carried out by the UK India Business Council and Confederation of Indian Industry found that difficulties in obtaining visas and work permits for Indian professionals are seen as one of the greatest obstacles that need to be addressed when drawing up a UK-India FTA. Unless the two countries overcome the mismatch in understanding and expectations, it seems unlikely that India will agree to an FTA with the UK.

Faced with the latest uncertainty about the future of Brexit, the global fraternity has been seeking to know when will Brexit actually happen and why is it taking so long. This has simply added to the speculation of a no deal scenario.

All the political parties seem to be scared of the withdrawal. Maybe they had extended support to the idea in 2016, but as time passes, they have come to realise the futility of the move. In the initial stage an impression was created that UK was the ultimate gainer, but now just six months ahead of the D-day the realisation has dawned on them on the need to wait and watch.

The Tories are not the only party split over the EU Withdrawal Bill. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn saw 89 of his MPs ignoring his orders to abstain on another Lords amendment calling for UK membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) and a soft Brexit. What was even more striking was the way both sides in the Brexit debate defied him.

The Brexit negotiations include two parts: the first is a withdrawal agreement to establish the terms of the UK's departure. Both sides expect to finalize this agreement by October and the second is an agreement on the future trade relationship. For May this is tricky situation. The fact of the matter is that a Brexit scenario would reduce Britain's future influence and economic impact.

One thing is absolutely clear that in the existing situation India would have to redraw its own priorities and try to avoid becoming a victim of the confusing political and economic scenario. Even in the event of UK not being able to work out a convenient and satisfactory deal with EU, it would continue to remain a viable economic friend of India. The EU is already the prime trade partner. The UK is India's fourth largest inward investor and the 1.5 million-strong Indian Diaspora in the UK is not only one of the largest ethnic minority communities but also one of the most productive, contributing around 6 percent to the country's GDP.

Ever since Theresa May occupied the office of the prime minister she has been desperately trying to have her pleas heard by the EU leaders. Rejection of May's post-Brexit blueprint at the Salzburg summit rules out nothing as yet in Britain's rocky negotiations on withdrawing from the European Union. In contrast the development is a blow to May.

The EU holds all the cards and recognises the danger of giving ground. The EU is more interested in Dublin than London. It is most unfortunate that the British government has never understood the Brexit process. On 29 March 2019, 3.7 million Europeans will officially join the ranks of the "foreigners" living in Britain. The Brexit trickeries continue to increase market uncertainty. Neither inflation nor wages show any sign of taking off. The better-than-expected performance of the economy since the EU referendum illustrates just how difficult it is to predict the short-term path of growth. (IPA Service)

Making SC Tharoor's 'floccinaucinihilipilification'

Sabarimala will continue to be woman-unfriendly

By Aditya Aamir

Congress Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor is wasting time digging up fossilized lexicon like the worthless and of no value 'Floccinaucinihilipilification'. A Hindu horde is marching on Thiruvananthapuram, his parliamentary constituency, and momentous things are set to happen. There might even be 'mob violence' which some say is the 'bumper-sticker' for India under NDA rule.

Friday morning, police water cannons were pouring water over the LDF government's resolve to implement the September 28 Supreme Court order allowing women of all age entry into the Sabarimala shrine. Tharoor, who relishes throwing a farrago of flummoxing words at clueless hoi polloi, is an ardent fan of the verdict.

Tharoor tweeted 'floccinaucinihilipilification' last week to introduce his newest book 'The Paradoxical Prime Minister' to the Indian. The word means "act or habit of describing or regarding something as unimportant, of having no value or being worthless." Tharoor, probably, wanted to make a statement on Prime Minister Narendra Modi but like said Tharoor is wasting time on matters 'floccinaucinihilipilification'.

Remember, it was Tharoor who warned of the prospect and perils of an India-turned into 'Hindu Pakistan' if the BJP continues to rule India. But he was not talking of Sabarimala issue. And now the Sabarimala verdict has roiled the Hindus of Kerala. A 'Save Sabarimala' campaign has caught on like wildfire. Devotees of Swami Ayyappa, led by female devotees, all over the state are out in the streets protesting the ruling and a churning is on in the Kerala Hindu milieu not seen since the days of Sree Narayana Guru.

The BJP and the RSS are on a 'Long March' to Tharoor's city, hoping to hit landfall on October 15, even as the Pinarayi Vijayan government's attempts to wean away sections of Hindu society came a cropper.

The BJP and the RSS are on a 'Long March' to Tharoor's city, hoping to hit landfall on October 15, even as the Pinarayi Vijayan government's attempts to wean away sections of Hindu society came a cropper. The 28%-strong Ezhava community led by Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam threw its lot with Vijayan but the very next day ditched him. LDF warnings that the 'Sawarna Castes' were leading lower castes up the garden path wilted in the fervour.

The anti-RSS are warning of a 'Kalaapam' or strife if the RSS/BJP combine succeeds in instigating violence and polarising the electorate in the state, which is probably too alarmist a view. The Hindu Malayali, like his Christian and Muslim brethren, is too political an animal to shift loyalties on issues that are not intrinsically communal. He, and in this case the 'she', only wants Ayyappa Swami to be left alone with his celibacy! His/her political affiliation will not shift unless the government implements the SC order.

Tharoor is all for 'women's entry' into the Sabarimala shrine and that is also the Congress party's stand but the state unit of the Congress is with the "sentiments of the Ayyappa devotees", which "cannot be ignored". The Congress position in Kerala gets tricky because its main opposition is not the BJP but the LDF. The BJP, regarded "untouchable" by both fronts, has a vote-bank of an estimated 15% of the electorate. That's a status the party wants to change and the Sabarimala verdict is propitious to say the least.

The problem for the secular forces is the "issue", the "deity" and the "female devotees". If there is any deity that is 'secular', it is Swami Ayyappa. His devotees include Hindus, Christian and Muslims. Besides, "not visiting the shrine during their fertile years" is an article of faith with the female devotees of Ayyappa. It is the resolve of the #ReadyToWait female devotees that spilled out in the streets in spontaneous protests which rattled and forced BJP/RSS and the state Congress to switch sides.

The CPM-led LDF did not expect the kind of "Hindu unity" seen. Late attempts to "fix" the problem failed. The Hindu juggernaut has been picking up stragglers all along the way on its 'Long March' like a magnet picks up iron filings and the state government doesn't want violence. Tharoor's 'Hindu Pakistan' comment might have been rhetoric but the explosive mix of the "Hindu cultural revival and renaissance" that Ayyappa Dharma Sena President Rahul Easwar speaks of cannot be dismissed away with derision.

Of course, Easwar and his ilk do not talk in stark terms. They camouflage with the rhetoric of "traditions going back millions of years" and "there are forums other than the Supreme Court to consider such issues". In the process, the allegation that there's a move to entrench the hold of the "Sawarna castes" on Hinduism is lost in the play of words. Rahul Easwar is a member of the tantric-family of Sabarimala, hereditary "tradition-keepers."

If there is anything like 'secularism' on earth, it's on test in Kerala. Diluting Article 25 and laying all the eggs in the Article 14 basket seems to have boomeranged. Friday, October 12, 2018, Attorney General KK Venugopal, speaking in his "private capacity", said the top court failed to get the "pulse of the people" and that he agreed with the dissenting judgement of Justice Indu Malhotra.

Venugopal was speaking at another of the many "farewells" for ex-CJI Dipak Misra, who has fans among the "progressives of Kerala" for whom "Hindu revival and renaissance" are nothing but floccinaucinihilipilification, worthless and of no value. But, for the LDF, Ayyappa devotees are no longer unimportant. Its own entities are deserting it.

The Travancore Devasom Board (TDB), which is controlled by the government, has thrown its hands up in surrender. Plans to build 'ladies toilets' and 'waiting places' for women at Sabarimala have been shelved. The government will not chopper-lift women constables to the hilltop shrine. Sabarimala will remain women-unfriendly. The fact of the matter is, as we move closer to October 17, everything surrounding Swami Ayyappa including the SC order looks rendered worthless, of no value - floccinaucinihilipilification! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

When will justice prevail?

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Water project delay drains Rs 132 crore" (ST Sept 28, 2018) and the letter to the editor," Need for CBI enquiry into the GSWSS project" by B. Mawlong (ST Oct 4,20l8), as per the CAG report it was revealed that the delay in the completion of Phase III of the GSWSS has led to an unfruitful expenditure of hundreds of crores of rupees. B Mawlong's letter clearly reveals the mess of PHE projects in the State and exposes the irresponsible and inefficient management of the entire Department for so many years.

We all know and saw and we still see that the entire GSWS Scheme is going to down the drain. Water is leaking everywhere and flows down to Umiam Hydel Project, which ultimately is a blessing to the Meghalaya Power Generation Corporation Limited (MePGCL) and this Corporation supplies power to the PHED to pump water to the leaking pipes. What a brilliant idea and what beautiful understanding between these two Departments!

Another disturbing scene is the water pipes are being stocked and dumped carelessly in almost every locality in Shillong. These pipes have been lying by the road side, playgrounds etc. for many years. They are covered with dirt, moss and all kinds of wastes. Rats make their breeding ground inside these pipes; stray dogs and bitches live and breed inside these pipes; even household garbage is being pushed inside these pipes. We all know that rats carry plague and dogs also carry many diseases hence these pipes are exposed to all kinds of contamination. If Phase III of the GSWSS is to take off in the near future and these pipes are utilised what will the general public do? Is it not dangerous to our health? I personally feel that if these pipes are to be laid down and connected for drinking water supply to households, they should be thoroughly washed and sterilized first.

Hence, I humbly beg and request the Honourable High Court to instruct the PHE Department to do the needful. Like Mr Mawlong said, it is high time for a CBI enquiry into the PHED. Responsibility should be fixed and the culprit booked.

Yours etc.,
N. Hynniewta
Shillong-1

Parking lot sans electricity

Editor,

The news item, "No CCTVs, cleanliness in Shillong parking lots" (ST 9, October, 2018) has rightly pointed out that the numerous parking lots in and around Shillong lack cleanliness and CCTVs. I wish to draw particular attention to the parking lot at Khlieh Iewduh. While the parking lot does accommodate a number of vehicles both commercial and private, ranging from trucks (that feed the entire population of the state) to two wheelers and every evening the lessee does clean up the place by sweeping all dirt and garbage, yet all this work is being done by men in a public place that does not even have electricity. The only lighting they get is through the torch that they wear on their helmets. Since there is no electricity, the place wears a very eerie look once it gets dark. So the question of placing CCTV cameras in this parking lot must walk hand in hand with proper electricity connections and lighting. In the past brawls, anti-social activities of all kinds in this parking lot were being reported, especially once it gets dark. I urge the concerned authority in the Urban Affairs Department to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves and provide this place the basic minimum need of proper lighting, sewage management, CCTVs, etc. And since this is part of the Cantonment area too, one is surprised that the military is not contributing towards lighting up the place at least.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Curse of caste in India

Editor,

According to Human Development Report 2018, India is placed at 130th position. Among our neighbouring countries, we are behind Sri Lanka (76), China (86) and Maldives (101) and ahead of Bhutan (134), Bangladesh (136), Myanmar (148), Nepal (149), Pakistan (150) and Afghanistan (168). India must try to beat Sri Lanka to be at the top in the region by ensuring right to education and health care for all the citizens. However, minimum positive actions and positive discriminations have been taken in our country in favour of the backward class in the form of subsidies and the backward castes in the form of reservations in government jobs to make public administration free from caste bias. This makes us perform at least better than six of our neighbouring countries.

As a matter of fact, the human development report has praised India's reservation policy. The report says that even though the reservation policy "has not remedied caste - based exclusions," it has "substantial positive effects". It has pointed out that "in 1965, for example, Dalits held fewer than 2% of senior civil service position, but the share had grown to 11% by 2001". The HDR also hailed the national rural employment guarantee programme as a "prime example" of "combining social protection with appropriate employment strategies".

It is a pity that vested interests with the help of constant propaganda have become successful in making a sizeable section of the people believe that our policies of reservation for backward castes and subsidy for backward class are the cause of our lack of development. On the contrary, India would have been in the bracket of Pakistan and Afghanistan had we not pursued positive discrimination. The human development report clearly acknowledges the merit of such inclusive policies.

Majority of Indians have still been subjected to two layered discriminations - caste and class - since ages. This is not to confuse caste with class. A Dalit will be recognised as a Dalit and face religious and social exclusion even if she or he has money power. This is the overall truth barring a few exceptions here and there. A somewhat affluent Dalit was killed a few months ago in Gujarat just for riding a horse. In many parts of our country, money cannot give Dalits rights even to sport moustaches, let alone riding motorcycles.

So, to add an economic criterion to determine eligibility of an SC/ ST for promotion is nothing but to water down the concept of proportional representation of Dalits in public administration. When an SC or ST becomes eligible for a promotion in the government sector, it will be highly unfortunate if the economic or class qualification deprives the person from getting the benefits. Thus, the higher castes dynamics will remain the name of the game as a person from higher caste gets the opportunity of replacing a Dalit in a post which is earmarked for a Dalit. This will break the backbone of caste balance of power and push India's HDI rank further behind.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

‘In a living democracy you should never take a stance’

Sadhguru, *the founder of Isha Foundation, is a new-age master who touches one's conscience with words devoid of the usual twists of scriptures. He visited Shillong recently for an interactive session with youths. As expected of him and quite unexpected of a 'yogi', he drove the car to the venue. It did not take him much time to win over the youths. Ranked among the 50 most influential people in India, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and a* New York Times *bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India in 2017.*

The guru has a huge fan following despite several controversies dogging him and his foundation. One would wonder what makes the mystic so popular. There is no one reason for this. His persona, witty comments, simple solutions to life's problems and above all his hearty laughter make him more human than mystic. "All I have is what I know within myself," is how Sadhguru defines his self.

However, meeting him in the hill city became a daunting task as there was no way of transgressing the invisible security cover around him. So technology came as a saviour to get connected to the new-age mystic.

In an email interview, the mystic talked about "true enhancement of life", godmen, the controversies, politics and 2019 Lok Sabha election.



Sadhguru interacts with students in Shillong

You have been described as a mystic, ultra-modern guru…. But who are you really? Do you like to be termed as a God-man?

I have seen men and goddamn men in my life, but I have not seen a god-man anywhere. This is a word coined by the media. There are no godmen in this culture – we have been reverential towards certain men because of the contributions they have made to our life. Otherwise, in this country we are reverential towards everything.

Now, Sadhguru means an uneducated guru, in the sense that he does not come from the scriptures or study of spirituality but from inner experience. All I have is what I know within myself – I know this piece of life from its origin to its ultimate. If you know this piece of life in its absolute nature, by inference you know almost everything that is worth knowing.

What events in your life turned you into a guru/mystic?

When I was about four years of age, I suddenly realised one day that I don't know anything at all. If I had a glass of water in my hand, I would not know what water is. I would just stare at this water for hours on end. I knew that water would quench my thirst and how to use it, but I did not know what it was. If I found a dry leaf, I would spend five, six hours with it. There were many nights where I just sat up in the bed staring at the darkness for the entire night.

I developed a very keen sense of attention to everything and I realised there is something wrong with the way we are paying attention itself. So my attention shifted from outside to inside. I started paying a very profound attention to my own faculties because I realised that unless we enhance our perception, there is no true enhancement of life.

What is the purpose of the 112-ft Adiyogi statue that created so much controversy and how does it add to the foundation's credibility?

As a generation of people, we are the most comfortable generation ever in the history of humanity. Never before has survival been as organised as it is today but still people are in desperate situations within themselves. You cannot say this is the most joyful generation ever on this planet.

As there is a science and technology for external wellbeing, there is a whole science and technology for inner wellbeing. If human wellbeing has to happen, one has to turn inward because human experience is generated from within. What we call as yoga is the science and technology for turning inward.

Adiyogi means "the first yogi" – he offered 112 ways in which a human being can realise his ultimate potential. As a way of honoring him, we created this glorious face of 112 feet as an iconic inspiration and also to bring back this dimension that your wellbeing is not in looking up or looking down, but looking inward. In is the only way out.

Assam government and the Sadhguru-led Isha Foundation have inked an MoU for rejuvenation and conservation of rivers. How will the Foundation help? What expertise does your Foundation have?

We are a hundred percent volunteer organisation and we have worked in this field for over twenty-five years now. Through Project Green Hands we have planted over thirty-two million trees. In 2010, Project Green Hands was awarded the country's highest environmental award, the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar, by the Government of India. This year, Rally for Rivers also worked in collaboration with UN Environment for World Environment Day.

Rally for Rivers is a national movement to revitalise India's waterways, which had an unprecedented participation – 162 million people were part of the event. The most important aspect is that a minimum of one kilometer on either side of the river should become forest, which will lead to river revitalization and flood mitigation.

Rivers need a much more aggressive approach because the depletion that is happening is very rapid and sharp. You may not notice it much in Assam or Meghalaya simply because of the heavy rainfall that you have, but the rest of the country is experiencing this. It is very important that we bring back a certain volume of vegetation in rainfall areas, otherwise the excess water and flooding will continue to happen.

When everyone is harping on saving rivers, one of the spiritual gurus ruined the Yamuna and the ecology? Don't you think this is an outrageous act in the name of religion?

I don't wish to comment on any individual person. If someone does something wrong, there is a law in this country. The law just needs to act – there is no need for controversy. Right now the laws are very ambiguous. There must be a mandatory enforceable law – it does not matter who it is.

TALKING POINT

SADHGURU | ISHA FOUNDATION

So, the question is not about the gurus, the question is about how the nation handles its subjects.

A river bed is a very complex thing and it takes millions of years to form. There is movement of water both from the aquifers to the river and from the river to the aquifers. No individual should be able to touch the water bodies. It must be approached scientifically and the policy must clearly define what you can and cannot do. You can't mess around with it anymore.

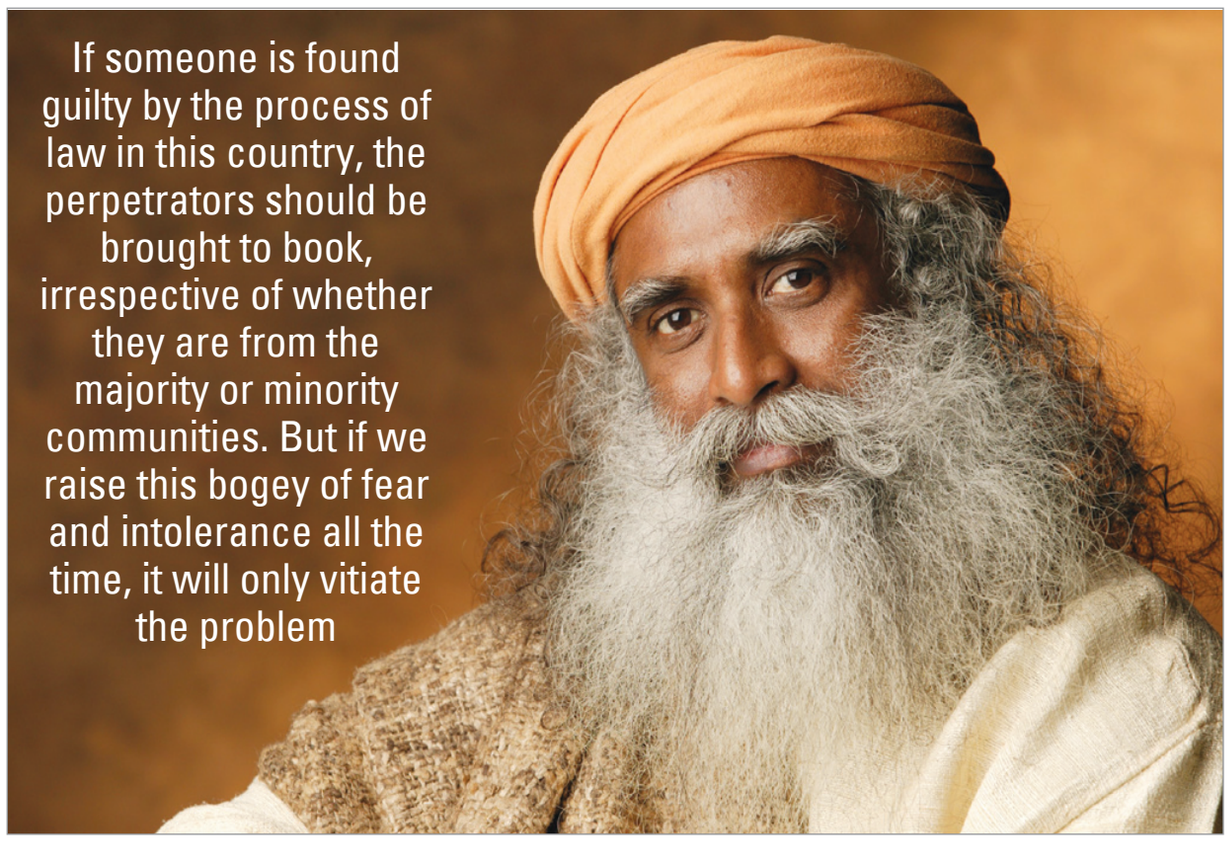
The Foundation is officially non-religious and ostensibly aimed at public service. But isn't there a distinct religious colour to it? What do you have to say about the tradition of mixing politics and religion? Is this healthy in a secular country like India (of course considering the fact that even Chanakya wrote about using religion in politics in *Arthashastra*)?

The word "Hindu" comes from two words, the Himalayas and Indu Sagara, which is today called the Indian Ocean. Hindu does not mean a religion – it is a geographical identity, which in turn evolved into a spiritual tradition. Now, over these millennia of transmitting yoga, invariably it has picked up many cultural frills. One of the basic aspects of my work has been to trim all these cultural frills and present yoga as an absolute science and technology. The significance of technology is that it does not matter who you are, if you learn to use it, it works for you. That is what yoga is about. About yoga being connected with the Hindu way of life – obviously it evolved in this land, so these are the people who propagated it everywhere in the world. If you want to call yoga Hindu, I think then you should call gravity Christian.

What about the lynchings in the name of the holy cow?

This is a major issue in the country today. This is not about cows; this is about whatever is precious to people. If they believe somebody is taking it, they cannot call the police because they will come after twenty-four hours. And even when they come, there are so many issues where it does not get settled directly, so people have their own way of settling. We are not a state or country which is ruled by law enforcement agencies. It is only society which manages its own law because there are not enough policemen or infrastructure.

I am not trying to prove this is the way to do it but when mob tries to enforce their idea of justice, this is how it gets enforced unfortunately. We need to understand that is where we are. If we want to change this, we have to create a law enforcement mechanism that is available to everybody.



A fear psychosis has gripped Muslims in the country and even in a city like Kolkata, Muslim doctors were harassed. The RSS sent threat mails to respective journalists. What do you have to say about this culture of impunity that has gripped the nation?

I am constantly in touch with millions of people on a daily basis. I don't see any intolerance or fear psychosis anywhere. There are a few incidents happening here and there but this sort of talk is being revved up only for political gains. It is a certain machinery – the media and social media – that people have learnt to operate. The rest of the country is not even thinking about it because they are too busy trying to earn a living on a daily basis. If someone is found guilty by the process of law in this country, the perpetrators should be brought to book, irrespective of whether they are from the majority or minority communities. But if we raise this bogey of fear and intolerance all the time, it will only vitiate the problem.

How do you marry spirituality with technology?

Spirituality is a technology. Spiritual process is a tool for people to turn inward and create their own wellbeing.

This life is naturally happening to a certain law. If you know the nature of life within you, you can completely take charge of the way it happens. If you took charge of it, would you create any unpleasantness within yourself? Of course not! Right now, anger, stress, fear or whatever negativity you go through, it is happening essentially because of your inability to manage your system. Yoga is a technology of bringing your whole system to a certain ease where there is no such thing as stress, fear or any unpleasantness within you.

What do you have to say about freedom of speech in India in the wake of attacks on and killings of journalists and thinkers?

It is an exaggeration to say there has been a wave of killings. I am not saying there are no problems in the country, but do we want to be part of the solution or part of the problem? If we constantly pick on negative things, it causes so much damage to the country. Recently, a lady from a wealthy family in Greece wanted to come to our India ashram. She was so excited, but at the last minute she called me from Greece. She was crying and said, "My husband won't let me go to India." So I spoke to him because I know him well, and he said, "I don't want my wife to be raped." This is not the image we should create.

About freedom of speech, what I see is that the moment somebody starts talking about freedom, they start doing irresponsible things. Where there is no responsibility, there will anyway be no freedom. Only if all of us behave responsibly, there is Freedom.

What do you have to say about student politics and young faces like Umar Khalid and Kanhaiya Kumar? Does Communism scare people now as they did in America?

Unfortunately, people are talking as if communism is an ideology against everyone. No, communism is an ideology for everyone – not against anyone. Communism means whether you are capable or not capable, you must still live well. Unfortunately, people have misunderstood it as a way of fighting with everyone. We are no longer at a stage where there is no hope for the country unless you shake it with armed struggle.

For example, China moved a billion people from poverty to economic well-being in 50 years' time. But they did it the hard way – with bullets. But we are on the threshold of a much more miraculous thing that has never happened in history with such a large mass of people: if we conduct our economic process right in the next 10-15 years, half a billion people will move from one level of living to another through the democratic process. We are right on the threshold, it is important the entire nation works in one direction, if we have any concern for malnourished millions. Some people think it is their right to debate ourselves to death.

What do you have to say about gurus like Ramdev, also a corporate honcho, Asharam, also a rapist, and Yogi Adityanath who is also a shrewd politician? Are they using religion as a facade to hide their real and overpowering ambition for power?

Yogis have always been active in the society. It has always been so that yogis did whatever was needed in those times. As I mentioned previously, there are laws in this country and if someone is not following them, then it needs to be dealt with accordingly. But now, just because someone is a yogi, have you given him any special rights? A yogi pays taxes, needs a license to drive, and everything else. If I can't stand for an election or start a company, that means I have all the responsibilities in this country but no rights. When a student, an engineer or a journalist can create their own business or stand for election, why can't a yogi do the same? I am not going to stand for election ever – that is a different matter. But if a yogi wants to stand for election or start a business, it is his right.

What is your prediction for the 2019 Lok Sabha election?

I do not have a prediction. It is the people's will. Democracy cannot be a spectator sport, it is a participatory process. Most people think that if they come out once in five years and vote, their responsibility is over. No, democracy has various instruments through which you can participate on a daily basis. We need a more participatory democracy on all levels but unfortunately people are still voting by their religion, caste, or creed. Democracy cannot work if you are voting by religion or caste because immediately you are going back to electing a feudal leader – you are destroying the fabric of democracy.

In a living democracy you should never take a stance, this is something we have forgotten. Right now, in the United States I think only about four to five percent of the people decide the election. The rest of the people are already fixed. A democracy means that you evaluate the stance you want to take every time. And that is never a permanent stance.

Having spent some time here what are your observations about Meghalaya's socio-political scenario?

When there were plans for the Northeast, Jawaharlal Nehru was advised not to touch the pristine nature and tribal cultures of the region. Initially, it was a conscious decision not to touch the Northeast because the people were beautiful and they were living in their own ecosystems. They were doing great by themselves.

Later on, development started happening in unplanned ways, little by little. But today because of connectivity, everyone has succumbed to the western ways of life and they think we also have to become like that. The government has decided to put railways, airways, roadways and everything in the next 15-20 years. Once that happens, the rest of India will be driving all over the Northeast. That is going to happen to you because you asked for development. We can think it is development, but it is also a certain loss to the country.

~ Nabamita Mitra

Shortlist full of surprises



Poet Robin Robertson's The Long Take *is the first novel in verse that made its way to the Man Bokker shortlist.* *Photo courtesy: Google Images*

By Willie Gordon Suting

The shortlist for this year's Man Booker Prize, one of the world's most prestigious literary awards, includes for the first time a novel told in verse.

The book, *The Long Take*, by poet Robin Robertson, mixes verse, prose and photographs to follow the story of a World War II veteran across the United States in the golden era of Hollywood. One of the judges, the feminist critic and writer Jacqueline Rose, described it as "a genre-defying novel" that "offers a wholly unique literary voice and form".

The judges said they realised that its inclusion in the shortlist was likely to set off a debate but they said its style had not come up in their discussions. Val McDermid, a crime writer, praised its characters, language and the insight it gave into the world. "I'm not sure what else a novel is meant to do," she said.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, the chairman of the judges, said the six-book shortlist was most notable for the bleakness of its subjects, among them ecological destruction, prison life, institutional racism and slavery.

"People reading our books 100 years from now would know that we live in dark times," Appiah said. "The dominant theme of the novel in English today is of our species, and sometimes the other species with which we share this small planet, challenged by anxiety, suffering from pain, and of our institutions and environment under threat," he added.

Hope comes in the quality of the writing and the fearlessness of the authors in tackling such subjects, he said.

"Reading these has not left me in a state of depression," McDermid said, adding that some of the books also offered "moments of toe-curling hilarity".

"It's that human capability to find humor in the darkest moments," she said, adding, "That's why paramedics have the best jokes."

In addition to Robertson, the shortlist — two-thirds of which were written by women — includes Anna Burns for *Milkman*, an experimental novel that looks at Ireland in the time of the Troubles through the eyes of a young girl; Esi Edugyan for the novel *Washington Black*, in which an enslaved boy and his master's brother flee a plantation in Barbados and forge an unlikely bond.

Edugyan, who is from Calgary, Alberta, appeared on the shortlist in 2011 for *Half Blood Blues*, Daisy Johnson for her debut novel, *Everything Under*, in which a reunited mother and daughter delve into their eerie past.

Johnson, 27, is the youngest author to make the shortlist; Rachel Kushner for *The Mars Room*, a darkly comic novel set in a women's correctional facility in California; Richard Powers for the ecological epic *The Overstory*, about nine strangers trying to save one of the world's last areas of virgin forest.

This is Powers's first appearance on the Man Booker shortlist; he made the 2014 longlist with *Orfeo*.

All were chosen over longlisted novels from Michael Ondaatje, who won the Booker in 1992, and the acclaimed Irish novelist Sally Rooney. Also failing to make the cut was Nick Drnaso's *Sabrina*, the first graphic novel to be longlisted for countries.

Since then, two Americans have won the prize: George Saunders in 2017, for *Lincoln in the Bardo*, and Paul Beatty in 2016, for *The Sellout*. This spring, a literary society that counts Margaret Atwood, Ian McEwan and Zadie Smith among its members demanded that the rule change be reversed.

Originally called the Booker-McConnell Prize, the Booker was first awarded in 1969. It was renamed in 2002, when an investment firm, Man Group, became the primary sponsor.

The prize has been stuck in a debate for years about whether American authors should be eligible. In 2013, the rules were changed to allow any author writing in English to win. It was previously limited to writers from Britain, Ireland, Zimbabwe and Commonwealth.

That debate could gain new strength if either Powers or Kushner wins. But Appiah dismissed the attacks. "I think it's sort of weird to look at people's passports to see whether you should read them," he said.

The winner — who receives 50,000 pounds, or about $65,000 — will be announced on October 16.

Wedding style goes trendy

By Sonali Jha Chatterjee

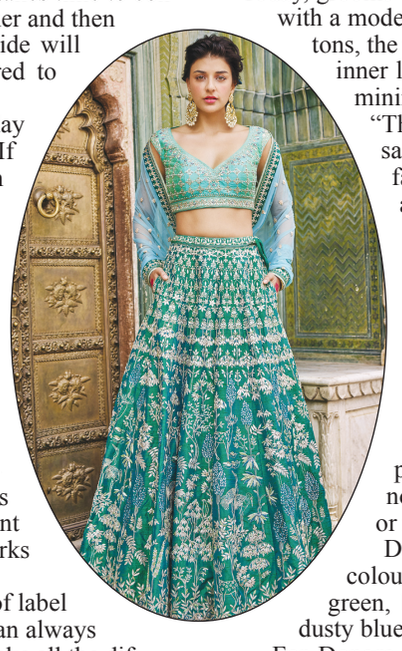
The Big Day is here. The bride and groom are in a tizzy: what to wear, what will go best with their personalities? Today the stylists are there to advise and guide. The first and foremost advice that most stylists give to the couple is to 'Be yourself'.

Says Anaita Shroff Adajania, fashion director for Vogue India magazine, "What we believe at Vogue is that it's very important to be and look like a bride that talks about who you are as a person. That day is very special and the day is about you. If you are someone who is bohemian, don't try to be a demure bride. If you are someone who is very quiet don't be loud. Be who you are."

Personality matters: The couple at the centre

Knowing the personality of the client is important for fashion designer, Falguni Peacock. She takes time to converse with the bride to be, understands her and then creates her wedding lehenga. A shy bride will have certain preferences when compared to one who is an extrovert.

Experimenting with styles on the day of the wedding is a complete no-no. If you generally wear your hair down then wear your hair down on your wedding as well. "Don't suddenly make a tight pasted bun and use a bright red lipstick which you have never used before so no one knows who you are!" cautions Adajania.



Jewellery: Less is more

Anita Dongre, fashion designer, believes. "When it comes to accessorising and jewellery, the concept of 'less is more' is the key. Wearing one statement piece that complements the outfit works wonders for the look."

This perception is echoed by Monica of label Jade that, an heirloom jewellery piece can always be paired with the lehenga or sari and make all the difference.

Foremost fashion designer Tarun Tahiliani also feels that less is more as far as jewellery is concerned. A necklace, maangtika or fresh flowers can do wonders to the bride.

Adajania agrees that jewellery is something people are still struggling with. They tend to bring out everything. It is not essential to wear everything you own. "Pick one or two hero pieces that add to your look. Team your jewellery with your dress. The maangtika or the maathapatti which is in great demand could be paired with a necklace" she advises.

Outfits: Light and structured

Brides often complain about the heavy lehengas and say they cannot move around in it. Those days are gone. The embellished blouse is biggest trend this season. With a jewelled blouse you could do away with the heavy necklace. The heavy lehenga can now take a back seat. Now you can dance to your heart's content and have as much fun as you want.

Today's brides and grooms are setting new fashion trends instead of following them blindly. Shirts, jackets and off-shoulder tops with lehengas are a big trend. You can do away with the dupatta if you want to. It is quite the in-thing to separate the heavy lehenga from the heavy blouse. You get two different outfits. Wear the lehenga with a polo neck top or a shirt. Wear the heavy blouse with a hand-woven simple sari.

According to Monica who believes that Jade symbolises subtle luxury. "Weddings should not go with trends. This is eternal." The idea is to create timeless outfits which can be worn again.

Tahiliani finds that increasingly, new generation brides and grooms want to be able to enjoy themselves with friends and therefore, want to feel light. As a result, heavy work on their outfits is not in vogue. What you wear to the most important day of your life is not a costume and should be a part of your regular wardrobe. Therefore, brides float in gossamer lightness with engineered dupattas, easy to manage. Structured drapes are very much in fashion because it allows the bride to wear her outfit without much fuss and then forget about it. So also for the grooms. He creates similar structured drapes where everything is zipped in place so that the groom has fun even while wearing a dhoti.

"Today, grooms can experiment with classic silhouettes with a modern twist. Be it in the details on the buttons, the pocket squares, or the butti print on the inner lining of a bandh gala, there's always a minimal touch of modernity," says Dongre.

"The menswear line sees some traditional safaas and further experimentation with fabric texturing and silhouettes," she adds.

Colours: Pastels rule

Stylists opine that of late there has been a gradual moving away from the traditional bride's attire. There is a lot of attention to subtle and small detailing. 3D floral embroidery finds its place with all the designers. Just as paisley was the thing some years ago, now it is all about flowers, embroidered or fresh.

Designers are now looking at off-pastel colours as well. Not bright yellow or bright green, but a dusty pink, a dusty green or a dusty blue.

For Dongre, the colour palette this season speaks of a variety of jewel tones with deep ruby reds, emerald greens, sapphire blues and softer pastel shades.

Mauvy blue and grey are colours Falguni and Shane Peacock experimented with as well and found most brides-to-be were attracted towards these colours. Powder blue is another colour doing the rounds this season and finds a lot of takers. In fact, Jade has ivory for the bride as well. It has a tone- on- tone feel to it. This can be enhanced with varying degrees of embellishments.

Pastels for grooms have been trending of late too. New age pastels, which are subdued and classy- like orange, green and pink, look great on grooms. Black and light blue velvet tuxedos are also in vogue. Besides, salmon is a big colour this season. This goes wonderfully with orange red bundis.

According to Tahiliani, brides are opting for paler colours which are closer to what they would wear normally. So, on the wedding day they are being themselves and comfortable in it.

Finally, those days are here. Each day leading up to the wedding has its significance. Tying the various threads of tradition, joy, religiosity, music, dance, food and modernity, this is indeed a unique experience. And in the midst of it all, enjoying every moment and gathering memories are the 'Bride and the Groom'. (TWF)

Image: Anita Dongre Collection

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, OCTOBER 14, 2018***

Moon sextile Sun on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. You will be popular, and sociable at work, and will be appreciated by peers and seniors. You will be congenial but nobody will be able to push you to do anything! You will get to work on your own instincts. You enjoy traveling, and you may get to travel a lot, especially for leisure. You will have a distinct and particular sense of style, which will play an important role in attracting your crush to you. You may meet your soulmate, if still single.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



This promises to be a busy, dynamic, and significant phase. There would be a turning point in your professional life and also in terms of personal growth. Your emotions run high and mood swings are possible. There may be some kind of conflict in your life arising from a great urge to do something different. You need space and contact with others in order to feel content. Financial benefits may come on your way. You would impress people with your style and win their confidence and trust. You are blessed with intuition and foresight which lead you in the right direction. You are relaxed within and relate well with others at home and work.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



The planetary influence indicates favorable outcomes when it comes to legal affairs, education, and travel. You are more accepting and understanding your friends and lovers. Contentedness in love is likely to figure and to attract positive circumstances and people into your life. You are bound to enjoy increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. You would think more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You may have a desire to redecorate your office or a place of work and bring in small yet significant changes. This is an excellent time under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You would have an optimistic, but not necessarily realistic, attitude. You may feel a vague restlessness and discontentment with life as it is, although you are generally in a happy mood. Excellent work opportunities emerge for those working with overseas connections. At home, you accept the individuality of your spouse and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. Financial benefits may come on your way. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



People in authority regard you favorably and events take place in which you feel like you are moving forward and growing into a new phase of your life. You will be making contact through learning, communicating and mental pursuits. This indicates an intellectually stimulating time in which the exchange of ideas with others figures prominently. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. Health will take a turn for the betterment and you inculcate a new diet or exercise regimen. You display great skills in sports, competitive exams, physical activities and this wins appreciation and brings up new opportunities for professionals in this field.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



You are likely to form new relationships or connections that further your financial growth. This phase brings socializing, romance and stability at work place. It's time to make a lifestyle change. Any unresolved argument may create rifts in your relationships, take a softer approach in your interactions when comes to family related matters. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. You are likely to get back to fitness routines and diet programs to enhance health and energy.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



You tend to entertain people with your conversation and sense of humor. You may change your image and an unconventional one at that. Your social life would be busy as you would popular among your social circle. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful by your efforts and care. People in fine arts, creative line and communication related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations and get popularity by the work done. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. There may be minor health ailment as you need to give more attention to your health.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



You want your objectives to reflect what you're really about and you are likely to rid yourself of unsatisfying goals. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. A new project or goal begun at this time has a good chance of being successful in the long term. Your ability to concentrate on what really matters to you is enhanced. Love and emotional bonds keep the family and loved ones together. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. This is a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

Scorpio:(October 24 - November 22)



This is a phase where you are more friendly, optimistic, and large-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. You may change your dressing style to present a glamorous and unconventional image. Your social life would be busy as you would popular among friends and family. Stick to a regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



You could find that you are more open and trusting with friends and lovers, and that you easily win family's trust. Healthy speculation is favored as financial benefits may come your way. Some people fall in love under this influence. Certain elements of your social and financial life are stabilized, secured, and more reliable. More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also figure. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you a big boost of confidence and your personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated. This is an especially spiritual time for you, this is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will get you everywhere now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities and family relations. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



At the workplace you are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. You accept the individuality of loved ones and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation. The unattached may strengthen a romantic relationship or become involved with a likeminded partner.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



A fine balance between optimism and practicality is with you as you discover goals that suit your true self better. A more lenient and contented attitude towards others tends to bring positive circumstances into your life. A tendency to take on more than you can realistically handle should be watched. Your social life and finances stabilize. You are feeling good in general, and you tend to spread the joy and happiness. You work hard and get appreciation too. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and wellbeing.

New-age beauty professional

By Ranjan K Baruah

Electrology is the practice of electrical hair removal to permanently remove human hair from the body. Electrolysis is the actual process of removing hair using electricity. In electrolysis, a qualified professional called an electrologist slides a hair-thin, solid metal probe into each hair follicle without puncturing the skin (when inserted properly). Electricity is delivered to the follicle through the probe, which causes localised damage to the areas that generate hairs, either through formation of caustic sodium hydroxide (the galvanic method), overheating (thermolysis), or both (the blend method).

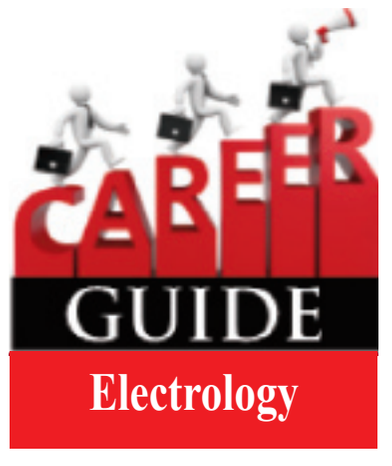
Electrology or Electrolysis is a unique beauty trade that is continually growing popular among men and women alike. Electrolysis was invented by Dr Charles E Michel, an ophthalmologist, to treat ingrown eyelashes. Electrolysis is said to be the only medically recognised treatment for permanent hair deletion.

Most areas of the body, including bridge of the nose between eyebrows, eyebrows, hairline, hairs from moles, on the neck, face, breasts, chest, abdomen, thighs, shoulders, arms, under arms and legs can be treated with electrolysis.

Electrologists/Electrolysis technicians are professionals specialised in the treatment of permanent hair removal. They use various electrolysis techniques and methods to remove unwanted hair. The Electrology programmes cover topics such as skin and hair physiology, sterilisation techniques, thermolysis, blend techniques and machines used office management, and principles of electricity.

After completing MBBS, one may do specialisations in this field as it has demand at present. Apart from MBBS, there are some short-term courses in cosmetology or beauty courses where aspirants who have not studied MBBS may take up some courses. As beauty industry is growing so one may be self-employed easily by starting own saloon or beauty clinic after obtaining some experience. It usually takes two to five years to become a self-employed Electrologist.

The hormone imbalance factor resulting in the unwanted growth of hair experienced in the human body of females and the desire for men and women to remove hair from their body for cosmetic purpose has made



it necessary to find permanent solution for the removal of unwanted hair. As a result there is a great demand for trained electrologists in India and other places. There are few institutes in India that offers courses related to this subject. Courses include Certificate in Electrology/Electrolysis; Diploma in Electrology/Electrolysis; PG Diploma in Medical Radiology and Electrology (DMRE), etc. One must be skilled to get job or start own venture. Aspirants may look at the job portals for the vacancy related to same as they advertise against vacancies.

Update:

Scholarships for Girls: Applications are invited from girls belonging to minority communities for Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship Scheme for Minorities Girls for the session 2018-19. The scholarship aims to provide tuition fee assistance along with other benefits to the deserving girl students who are unable to support their education due to financial issues. The scholarship is being provided by the Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF), Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India.

Only girl students belonging to Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi communities are eligible for this scholarship. The annual family income of the student should be less than Rs 2 lakh. Girl students studying in classes 9 to 12 can apply for the scholarship. A student must have secured minimum 50 per cent marks (in aggregate) in the previous class. Aspirants may apply before October 15.

Fellowship to Outstanding Persons in the Field of Culture: Senior/Junior Fellowship to Outstanding Persons in the Field of Culture 2018-19 invites applications from graduate artists for Senior or Junior Fellowship. The fellowship aims to award those artists who undertake research-oriented projects. The fellowship is being provided by the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) under the Ministry of Culture. Last date is October 16.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

"It is the coward who fawns upon those above him. It is the coward who is insolent whenever he dares be so."

--- Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Push forward in Kashmir

THE civic elections in Jammu and Kashmir are on in phases since October, lasting up to December 11. Predictably, the polling is heavy in the Jammu region, while it is lowest in the Kashmir region. The urban body polls are over and the polls to panchayats are currently underway, the processes involving an electorate of over 58 lakh. Democracy is having its say, with notable if's and buts. With the electorate in the Valley largely keeping off the polls, elections will have only limited legitimacy. At the same time, that this much is happening is proof that Kashmir is not a lost cause yet. The state had not seen regular polls due to the militancy, threats from terrorists, and administrative problems. The present round of civic polls remained postponed since 2016 due to the spurt in militancy following the extermination of young militant commander Burhan Wani. The efforts by the BJP-PDP government to hold elections did not progress smoothly. The imposition of President's Rule there led to the creation of conditions suiting the present polls.

Threats from militants are the main reason for the poor voter turnout in Kashmir region. Yet, notable is the fact that the process is progressing with participation of the people even in the Valley. The final round of the polls is to take place on December 11. The process would be completed on December 17 and results declared thereafter. The fate of Kashmir's progress despite the continued sway of separatists backed by Pakistan is tied to the ongoing civic polls. Since there was no civic polls since 2011 – when too, polls were held after a gap of 10 years – the state stood to lose financially. For instance, the over Rs 4,000 crore earmarked for the local bodies in the state for spending between the years 2015 and 2020 could not be availed due to the lack of formation of new elected bodies. In a state where militancy has already taken a huge toll on development process, this remained as an added jolt. The funds would be freed up once the new civic bodies are in place. The fight is between the Congress and the BJP this time, as the regional parties like the PDP and the National Conference are boycotting the elections. So too are small entities like the CPI(M). Kashmir is a sensitive case, a festering wound. It is important that political parties collectively push the national cause and heal this wound.

MUA II and MDA: Same wine in the same bottle

By HH Mohrmen

It has only been few months since the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance Government was installed in the state but the hype is slowly dying down. The new Government is fast losing its sheen and it has nobody to blame but itself for losing its popularity in a matter of less than a year only. Critics of this Government already question its ability to deliver when the average educational qualifications of the ministers is so inadequate. How can this Government bring change when of the entire cabinet, some of the ministers are not even Matriculates, and another merely passed SSLC and yet other passed only Class XII. One can argue that well, the other cabinet ministers are Graduates and Masters Degree holders but the challenge is in the performance of those who are less educated.

This doubt was confirmed by the video which went viral in the internet in which the cabinet minister in his reply to the debate in the House made himself a subject of ridicule. The 'he is not a scientist I am not a scientist' drama in the Assembly not only belittled the August House but it tells us more about the kind of ministers who head the different departments in the current MDA government.

MDA is therefore no different from the MUA II; it in fact is just old wine in old bottle because the same MLAs who had defected from the Congress and joined the NPP, the BJP and the UDP who are today cabinet ministers. The saying goes that a leopard never changes its stripes, therefore how can we expect this Government to perform when we know that people cannot change just like that? Hence it is not prudent to expect this Government to bring change because at least four of the cabinet ministers were, until last year, leaders of the Congress party.

The MDA complained about the financial difficulties that the Government is facing but it is now obvious that there are financial constraints only for schemes and projects meant for the people, but there is enough money for the government to buy expensive cars for the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues. The Government is claiming that all the financial resources are running dry but the same Government can afford to induct more than 70 political appointees at the expense of the public exchequer. It was reported that Agatha Sangma was recently accommodated in the Government and appointed as Chairman of a Committee which is yet to be constituted.

The latest appointee was the former Congress leader and Chief Minister, DD Lapang. Now if he is really an astute leader for which the incumbent CM needs his advice to run the Government, then why is the State is in such a mess? In the last two decades DD Lapang has been part of the Government and at times the Chief Minister of the State himself, but, the government he was part of has failed us in almost every front. If he has not been able to bring change when he was at the helm of power how can we expect him to do so when his status is only that of an advisor to the Government?

The question is why has the National People's Party (NPP) accommodated him when the Congress has relieved him of all his duties and responsibilities in the party considering his age. At least the two major national parties - the Congress and the BJP are clear in their stand on the issue of retirement of the members of their respective parties. They have taken human frailty into consideration and have accepted the universal truth that no one can go on forever hence they have allowed members of their parties who had crossed a certain age to retire. By accommodating Lapang, the NPP's only hope is to gain some brownie points against its arch rival the Congress. Again the question here is whether a lemon can change its taste and taste better just because it is now in new surroundings.

In the West Jaintia there was spree of transfers of government employees and transfer orders were served to a peon, a chowkidar or even a person that is due to retire in few months. A government employee who is related to the defeated candidate or who was suspected to have supported the opposing candidate was served with transfer orders. The Chief Minister is right that transfer of government employees is natural; but it should not be on the basis of political considerations either. Hence if the transfer of government employees becomes a political issue it is the MDA which fired the first salvo.

The other question to the CM is why was a particular official served two, three transfer orders in the span of a few weeks? There are many cases where in the first order the official was transferred to one place and subsequently in the next order the same official was transferred to another location. Why is this necessary? Or what is the need to transfer chowkidars and peons for that matter?

It is obvious that the order was selective in nature and was done so please the whims and fancies of someone who is in power but more seriously, it was very clear that the transfers were vindictive in nature and were only aimed at punishing those who thr MLAs/ministers think did not toe their line. The Chief Minister clarified that the transfer is normal but how can it be normal when the officer was transferred the very day he refused to favour a Minister's relative? Can we expect governance to improve when officers are verbally abused just because they refused to do the bidding of a Minister? This is a very serious issue and the Chief Minister should not simply brush it under the carpet if he really wants to nip this kind of attitude in the bud.

It is also true that job and contract work is being allotted only to the supporters of the MLAs and particularly those in power, but those who are close to the minister abuse their powers and positions of their relatives and even refuse to respect the officials who are charged with supervising the work. If the Chief Minister chooses to ignore this issue then history will hold the MDA Government led by the current Chief Minister responsible for the beginning of a system where relatives of politicians will take control of the government departments in the state by bullying the officers in charge.

Ironically while travelling with the Forest Officer to join the Minister of Environment & Forests for the celebration of the Wildlife week at Amlarem, I was shocked to see that fresh coal was stocked almost everywhere in the Shkentalang area. Obviously the Minister and the Government are turning a blind eye to the illegal activity that is going in the area. The question is why? If mining and stockpiling of coal in this area is not controlled then Wah Umngot will also be affected by acid mine drainage and villages like Shnongpdeng, Darang and Dawki which are now major tourist destinations, will lose their charm to attract tourists. And sadly the aquatic lives which are part of wildlife that we try to protect will disappear like those on the Myntdu,, Kupli and Lukha.

Conrad may have projected himself to the outside world as the CM who is concerned for the environment but the Government he leads is doing the opposite because coal and limestone mining are going on unabated in the two districts in spite of the ban. The million dollar question then is why is the MDA government not stopping this illegal activity?

In fact it is now obvious that the only difference between the MUA II and the MDA is that in the MUA II at least in Dr Mukul Sangma we had a strong Chief Minister who is known to take non-performing ministers to task and even relieve them of their charge. But in the current coalition arrangement does Conrad have that leeway or the courage to do the same? Considering the performance of the incumbent government it is safe to say that MDA is not even old wine in the same bottle but it is the same wine in the same bottle, and the difference is only in the label.

Hexing the celebate and the mob

A reverse *mann ki baat* is in order

By Sushil Kutty

A bunch of Brooklyn 'witches' are set to hex newly confirmed US Supreme Court Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, make "life hell for him", because Kavanaugh has become the symbol of the "rape culture". 'Hex' is to "cast a magic spell" and though there is a "wish to do harm", there will be "no actual harm" done. Attendance at the witches' council will cost $10 per person and some people are asking, what if actual harm is done?

In India, civil conversations across enemy lines ground to a stop within months of the NDA government taking charge. Unlike the Atal Bihari Vajpayee dispensation, which was a far more evenly spread coalition, the Narendra Modi-led regime started off with a comfortable majority of its own in the Lok Sabha and but for the Rajya Sabha it would have gone all-out Hindu-nationalistic.

But the RSS and its other affiliates could not and would not wait. It was as if the genie was out of the bottle and wishes were horses, such that even beggars could ride. The 'Bhaktification of India' and a right assertiveness took hold. Successive electoral victories in several states and the Congress-mukt war cry emboldened hardliners. It was also a dread feeling of 'now' or 'never'.

Result: Bizarre became the new normal. Ministers such as Dr Satyapal Singh went off the bend. Charles Darwin lost his pedestal when Singh pronounced that his great-great-great grandmother never met an ape! Millions of Indians who went through school and were taught otherwise were in shock. Modi and Amit Shah sat on the tip of a mountain of bunkum and hocus-pocus.

Doon School secular-types lost patience and exclaimed angrily 'Wah Taj!' but the Chaiwala and 'Tadipar' were not done. The "cowification of Bharat" found urgent agency. The debate over tolerance and intolerance was altercation not conversation; the cow vigilante on late night missions took scalps on the highway and in states like Jharkhand. The picture of the Muslim pleading for life surrounded by the brainwashed spoke volumes of the descent of Man.

It was not the fault of the cattle-class. Decades of giving literacy a lead over education had raised a standing army of the ignorant ready to be converted with raw emotion. For the Hindutva forces there was no dearth of human guinea pigs to sow dissent and test discontent. There was never any doubt on the Hindutva's expertise in setting up laboratories. It was in the resume, if not in the genes.

The 'mob' is not a Whatsapp creation, or aggregation. The messaging app came handy, that is all. What is a mob? Four people congregating or 10 or 20, a 100? A mob is by definition lawless. A score or even less men with grim faces and menacing looks coming at you is a mob. The mob is not orderly. Shouting and screaming is its lexicon. God save the crowd from a mob!

Akhlaq was killed by a mob. So too Pehlu Khan and Junaid. The young Muslim in Jharkhand with pleading eyes and folded hands. God save the lone helpless from a mob! Sometimes even the staunchest Modi-fan wondered why this globe-trotting Prime Minister with a hug for leaders did not get it that a single word from him could have stopped the mob in its tracks, saved lives. Silence is not golden; it is saffron stained blood red.

Millions of Indians have a beef with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and it has nothing to do with ideology, fuel prices or the shameless slide of the rupee. Maybe a reverse Mann Ki Baat aimed at Modi's ears is the messaging app required to disaggregate the mob. Unfortunately, the daily prattle on mainstream TV media brings out only more poisonous rattlers out of the holes.

The recent mob attacks on Bihari migrants reminded one of the 2002 mobs, including the one which burned the train in Godhra. India has in the last four and a half years settled into Hindutva enclaves, the ghetto being historically and solely Muslim. The Hindutva mob is no different from the mobs that necklaced Sikhs in 1984. The "outsider" is clearly identified, and David-starred for the kill!

That said, mobs fashioning ideology and indulging in violence are not made in India. Right now, the left in the United States is rattled by POTUS Donald Trump calling Democrats a party of the mob and the media, "enemy of the people". A Democrat leader paraphrasing Michelle Obama and substituting "when they go low, we go high" with "when they go low, we kick 'em" hasn't helped.

It is electoral politics and the grab for power, as in an India with approaching general elections. The mob mentality switches side every election cycle. Which brings us the question: Is protesting a ruling of a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court mob violence? Does the fact that the protests are non-violent make the spontaneous and peaceful uprising any less mob violence?

That calls for an explanation of "faith" and there are lessons in the explanation for Modi and Shah. Maybe the two should fast and head for Sabarimala. That will also clear the way for Trupti Desai her right to pray. The plus point is Modi is celibate though he and Shah could do with some hexing from witches, harmless magic spell! (IPA Service)

In India, civil conversations across enemy lines ground to a stop within months of the NDA government taking charge. Unlike the Atal Bihari Vajpayee dispensation, which was a far more evenly spread coalition, the Narendra Modi-led regime started off with a comfortable majority of its own in the Lok Sabha and but for the Rajya Sabha it would have gone all-out Hindu-nationalistic.

TO THE EDITOR

Umsning bypass at what cost?

Editor,

While the news item, "Umsning by-pass to be ready this month" (ST October 8, 2018) has brought a ray of hope and we are grateful to the authorities concerned, it may be mentioned here that a similar news report was also published some four to five months ago (May 15, 2018). In the meantime there has been a lot of in-convenience faced by the land owners all along the same stretch of the Umsning by-pass due to absence of proper regulations for vehicles plying along this road, especially when it comes to heavy vehicles. There had been some serious accidents occurring during this time period. So who is to be held accountable for this? The school going children, especially the little ones have really suffered due to improper regulations and absence of signals. The NHAI officials have not considered addressing the issue of connecting the entry and exit points to private lands connected to the bypass for convenience. In addition, most of the culverts constructed are filled with mud and the fish ponds have perished forever. The low lying areas, some with paddy fields are now all doomed and all our complaints do not seemed to have any effect. Will somebody come to our rescue? We are left at the mercy of the NHAI authorities!

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Not even cosmetic changes in MDA

Editor,

Much has been written about the present MDA Govt and its political appointments where even senior members of the Congress Party are being wooed by the Nationalist People's Party (NPP). What is the NPP trying to prove? That it can get Congress people to migrate and strengthen the Party? One thing must be clearly understood. Those in the Congress today are tried and tested and not worth taking into the NPP. If Conrad Sangma's Party wants to make a difference to Meghalaya then it ought to find young people with leadership qualities and train them in the crucible of the Party. They are more likely to remain loyal to the Party than to the post dangled before their eyes. It's one thing that people like DD Lapang have no shame about taking on the post of Advisor to the Government when his mental faculties are no longer at their optimum. It's another case that they still find work. No one can be expected o remain mentally agile after the age of 85.

The MDA is walking the tightrope of keeping its coalition partners happy so they don't walk out and form some other coalition perhaps with support from the Congress. Politics in Meghalaya is so unpredictable that MLAs can sacrifice their loyalties just to be given some political appointment. Meanwhile the Govt is busy just tying itself up in knots because trying to meet the aspirations of its ambitious party men and women. This is where political sagacity matters and maturity too. Conrad Sangma is trying his best to placate all just to remain in power. This will not work because Govt can no longer pay for services not rendered. In fact there must be public vigilance to check how much the present Govt is spending per month to pay the political appointees. This Government like its predecessors is also hell bent on reviving mining without counting the environmental costs involved. Meghalaya like its sister states has been facing Climate Change in many forms – the present one being Cyclone Titli. The MDA Govt has to work full steam to ensure that the first phase of development begins soon. Sadly, other than the Jackfruit and Fisheries missions there is no kick-starting of any programme to benefit the people of Meghalaya. Those who believed that Conrad Sangma and his team will be strict with implementing and monitoring projects are now beginning to be disappointed. It's bad enough that social audit which is meant to check corruption was only a poll gimmick of Mukul Sangma and has now come a cropper. When will we get a Govt that delivers?

Yours etc.
Tomsine Lyngdoh,
Via email

Uncle Lapang as Adviser to the Govt?

Editor,

It really amused me and perhaps others to read the news report regarding the appointment of grand uncle D.D Lapang as the Chief Adviser to Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and to the present MDA government of Meghalaya. I only wonder what type of advice the Uncle can give when as the former Chief Minister of the state he did not display any extra-ordinary calibre or performance and in fact during his tenure as CM his government had no vision and mission except commission and mediocrity. However, in the eyes of the present CM perhaps he sees some sound reasons of long lasting political benefits. Again, it may be foolish on our part to underestimate the wisdom, shrewdness and sagacity of experienced people like uncle Lapang, especially in politics. However, resigning from the Congress party from which he has drawn huge succour and a splendid career, at the fag end of his political career does not speak very well at all of him, although resigning from the party is his prerogative. Definitely, he must be fired up for some extraneous considerations hence the decision that he took. Also perhaps his resignation has something to do with the new appointment. Any way if it serves his purpose well who are we to pass any judgement or comment.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
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.

" If you see harassment happening, speak up. Being harassed is terrible; having bystanders pretend they don't notice is infinitely worse."

-- Celeste Ng

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.67 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2018

#MeToo hits big names

THE MeToo campaign started in 2006 by Tarana Burke, an American social activist and community organizer was later popularized by American actress Alyssa Milano, on Twitter in 2017. Hollywood actors Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd also took to twitter by storm when they leveled accusations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein. In October 2017 the MeToo movement started with a hashtag on social media to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. Weinstein a powerful man with political clout is the co-founder of two film producing companies Miramax (1979) and The Weinstein Company (2005). Amongst those who leveled charges of sexual misconduct against Weinstein are big league actors Angelina Jolie, Gwyneth Paltrow, Cara Delevingne, Kate Beckinsale etc.

Following these glaring exposes, Weinstein's wife, Georgina Chapman, a British fashion designer, publicly announced that she was leaving him. She apologised to all the women who have suffered at Weinstein's hand and says she is committed to caring for her young children single-handedly.

Cut to the chase, in India, some very big names in films and media have been called out. Social media has given agency to women who have long suffered at the hands of lecherous male bosses and colleagues. Indian newsrooms are known to be exploitative male domains and women journalists bear the brunt of their brusque behaviour. MeToo has empowered them to call out against even bosses who take liberties with them. Prashant Jha, Bureau Chief of The Hindustan Times who was accused by a lawyer for sending out inappropriate messages to her despite her protests has stepped down from his post pending investigation. What is shocking is the reaction of MJ Akbar former editor and currently a junior minister in the NDA Government, to the spate of allegations against him by his former female colleagues. Akbar has rubbished all claims and even filed a criminal defamation case against one of his accusers for, "willfully, deliberately, intentionally and maliciously" defaming him on "wholly and completely false, frivolous, unjustifiable and scandalous grounds". Akbar's wife and family are of course silent on this issue. This is what differentiates us in India from the West because a wife is expected to know the character of her husband better than anyone else. Akbar has also used the oldest ploy of blaming his accusers of targeting his Party the BJP for the 2019 elections. When predators play victims it is only the Courts that can deliver justice.

#MeToo movement: A great social churning process

Harassed women have to make full use of 2013 act

By Amritananda Chakravorty

The last two weeks in India have been jolted by allegations of sexual harassment, molestation, stalking and sexual assault leveled by women from various fields, especially in media, entertainment, and even IT companies, against men in high and powerful positions. #MeToo Movement, which started in Hollywood in October, 2017 with allegations of sexual harassment committed by the famous producer, Harvey Weinstein and then spread to many other countries, finally arrived in India this month. In fact, in October, 2017 itself, a young law student, Raya Sarkar, had compiled a List of Sexual Harassers in Academia ('LoSHA'), which had names of Who's Who of Indian academia, including Dipesh Chakraborty, Lawrence Liang, Sadanand Menon, etc. Nothing much came out of that list, since most complainants did not choose to make an official complaint, except in certain cases.

This round of #MeToo began with actress Tanushree Dutta speaking out on sexual harassment against the well-known actor Nana Patekar, and the producer during the shooting of a film in 2008. It opened the floodgates, wherein women from all walks of life talked about their horrific experiences of being sexually harassed, assaulted, and even raped by men, who were their peers, colleagues or bosses. Prominent accused persons include Minister and journalist, M.J. Akbar, journalists Gautam Adhikari, K.S. Shreenivas, Prashant Jha, Mayank Jain, directors Sajid Khan, Subhash Ghai, etc. Actor Alok Nath has been accused of rape by writer Vinita Nanda, while actresses like Sandhya Mridul have accused him of gross sexual conduct.

There is a collective outpouring of experiences and solidarity by working women who have had enough of sexually charged and unsafe working environments, and calling out their employers or ex-employers to follow the law in true spirit. It is evident that neither Vishaka guidelines nor The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 ('SHW Act') were followed by the organisations, as most of the complaints were either not investigated properly, or women could not complain. There was no attempt to dismantle the 'boy's club' that prevails in most work settings in India.

While some actions seemed to have been taken with people being asked to resign or enquiry being constituted, there is a fear of backlash against the women who complained and that backlash already started, with Alok Nath filing a defamation suit against Vinita Nanda or M.J. Akbar threatening to take legal options. In this context, it is important to know what legal options are available for women complainants. Sexual harassment at workplace was first recognised in 1997 when the Supreme Court passed the landmark decision in Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan [1997 (6) SCC 241], wherein sexual harassment at workplace violated the fundamental rights of equality, non-discrimination, freedom of profession and dignity of women guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19(1), and 21 of the Constitution. The Court directed the setting up of complaints committee in all organisations, which are not covered by the civil service conduct rules, and investigate complaints of sexual harassment. Thereafter, gradually civil service conduct rules began to include sexual harassment as misconduct and provided procedure for disciplinary action against those employees found guilty of sexual harassment.

This round of #MeToo began with actress Tanushree Dutta speaking out on sexual harassment against the well-known actor Nana Patekar, and the producer during the shooting of a film in 2008.

In 2013, the Parliament passed the SHW Act, which provided for establishment of Internal Complaints Committee in all organisations (with more than 10 employees) that would enquire into such complaints. It defined 'sexual harassment' in a broad fashion to cover myriad forms of such conduct, and provided that a complaint could be made within three months of the incident or the last incident, and if necessary, an extension of three months could be given. The ICC then would conduct an investigation into these allegations, with both the complainant and the Respondent having an opportunity to produce documents, and cross-examine witnesses, if any. The ICC then has to finish its enquiry within 90 days and submit its recommendation to the employer. As is evident, the ICC procedure is at the heart of the SHW Act, and it is where the employers fail the women most. The composition of ICC is such that it ought to be presided by a senior woman employee, half of its members should be women, and an external representative from a NGO or women's group. The idea of an external representative is to check the institutional bias of ICC, and it is critical that the external member is aware of her role on the ICC.

In my experience, most ICCs are neither trained in the Act, nor aware of the critical role they play in the implementation of the law. They are also not sensitised to the issue of the nature of sexual harassment that it does not lend itself to traditional proofs, i.e., eyewitness accounts or documentary proof. The Act lays lot of emphasis in the training of ICC members, apart from training of the employees on the SHW law, which is sorely lacking in the functioning of most ICCs.

Besides SHW Act of 2013, Parliament also enacted Section 354A, Indian Penal Code, 1860 in 2013, vide the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, which introduced a law on sexual harassment, whether or not at workplace, which makes it liable for punishment ranging from one year to three years' imprisonment, and fine.

One of the biggest legal impediments is that of delay in reporting these allegations. Some of the allegations made by women go back a long time, even before 1997, when there was no law on sexual harassment at workplace. In those cases, if it were a case of sexual assault, then a complaint can still be filed, since there is no law of limitation vis-à-vis serious criminal offences like rape, or sexual assault (Section 354, IPC). The bar on limitation only comes, when an offence is punishable with fine, or a maximum of three years' imprisonment. Any offence, which is liable for punishment exceeding three years' sentence, is not covered by statutory limitation.

In other words, any woman who has suffered rape or sexual assault can still lodge a criminal complaint against the alleged harasser, and start an investigation. In other cases of sexual harassment or abusive behaviour, limitation may apply. In terms of recent cases, the ICCs can take note of these allegations, and institute an enquiry, even if the complaint is dated. One can also file a criminal case under Section 354A, IPC if the incident is a recent event. Last week Maneka Gandhi, the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, announced the setting up of a committee with jurists and lawyers to investigate into these allegations, but the modalities and the powers of the committee are still unclear. And most importantly, it is not clear whether it would enquire into all complaints or the egregious ones.

The way forward is bumpy, and could be long winded. What the last couple of weeks have shown is that women can no longer be silenced, and they would call out the entitled impunity with which men conduct themselves at workplaces or in relationships or even in families. They would not tolerate inappropriate behaviour or sexual misconduct or sex stereotyping, and the onus is on the employers and the management to ensure that there is no sexual harassment at workplace. More than legal, it is a social revolution happening, wherein the so-called acceptable behaviour or norms and long-standing practices of abusive or predatory behaviour by men are being debunked or called out. It cannot be 'business as usual'. It is a much-needed purge. Let it happen. The churning will hopefully result in safer and respectful workplaces for women, and even for men. (IPA Service)

(The writer is a leading Delhi-based Advocate and Human Rights lawyer).

Maa Durga for

Cosmic divinity

By Salil Gewali

October is here, and we are all set to welcome Maa Durga for a few days. For many of us, Durga Puja is more of an excuse to eat, drink and be merry. We buy ourselves new clothes, move from pandal to pandal, and forget our exercise and diets for a few heavenly days. But is that all that Durga Puja stands for? Are we aware of the philosophies behind this annual celebration? There is more to the philosophy, knowledge and devotion of self-awareness -- if we go deeper.

The word Durga is derived from the root word 'Durg' which means Fort. Just as a fort stands tall and mighty around low lying land and water and jungles, and protects the inmates from all kinds of dangers, we look upon Maa Durga as our "divine protector" from all evil. We feel safe and secure in her divine embrace and feel her all-pervasive energy around us and within us. Divinity has always been looked upon as something far removed from science, mundane logic, and facts. But modern science is only just beginning to realize that the energy of Maa Durga which we refer to as Shakti does have strong underpinings in every aspect of our life, and is actually the governing philosophy behind many of the relational dynamics - visible and invisible.

" This story is a fable, but the philosophy it underlines is profoundly cerebral. Every force of evil in this world would be balanced by an equivalent force of good. Whenever the evil goes beyond a certain level, the forces of good come together to destroy the evil and restore the balance of this world."

Of course, the philosophy behind our worship of Maa Durga is not just an amalgamation of sundry religious rites. A rational scientist would find many similarities in facets of her story and our real life. For example, let us look at her weapons. The trident or trishul: The three-headed sharp weapon is said to symbolize the three gunas a human being is made of, i.e - tamas, rajas and sattva - this itself is a very complex and vast subject to understand. Discus or Sudarshan Chakra, Lord Vishnu's gift symbolizes the centre of creation. Thunderbolt or vajra, Indra's gift means steadiness of character, determination, and supreme power. Conch is the symbol of the primordial sound of "creation" - AUM. Spear represents auspiciousness which is a gift of fire which also symbolizes purity of power. The sword symbolizes intellect and wisdom with the complete sense of responsibility and the understanding to discriminate right from wrong. Bow and arrows are the combination of potential and kinetic powers symbolize all segments of ENERGY. The axe symbolizes the power of Vishwakarma, and has the power to create as well as destroy. Lotus represents wisdom, "LIBERATION through KNOWLEDGE". Snake symbolizes consciousness and the masculine energy of Shiva.

When you juxtapose this life-giving form of Maa Durga against the Trishul and sword-wielding warrior form of the Mother Goddess, she comes across as the Destroyer. The targets of her weapons of destruction are the evil forces which she wishes to protect her children from. So the philosophy of Maa Durga encompasses all three incarnations in one form - The Destroyer, The Life Giver, and The Creator.

Yes, it is easy to look upon the fable of Maa Durga as a story we have created for our own consumption. But like the examples we have illustrated above, there are several ways in which the legend of Maa Durga finds reflection in our daily lives and helps to underline some of the philosophies she represents. Let us examine a few of these.

According to mythological accounts, Ramba was an asura who pleased the fire God Agni with his devotion and got a boon that a son would be born to him who could not be killed by any God or man or animal. This son was named Mahishasura and he grew up to be a strong and powerful warrior. When he heard of the boon, it made him incredibly haughty and merciless, and he went around defeating all kinds of men and demi-Gods and expanding his own kingdom. This cold-blood massacre and destruction soon left the Gods worried, and they went into a huddle to plan an effective counter to Mahishasura without tampering with the boon he had been granted. The solution came from the Gods themselves, who took advantage of the syntax of the boon. The boon had mentioned God, man, and animal, but had no mention of the "woman". So the Gods put together their powers and created Maa Durga. She would fight for the forces of good and vanquish the evil. Armed with all the boons and weapons that the Gods could provide, Maa Durga took on the EVIL represented by Mahishasura. After a long and ferocious battle, she finally put an end to the cursed life of Mahishasura. This story is a fable, but the philosophy it underlines is profoundly cerebral. Every force of evil in this world would be balanced by an equivalent force of good. Whenever the evil goes beyond a certain level, the forces of good come together to destroy the evil and restore the balance of this world.

Outside of the physical manifestations of our prayers and devotion for Maa Durga, she also embodies the spirit and the characteristics of a mother. Maa Durga is the divine force we look up to who can protect us from worldly ills in every kind of situation because she is "omnipresent" and all powerful. SHE embodies the perfect amalgamation of power and mercy which we see in Mothers everywhere.

As we see from these few examples, Maa Durga is considered an epitome of Shakti (ENERGY) that is GOOD which can triumph over EVIL. Yes, our scriptures with all reaffirmation pour out a rich vein of philosophical underpinnings on which to lead our lives well, and gradually make an earnest effort for the self-realization and then merge with the DIVINE GOOD. Ultimately, it is the Mother's DIVINITY that encompasses the WHOLE COSMOS.

TO THE EDITOR

Too soon to pass judgment

Editor,

Having read through the article, 'MUA-II and MDA: Same wine in the same bottle' (ST Oct 15, 2018) I must mention here that I tend to agree to most of the points raised by H H Mohrmen in his write up but on some issues I beg to defer. Firstly I do not agree that the seven month old MDA government has lost its popularity. It has not lost its popularity at all. In fact the people, both in urban and rural areas, are still pinning their high hopes in this conglomerate MDA led by the young dynamic Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma. Till now he is looked upon as Mr. Clean until proven otherwise. Again, till date, no minister of the MDA Government is accused of any gross misdemeanour. The success and failure of the government cannot be judged by the educational qualifications of the ministers but by their ability to deliver. Also if we are to judge the overall performance of the government that can be done only after it completes at least two years in governance. It is too early to judge this government because it has completed only seven months and most of the new ministers are yet to be conversant with the intricacies of their respective ministries. Secondly, judging from what has happened I do not agree that Dr. Mukul was a strong Chief Minister but I tend to agree with those who called him a dictator or despotic CM who cared for no one, not even his cabinet colleagues (megalomaniac) and cornered almost all portfolios and ministries unto himself leaving his cabinet colleagues on skin and bones. To be despotic CM does not tantamount to strong CM. An able and strong CM is one who can distribute portfolios to each of the Ministers according to their ability to handle those and who can get his cabinet colleagues to act as a team to deliver good and efficient governance bereft of corruption and for the benefit of the public .

Hence, I personally feel that it is too early to conclude that this MDA government is the same wine in the same bottle. We have seen the wine of MUA I and MUA II for donkey's years but certainly the MDA has hardly produced any wine to definitely say this is red wine or spurious wine.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Know your mission Conrad Sangma!

Editor,

HH Morhmen's article seems rather prejudiced towards the Conrad Sangma led-MDA Government. He has done this in the past too - praise Mukul Sangma while berating those in the present government. However, I will agree with him on one point and that is the arbitrary transfer of officers at the whims and fancies of his ministers. The Chief Minister cannot succumb to coalition pressure when it comes to transfers and postings but Conrad Sangma seems to have done that when he immediately shifted some police officials from their present postings and transferred them elsewhere. In doing so, the CM has not gained the admiration of the forces. Police officers known to make a quick buck have been posted at strategic points to facilitate coal smuggling or to ensure smooth passage at check points. This is nothing but succumbing to pressure which in turn is linked to corruption. And now we hear of the intent to revive the State Lottery. Many years ago the Peoples' Rally Against Corruption (PRAC) comprising all leading pressure groups had done their utmost to stop the online lottery proposed to be run by the Lottery baron and former MP from Assam, Mani Kumar Subba.

Why, do these dubious firms always land up in Meghalaya unless there are touts who bring them in and make money by introducing them to powerful people in the Government. And why has this firm - NV International which still has heavy dues to pay back to the state even daring to file a case against the Government and claiming something like Rs 28 crore as being due to it. The Government has to make this whole deal public and the NGOs need to get to the bottom of this deal. We in Meghalaya do not want these storm troopers who want to make easy money cashing in from this state. And we expect the Government to stop encouraging touts and consultants from inhabiting the corridors of power.

Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma should know that it is not out of a whim that people voted his Government in. They wanted to give him and themselves a chance to experience better and transparent governance that will redeem Meghalaya from the morass of years of corruption, leading to poor service delivery. We know that some crooks from the MUA have found their way into the present government but we want to see the CM rein in these greedy ministers and putting them in their place. The people of Meghalaya should also learn not to vote for money but for a better state. If these rapacious ministers are reined in and shown their place, then Conrad Sangma would have earned a place in our hearts. Governance is not just political jugglery; it is a God-ordained responsibility and the young CM should be conscious of this. Young voters like me should not regret having voted in a government with an average age of 35 years.

Yours etc.,
Merinda Kharsohnoh,
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.

"Pessimists are the people who have no hope for themselves or for others. Pessimists are also people who think the human race is beneath their notice, that they're better than other human beings."

--- A. W. Tozer

The Shillong Times

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Courts to the rescue of citizens

INDIAN democracy rests on three important pillars - the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary with the media playing a fourth, yet intrinsic role in nurturing those core democratic values. In recent times the legislature has played safe on many contentious issues for fear of offending one section of the population or the other. This fear arises primarily from the fact that taking unpleasant decisions could erode the vote banks of politicians and political parties. From reading down Article 377 to the ruling on women entering Sabarimala temple, which the apex court has interpreted as 'gender justice,' the judiciary has remained the sheet anchor of the Indian people. In Meghalaya the High Court has been pro-actively aiding citizens who approach it with public interest litigations (PIL). The latest one on expanding and completing the repair work of the road leading to one of the region's largest medical institute, the North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute for Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS)and other public institutions located there is timely. It is difficult to understand why a road of a few kilometers should take over a year to complete. Meghalaya roads are notorious for needing frequent repairs and this is purely because of corruption in the Public Works Department (PWD) where ministers, contractors and engineers profit while the public is at the receiving end.

The latest PIL in the Meghalaya High Court pertains to the supply of non-potable water laced with oily substance to the residents of Shillong. The Court has taken cognizance of this plaint and made the PHED and the State Pollution Board the main respondents. Corruption in the PHED is an open secret and the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) has benefitted a particular technocrat who has ruled the roost until his retirement, despite brazen lack of performance and questionable deployment of funds. It is unbelievable that one person should wield so much power in a particular department but that was possible because of political patronage. For the citizen, things look dismal. Power supply is erratic; water supply is fraught with fears of contaminated water entering our kitchens; roads are in a pathetic condition in most parts of the city. The most neglected road by far is the one leading to the Union Christian College(UCC) in Umiam. The Justices could perhaps familiarize themselves with this road too which has led to many a slipped disc. There is a limit to corruption and only the Courts alone can rescue this blighted citizenry.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

Issues in the Bodo Movement

The North-East region of the country has been continuously experiencing a series of pulls and pushes traumas and turmoils, from the forces within and outside, during the lsat four decades of India's independence. It is a tribute to the political wisdom of Mr Rajiv Gandhi who realized the sensitive issues involved in the disturbed border areas of North-East and engineered a number of accords with the agitationists and rebel leaders of this region, such as A.G.P., Mizos, and Nagas opinion is sharply divided about these accords, the pendulum swinging from one extreme position to another. I fund this on the basis of my visit to the area of North-Eastern sector of the country.

In a democratic set up it is only through political processes that the regional demands could be legitimately satisfied within the broader national framework, Mr Rajiv Gandhi's perception of politics is based on the principles of understanding and mutual trust and it is this philosophy of politics that has guided him in determining the political processes in the country. The accord that he engineered with the A.G.P. did bring stability and peace for sometime but the region is extremely sensitive to political and other development issues and the A.G.P. government is facing new challenges for maintaining peace and stability.

The traumatic experiences that the Assam State has witnessed during the period of its unrest brought about a total collapse of the economy. Though the Congress(I) government tried to contain the regional aspirations and sub-nationalism, yet during the long spell of agitation by the Assam student community a climate of misunderstanding and suspicion was generated among the people and the forces of sub-nationalism assumed a formidable proportion.

Drugs, alcohol and the youth

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

So what are we going to do now? Are we supposed to trade-off between drugs and alcohol? Shall we discourse upon which is a holier evil of the two and hence, live with it? (Read ST October 8, 2018; Check on liquor leads to rise in drug abuse). Although the news report concerned Nongstoin town alone but the context applies to the entire state. It goes without saying that alcohol has been a perennial social problem in Meghalaya and now we seriously have the ugly head of drugs staring us in the face. The problem is even dire when the major affected group is the youth. Interestingly, these days the discourse on alcohol has died down; naturally since now we have drugs to deal with. However, does this mean that we have accepted alcohol as a way of life? To this there is a case in point; the lifting of the ban on the sale of alcohol through the wine stores did not result in any serious condemnation/ challenge from any prominent quarter. Be that as it may, alcohol continues to sell as a major problem for the youth now, added with a deadly cocktail of drugs. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly and philosophically speaking, we all live on drugs. Even a newly born baby is fed the very first dosages of drugs through the hands of its own mother. Of course, in the name of civility and the fight against infant mortality rate we commonly call them as medicine(s). Point being, our bodies are inherently programmed to take drugs. Indeed if properly taken, this external stimulation can cure ailments (cold, fever, etc). However, what it also does is that it psychologically makes us consciously/ unconsciously aware that such stimulations can give us additional feelings too (such as taking too much of any cough syrup in one go will give a fascinatingly-dizzy-sleepy feeling). This 'feeling' is increasingly looked upon by the youth to enable them to dodge/ deal with their problems. The same goes with alcohol. Where is its starting point? In general, studies have shown that moderate quantum of alcohol is beneficial for health but here lies the problem again - that this stimulant psychologically drives the body towards craving for more so as to elicit a so called wonderfully-satisfied feeling. It is this 'wonderfully-satisfied feeling' that the youth like to drown into in dealing with myriad issues.

Secondly, is alcohol a holier evil? Well to be candid and brazen; it is but that does not mean encouraging it. In fact, it is a catch 22 situation. In many cases we will hear phrases such as 'alcohol is a great social leveler', 'alcohol destroys all forms of social class structure', etc. Moreover, during the time when alcohol sale was banned in Meghalaya; people were helplessly indulging themselves (through the secret/black market) into 'locally made alcohol'. To many, these local brands (if at all they could be called as 'brand') are extremely harmful to health purely on account of their make and ingredients involved. There have been numerous accounts on how and what such alcohol makers do so as to 'spike an aggressively coarse taste' in the drink. That way when the ban was lifted, in many quarters it was taken as a welcome step (not to mention the return of tax revenues to the state government). Critically, overall in society this is a conundrum. To the social fabric of our state, the argument of 'catch 22 situation' does not work. Importantly, where do we draw the line? How do we keep the youth away from alcohol? Is awareness enough or do we now need in practice a 'strict moral policing' (across stakeholders)?

Thirdly, that we have made some sort of a compromise with alcohol is evident from the statement "ban ia kaba kin dih drugs, dang lah ba ki dih kyiad" (at least they are addicted to alcohol and not drugs). If anything, statements like these only depict the gravity of the problem that we are dealing with. There was a point in time when we used to talk about alcohol as a root cause of all evil and there used to be debate competitions based on the subject-matter. However, those days are now passé. Today, we have a new demon to wrestle against; and indeed it is far worse than anything we have crossed upon. The recent news reports in print/electronic media concerning drugs related arrests (both sellers and buyers) are only the tip of the ice-berg. The undercurrents of drug abuse in our state run far deeper and wider than we can fathom. Somehow it seems as if it is pretty easy to find drugs in the market (if one really wants to). Disturbingly, drug addiction is starting to be considered as a way of life; a status symbol if you like. Doing drugs to some youth is actually a depiction of being macho/ manly; to some a way to enjoy; and to some an escape from the various challenges of life. This will only lead to an increased number of drugs related tragedies in future (starting from petty stealing/cheating culminating on murder). Thus, it is time we act and nip the problem in the bud; else the number of rehabilitation centres we have now will be overwhelmed in due course of time.

Fourthly, although drugs are a clear and present danger in Meghalaya let us try and address a bigger question. Are the drug suppliers trying to create a market or are they servicing an already existent market? Indeed, it is difficult to give a clear cut answer to this question. However, going by reports of the last five years across all forms of media the number of drug peddlers and buyers/users in Meghalaya are on the rise. Hence, if there was not an 'already existing market' we are definitely beyond any iota of a doubt seeing the 'creation of such a market'. Drug abuse is in a period of 'market development' and if this is not stopped it will further lead to 'market penetration'. If that happens, it shall be curtains for the state; it will be a case of 'irrevocable damage'; one that shall be near to impossible to reverse. To this, factor add the developing social fabric of our state. Our families are getting smaller with more independent children. Add to that the loosening social value systems (tip kur tip kha) over time in terms of keeping up with family members, relatives, friends and neighbours. The end result is that the youth are mostly on their isolated own. They may be surrounded with people, but they are not with people. Couple this with the challenges of life; the result is a disturbing inclination/ motivation towards drug abuse.

Lastly, it is true that it is a persons' right to drink and get drunk too (if he/she wishes to), at least we have not come to 'the right to do drug abuse'. By all means let us not let it get to that level. To this end, the social fabric of the state will have to rise up responsibly to counter it this growing menace. Moreover, the governance of the state shall have to live up to its duties of creating an 'enabling and nurturing environment' for the youth to learn, try, grow and prosper.

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

TO THE EDITOR

Pasteur Institutes of India

Editor

During the colonial era, four Pasteur Institutes were set up for coordinated pathological research in British governed areas namely at Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh), Coonoor (Tamil Nadu), Shillong (Meghalaya) and Yangon (Now in Myanmar). The first one among them i.e. The Pasteur Institute of India at Kasauli set up in the year 1900 was merged with Central Research Institute in the year 1939. The Central Research Institute (CRI) located at Kasauli is now recognized as a Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Training in Microbiology by Himachal Pradesh University. The Pasteur Institute located in Coonoor (1907), which was originally known as the Pasteur Institute of Southern India was re-christened as The Pasteur Institute of India and is functioning as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, from the year 1977. The Pasteur Institute at Coonoor has developed into a full-fledged Research and Training Institute and presently offers various academic programmes in Microbiology, Biotechnology and Biochemistry in both non-medical and medical streams in affiliation with Bharathiar University, Coimbatore and Dr MGR Medical University, Chennai. The Pasteur Institute of Burma at Rangoon (1915) in present day Yangon (Myanmar) is now a part of the National Health Laboratory (NHL) of Myanmar. Recently the Institute is reported to have developed collaboration with the French Pasteur Institute for sharing technical expertise on diagnosis and laboratory-based surveillance of infectious diseases.

The Pasteur Institute at Shillong (1917) established on similar lines with other Pasteur Institutes, is not only a historic Institute, but is the only one of its kind located in the North-East Region of India. It is therefore desired that the Pasteur Institute at Shillong be developed into a world class Institute for Research and Training in the field of Microbiology and Health Sciences. This would not only lead to strengthening of the Higher Education Scenario in the region but is also likely to open up new vistas for revenue generation through promotion of Heritage/ Medical Tourism in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.
Dr Ranjan K.
Bhagobaty.,
Via email

Blue Revolution

Editor,

I was delighted to read the news item "Blue Revolution to come to State on October 26 " (ST Oct.12, 2018). I was also pleased to learn that this will be the second phase with the total project cost of Rs 51 crore. However, the components of the project were not spelt out in the news report and this leaves room for a lot of speculations. The report should have revealed the various components of the project.

The first phase of the Blue Revolution, better known as the Aquaculture Mission was launched with much fanfare in 2012 and with the clear target of creating 20,000 ponds in order to achieve self sufficiency in fish production and thus avoid fish import from outside the State. The total cost of the first phase (aquaculture mission) was Rs 25 crore and most of it has gone to Garo Hills, especially to Ampati and South West Garo Hills. Nowhere were the targets met either in terms of creating the required number of fish ponds or for reaching self sufficiency in fish production. It ended up only in creating a few fish ponds and producing only just a few thousand quintals of fish. Where are the 20,000 fish ponds (perhaps only few thousand puddles) and where was the targeted 15,000 Metric Tonnes of fish that was to have been in the market by now? But the money is spent. How was it spent? There is no account for it!.This is a huge scam and an independent inquiry should be ordered to unravel the truth. This second phase of the Aquaculture Mission (Blue Revolution) will meet the same fate as the first one if transparent and measurable guidelines are not followed in implementing the project. Moreover, there should be proper monitoring at every step in the implementation of the second phase of the project so that no aberrations take place in Phase II of the Mission. Also , the functioning of the Fisheries Department should be properly followed up to ensure that it runs in the correct lines since there has been no follow up and review of the Department since Meghalaya was created forty six years ago. In fact a review of all departments is called for to assess their efficacy.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Stop politicizing Ayodhya

Editor,

It is an undeniable fact that the Ram Mandir' issue in Ayodhya had always been a very controversial matter which had in the past led the nation into the whirlpool of bloodshed and massacre. Once again the issue is being raised by political parties including the ruling BJP. Everyone knows that it is up to the Supreme Court to give a verdict in this regard on the basis of concrete evidence and after weighing all aspects of this contentious matter. So the question why should politicians raise the matter in public gatherings. We should wait for the verdict of the apex court and everyone should respect that verdict irrespective of whether it is to our liking or not. I request the Supreme Court to give strict directions to all political parties and politicians not to aggravate matters by raising the Ayodhya issue in public forum for the purpose of vote bank politics. because this will only create schisms in the country and provoke the people of both religious the groups to indulge in violence. Our country cannot afford this now.

Yours etc.,
MFU Tandvi,
New Delhi

Regionalism Raises Ugly Head

Insider 'veto' on outsider

By Poonam I Kaushish

India pre-1947 resounded to the battle cry of "throw out the British". Sprinkled with nationalism, all pledged to make India united and secular. The 2018 *Mera Bharat Mahan* is all about chucking the "outsider *aam aadmi"* from States and imposing an "insider curfew" on them. Peppered with loads of patriotic regional *chaap, a*ll promising to make their respective States more local and faithful than ever.

The trigger for the latest exodus of Biharis and UP *bhaiyas* from Gujarat was the abysmal rape of a 14-month-old girl in Sabarkantha district by a Bihari lad last week. This unleashed the genie of regionalism in the State whereby the State was caught in the vortex of 'Gujarat for Gujaratis' and 'throw out the North Indians' campaign resulting in poor migrants being beaten, attacked and threatened, notwithstanding, assurance by Chief Minister Rupani of safety and action against the perpetrators.

Similar to the 'throw out North-Easterners' from Bengaluru in October 2014. Recall, two North-East students were beaten by three men for not speaking Kannada and another by seven men. Alongside, they were asked if they were Japanese, Chinese or Korean? Indeed, resentment runs deep over North-East and North Indian techies flooding the city with their loud, noisy, in-your-face manners. In Mumbai, the same paranoia against North Indians raises its ugly head every few years. In Punjab and Assam Biharis are no longer welcome.

Questionably, are we racist? Is regionalism ingrained in our psyche? How does one control the hate mongers? Does our polity realize the ramifications of this regionalism? Does it not further divide people on regional lines and is antithetical to hope of narrowing India's burgeoning regional divide, thereby unleashing a Frankenstein?

Clearly, in a milieu of competitive democracy, if caste politics ensures convergence of electoral booty, politics based on region has better chance of polarising voters *via* vicious speeches induced raw emotions of hostility and hate. Who cares if it is destructive, stokes violence and sows seeds of rabid regionalism alongside communalism.

Recall, regionalism debuted in Tamil Nadu in early 60s, wherein people's alienation from the Centre led to the DMK's birth, which later split into AIADMK etc. It then moved to Maharashtra where little-known cartoonist Bal Thackeray became the self-styled champion of everything Marathi. His Shiv Sena nurtured on the infamous *'Marathi manoos'* standard, by which practically everyone in Mumbai was an 'outsider' except 28% Maharashtrians. His first victims were skilled labourers from southern States who were branded *"lungi-wallas"* and their businesses attacked. After them Gujarati entrepreneurs and now North Indian UP *bhaiyas* or Biharis.

Then Assam burnt over the foreigners issue in the 80's, when the All Assam Students Union started an oust all "illegal Bangladeshi migrants" movement. This caught the people's imagination and the Congress Government was voted out and Asom Gana Parishad elected. In Nagaland and Manipur students want all non-Nagas-Manipuris out. Regionalism had arrived.

In November 2003, India resounded to parochialism again, when Assamese stopped 20,000 Biharis from taking a recruitment test in Guwahati. Biharis retaliated by stopping trains from North East, dragged people out and killed and beat them. Assamese hit back killing over 52 Biharis. Dreaded militant outfits ULFA and All Bodo Students Union joined the mayhem. Their slogan: "All Hindi speaking people leave Assam". "Catch Assamese and kill them," countered Biharis.

Why blame locals alone? Our *netas* too reveled in playing the regional card. In the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP dubbed Congress Lucknow candidate Karan Singh, former J&K's *Sadr-i-Riyasat* 'outsider' vis-à-vis 'insider' Vajpayee. Never mind, Lucknow is miles away from Gwalior, Vajpayee's birthplace. Interestingly, the Sangh again portrayed 'Vajpayee the local' in Himachal, by underscoring his love for Manali.

Thus, regionalism thrived with Parties and leaders making it their *mantra.* Former Prime Minister and *kisan* leader Charan Singh floated the farmer-oriented Janata Party and Devi Lal Lok Dal in Haryana. Badal his Akali Dal in Punjab, NT Rama Rao Telugu Desam in Andhra, Bangla's Mamata Banerjee her Trinamool Congress and Naveen Patnaik floated the BJD in Orissa. All with a common USP: "We are locals who shall rule, Delhi is *dur* — the outsider."

Additionally, Mandalisation gave a further impetus to regionalism with "Made in India" leaders Mayawati, Mulayam, Laloo, etc. Their electorate no longer was willing to know-tow to centrist Parties and those foisted by them. They plugged for own *biradari.*

Further complicating matters we not only have castes and sub-castes*(gotras):* Brahmins, Baniyas, Dalits, and Kapus etc, we also have to deal with Biharis, UPwallahs, Haryanvis and all South Indians are dubbed Madrasis. Along-with pre-conceived notions on place, language, cuisine and customs a person comes from. Consequently, our large regional diversity, leads to communities pitted up against each other ideologically or for resources.

While Northerners look down on *'Madrasis'* and their eating habits, Southerners think *'Panjus'* are loud, braggarts and only good enough for *Bhangra!* The Bengalis are intellectuals, and a half-decent Bihari is supposed to crack IAS. There are the stingy *'Gujjus'* from the West and *'Bhaiyyas'* from UP. These differences make people suspicious of those who are not like them. Hence, 'people like us' close ranks. These closed communities are naturally full of prejudices towards the 'outsider.'

Undoubtedly, citizens should have equal job opportunities across the country. The problem kicks in when locals demand their pound of flesh and to some extent, rightly so. Arguably, why should people from outside a State apply for menial jobs? If outsiders corner sweepers or helpers jobs where should the locals go for their bread and butter? Join militants and take up guns? Does that promote national integration?

In States where militancy rages, statistics prove unemployed local youths taking to crime and terrorism as jobs are cornered by outsiders. Kashmir and North East bear this out.

Alas, over the years are polity has chipped away with deadly precision at the reality of a united and integrated India where regional aspirations play second fiddle to national unity. And, where every Indian has the right to live in any part of the country he chooses and get equal opportunities to earn a decent livelihood. In sum, an India that is equitable and offers a level-playing field for all classes, castes and communities.

High time we remember India is a Union of States and address this 'outsider' issue else regionalism will lead to disintegration of the country. The Government needs to put in place a strong deterrence in instances of violence towards a particular community or regional abuse against 'outsiders' who come to different States to eke out a living.

The country needs a strong anti-racial law to condemn all forms of racist discrimination, abuse, assaults and killings as it a threat to their right to live. The Law Ministry needs to frame a strong law which covers all kinds of regional crimes committed against regional minorities living away from home.

A clear no-tolerance policy towards regional intolerance is the need of the hour. The message should be loud and clear. Time we looked beyond the *gora-kala*-Hindu-Muslim, Madrasi-Punjabi phobia. We are two sides of the great skin divide - all people. We need to sing along to that old Bollywood song: *Hum Bihari hain toh kya huah, dil wale hain!* —— INFA

" The myth of the Pujas is a simple one – full of rural sweetness. ... The Pujas are, in part, an ever-returning homage to that magical sense of being rescued, so indispensable to children."

-- Amit Chaudhuri

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EXIT AKBAR

THE #MeToo movement in India has claimed its first scalp in the name of a Union Minister. With the resignation of MJ Akbar as minister of state for external affairs, after initial hesitation, the popular cause for safety of women in workplaces has registered a major victory. This is bound to embarrass the Narendra Modi government at least to an extent in the run-up to the next parliamentary polls, but chances are also that this might not be last such case involving a governmental figure.

The campaign in India has already made several top names in the entertainment as also media industry run for cover, or even resign from their high posts. This, after the US-initiated global campaign hit several male reputations in the West in a matter of a few months. More of such "exposes" are bound to come out and this is time for many in various walks of life to be prepared to face the consequences of their wayward actions in workplaces or elsewhere.

The minister has, upon his return from an official visit to Nigeria, filed a case against one of the woman professionals who raised serious allegations against him, and outright rejected all the charges levelled against him by her as also some other former colleagues at work. His initial effort seemed to be to fight back and hang on to the chair. More allegations followed. Under the circumstances, it was untenable that he continues in the ministry as the reputation of the government itself was seriously ruptured. One is not guilty until proven so. Akbar will still have time to prove his innocence or face the consequences of his allegedly wrong actions.

On the positive side, the campaign and the resignations of several key figures from their posts following the levelling of charges would send out right signals and help clean up the workplaces of wrong trends, and restore sanctity there. The setting up of a panel by the Union Government with some retired judges at its helm, in the backdrop of the flurry of allegations, is welcome. This would also ensure that only genuine allegations will spring up in future as there would be legal scrutiny of every word that is sent out in the form of accusations. Since several of these complaints related to incidents that were alleged to have taken place long years ago, producing evidence might not be easy for the complainants. But, this might not act as a constraint in bringing the guilty to book.

Buying Russian Missile System

Despite US Sanctions Threat

By Atul Cowshish

Has India cocked a snook at the US by clinching a crucial $5.4 billion s-400 Triumf missile defence system with Russia that can potentially place India under severe US sanctions under CAATSA? It appears so at the outset. A narrative is being circulated to demonstrate how 'independent' India is in doing trade with Russia despite a looming US threat of sanctions. The US sanctions will kick in only on November 4 but India seems sure of being given a waiver by President Donald Trump.

Of course, it could all go wrong, given the unpredictable ways of Trump who does not hesitate to profess his 'love' for India and its prime minister, Narendra Modi, while not sparing criticism of the country for its trade and tariff practices that irk him. He has called India 'Tariff King'. He also likes to make fun of Modi's English accent!

But there are reasons to believe that Trump will not derail the India-Russia deal. The US seemed to have signalled in advance its approval of the missile deal ahead of its signing during a low-key two-day Putin's visit to India in the last week of September. The US stand was not made publicly known perhaps to avoid similar demands being made by some other countries who want to continue trading with Russia—and also to convince India about US 'sincerity' in wooing India.

The waiver, as and when it comes, for the Russian missile defence system will be a one-time exception. But India is also hoping that the US will also not apply full sanctions in some oil-related related deals with Iran, one of the countries along with Russia, and China facing the full fury of maverick Trump. But India may not make a big issue should the US veto oil trade with Iran.

What is of more importance for India, as far as Iran is concerned, is the completion of the Chabahar port that will open a trade route to land-locked Afghanistan and the territories beyond. At the moment, the US position about Chabahar is clouded in uncertainty. It must have caused some anxiety in New Delhi but it does not seem to have been fully conveyed to the US.

There are questions about the claim that signing the Russian missile defence system is an example of India's 'freedom' to pursue its interests unmindful of US wishes. The incorporation of the Russian missile system—after about two years—would make the country much more secure than it is at present.

"The incorporation of the Russian missile system—after about two years—would make the country much more secure than it is at present."

But procuring a 'game changer' defence missile system would normally have been a big occasion for drum beating by an Indian government that likes to celebrate everything that it does with much fanfare, publicity blitz and plenty of self-praise. Contrast this with the fact that there was only a muted reference to the missile deal in a lengthy joint statement issued by India and Russia. There was no mention of it in the joint press conference given by Modi and Vladimir Putin, the Russian President.

"Modi might see him as a good friend of India, but the fact is that the Jordanian King is not in the same league as the US and Chinese presidents and there is nothing 'special' in India's ties with Jordan."

It looked as though India was signing a deal with Russia in a hush-hush manner. Putin arrived in New Delhi to a warm reception at the airport but what was glaring was the absence of the prime minister. Putin was received by the external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, not Modi as might have been more befitting given the importance attached to Putin's visit and his stature as a leader who commands wide influence.

Modi had broken protocol on the visits of at least half a dozen heads of state or government by travelling to the Delhi airport to receive them with his customary hug. That included (former) US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Eyebrows were raised when he personally received the Jordanian ruler at the airport. Modi might see him as a good friend of India, but the fact is that the Jordanian King is not in the same league as the US and Chinese presidents and there is nothing 'special' in India's ties with Jordan.

It can be surmised that Modi stayed away from the airport because he wanted the outside world (read the US) to note that India was not treating Putin effusively because he has become a bad boy in the eyes of the West. It is also possible that the US wanted India to keep Putin's visit as low key as possible.

Not only Modi was absent at the Delhi airport, almost all the ceremonies associated with the visit of foreign dignitary were avoided. There was no guard of honour in the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Putin did not pay floral tributes at the Rajghat. There was no stately banquet for him. In short, he came, he talked and quietly returned to freezing Moscow to face the blast from the US, the UK and other Western countries that have painted him as a villain who supports oppressive regimes by supplying arms, kills suspected Russian traitors in Europe and interferes in elections in the US.

The Americans, still not rid of their habit of telling others what is right and wrong for them, cannot be happy when such a leader receives a warm welcome in a 'friendly' country. But the US has already annoyed many of its old and traditional allies and friends. Why should it antagonize a newly acquired friend like India for doing something that after all, poses no threat to the US? The Russian missile defence system is clearly designed to protect India from threats from China and Pakistan; neither of the two is looked benignly by the US.

What could have perhaps prevented the US from thinking of using CAATSA against India was the near certainty of striking more lucrative defence deals with India, worth many more billions of dollars than the 'paltry' $5.4 billion s-400 Triumf order India is placing on Russia.

It would not be out of place that, according to Trump, India is showing signs of buckling under US 'pressure' by agreeing to lower tariff in consideration of US wishes. Trump has publicly announced that India wants a trade deal and the government of India has been silent on it.

What it all boils down to it is that the US gains by keeping its eyes and mouth shut on India's missile defence deal with Russia. The Modi dispensation has entered into a tight US embrace which pleases a business-minded Trump even when he knows that India is not capable of being a counterbalancing force in Asia to face the Chinese Dragon.

Faith and the reds

By Prem Chandran

The Left Democratic Front government headed by strongman Pinarayi Vijayan is obviously rattled in the face of massive street protests rejecting the line his government as also the LDF and more importantly the Supreme Court have taken in the matter of women entry to the Sabarimala Sree Ayyappa temple. What was thought to be an attempt to ensure equality of the sexes in worship has failed to enthuse the women devotees of Lord Ayyappa themselves, as is evident from the protests spilling into the streets town after town in the southern parts of Kerala.

Taken unawares, the LDF government is handling the matter with both caution and restraint. At the same time, it would now appear that the Communists have unwittingly given a platform for the BJP and other Hindu outfits to rally forces against the reds.

At the height of the protest movement, he took a flight to the UAE Wednesday to collect contributions for the Chief Minister's Flood Relief Fund, leaving it to his deputy and industries minister EP Jayarajan to tackle the matter. In other words, he sent out signals that he couldn't care less for the protests. Jayarajan stated as much – that the proteststst would fizzle out sooner than later.

The decision by the Supreme Court to grant entry to women of all ages into Sabarimala, the seat of Lord Ayyappa, came from a division bench of the apex court shortly before Chief Justice Dipak Misra stepped down from office late last month. The existing practice was to disallow women of menstruating ages – between age 10 and 50 – to the hilltop temple or its precincts, based on arguments allowed by the Kerala high court in 1991; the reason cited being that the Lord is present in the temple in a celibate state and that the presence of young women in their menstruating age would not be to His liking and also affect the sanctity of the shrine.

The temple that traces its history to the 12th Century sits atop a cluster of 18 hills forming into dense forest. One of the largest pilgrimage centres in the world, the Lord Ayyappa shrine attracts an annual turnout of over 15million visitors in highly devotional mode.

The LDF governments in the state generally took the stand that all women should be allowed entry into Sabarimala and the shrine. They saw in it another grand design to promote the cause of equality – something that they had not been able to achieve in other fields of human activity despite long years of lip-service to the cause. Expectations were also that this would draw the support of women in larger numbers to the Communists. When the apex court order came, the government had glee on its face. Its stand had been vindicated. The tone was palpable in Chief Minister Vijayan's stress that the government would do everything to implement the apex court order.

Within days, however, the scenario saw a dramatic change. Large numbers of women formed the vanguard of the protests against the apex court order, and began alleging that faith was facing a crisis. The southern districts of the state are faced with an upheaval of an unusual kind. The RSS that initially backed the apex court order quickly changed its tune; but not the LDF and its government. In a way, there was little it could do under the present circumstances. As the apex court had, in effect, ratified the government stand on Sabarimala through a court order, it would look odd if the government again approached the court with a review petition. Meanwhile, it also occurred to the Travancore Devaswom Board, a prop of the state government that governs large numbers of temples in southern districts, that it could not take a stand different from the government stand.

The situation was Advantage BJP, which claims to uphold the cause of the Hindus in specific. The party that tried hard to make a mark in the state could, even after the Modi wave across the nation, just about manage to get one seat in the 140-member state assembly in the 2016 elections. The party in the state is virtually rudderless after a credible figure like Kummanam Rajasekharan was moved to Mizoram as Governor a while ago. In a state where about half the population is Hindu and as much comprised Muslims and Christians, an electoral success is not easy for the saffron party. That's possible only if there is a total unity of the Hindu forces – something that, till yesterday, was impossible and a mirage. Now, the LDF has handed down such a possibility on a platter to the BJP's hands, though there still are very many if's and but's for a BJP upsurge in the state.

The Chief Minister is in a combative mood, though. At the height of the protest movement, he took a flight to the UAE Wednesday to collect contributions for the Chief Minister's Flood Relief Fund, leaving it to his deputy and industries minister EP Jayarajan to tackle the matter. In other words, he sent out signals that he couldn't care less for the protests. Jayarajan stated as much – that the proteststst would fizzle out sooner than later.

All eyes on the present round of temple rituals in Sabarimala. The shrine opened Wednesday evening for the usual six-day rituals marking the Malayalam month of Thulam. The big question is, how many young women would dare to visit the hill shrine, backed by the green signal women got from the apex court to venture into sacred hills and its highly sanctified shrine. If the apex court refused to change its mind and dismisses the few review petitions that were already filed in the past few days, chances are that at least smaller numbers of young women would venture in there – if not during the present ritual days, then in the coming months. In due course, the protests could lose its steam.

Notably, the state government is handling the protests with restraint, in order to avoid turning the situation more grim and also avoid helping the BJP to take political advantage. Yet, fact is also that for the first time in the history of the state, the BJP has been able to create a stir of notable proportions. With this protest movement, the political history of Kerala might witness a major change and take a new direction. The influence of the reds might slowly be on the wane and of the BJP on the ascendant. The fight between those on the side of faith and those against faith are, as of now, heavily loaded in favour of the former. The street protests have demonstrated as much.

TO THE EDITOR

Stop this 'Fastival' culture

Editor,

The word Fastival is intentionally spelt like that because while some people are fasting others are enjoying all kinds of festivals held in this city and beyond. There are too many of these festivals held at Government expense while school teachers (under different systems such as the Deficit system, SSA etc) have to go without salaries for months on end. Is this fair to the teaching community? All the MLAs and ministers would not be where they are if they were not taught by their teachers. So why do successive Governments play foul when it comes to paying teachers their just dues? And why allot so much money to Arts and Culture which spends most of its funds on entertainment of an elite lot and paying event managers who make money at the expense of Meghalaya. From every Government we hear the same old excuse – financial crunch when it comes to paying teachers on time. When will their payment be regularized so that they too receive their salaries on the first day of the month like all the officers and clerks working in the Government system? Can we expect the MDA Government led by Conrad Sangma whose father was once a teacher, to consider the plight of school teachers and ensure that they do not have to agonise over their salaries after having rendered their duties with all sincerity?

Yours etc.,
Lou Majaw (artiste),
Shillong- 8

Assembly Complex – a distant dream.

Editor,

The much awaited dream of having our own Assembly Complex in the proposed site at Mawdiangdiang appears to be a distant dream or at best a farce. Like someone sarcastically said, perhaps only in the era of our grand grandchildren will we see this structure coming up. It pains and annoys me to see things drifting and not going the way people desire them to when they elect their representatives. Be it during the Speakership of Bindo Lanong or Charles Pyngrope or Abu Taher Mondal … all are just big mouths, visionless and incapable of delivering. People have outrightly rejected them after their speakership. Dr Donkupar Roy, the onus is now on you but I'm doubtful if leopards can change their stripes or a lemon can turn sweet. So, the potential candidates from Shella Constituency can use this as animation to fire the bullet to their heart's content and be the giant killer. Thus history will repeat itself. But, if Dr Donkupar Roy could make the State Assembly building come up during his tenure he would have turned the dreams and aspirations of every Meghalayan into reality. His own future too would be bright and he would continue to win from Shella.

There is a saying. "Where there's a will there's a way". Wake up Mr. Speaker Sir, time is racing so take this as a golden opportunity to create history and win the people's hearts with your leadership and definitely your name and fame will be imprinted in the minds and hearts of the people. Truly, we have high expectations from you and the new MDA govt.

Yours etc.,
T.K.Lyngdoh
Shillong -4

Will the State Pollution Board wake up?

Editor,

Meghalaya is called the "Abode of clouds" - a beautiful paradise where tourists love to visit and experience it's beauty but as development is at its peak many factories have played spoilsport and are polluting the Meghalayan atmosphere. One such is the M/s Abhi Coke Factory located at East Jaintia Hills where every morning you can see and experience black and sometimes white foul smelling smoke emanating from its solid, tall chimney visible up to the district headquarters. What I don't understand is why this is not visible to others and why no one is speaking up. The smoke is not just purified smoke from the incense sticks; it's harmful smoke mixed with certain harmful compounds and is released as a result of coke production. This smoke may cause serious health hazards not now but later. What I also see is that the factory doesn't have smoke precipitators or filtering systems. Moreover the location of the factory is an eyesore where certain schools and important establishments are there so my request to the State Pollution Control Board is to please take measures before it's too late. Of course the factory may serve be creating wealth for its owners and livelihoods for poor workers but health is much more precious for what is the use of wealth when health is compromised.

Your's etc.,
Nissar Fazil
Ladrymbai,
East Jaintia Hills

Time to effectively quash fake news

Editor,

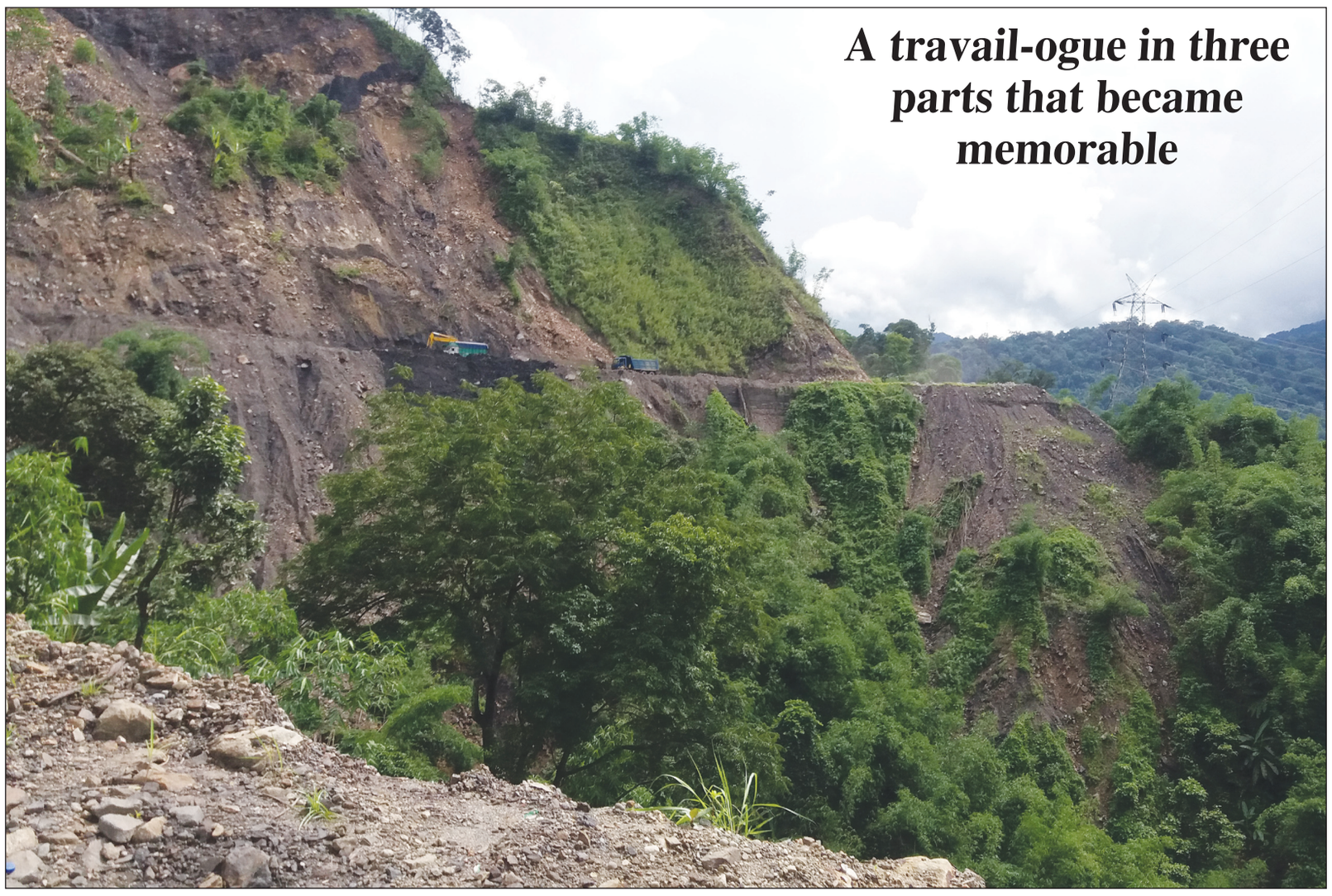
Rumours and fake news that have been circulated by 'cyber-nationalists' must effectively be dealt with to unplug the panic channel that can instigate the mob to lynch. Recent cases of lynching had their origin in hate - speeches and rumours in social media, which snowballed into street murders. Rema Rajeshwari, Superintendent of Police in Jogulamba Gadwal district of Telangana reportedly ordered training session for 500 police officers to counter fake news. Officials go to villages and spread awareness about social issues. They have joined WhatsApp groups in villages and nip any rumour in the bud. His efforts have earned him great success. Not a single rumour - related lynching has been staged in his jurisdiction. Given that lynching has become a new normal, Rema Rajeshwari model needs to be followed in every district of our country to effectively stop rising incidents of lynching.

West Bengal police have also done a good job in timely and effectively tackling rumours. Recently, a fake news that the state government had sanctioned a five - day Eid holiday was doing the rounds in social media to incite communal tension. But the police over there promptly took the help of Twitter to dispel the rumour in time. Administrative vigil both digital and direct to weed out any kind of hatred generating rumour is the need of the hour. There should be an effort to build strong public opinion against lynching as it throws down the gauntlet at the law of the land.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

Of cheaters, broken roads & Tawang



A travail-ogue in three parts that became memorable

The trip to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh was the result of days of deliberations and series of altercations with my friend, who had come to Shillong from Delhi. Finally, on July 16 we left for our destination, almost unprepared for the trip.

In our haste, we completely forgot about getting the inner line permit papers and decided to get it from Tezpur, from where we were to take a tourist Sumo to Tawang. Between Tezpur and Tawang, it was an eventful time.

Time in this passage is divided on the basis of its flow and will have its ebbs and tides. The anecdotes, which can be stringed together into a travelogue, will focus more on the trying times and the hurdles and hassles of the journey. This negativity in narration of the road to Tawang is not only to overcome the monotony of praises by awe-struck tourists but also to highlight the appalling picture behind a façade.

Tezpur travails

Tezpur was our transit point. Passenger cars to Tawang are available every morning. The plan was to reach Tezpur by noon and take a car to Tawang. However, the first mistake, albeit unknowingly, which we made was taking a bus to Tezpur from Guwahati via Nagaon. It takes not less than five hours, unless the conductor and the driver feel too lonely to run with 5-6 passengers and decide to delay departure time by 45 minutes, in taking that detour. Later, we came to know about the route through bypass. It takes less than three hours on a lucky day.

The bus conductor asked us to get down in Nagaon and showed another bus. On enquiring he said there were not enough passengers to Tezpur. Our travail had already begun, again without us being aware of it. By the time we reached Tezpur it was already 12 and we were hungry.

After picking up munchies we took an auto (we were told by the food joint owner that the fare to the bus stand was Rs 10 and so we expected a short journey). But the path seemed never-ending and when we realised that we were going in the wrong direction it was too late.

After an argument, we left in a huff for another ride, this time a gentleman who dropped us at the bus stop at a cost of Rs 100 (this was despite us sharing the ride with at last five other passengers).



(Top) The sight of heavy vehicles almost hanging from broken roads can sink your heart; (above) Sela Lake; and (right) the main point in Tawang town

However, the ordeal took an hour of our precious time and we had already missed the car. That meant that we had to spend the night in a nearby hotel. The man at the counter, who had helped us with the inner line permit papers, promised comfortable accommodation and asked a "colleague" to show us the way to 'XYZ hotel'.

There is no end to deception in this mortal world and that we learnt so well on our trip.



The hotel, though looked decent from outside, turned out a damp squib inside. With broken toilet flush and clogged drain in the bathroom, used towels and stained bed sheets, the young manager, a Bengali from Assam, was shameless to smile and quote Rs 1,200 a night.

After threatening to call up an imaginary friend in Tezpur and walking out of the hotel, we settled for Rs 600, a new towel (which they had to buy from the nearby market) and a starched bed sheet.

As the sultry summer and the day's hassles took a toll on us, we melted in the bed immediately after taking bath. The next day was to start early.

Tawang, finally

We were told at the counter that the shared vehicle would pick us up at 5am. So both my friend and I were ready. When we got into the Sumo, there were only two passengers, the mother-son were from Bomdila. The vehicle took us back to the bus stop where it waited for 45 minutes for passengers. When asked, the driver nonchalantly answered it was the regular practice and we should learn to be patient.

By the time we started for Tawang, it was 7am. The journey was 12-hour long and we would be left with no time to go around the town after reaching Tawang. But the road trip through the snaky broken roads of Arunachal (till then we had no idea what nightmare awaited us) looked promising despite the fact that two of us managed seats at the back of the Sumo. A young army jawan, who later told us that he was from Himachal Pradesh and would go beyond Tawang, smirked at me and said, "Brace for a hard journey."

The Kameng river started following us from Bhalukpong, the border locality where papers were checked and formalities done to ensure there were no illegal migrants.

The journey till Tippi in West Kameng was pleasant. Once the vehicle crossed Tippi, where we had stopped for refreshment, the real hurdle started. The road (if we could call it that) was broken beyond repair though JCBs and workers were busy fixing it. The car had to stop several times to make way for vehicles coming from the opposite direction. Later, a tourist car driver told us that the road remains perpetually broken and despite the Border Roads Organisation's eight-year struggle, no solution could be reached.

We overcame the fatigue and muscle cramps at 6th Mile with a sumptuous meal of roti/rice, vegetables and chicken. The spicy chutney was a booster and we were ready for another roller-coaster ride.

It was a joyride for more than an hour and the road smoothened as the car neared Sela. The Sela Pass is located between Tawang and West Kameng districts and one of the highest points in the region. The vehicle stopped again for another round of refreshment. The Sela Lake reflecting the Tibetan flags of multiple colours was serene and mysterious. Clouds slithered down the mountain slopes to settle atop the lake making it look even more enigmatic.

After a break of 30 minutes, the vehicle and its passengers were ready to continue the journey but only for a few minutes. A senior army official was travelling with his family in a car followed by a convoy. The pace of the vehicles was sluggish owing to the mucky and broken road but as the traffic halted, a state police man came up to us with an apologetic smile and informed that the army official's wife wanted to take photographs. Since the road was broad enough for one vehicle, there was nothing we could do but wait.

The dilapidated road continued till we reached Tawang. It got worse in places where there were landslips a few days ago following incessant rain. It was surprising how, despite the advanced technology at hand, the BRO had failed to provide tough roads in almost a decade. This is despite the fact that Tawang is a popular tourist site.

No wonder the bad roads had prompted locals to come up with imaginative one-liners written on rusty signboards. While one said 'Safety on road is safe tea at home' as a warning against drunken driving and speeding, another read 'Check your nerves on my curves' as a pointer to hairpin curves.

By the time we reached Tawang, we had exceeded the 12-hour threshold and it was almost 9.30pm. Our two co-passengers, both army jawans, turned out to be real gentlemen who not only found us a room to stay but helped us get dinner at a Bengali restaurant (Bengalis from Tezpur are in large number in the town and Bengali food corners are dominating). By 9.30 pm all shops, barring the liquor counter, were closed in Tawang. It was July 17.

Disheartened

Tawang, till that day, was a utopia hidden behind the mountains and clouds. It would have remained so had not the traitor daylight revealed the changing face of the sleepy town that stirs up only by the gongs of the monastery bell. The town that still plays with our imagination has met the same fate led by greed and development. Ugly concrete structures mushrooming on mountains, heaps of bricks and cement on the roadside, the air carrying dust and construction particles and too many tourist vehicles can dishearten any first-time visitor. The Buddha's life size statue in meditation and the monastery are the only attractions in the rapidly urbanising Tawang. We started from Tawang on the same afternoon. On our way back, the driver showed us a five-star hotel under construction. It was the chief minister's project and a coveted one. In a few years, Tawang will have 'luxury' on offer.

The whole trip back, my friend and I continued sulking about the onslaught of capitalism and fatal politics. The road back was the same old wreckage so we hardly paid any attention except at a point after Sela where tyres started skidding because of excessive muck.

As the vehicle stopped in front of Padma Momos, a dimly lit eatery run by a Nepalese woman, around 7pm we decided to stop fretting over changing times. Steaming chicken momos came on a platter with a pinch of a mix of indigenous spices and soup. The food made up for the broken roads and the Tawang we did not imagine. We thanked the driver for the stop.

As the car bumped forward, we felt the urge to take a nap. The momos were filling and made us stretch joyfully. It was another four hours before we reached Bhalukpong. Without delay we cosied up on the seats, bidding goodbye to Tawang and promising to return to witness the transformation.

~ NM

Imparting skills: The Aizawl experience

By Annapoorna Ravichander

I recently had the opportunity to conduct a hands-on workshop on entrepreneurship, creativity and communication for three government colleges in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, with two of my colleagues.

We went to Aizawl with limited knowledge of what to expect. Six days of interacting with a bunch of college students primarily with a social science background was something that we were looking forward to.

I did some research on what the government had to offer with reference to skill development and entrepreneurship for students. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) states that 10 million youth will benefit from this scheme by 2020. The government website states that this scheme will be initiated by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).

The primary objective of the workshop was to help students to think out of the box. This was done by encouraging them to think of a community problem that bothers them and find a solution. This clearly helped them relate to the schemes provided by the government, which supports entrepreneurship by enhancing knowledge using the latest technologies.

This also helped students to try and think of innovative ways of solving problems. For example, a group of students came up with a concept of increasing tourism in Aizawl since there is a huge scope but the city lacks the wherewithal.

Since the government already has a clause that states the scheme will provide a platform to facilitate training for special projects, it was imperative to encourage the students to clearly communicate their needs. The session on communication discussed body language, importance on carrying appropriate communication materials while going for a meeting, and audience mapping, to name a few.

The training was an eye-opener, in terms of the lack of awareness of students to use technology for skill development and entrepreneurship.

The hands-on workshop involved a lot of activities to apply the knowledge imparted. For example, when the concept on ideation was explained and students were asked to come up with problems encountered in their daily life, they shared "problems" which was for us something that was solved, sorted and addressed. As a result of this, we had to customise some of the concepts to suit the needs of these students so that we could achieve the desired results. While there are the schemes/opportunities available there are some challenges faced by the modus operandi of imparting education.



Pexel

While English is the official language all subjects (in college) are taught through the vernacular language. As a result, there is no practice and hence no scope to improve communication in the English language.

Because of lack of practice in using the English language, the students were unable to respond to questions despite having knowledge. They ended up being passive learners with no scope for interaction. An innovative way of handling this subject will perhaps improve the quality of education. For example, apart from following a text book method, role-plays, activities to understand and apply the learnings may perhaps provide confidence to the students.

Having a close-knit socio-cultural background sometimes hampers the growth of a society. There are strong organisations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Kristian Thalai Pawl (KTP) and Thalai Kristian Pawl (TKP) but they bond the Mizo society and hence exposure to several opportunities is ignored.

Looking at the brighter side, several technical and vocational courses have been initiated. Students now stand a chance to opt for courses like pharmacy and nursing, technology, engineering, veterinary, business management, to name a few.

The city is clean following some of the best practices. The traffic is heavy but people have great respect for fellow commuters. Despite narrow lanes jammed with traffic, one does not hear the blaring of car horns/scooter honks from impatient drivers/riders. The several road curves also reduce the speed of the traffic and people follow rules. Rain water harvesting is practised due to scarcity of water. Dustbins are provided at all junctions hence there is no littering of garbage.

The sun rises around 5 am and sets around 5.30 pm Hence life starts early and all shops close at 5.30 pm since it becomes dark.

There are no beggars or scavengers on the road. Almost every shop is run by women and they do it with great efficiency. Sundays are spent in church, since Mizoram has a high population of Christians. *(IANS)*

(Annapoorna Ravichander is an independent writer. The views expressed are personal. She can be contacted at annapoorna@pacindia.org)

Hair's an option

By Ranjan K Baruah

People are concerned about beauty and style. Hair is styled on many different occasions as it adds to beauty. From ancient times, individuals are concerned about hair and styling. In any place of India, we can find barber shops and now more beauty parlours or hair studios. Many families are earning through the profession related to hair cutting or styling. A new-age barber has many terms associated with him and in today's edition we are talking about hair stylist or hair dressers. Hair stylist is a person who cuts and styles people's hair professionally.

The fashioning of hair can be considered an aspect of personal grooming, fashion, and cosmetics. A hairdresser is a person whose occupation is to cut or style hair in order to change or maintain a person's image. This is achieved using a combination of hair colouring, haircutting and hair texturing techniques. Most hairdressers are professionally licensed as a hairdresser, a barber or a cosmetologist.

Hairdressing as an occupation dates back thousands of years. Ancient art drawings and paintings have been discovered depicting people working on another person's hair. Greek writers Aristophanes and Homer mentioned hairdressing in their writings.

In Africa, it was believed in some cultures that a person's spirit occupied his or her hair, giving hairdressers high status within these communities. The status of hairdressing encouraged many to develop their skills and close relationships were built between hairdressers and their clients. Hours would be spent washing, combing, oiling, styling and ornamenting their hair. Men would work specifically on men and women on women. Before a master hairdresser died, they would give their combs and tools to a chosen successor during a special ceremony.



The first appearance of the word "hairdresser" was in the 17th century Europe and hairdressing was considered a profession. Hair fashion of the period suggested that wealthy women wear large, complex and heavily adorned hairstyles, which would be maintained by their personal maids and other people, who would spend hours dressing the woman's hair.

A hair stylist, who is sometimes called a hairdresser or beautician, shampoos, cuts, colours, bleaches, and styles hair. He or she may also use chemicals to straighten or curl hair and apply extensions to lengthen hair. Before working on a client, a hair stylist analyzes her hair, recommends a style or service, and may even provide instructions and sell products that will let the customer get the same look at home. We shall publish more in our next edition.

Updates:

Fair and Lovely Foundation Scholarship: Fair and Lovely Foundation Scholarship is an initiative of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) which invites applications from the college-going girl candidates only. Girl students studying in coaching classes are also eligible to apply. The total number of scholarships to be disbursed for the year 2018 is 55. Interested candidate must have scored 60 per cent marks or above in classes 10 and 12 board examinations.

Girls wish to pursue or pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate courses in a government-recognized institution in India and or taking coaching classes for entrances like medical , engineering or civil services and have passed class 12 (Science, Commerce, Arts, Others) and secured a minimum of 60% marks in class 10 and 12 board examinations are eligible to apply. Aspirants may apply before October 30.

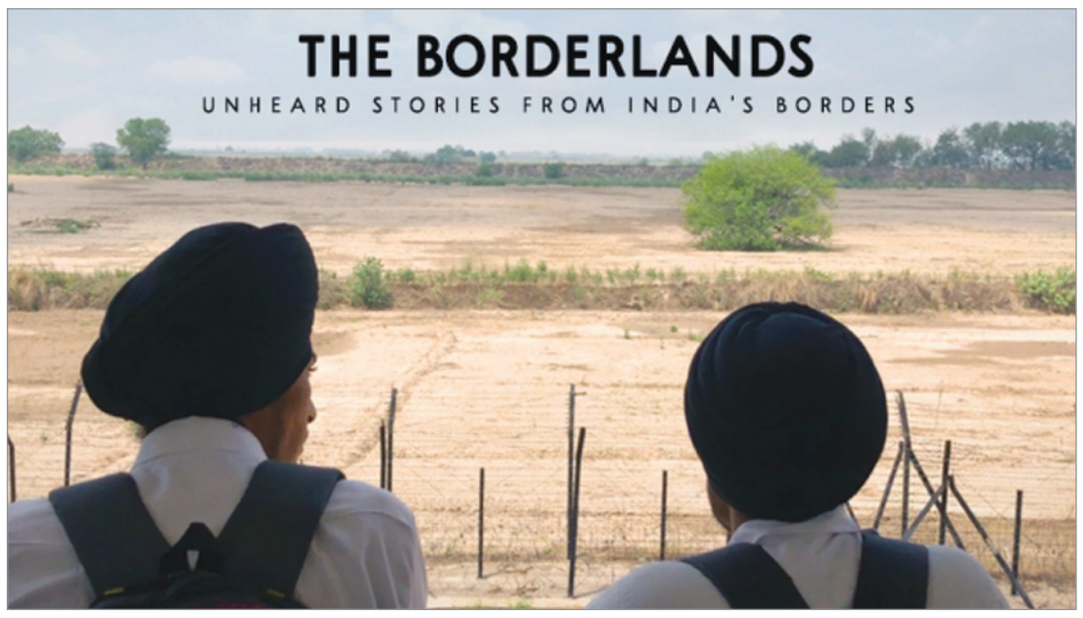
SN Bose Scholars Program 2019: SN Bose Scholars Program 2019 has been announced by the Science & Engineering Board (SERB), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India, the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and WINStep Forward. It aims to provide an opportunity to Indian students to experience world-class research facilities in top U.S. institutions. This scholarship works toward building a long-term collaboration between India and U.S. in the R&D sector.

The Science & Engineering Board (SERB), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India, the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and WINStep Forward have all partnered to offer this scholarship with an aim to nurture future innovators and thought leaders. Deadline is October 31.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

Documentary sets out to humanise borders

By Radhika Bhirani



What do pilgrims in Punjab's Dera Baba Nanak feel when faith travels across the border to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan through binoculars or a telescope? At a time when borders have mental images as frontiers of cross-fire, illegal crossings and violence, a documentary filmmaker intends to humanise them and create conversations on cross-border relationships.

Director Samarth Mahajan, 27, comes from Dinanagar, a small town 10 miles from the India-Pakistan border. Interactions with borderland citizens were a way of life in his growing-up years.

After his National Award-winning non-feature film 'The Unreserved', which was an inquiry into the lives of passengers who use the unreserved compartment in trains, the idea of 'The Borderlands' struck him.

"During 'The Unreserved', we met a young Kashmiri guy who told us how he supported Pakistan while his brother, being an army man, supported India. The conversation ended with him telling us that if he got a job in India, he would start supporting India too. It taught us something about the fluidity that a borderland citizen might experience due to the 'other' country being an immediate reality," Mahajan told IANS in an email interview.

This piqued his interest, resulting in researching stories from border areas.

"We found such counter-intuitive narratives that we had to start making the film. In the current context, when borders are being used as a divisive tool and depicted as hubs of violence, we intend to humanise them and create conversations on cross-border relationships," Mahajan added.

The intent of the film's team, Camera and Shorts, is to explore all of India's borders.

"Our journey is divided over three phases, Kutch to Punjab, then Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, and then our borders with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. We feel a film will be representative of the title 'The Borderlands' only when we move beyond the set image of borders being the Indo-Pak border or the LoC in Kashmir," he said.



For example, he says, they are looking at how families cope when, in Diu and Kutch, fishermen looking for a better catch often drift into Pakistan's waters and are consequently jailed. Or how, in Jaisalmer and Barmer, grooms from a Pakistani Hindu community visit border towns in Rajasthan in search of brides. Can such alliances break stereotypes?

The research for the project involves a mix of visits to border towns in Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat, talking to locals, watching previous visual works on India's borderlands, reading travel books and ethnographic accounts of researchers.

Mahajan, who has taken the crowd-funding route through Wishberry for the movie, feels it could be image-changing for people who have grown up in the mainland to know about life in the borders.

"As mainland citizens, it is quite easy for us to say that we want to wage war with another country, without having any idea of the effects on the lives of people on the borders. We are hardly taught to comprehend what it means to belong to a nation. Borderland narratives can shed a new understanding of fluidity in identities and movement across borders," said Mahajan.

When the film takes complete shape — hopefully by April 2020 — Mahajan hopes for a theatrical release for 'The Borderlands' in tier-I and tier-II cities. They are also in talks with a few digital platforms.

"Our bare minimum budget for the film is Rs 25 lakh, yet to do it at the scale which the idea deserves, we need funds to the tune of Rs 1 crore. The crowd-funding campaign has inspired us by proving that people trust our idea and ability. Audiences are willing to invest in meaningful content."

But has the market for documentaries opened up in India?

"The market is improving with the springing up of digital platforms like Netflix and Amazon which have dedicated sections for non-fiction films. There is still a gap between traditional distributors and non-fiction filmmakers. The distribution networks for documentary films remain fragmented and non-fiction filmmakers continue to shy away from taking professional routes of distributing their films due to fears about return on investment of time and energy. There is a dearth of development funds, which is a major reason why we decided to crowd-fund," Mahajan said. *(IANS)*

Photo courtesy: Google images

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, OCTOBER 21, 2018***

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. The coming year promises new hope and possibilities. Your gains will commensurate according to your efforts, but luck will definitely be on our side. Your imagination and skills will do wonders for you and your creativity will be at all-time high. Your best opportunities will develop through your association with people who hold position of authority. Sudden gains and losses are foreseen, therefore do not indulge into hasty speculation. Children will bring happy news later in the year.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are expected to gain momentum and it will be a good time ahead. You will have good ventures in the field related to publishing, writing and education. You will use communication skills to attract the people which may be favorable for your professional life. Amid some minor misunderstandings your family life will be soothing and enjoyable. Health should be looked after. Stick to routine work and have a suitable diet. Matters related to your career will be sorted out soon. Be prepared and watch for the favorable time which will be coming soon to boost up your business and career. Enjoy with children and loved ones.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You may have mixed results as predicted from the position of stars. You may be facing a not enviable position at your work place. Cooperation and amity is needed in your behavior with superiors. Think before you speak and be careful in what is performed by you in your career. There may be a temporary conflict in between your family or may they be not satisfied with your thoughts so try to be very tactful with your family and loved ones. Take care of self and your luggage in travels. There may be some expenditure which may disturb your budget, so spend wisely. Take care of your health. Your friends may help and guide you in matters related to material gains.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The position of stars predicts that you may be in a position to care for the health of a family member. You may have to look after your family and loved ones. Your emotions and feelings about your children may bear fruit. They will work according to your desire. Professional and career matters will need more attention these days. You are clever enough to so decide well before you start a new venture. You may have to face some problems in love life or marriage matters. Avoid having contacts with unknown persons at your work place. Health will need attention. You may have to take some precautions and also take morning walk to avoid stress.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This position of stars will give you some mixed results. Financial matters and profits will grow slow. You may take steps for entertainment and betterment of health of your family and children. Education and progress in career may get affected so you may have to consult your elders to sort out problems related to these matters. Your health will be good and may enjoy some trip with your family and children. You may have to work hard in order to maintain your image in public. Your communication skills will give you desired results in improvement of relations with people. Dispute in some common sharing matters related to property, joint finances or other resources within the family are more likely at this time.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is a time where you have chances of progress in profession and career. This is equally good for intimacy and friendship related matters. You may expand your social circle by image building and better communication skills. People recognize you by your talent and soft spoken words. You may have some sudden profits or achievements related to money, finance and real estate. You may have good opportunities for starting a new venture. Your marriage or love problems may get solved suddenly. Take care of your responsibilities and duties and let it not disturb your health.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Configuration of planets at this time depicts some mixed results. You may expect some uneasiness and unfavourable circumstances. Your friends and well-wishers may not support you at this time. Take up each matter related to finance, profession or career wisely. You may be misled by some friends or an intimate person so keep watch over what transpires. You will have to decide every matter patiently and personally, do not give any opportunity for others to interfere in your work. Your life may take a new turn. Your love or romantic related problems will be sorted out. Love and affection among your family members is expected.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

A favourable combination reveals that there are good opportunities for you in regard to your job, work and investments. You may enjoy a time where your public image and business opportunities may get a new perspective of progress. You should keep yourself out of emotions and feelings and remain balanced and focused. Your family and children will enjoy your company in some outing. Love and affection with loved ones is assured. Sudden expenditure is expected and it may be for religious work. You may focus on utilizing this time in some important issues.

Scorpio:(October 24 - November 22)

Stars depicts a time of monetary and financial gains for you. Take some wise steps in investments which will prove to be very beneficial for you in the long term. It may be a better time to carry your imaginations to a realistic stage. You will arrange to spend time with family, children or loved ones which will prove to be helpful in stability and peace of mind. Your courage will be remarkable and you will show your skills in order to have good combination of wits and health. Relations with friends will be good and your may enjoy good public relations. You could get involved in some charity work and improvement in social circle is also indicated.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may plan to enjoy yourself and focus on matters related to entertainment and romance. You resolve problems of finance and money now. During this time you may buy products related to cosmetics, jewelry and clothing. You may give a change to your personality and outlook which may help you to be popular among friends and associates. You may engage yourself in some renovation at home or at your business place. Your vigour and courage will help you to achieve your goal. Many matters will go slow but these will be favourable for you. Health related problems may be checked in time.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Simply attending to your home affairs and making efforts for creating a loving environment and affection among your family members will give you satisfaction. Peacefully attend to your duties and give a bit more care to your professional work. You will prove to be good at making contacts in social life. You may take steps to take your career to new heights and achieving goals for success. Take care in travel and long journey for any injury. Health would need attention. Give due care to your children. Avoid showing some extra ordinary courage in matters related to friends and in public else you may get entangled in some conflict. Solve problems with a calm mind.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You may have some favourable scope in profession and career related to the armed forces. There are chances of promotion in your job. You may enjoy good health now. Financial and money problems will be resolved. If you are looking to start a new business you may go for it for profitable returns. You will enjoy interactions with relatives and friends. Marriage problems or children may get solved. You may plan for a long distance journey. Full efforts are required in love or romance affairs for stronger ties.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will emphasize on improving your personal social image. You will get due regard from family and loved ones. This is a time where one should make efforts to make personal contacts within office or at your place of work. You will have wonderful relations with your family members and children. You may go with children and family members to an entertainment place or for religious trip. Spend time in creative ventures in order to have peace of mind. Keep up regular exercises in order to have sound and stable health. Money related problems will soon be resolved and gains are on the cards.

Side-effects of fish pedicure

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



A few months ago, a young woman went to her doctor in New York. Her toenails had gradually blackened over six months and fallen off. No one in her family had abnormal toenails and she had no diseases, no injuries, nor a family history of nail disorders. During the tests it was discovered that she had had a fish pedicure six months ago.

The fish had caused injury to the nail matrix, which is the nail growth centre. This led to a nasty case of onychomadesis, in which the nail plates that make up the toenail halt production and separate, causing her nails to fall off. The condition can cause deep grooves to run horizontally across the nails, or large gaps where there is no nail. The case has been reported in JAMA Dermatology.

This is not the only problem fish pedicures have caused. Fish pedicures have transmitted Staphylococcus aureus and mycobacteriosis infections.

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium which is a common cause of infections which range from minor skin infections, such as pimples, boils, cellutitis, folliculitis, carbuncles and abscesses, to life-threatening diseases such as pneumonia, meningitis, osteomvelitis, endocarditis, toxic shock syndrome, bacteremia, and sepsis. An estimated 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the human population are long-term carriers of S aureus. It can cause skin and soft-tissue infections, particularly when the skin has been breached. It can spread through contact with pus from an infected wound, skin-to-skin contact with an infected person, and contact with objects used by an infected person.

S aureus can lie dormant in the body for years. Once symptoms begin to show, if untreated, the disease can be deadly. Once the bacteria have entered the bloodstream, they can infect various organs.

Without antibiotic treatment, S. aureus bacteremia has a fatality rate around 80 per cent. With antibiotic treatment, case fatality rates range from 15-50 per cent depending on the age and health of the patient – but the bacterium is now almost antibiotic resistant.

Mycobacteriosis is a chronic disease that occurs in fish reared under intensive conditions. Temperatures between 25°C and 35°C are ideal for the bacteria.

In the last decade there has been a steady increase in the frequency of Mycobacterium marinum infections in cultured fish, and human cases associated with fish aquaria have been seen all over the world. In fish, transmission can occur by consumption of contaminated feed, aquatic detritus, or entry via injuries, skin abrasions or external parasites. In humans, breaks in the skin serve as an entry point for the organism during contact with contaminated water sources, or infected fish and injury from fish fins or bites.

Mycobacteriosis infection most commonly manifests as a skin disease. Lesions tend to be noticed two to four weeks after exposure to the mycobacterium. The lesions swell and develop into ulcers which persist for months. In some instances, infection spreads to the lymph nodes. The skin, kidney, and liver are the main body parts affected in both fish and humans.

Diagnosis can be difficult and is often delayed, and by then the infection has spread, causing considerable damage to tendons and bone. Deep infections typically require both antibiotic and surgical treatment. Skin lesions can be chronic and leave scarring. Deep infections can lead to the loss of joint mobility, and severe cases may need amputation.

I had written about the dangers of fish pedicures two years ago, but India has still got dozens of parlours offering the service. I have just returned from Goa where the main tourist areas have small shady shacks advertising fish pedicures.

During a fish pedicure, people immerse their feet in a tub of water that contains small fish called Garra rufa. These fish supposedly pull out dead skin from the customer's feet, exfoliating them as the customer relaxes and enjoys the tickle. These fish are specially grown in tanks and they are imported into India.

These little fish are not doctors, cosmetologists or inanimate loofahs. They eat human flesh because they are starved of their normal diet, which is plankton or vegetable matter. The fish themselves are so mistreated by this unhealthy diet that outbreaks of systemic bacterial infections in the animals are common, causing abnormal eye protrusions and haemorrhaging around the gills, mouth, and abdomen.

They carry bacteria responsible for a variety of dangerous tissue infections and the tubs in which you put your feet are a fertile breeding ground. They excrete like all living beings, and this excreta is what you put your feet into. Government warnings across the world have warned people that fish pedicures may even cause Hepatitis C and HIV.

Since they are not cosmetic surgeons, their biting results in bumpy uneven skin, and some areas are bitten deep enough to draw blood. Their nibbling of human feet could spread harmful microbes from one spa guest's feet to the next. The hot water tub that you place your feet in is re-used, as are the fish and fungi, and disease-causing bacteria have been detected at fish pedicure spas. The mouths of the living fish cannot be cleaned or sterilized. The fish tanks are also not cleaned very often, or the water altered frequently enough. Obviously, all this increases the risk of spreading infection. These are the reasons that fish spas have been banned in many countries.

In 2011 and 2012, the Fish Health Directorate of Great Britain intercepted five different shipments of Garra rufa fish from Indonesia, bound for UK spas, and tested them for bacteria. They found that all the fish carried a number of harmful bacteria.

In the absence of any regulation in India, shady shops have sprung up online which sell garra rufa fish. No one knows how they have been able to import them. I saw an ad of a Mumbai shop, Pedifish, which sells "fish spa" fish at Rs 8, and Rs 40 for grarra rufa hybrids. They take orders of a minimum of 1000 "pieces" – which shows you how little they know, or care, about fish. If you want to clean your feet use a pumice stone not a live fish.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

"Writers, like teeth, are divided into incisors and grinders."

--- James Baldwin

The Shillong Times

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Deadly Dussehra

The Dussehra festivities this time were marred by two major incidents – a train tragedy in Punjab killing over 60 persons watching a fireworks show from the tracks, and an incident in Jehanabad in Bihar where some 20 young women/girls faced slashes on their bodies with sharp blades by anti-social elements. What should have been a season of joy has turned into a period of deep sorrow and serious distress. The blame-game indulged in by the Punjab government and the Railways over the train mishap on Friday night at Amritsar was only to be expected. Politics is at play with the Congress trying to embarrass the BJP and vice-versa. It would, however, turn out that the festivities including a fireworks display were organised in the spot near the scene of the tragedy in the presence of a state woman minister. No permission had been taken for the event, as per first reports that were later "denied" in part. It is common knowledge that a fireworks display in an urban area, as also use of microphones, required police compliance as also a nod from municipal authorities. Had normal procedures been followed, chances were that the Railway authorities would have been informed in advance. At night, visibility was poor. The crowd could not sense the arrival of the train due to the heavy noise caused by the fireworks display.

The Railway authorities claims they had no information as to the likely presence of a crowd on the tracks and hence no precautionary measures were taken. There is little meaning in continued mutual recriminations. The police on its own could have taken action if an event was held without its permission. It could even have stalled it. The presence of a state minister also meant the cops had to bend over backwards and not do their job. Those guilty must not only take the responsibility but also quit their jobs; or, they be ousted out of their chairs. This includes the minister too, as a huge tragedy has taken place and accountability is of prime importance. As for the Jehanabad incident, locals complain that such attacks had been occurring during the Dussehra festivals in the past too but still the district administration did little to check this. This is the tragedy. During such festivals girls and women in large numbers stir out of their homes, enjoy the evenings and attend the fairs. Gaiety is in the air. But, tragic things have happened. At the minimum, policing requires more seriousness.

Durga Puja in Nartiang: All's well that ends well

By H H Mohrmen

In spite of all the controversies surrounding the Nartiang temple, Durga Puja observances ended peacefully and Shakespeare's famous saying, "All's well that ends well," rings true yet again. The conflict at the oldest Durga Temple in the state, which earlier seemed as like it would affect the celebration of the annual festival, ended on a positive note. The issue came to the public domain when the two groups took the matter to the court and it later took an ugly turn and became a law and order situation. And as the saying goes, all publicity is good publicity, this incident also provided us the opportunity to better understand Hinduism and of course the worship of Durga and Shiv by the Pnars in Nartiang.

Like any burning issue in today's world the incident also became a subject of debate on various social media platforms and it provided the opportunity to shed light on the fact that Hinduism arrived in the hills much before Christianity; in fact more than four hundred years earlier to be precise. Some find this truth difficult to accept but because Hinduism is a non-proselytising religion, it remains confined only amongst the people of Nartiang. And as mentioned in my previous article, the unique aspect of Hinduism in Nartiang is that it blends with the traditional religion, hence I call it the worship of Durga in Nartiang; a synthesis of Hinduism with Pnar culture and tradition.

I interviewed Uttam Deshmukhya many times during my study and it was from him and the late Dontha Dkhar the then Pator (an office in the traditional governance which is subordinate to the Daloi) of the Elaka Nartiang that I learned about this unique blend. And I learned about the significance of the Temple which is considered to be one of the fifty-one Shakti-peeth from RS Mushahary the former Governor of Meghalaya.

The followers of Niamtre in Nartiang have the unique distinction of observing both their religious tradition as prescribed in their traditional Niamtre culture, and celebrating certain Pujas set by the adopted religion they have inherited from their Kings. In other words Pujas are not the only religious rites and rituals observed by the people of Nartiang. Apart from the various rituals people also perform sacrifices to appease the tribal goddess ka Kupli and her husband u Yale, the Thunder god (u Pyrthat), the Shillong deity (u 'lei Shyllong), the innumerable nature gods (ki laiphew Ryngkaw ki laiphew Basa), and other gods and goddesses in the Khasi Pnar pantheon. It is also interesting to note that all rites of passage from birth to death are performed according to Pnar tribal traditions that they inherited from their ancestors.

To invoke these tribal gods and goddesses, people use the usual animal sacrifice of the Pnars comprising roosters, pigs and goats etc. These sacrifices are performed by the Langdoh and other religious heads of the Elaka, whereas the various Pujas were performed by the priest (wamon), a descendant of the first priest, since the reign of the Jaintia King when the Durga temple was first established in the village.

The other unique feature of the tradition adopted by the followers of Niamtre in the village is that people accept a special local calendar which allows them to pay obeisance to the different gods and goddesses they worship. The calendar is divided into different seasons in which there are times for observing pujas as per Hindu tradition and also seasons for performing sacrifices for the traditional tribal gods and goddesses of their ancestors. Since time immemorial, tradition has it that during puja seasons, all the sacrifices to the local deities were put on hold and similarly no pujas were performed during the seasons earmarked for performing sacrifices to appease the tribal gods and goddesses. So there is no room for conflict between the rituals of the traditional Niamtre religion and the pujas, because the season for paying obeisance varies and persons responsible for performing these religious rites are also different.

According to Uttam Deshmukhya, (the wamon) of the Durga temple; (who speaks in chaste Pnar, the four pujas that the community celebrate are Holi, Bishari (Manasha puja), and Kartik puja – Durga is the most important and the biggest of them all. Like other festivals celebrated by the tribals, the Durga Puja is also greeted with a month-long drum beating by the Dhulias before the actual puja. Although the Daloi and other traditional heads of the village do not have a significant role to play in the actual rituals of the puja, but by virtue of the Daloi being the representative of the erstwhile Jaintia monarch in the Elaka, he is responsible for arranging all supplies needed for the puja.

Of the more than hundred goats offered, the most important goats offered by the Daloi for the sacrifice are the King's goat (ka blang syiem), the Daloi's goat (ka blang Daloi), and the midnight goat (ka blang syniaw) The midnight goat, as the term itself implies, is a special offering performed at midnight on the second day, and nobody is allowed in the temple during the sacrifice but the priest alone. The goat is dressed like a human with a turban on its head, a dhoti, and earrings (kyndiam) on both its ears. Finally a mask of a human face is placed on the goat's face before its head is chopped off. The priest informed that the midnight goat symbolizes human that the kings used to sacrifice during the days of yore. To the left of the sanctum sanctorum there is a hole in the ground and the priest explained that the goat's head is chopped off in such a way that the head rolls down from the hole to the Myntang river the same way as when a human was sacrificed.

Unlike the Durga idol used elsewhere, the idol of the Durga in Nartiang is always made of the banana tree, the then Daloi Mon Dkhar explained thus: "The banana tree is like a second mother to us; it provides human beings with banana, which in fact is the first solid food provided to a new born baby. The banana is human's second food, next to the milk from mother's breast. That is why Durga is always made of a banana tree in Nartiang."

The offering that people bring with them to the temple is also uniquely traditional; it consists of rice carried in bronze containers, one betel nut, five pieces of pan leaves and a few coins. The other amazing thing about the Durga puja is the chanting of hymns by the Dhulias and some village folks the hardamuid. These mantras are not in Pnar, but in a strange language that they have memorised and passed on orally from one generation to the next.

On the last day each family performs the 'siang ka pha,' to offer food, vegetables and fruits to their dead ancestors. This tradition is akin to the "ka siang ka pha" performed at the onset of the Behdieñkhlam festival of the people of Jowai. It is also strange that although the Pnar of Nartiang worship Durga, one cannot see a single picture or idol of the goddess or for that matter any gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon in any houses of the villagers at Nartiang.

The two temples in the village, that of the goddess Durga and Lord Shiva, are also exceptional in their own way, with a unique Khasi Pnar architecture, similar to the "Iung Lyntur" or the nearest example which is "Ka Iingsad" at Smit village with the roof resembling a boat turned upside down.

The problem that has arisen recently is because Uttam Deshmukhya the wamon has died and his son from a Pnar mother is supposed to take over as the new wamon. This was objected to by some group who brought in a new priest to run the temples. Uttam had informed me that his predecessors the Deshmukhya were appointed priests to look after the temples by none other than the Jaintia king and they continue to do so till date. Hopefully the issue is resolved once and for all and unlike my Christian friends who hope that the followers of Niamtre would soon convert to their religion, I wish that these followers of the indigenous faith (Niamtre) prosper and keep this unique tradition that we are all proud of for posterity.

Modi govt's dangerous game on women's temple entry

Sabarimala could well become Kerala's Singur

By K Raveendran

The Modi government is playing a dangerous double game using a flawed Supreme Court judgment lifting the ban on the entry of women of reproductive age into the Sabarimala hill shrine by insisting that the Kerala government ensure enforcement of the order despite widespread opposition from an overwhelming majority of people. And an inept Pinarayi Vijayan government is playing into the hands of the BJP, in the process creating a dream opportunity for lotus to bloom in the otherwise most unlikely state, by allowing the saffron party to highjack the volatile situation to create disaffection among the people against communists.

For some inexplicable reason, the state government has been acting desperately to oblige the Centre, by somehow getting a few women to undertake the trek, so that it could show that the court order had been complied with. As no genuine women devotees of the debarred age were forthcoming to make the trip, the state government organised what ultimately turned out to be a 'sponsored' trip by two activist women in full riot gear, one of them a Muslim atheist, to the sacred shrine complex in a massive security drill. But as the heavily-fortified contingent was only metres away from the famed 18 holy steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum, devotee resistance erupted into a spontaneous protest, including a threat from the head priest to close the temple, while protests sprang up all over the state in an instant. This forced the stage-managed show to beat a retreat. The BJP has already given its war cry.

If it was Singur that proved to be the turning point in CPI(M) fortunes, leading to its virtual elimination in West Bengal, it may be Sabarimala that will do the trick in Kerala, which incidentally is the only Left bastion that remains in the whole of India. And it seems that instead of achieving a Congress-mukt India, the Modi dispensation may have the pleasure of seeing the back of communists.

By getting the Union home ministry to write to the Kerala government on the need to ensure strict enforcement of the Supreme Court order, the Modi government is acting as though it is the responsibility of the Centre to ensure implementation of all the orders of the apex court even in issues that are within the jurisdiction of the states. There is no reason for the Centre to intervene, unless there is a breakdown in public order or any such serious situation warranting summary action. And if the state government defaults, it is for the court to make it accountable. Ironically, it is the implementation of the court order that is leading to all hell breaking loose and not the other way around. So, the Modi government game is not difficult to see through.

Much of the blame for the trouble can be put at the doors of the Supreme Court, which has made a grievous error in arriving at certain conclusions. The first major mistake is in determining the nature of Sabarimala temple on the basis of the character of the body that manages it. Sabarimala temple is steeped in antiquity and to give it an identity on the basis of administrative arrangements by a board that came into being only in 1950 is simply preposterous. The court denied Sabarimala the status of distinctive denomination because the board manages several other ordinary temples.

It is not the fault of the deity Ayyappan, as a legal entity, that the Devaswom Board, under which the Sabarimala temple has been brought arbitrarily and by an administrative step, receives grant from the government. The Sabarimala temple is not run on money from the public exchequer. In fact, Sabarimala contributes massive amounts to the state exchequer, which the government uses for various purposes and only a fraction of it is spent on Sabarimala itself. In one season alone, the temple earns in excess of Rs250 crore. The court has ruled that Sabarimala is like any other public place of worship as it can be deemed to receive government grant. What an irony!

The court has also erred in concluding that "the devotees of Ayyappa are just Hindus". Ayyappan's devotees include a large number of Christians and Muslims as he is considered as the most democratic and proletariat god, making no distinction between his devotees. Sabarimala also has deep rooted connections with churches and mosques. Acquiesance to Muslim Vavar at a mosque is part of the rituals of Sabarimala. In fact, Sabarimala is the only temple which allows entry to non-Hindus and secularism is integral to its doctrine. Legendary singer K J Jesudas is the most recognizable brand ambassador of Sabarimala as he is an ardent devotee. The temple rituals on any day ends with the rendering of his song Harivarasanam, a lullaby used to put Ayyappan to sleep.

The peculiarity of Sabarimala, in fact, is that he can continue to be a Christian and worship at Sabarimala, which is not possible in any other temple in Kerala, where non-Hindus are strictly not allowed.

By branding all those who come to worship at Sabarimala as Hindus, the court is striking down the secular character of the temple, the quintessance of Sabarimala, and putting a question mark on the fundamental right of people like Jesudas to practice his religion as a Christian and yet be a devotee of Ayyappan. The peculiarity of Sabarimala, in fact, is that he can continue to be a Christian and worship at Sabarimala, which is not possible in any other temple in Kerala, where non-Hindus are strictly not allowed. So comparing Sabarimala to other temples is fraught with grave danger, which is what the court has done.

There are already some 25 review petitions filed with the Supreme Court on its order to lift the ban on the entry of women to Sabarimala. The government has shown a tearing hurry to enforce the court order, although there are precedents where implementation of sensitive Supreme Court orders has been put off due to fears of law and order problems, such as a dispute between two factions of the Church over a large number of properties, where status quo has been allowed to continue. The government could easily adopt such a course on Sabarimala. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

In gratitude!

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I convey my sincere thanks and gratitude to all the concerned departments of the Government of Meghalaya and the District Administration which was involved in ensuring a smooth and peaceful celebration of "Durga Puja." We are grateful to the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills, the Fire Services, MeECL, PWD and the Dorbar Shnongs of our neighbouring localities. The Central Puja Committee also has done its best for a smooth and peaceful Puja celebration in the state as a whole and Shillong in particular. I express my sincerest gratitude to all my beloved residents and the residents of our next door locality "Umpling" for their support and for putting up with the trouble of road diversion for several days. For over three decades we have been trying to shift the HT&LT Power line drawn along close proximity of the Community Hall which was a threat to the safety and security of residents and passers-by. This year with a firm determination we moved all concerned and ultimately the work started on October 2, for which MeECL had to shut down electricity supply for 8 to 12 hrs daily until October 12. Considering the gravity of the situation the residents had shown their utmost tolerance and refrained from complaining about power shut down. During those days water supply also could not be maintained and residents had to purchase from water from private suppliers on those days. However, the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) tried to maintain their supply as that is not linked to the electrical supply in the locality.

I convey my sincerest thanks to the Area Manager MeECL and his team for their efforts to complete the work within the specified time. A special mention must be made of the Officer in Charge, Traffic Branch Rynjah. Her support and co-operation and that of her team was phenomenal, be it for shifting the power line or in ensuring smooth flow of traffic during the Puja celebration. Last but not least we sincerely express our gratitude to all the media houses which gave wide coverage of our Diamond Jubilee celebrations. I am also thankful that our Puja Committee was adjudged the overall best decorated pandal by the Kenchs Trace Durga Puja Committee.

Yours etc.
N Bhattacharjee,
President,
R & R Colony.
Shillong – 6

Is something fishy going on in EJH, DC's office?

Editor,

Recently, the District Collector, EJH, Khliehriat has issued letters to all the land and building owners for the purpose of compensating those whose land was duly acquired for expansion and widening of the NH-6. In the letter, the DC has requested the land and building owners to provide their bank account details to enable his office to transfer the compensation money directly to the account of the person concerned. In the letter, it has also been requested that a bank account with the Axis Bank may be opened for his convenience vis-a-vis the money transfer. Like many other people, I also took my mother's documents including the compensation letter, bank passbook and EPIC and submitted it to the office of the DC (Revenue) as requested. There was huge rush in the DC's office for the same as hundreds of people were there to submit their respective documents. Like others, I also thought that since they have asked for bank account details, the compensation money would come directly to the account

Consequent to this, a team from the DC's office also undertook a re-survey to verify the land and building acquired. After the re-survey from the DC's office, many people including my mother were called to the office on October 20, 2018 to receive the compensation. To our utter surprise, when we had completed all the formalities we were asked to enter the DC's personal office and when we entered we were handed a bank cheque meant for compensation. The question here is why did the DC's office give us the compensation amount by cheque? Why in the first place did the DC's office ask all the people to furnish their bank account details with a promise to transfer the amount to their accounts? Why did the DC make everyone suffer by asking them to submit bank account details, if he has plans to issue the compensation money via cheque? Why at all were people asked to open bank accounts with the Axis Bank if the mode of payment is by cheque? Is the DC's office not violating the central government rules by giving the compensation amount by cheque when the central government has mandated that all such payments shall be by way of Direct Benefit Transfer through online transfer? Who authorized the DC to deviate from his own instructions with regards to the mode of payment? Is there something behind such a move? We all know that in today's world, all compensations are routed through NEFT/RTGS, but why is a different process adopted by the DC, EJH?

Not only this, during submission of the bank account details I enquired about the compensation money from the DC's office and I was told the amount my mother was entitled to receive. To our dismay, we got a much lesser amount than what was told and shown to us in the DC's office earlier? Now again, why is there is a reduction in the compensation money? Where is the rest of the money? Will it go back to the Government? Are we being compensated enough? Now, with this system of the DC's office to issue cheques instead of DBT, hundreds of people will have to travel from many villages to reach the DC's office and thereafter go the bank again and wait for weeks. Does the Government want people to suffer again and again? The problem does not end here, we were also asked by the DC's office to submit our LHC issued by the JHADC in original. Why original? Many people including us left the DC's office on Saturday October 20 with sad faces and anger. I have also noticed in my few visits to the DC, EJH office, that the higher ups in that office are arrogant and give scant respect to the poor people while only currying favour with the affluent. We need change in the administration, but will there be change? All should remember that the DC's office is meant to help the people build a successful life and not a means for gaining illicit wealth.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

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.

" Change your life today. Don't gamble on the future, act now, without delay."

-- Simone de Beauvoir

The Shillong Times

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Row over RAW

INDIA and Sri Lanka have not been on the best of terms for the past several years, and have worsened during the time when popular politician Mahinda Rajapaksa headed the nation. The present coalition government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe appears to be working substantially to repair the bilateral relations. However, a statement made by President Maithripala Sirisena that India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) plotted an assassination attempt on him is bound to create a flutter in political circles there. Prima facie, the statement has embarrassed the Wickremesinghe government as the president has also said the government was not being serious about this threat to his life.

It is small comfort that the president stressed that the Indian political establishment headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi might not necessarily know about the plot, and that even American Presidents might at times not know what its CIA was doing. The loaded statement from the president came at a time when a meeting has been scheduled in New Delhi between the Sri Lankan premier and PM Modi. The shadow of this allegation is bound to fall on the bilateral engagements in the capital.

Notably, the allegation was made in the context of the arrest of an Indian national in Sri Lanka after an anti-graft investigation official claimed to have detected a plot to harm the President as also former defence secretary and Mahinda's brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa. It is also notable that reports emerged of the president trying to topple the present coalition government, in which his party is a partner, and form an alternative alliance government with support from Mahinda Rajapaksa.

India's earlier close relations with Sri Lanka experienced strains on two counts - namely the separatist struggle waged by the pro-Tamil LTTE in the northern region, and the special interest China has taken to wean Sri Lanka away from Indian influence. Mahinda Rajapaksa rightly claims the credit for finishing off the LTTE offensive. He also helped take the country closer to China through trade, port infra and other deals. After his defeat, the new government is trying to strengthen ties between the island nation and India. This is time to invest more trust in this bilateral relation and clear the misunderstandings, if any, between the two neighbours.

Reports are that the president might change his statement, as no evidence has emerged to back such a claim against RAW. The sooner the air is cleared of baseless charges, the better for both the nations.

Autonomous District Councils - Wrong priorities ?

By Toki Blah

Our society, the Khasi-Pnar society, has in the recent past undergone some traumatic experiences. It started off with the proposed 2nd amendment to the KHADC Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, a controversial amendment which seeks to derecognise the Khasi and Schedule Tribe status of a Khasi mother and her off-springs when the woman marries outside the tribe. The proposal challenged the unbounded and age old Khasi concept of matriliny by putting conditions as to when and how it should be practiced. Such conditions never existed before and as such is a direct assault on tradition and custom itself which the MDCs were not mandated to address; a travesty on the powers conferred upon the KHADC by the 6th Schedule of the Constitution. Further fire was added to the controversy when the CEM of the KHADC accused the new found love for patriarchy among some Khasis as the greatest threat to the identity and survival of the tribe. The cry for increased legal and constitutional protection to safeguard the identity of a miniscule tribal community has always been there. The scream "The jaitbynriew is in peril, I alone can lead you to safety" has always found a sympathetic and receptive audience but has always led us further into the wilderness. It is no different this time round.

This write-up will also try to address a couple of social customs of the Khasi Pnars but will digress from populist issues such as mixed marriages or preference of lineage from the father's side. The writer recognises the possibility of the above being irritants within the ambit of a Matrilineal society such as ours, but which in all probability, will continue to remain so but also hardly constitute a major threat as is being portrayed. Many may not agree but I am not a politician with the need to be politically correct on any issue I choose to speak on. The threats that this essay will identify are not populist in nature; will garner no votes in the next MDC or MP elections but nonetheless will, unless contained, cause irreparable damage to the wellbeing, vigour and uniqueness of Hynniewtrep identity. This write-up will therefore focus instead on traditional strengths and exclusive practices of my tribe which we have allowed to deteriorate. Tribal culture is usually strong on practices that strengthen social bonding; community cohesiveness and clan unity. The fear therefore is that with the passage of time, we ourselves have allowed incursions into customs and practices that defined our distinctiveness from the rest of the world. We need to identify where we have gone wrong!

In the 1990's when India finally settled on the Panchayati system as the best form of grass-roots governance, it was by no oversight that tribal Meghalaya was exempted from the provisions of the 73rd and 74th Amendments. The exclusion was deliberate because of the realisation that we already possessed grass-roots institutions of governance that were intrinsically traditional, had broad universal acceptability, were basically democratic and potentially capable of delivering meaningful governance to the people. How then did Meghalaya, especially its Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) interpret this generous recognition of its traditional strength? The Village Councils of all three tribes, ie the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos were meticulously and painstakingly neglected and left to their own devices! We turned our backs on our very own traditional institutions. They were left to rot where history found them. The ADCs only woke up to the disrepair of the Village Dorbars when the Meghalaya High Court came up in 2014, with a verdict that questioned the legal entity of these Dorbars. The truth hit home that in the last 65 years of their existence, the ADCs had failed to come up with any legislation to legalise and empower their traditional durbars.

The only face saver was the draft Village Administration Bill (VAB) which if the truth be told, was actually conceived way back in 2011 well before the 2014 HC judgement, simply as a means to attract direct funding to the durbars through the KHADC. The fact today remains that Meghalaya as a state continues to remain bereft of a uniform grass-roots governance system, applicable to all its eleven districts, that is democratic, accountable and capable of handling modern developmental issues and concepts at the village level. The VAB, despite all its political hype, does not reflect these qualities. A review based on the powers of the State Govt vis a vis the ADCs through a fresh look at Para 12 A of the 6th Schedule read with Para 5 of List II of 7th Schedule of the Constitution is called for. Do we have the guts to do it?

While speaking of traditional practices and customs, it is accepted that the Khasi Pnars reserve a lot of respect and veneration for their dead. The occurrence of death is usually an occasion for the entire community to express its condolences and empathy with the family of the deceased. In days gone by, such a loss was shared by the community by it taking over the daily household chores, cooking and cleaning, of the grieving family. This perhaps has waned but as a community we still express our solidarity and support by visiting the house where death has occurred, comforting the mourners and offering consolation and solace by our presence. The grief and sense of loss of the grieving family is on the other hand is diminished by its ability to offer kwai or a simple cup of red tea to all those who have come to pay their last respects to the dead. It is a bonding process where everyone irrespective of social standing or status, indulge in; it helps reinforce the identity of our culture and it exhibits the egalitarian traits of our community as no other practice can.

Sadly this exemplary traditional practice too is slowly being corrupted while the District Council, the loudmouth in upholding such practices, stands by, a mute and helpless spectator. In most instances when death occurs the sense of mourning and grief has slowly been replaced by a need to convert the occasion into an event for communal feasting. The caller or visitor to a place of bereavement (he / she are not invited guests. They come on their own free will out of a sense of fellowship or camaraderie to grieve with the family) are greeted with a rich variety of snacks, cakes and biscuits to choose from. It is also in vogue now for the house owners to insist that the caller stay back for a meal as a mark of respect for the dead. I personally find such requests to be in very bad taste. Most of us visit the house of bereavement to mourn with those who grieve; to share in the bereavement; to give encouragement at the time of sadness. We didn't turn up on the expectation to be fed or that the bereaved family be further burdened by lavish spending on us. Of concern is that the poor or those who can least afford it may resort to borrowing in an attempt to keep up with the pretentions of the rich. I sincerely believe that direction from the KHADC and JHADC to the Dorbars to discourage the practice of community feasting at the time of death will be of big help in preserving custom and tradition.

Last but not least that we expect from our ADCs is some sort of legislation to deal with the rising population of single and abandoned mothers in our society. It's tragic, horrible and appalling to see young girls, even children of 13-15 years of age conceiving, becoming mothers and then being abandoned by their husbands, most times as young as themselves. Such mothers are in no position to care for their children and we are encouraging mal nourished, illiterate and a desperate generation of youngsters to grow up. What sort of social square pegs is our society producing? It is a blot to our society and the times we live in. The tragedy is that our society pretends this is not happening. The same society is however expressing concern over drug abuse; juvenile crime and juvenile rape. It will not be surprising if most of our juvenile criminals are products of such single motherhood. The tragedy is that institutions we look up to for guidance, be it the Church or the Dorbars continue to turn a blind eye to this social menace. Isn't it time for our constitutionally empowered social sheep dog, the ADCs to rise to the occasion?

The author is President of ICARE

Navjot Singh Sidhu is no Ravana

Smartphones make people stupid

By Aditya Aamir

Can we say hurtling technology killed the 60 in Amritsar? And we're not talking of bullet trains. The two trains that mowed people to death would have been least bothered if there were no folks to kill on the tracks. Regardless, it would have hurtled on. What killed the people were the people themselves, bang on the tracks and engrossed in smart phones held head high to make videos of Ravana burning!

Good triumphing over Evil.

That said there was neither good nor bad behind the unwanted slaughter. The trains shouldn't have been running if the Railways knew of a Dussehra crowd taking over the tracks. But trains are there to run. "Who let the trains run?" is the valid question. But, if the driver was new to the job or to the place and did not know, he cannot be blamed. It's crazy dangerous to hold such an event right next to the railway tracks.

Somebody should ask if the railways had forgotten that Dussehra next to the railway tracks has been a feature for 40 years. The simple answer to that is "it struck nobody." That was criminal. Forty years is a long time to get acquainted with the regularity of an annual event. Killing Ravana is not something people get tired of.

In an absolute sense, it could be said that if Ravana was not killed this year, the 60 or more killed and the scores wounded wouldn't have been standing on the railway tracks. But that is going down a rabbit hole: If there were no railway tracks, there wouldn't be a train heading that way… But the tracks are there and Punjab minister Navjot Singh Sidhu and his wife Navjot Kaur are being blamed for the slaughter.

Kaur is an ex-MLA of that area and was chief guest at the Ravana burning. She says she had warned the crowd to get off the tracks several times, and that she left the venue much before the trains came barging into the festivities. But Kaur being Navjot Singh Sidhu's wife adds to the focus: This tragedy could have been avoided if only the organizers had anticipated such an event and taken corrective measures.

For Navjot Singh Sidhu, it is not a laughing matter. He's now in full-steam protecting his wife's fair name and saving himself from the backlash. The man was miles away when limbs were severed and torsos separated, but to pin the blame on him is so much more exhilarating. Sidhu has enemies in Punjab and Amritsar and he is not a friend of Chief Minister Amrinder Singh. The two get on like a mongoose and a snake.

Opposition BJP and the Akali Dal are spewing fire and the media has a full box of matchsticks to keep scratching the surface. 24/7 news coverage has kept the marauding TV news channels fully engaged on Amritsar, drawing attention from other happenings and issues, including 'Mandir' and 'Rafale'. The impending assembly elections also took a backseat. What, even the Sabarimala standoff between Law and Faith and MJ Akbar's #MeToo fixation were relegated to the background.

Opposition BJP and the Akali Dal are spewing fire and the media has a full box of matchsticks to keep scratching the surface. 24/7 news coverage has kept the marauding TV news channels fully engaged on Amritsar, drawing attention from other happenings and issues, including 'Mandir' and 'Rafale'.

The railways have made a clean break from the tragedy with Minister of State for Railways Manoj Sinha making a visit to the spot and giving the Railways a clean-chit despite the fact that the killers were trains. In previous years, the Railways took "safety" measures to avoid just such an unfortunate event, but this time it did not. "Why?" Sinha did not provide an answer.

Navjot Singh Sidhu, Navjot Kaur, railways. The victims themselves and the trains ("saw but did not slow!") and their drivers are all being blamed. But the smart phones are making a clean getaway. Smart phones make dull people. Every smart phone that evening in Amritsar was slanted to the sky to capture the burning demon. The trains did not know that and Ravana wouldn't care. The Rama clan was celebrating and Navjot 'Sita' Kaur was gone with the wind.

Now there is false equivalence being created and a moral dilemma. A false equivalence is an informal fallacy that describes a situation where there's an apparent similarity between two things when in fact they are not similar. There may be common characteristics but there are also important differences. Because they are linked to a common tragedy, Navjot Singh Sidhu, Navjot Kaur and the railways are being linked.

The probe faces a moral dilemma for it will be false equivalence to indict Navjot Singh Sidhu just because he happens to be Navjot Kaur's husband and Amritsar-East MLA, a seat his wife held before him. Navjot Singh Sidhu maybe a much reviled man for his friendship with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan but that doesn't make him a Ravana! Extrapolation is also a strict no-no. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Intolerance in the Hills

Editor,

It is a terribly sad reality, that this addictive platform for inter-personal communication called Social Media is full of hate mongers and narrow-minded blokes with an acute understanding of culture, tradition and religion. Due to the security and sense of anonymity that they enjoy, people can say just about any dil-dilla-dodo that they want. Many a times, it becomes extremely painful and heart-breaking. Recently, I came across a news report that one of the most celebrated Khasi ladies of our time, Kong Silbi Passah, a decorated and distinguished woman who is a pioneer in the field of Khasi culture, was cyber bullied and badly trolled by "internet khlawaits," (warriors), the self proclaimed defenders of the Khasi community. Her only 'fault' was because her cultural dance troupe took part in a function to commemorate our fallen soldiers who gave their lives for our country, organised by a prominent Puja committee of our city as part of the Sri Sri Durga Puja celebrations. For this act of hers, she was badly condemned by a few miscreants on social media giving it a communal wash altogether.

It is indeed amusing yet sorrowful to see what kind of society we have become. Intolerance, intolerance, intolerance everywhere. Communalism has reached its peak in this land of ours (I clarify, this has nothing to do with politics, the current dispensation at the Centre or state, just that we as a people have become hateful and narrow-minded by the day). It is amusing to note that these self defenders of tradition hardly know how to even wear a 'jainboh khaila' or don a 'jainspong khor'. Amusing that these "internet khlawaits" have got no clue either about our rich legacy and history as a tribe or the legends and folktales that we are blessed with! Historically speaking, for hundreds of years we have existed peacefully with our brethren from the plains of Bengal and Assam, and we have learned the art of dressing decently even from them! (Reference: Ka Riti ka Ri ki Laiphew Syiem, Bynta 1)

For those out there communally charged, know the facts how Hinduism from the plains has beautifully merged with our indigenous beliefs. Know that for many Khasis, particularly those from the Sohra regions, there exists a deity called U Biskurom, U Khadar Kamar, the great artisan who is invoked to destroy the effects of Ka Khap Thlen. Till date, there are Khasi blacksmiths who invoke him once a year for good business. Who is U Biskurom if not a Khasi version of Vishwakarma, the divine architect? Know also of Ka Lukhkhimai, the Khasi Goddess of wealth, about whom we were taught as children to leave some rice in the pot before we sleep lest we annoy her. Who is Lukhkhimai if not the Khasi version of the Goddess Laxmi? In Nartiang, we have a more than 500 year old strong tradition of the worship of the Goddess Durga and the God Shiva, which beautifully blends the indigenous faith with that of Shakta Hinduism. Isn't this a sign of communal brotherhood?

We as a community fail to realise that in the past, we had beautifully adjusted with our brethren from the plains, even borrowing their customs and deities but now, all seems to go down the gutter in the age of western enlightenment and rigid nationalism. How intolerant can we become?

Yours etc,
Keith Nongsteng,
Shillong

Flight of geese

Editor,

As my wife and I were homeward bound after an exhilarating walk, around 7 in the morning, we heard a honking sound above our heads. We looked up and beheld a magnificent sight which really warmed the very cockles of our hearts. There was a V shaped formation of twenty odd geese honking away and veering eastwards over the Shillong sky. This was all the more significant as this was last sighted only when we were little children and that too either late in the night or very early in the morning. These hibernating birds have traveled thousands of kilometers, and are just another example of mother Natures' splendour..

May god keep them safe.

Yours etc.,
Dr.Tridib kakoty,
Animal Concern
Shillong 14

Bizarre train accident

Editor, ,

It is pathetic that 61 people were killed and around 200 were injured on account of a train that ran right through a crowd gathered next to the railway track in Amritsar to witness the burning of the effigy of Ravana. As yet no case has been filed against the organisers. In fact, both Congress councillor Vijay Madaan and her son who organised the ill-fated Dussehra celebrations, continue to remain untraceable. No inquiry has been ordered against the driver of the train and the Railways have already denied being remiss from their side. Also it is curious that no instruction was given to the drivers of incoming and outgoing trains to watch out for revellers. All such poor responses of officials raise many questions which are yet to be answered. Punjab Government must evaluate the incident and order a high level inquiry to find out the real factors behind the disaster rather than taking it as a political football blame game.

Yours etc.,
Mohd Rahmani,
Via email

KSU, Uranium and Development

Editor,

My attention was drawn to the news item "KSU not to budge on uranium mining" (ST Oct 22, 2018). Yes, it is well within the KSU's rights to oppose uranium mining in the State but my only request to the KSU is not to oppose the two lane road from Nongstoin-Rangblang-Wahkaji-Ranikor because this road is for development and the lifeline of the people of West Khasi Hills. People are facing a lot of communication problems because of the absence of good road. Several villages of West and South West Khasi Hills and lakhs of people will be benefited if the road is completed. Moreover, the road is not going to the uranium rich areas. In fact the uranium area of Mawthabah-Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong is as far as 22 kilometres from the proposed road. So opposition to the road project is uncalled for since the Government and the District Council have finally said "No" to uranium mining. Why can we not trust them?

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
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.

"Never tell the truth to people who are not worthy of it."

--- Walter Bagehot

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The DGP conundrum

IN 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that State Security Commissions (SSC) be set up to oversee police functioning. The SSCs are to evaluate the performance of the state police, prepare a report thereon and place it before the State Legislature. According to the apex court directives the SSC must be chaired by the Home Minister of the state and must have on board the Leader of the Opposition, the DGP as ex-officio secretary and five other independent members drawn from civil society and to be nominated by the Governor of the State. Meghalaya set up the first SSC in 2009 which was chaired by the Home Minister and included the Leader of the Opposition as well as the Director General of Police as the Ex Officio Secretary. But of the five independent members, three were retired bureaucrats, one a retired DGP and the last was the Chairperson of State Commission for Women (a state government appointed post hence hardly an independent member). Hence the Meghalaya SSC was heavily loaded in favour of the Government and there was hardly an independent voice to bring in the required checks and balances. So while the State Government has fulfilled the SC directed mandate it intentionally created a weak and voiceless Commission. Independent members in the Commissions are to be selected by an empanelment process and not appointed directly by the state government. The complete lack of transparency on how non-official members are chosen reveals that the political executive does not wish to let go of its tenacious grip on police affairs in the country.

The SSC is intended to prevent the interference of elected politicians and bureaucrats into the everyday management and functioning of the police as this weakens its leadership, creates uncertainty of direction, breaks chains of command, obscures accountability, destroys discipline and divides loyalties all down the line. Above all the SSC is meant to insulate police from arbitrary transfers and to ensure that whoever is appointed DGP merits that post and it is not done on political considerations. The present government has only followed on the heels of its predecessors. It has not made public as yet who the members of the present SSC are. The SSC should be having a say in the appointment of a stop-gap DGP and should not have allowed someone with a criminal record in the adjoining state to hold the top post even for a brief period. But that was allowed to happen and interestingly there is no public outrage. And now another controversy ensues about the final appointment of a DGP!

Water Crisis

Govt's Ostrich like approach

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Water scarcity is fast becoming, or if not already emerged, as urban India's number one problem with government data having revealed that residents in 21 or 22 of 32 major cities are facing daily shortage. In fact, with the surge in population and supply of renewable freshwater water dwindling, the entire country is in the midst of a severe crisis. According to reports, India will become a 'water stressed country' shortly while another section of experts believe this stage has already been reached.

The worst-affected city is probably Jamshedpur where the gap between demand and supply is a yawning 70 per cent. The crisis is also acute in Kanpur, Asansol, Dhanbad, Meerut, Faridabad, Visakhapatnam, Madurai and Hyderabad. Though not mentioned by the government, presently Chennai has also been affected by water scarcity in recent years. The figures further reveal that Greater Mumbai and Delhi, which have the highest water demand among all cities, the gap between demand and supply is comparatively less. The shortfall was estimated at 24 per cent and 17 per cent for Mumbai, both of which has increased significantly and may be around 30 and 25 per cent respectively at present.

In most cities, the spurt in population resulted in the demand for water. The data pointed out that if corrective steps are not taken, the situation may further aggravate. Meanwhile, it may be mentioned that most cities are recharging groundwater to tackle the water shortage.

According to Rajendra Singh, an expert on water management, the over exploitation of groundwater, unplanned construction, mindless destruction of environment in the name of development and no water management plan on the part of government has resulted in the current situation. Obviously, this precarious situation calls for the government to take urgent steps to prevent misuse of water resources and harp on conservation measures.

Per capita freshwater resources have greatly diminished and are no longer a sustainable resource for potable applications and also for agricultural and industrial use. In regions lacking freshwater resources or water-stressed by climate change, 'wastewater' has been reinvented as a water resource. Whatever we call wastewater today, it is still H2 O. It is only the remaining one per cent which renders as 'wastewater'. The in-migration to the cities, which has expanded over a period of time, has aggravated the problem.

Take the example of Bengaluru whose population is around 0.5 million and by 2020, over 2 million IT professionals are expected to live there. The ground water level of the city has reached zero in many pockets and the city is dependent on private water tankers for its water supply. Question is how can the city, which is dependent on ground water for 40 per cent of its supply, meet the increased demand for water in future?

Another example may be Gurugram, which is hardly 30 km away from the Lutyens Delhi zone, but facing severe water crisis and is dependent on water tankers for daily water supply. As mentioned earlier, the cities in the South like Hyderabad, Chennai, Coimbatore, Vijaywada, and Kochi are moving towards acute water crisis. Climate change, early summer, deficit rain-fall, depleting water level, rising population and lack of water management policy is making it difficult for the urban local bodies to meet the increasing demand of water. According to a World Bank report, most of the cities are moving towards zero ground water level by 2020, which has already set the alarm bell ringing for policy makers and urban planners.

As per government estimate, our cities produce nearly 62,000 mld of sewage out of which only 18,883 mld sewage is treated. Rest of the untreated sewage goes directly to water bodies polluting our water resources. Domestic sewage accounts for 70 per cent of the contamination of rivers and ponds. The department of water and sanitation are among the top spenders, but if the sewerage water is treated and reused for industrial purpose, it will supply water to cities and also help save millions that we spend on cleaning our rivers every year. Countries like Singapore, which faces acute water crisis, have already set an example of how effective management can ensure safe water supply to people. With technology available, there is no reason why India cannot replicate this in its cities. An important aspect is the need to generate public awareness which can go in a long way to save water. People need to be sensitised about the judicious use of water. Cutting wastage of water in showers, toilets, and sinks, which account for approximately 75 per cent of the water used in our daily lives can go a long way in saving water.

The other dimension of the problem is the issue of contamination, specially of arsenic and fluoride in different parts of the country. An alarming 75 per cent or more of India's surface water is polluted, an assessment by Water Aid, an international organisation working for water sanitation and hygiene.

The report, based on latest data from the Ministry of Urban Development (2013), census 2011 and Central Pollution Control Board, estimated that 75-80 per cent of water pollution by volume is from domestic sewerage, while untreated sewerage flowing into water bodies including rivers have almost doubled in recent years. While availability has become a problem, if this water becomes contaminated, this has grave consequences on human health, specially for the poorer sections of the population.

Around 239 million people spread across 152 districts in 21 States drink water that contains unacceptable high levels of arsenic. In effect, they are being slowly poisoned. In response to a question in Lok Sabha, the Water Resource Ministry, revealed that 65 per cent of Assam's population or about 21 million people have been drinking arsenic contaminated water while in Bihar it is 60 per cent and in Bengal 44 per cent of the total population that is dependent on this poisonous cocktail to quench their thirst. In terms of absolute numbers, UP has the largest number of people exposed to the risk with over 70 million people consuming the polluted water.

The World Health Organization has warned that long-term intake of such water leads to arsenic poisoning or arsenicosis with cancer of bladder, kidney or lung or diseases of skin -- colour changes and hard patches on palms or soles or blood vessels of legs and feet. Further evidence indicates possible association between intake of contaminated water and onset of diabetes, hypertension and reproductive disorders.

Sadly, our political leaders and bureaucrats are deliberately not acknowledging this threat and advising their constituents how best to combat the problem and make investments in technology necessary for delivering arsenic-free water. What is the problem in setting up inexpensive community run arsenic treatment plants that can ensure the long term environmental health and economic security of an urban neighbourhood?

The challenge and impending urban water crisis needs to be tackled with all urgency before the problem goes out of hand. Though the recently released Special Report of the IPCC has not clearly highlighted this aspect, it is clearly manifest that the increase in warming levels may need more water which would become scarcer with every passing year. It goes without saying that intervention of the Central and State governments is urgently called for to evolve a plan of action to tackle water crisis.---INFA

CBI is now Central Bureau of extortion

Shadows lengthening to uncomfortable zones

By Sushil Kutty

For the first time in Central Bureau of Investigation history, the top-dog and second top-dog in the CBI are engaged in an ugly dogfight, each snapping at the heels of the other, leaving it to the imagination as to who is Honest George Washington - CBI Director Alok Verma or CBI Special Director Rakesh Asthana? To complicate matters, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was drawn into the controversy and his brag "Na Khaunga Na Khaane Doonga" slipped a disc.

That was on Monday. Tuesday the spine was sagging with more discs slipping after the CBI admitted in court that an "extortion racket" was being run from within the CBI headquarters in Delhi. "By whom" and "under whom?" spelled the divide. Asthana charged for "by whom?" and Verma for "under whom?' With that Congress president Rahul Gandhi's charge that the CBI was in "terminal stage" stood virtually vindicated.

The fight on Tuesday was in the courts - Patiala House and Delhi High Court. Asthana team member deputy superintendent Devinder Kumar was arrested on Monday and he was produced in a Patiala House court with the CBI seeking his custody for questioning, claiming that it had recovered incriminating evidence from Devender Kumar, who along with Rakesh Asthana also moved the Delhi High Court for quashing the FIR.

The irony is that Monday CBI Director Alok Verma met Prime Minister Modi and Modi told him to "let the law take its own course." Verma called Asthana "disgruntled and tainted" and that's a big allegation because Asthana is from the Gujarat cadre of the IPS and is believed to have been brought into the CBI by Modi himself in a "midnight operation". In fact, Rahul Gandhi called him the "blue-eyed boy of Modi infiltrated into the CBI."

Verma accused Asthana of taking a bribe and Asthana charged Verma with stalling investigation in a corruption case involving notorious meat exporter Moin Qureshi. Asthana allegedly was paid a bribe of nearly Rs 5 crore by Dubai associates of Qureshi. Verma in turn has been accused of receiving crores in gratification for stalling the case against Qureshi.

Remember the Supreme Court had not long ago said that the "CBI is the caged parrot" of the Central Government. Now, it emerges that the cage is gilt-edged with money in the crores paid into the pockets of CBI officials. Verma, for all his bold extortion racket revelation, opens himself to charges of being incompetent and totally clueless as to what was happening right under his nose.

Just for that, the current crop of CBI officials should like Little Tommy and Denis the Menace be made to stand in the corner and sing nursery rhymes. Because of them, the "FBI of India" is being labelled the "Corrupt Bureau of Investigation". Unpardonable. The CBI started out Honest George Washington but has ended up Watergate Nixon!

The question is not 'who is Nixon, Verma or Asthana?' The question is who does Prime Minister Narendra Modi think is Nixon? For sure, as far as Modi is concerned, his "blue-eyed boy" would not have the squint eyes of a liar. Or, maybe, for all we know, Verma is acting on orders from Modi? That doesn't mean Modi is not in a fix. Asthana, because he is from the Gujarat IPS cadre, taints the narrative for Modi. A former CBI joint-director recalls Asthana as a "brilliant investigator", who as "CBI Dhanbad" investigated Lalu Yadav in the fodder scam, and "then went back to the Gujarat cadre." Asthana investigated, among other cases, the Godhra train burning before being made CBI Special Director - "CBI No.2".

"CBI No.1" Alok Verma did not like the choice one bit. The Alok Verma-Rakesh Asthana relationship began with frost and has since turned into ice! Verma was Commissioner of Delhi and is an ex-DGP Tihar Jail. And he is said to be a low-key officer. Modi and Asthana on the other hand are both said to get along like a house on fire!

Asthana was assigned to head the CBI SIT probing "half a dozen UPA-time cases" including the coal scam. He was given charge of investigating Mallya emptying bank vaults and the Aircel-Maxis involving P Chidamabaram's son Karti C. Apart from Lalu's conviction, Asthana has nothing much to show in terms of success, except probably in giving Karti a couple of nervous breakdowns as Modi went about 'Congress-mukting' India.

Hidden in the folds of the "CBI No.1-CBI No.2" dirty spat saga are several pages packed with Modi's failures, the biggest of which is his "Na Khaunga Na Khaane Doonga" brag, which turned out emptier than a hot air balloon - 'Feku' in Internet slang. Now, the flames of alleged corruption are singeing Modi's churidaar folds and the CBI Fire Brigade cannot be called because it too is up in flames. Two guys getting on like a house on fire can, if they're allegedly mouthing honest lies, engulf and bring the whole edifice down.

Modi's problem is that Asthana brought with him a load, and a lode - baggage and loyalty. As it turns out, Asthana in disguise as an officer with an "impeccable record" is not a blessing! Ditto with Alok Verma, another officer with an "impeccable record." Now, with the "infiltrator" too accused of taking bribes, PM Modi is left with little to say in Asthana's defence, except to say "let the law to take its own course."

Doubts of whether the government is "trying to cover-up" will beg the question: "Can you trust much of what's being said?" Parroting time-tested excuses are out the window. The door is open to the allegation: "The Modi regime is not corruption-free." A lot of the story is still not known but the story is getting complicated by the day. In a country of people with no money to put socks on their feet, even the perception of corruption can decide election outcomes as it happened to the UPA.

The UPA paid in MPs for sporting a corrupt face. Will the BJP end up in the same drudge report? Draining the swamp of corrupt creatures is a Trump fantasy that Narendra Modi gave the impression of hugging but apparently never actually held to heart. Till now it was "we never saw it, so it (corruption) never exists" but that may not be for long if Verma's CBI keeps digging Asthana's CBI and finds dirt that sticks, over and above "running an extortion racket." Politically, Modi's party could get royally screwed.

Will a money trail be established? If so, to whom will it lead to? Big money routed through Dubai with origins in a Hyderabad slaughterhouse. Alok Verma's tenure cops out in January 2019 and he has only time till then to dig through to the tunnel leading to the government's soft underbelly. That if Modi doesn't take the helpful advice of some people to "disable the duo" and appoint CBI No.3 to find out which of the two is Honest George Washington - CBI No.1 Alok Verma or CBI No.2 Rakesh Asthana? (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Much water has flowed under Mawlai Bridge!

Editor,

It is now several months since Shillong was rudely traumatized by widespread unrest in the wake of an assault incident of the Khasi youths by the locals of the Them Metor. As a sequel to this upheaval, we have experienced closure of educational institutions, indefinite closure of Iewduh. The lives of those residents in parts of Shillong's West, North and Mawlai localities had been derailed owing to imposition of prolonged curfews.

In the aftermath of the turmoil and in consonance with the agitators'/public's demand, the State Govt. constituted a High Level Committee (HLC) to explore convincing options as to how the residential employees of the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB), who are occupying the Them Metor could be shifted to a suitable and salubrious Govt. land in Shillong. Incidentally, in the heat of unprecedented public ire, three of our MLAs, Messrs Lambor Malngiang, Banteidor Lyngdoh and Edilbert Nongrum arrived at Motphran and standing at an elevated podium they had managed to temper the seething atmosphere by affirming before the restive crowd that the Govt. had resolved to shift the residents in question at the earliest. The trio were thus able to cope with the highly charged crowd. .

Alas! After all the mayhem, destructions et al, things are now apparently back to square one, notwithstanding the setting up of the HLC, chaired by the Deputy Chief Minister, P. Tynsong. The re-settlement issue is far from being resolved. I, for one, believe that the house-holders of Them Metor will move tooth and nail and may even appeal to the Punjab Chief Minister and other personalities of their preference to see that they are not uprooted from the dwellings they have been occupying since long. The riddle why these people are so hell bent on staying put in these specific spaces is perhaps not far to unravel: The pre-eminent logic of their unwillingness to shift is because their residential locations is a money churning area, as it is adjacent to one of the biggest markets of the North East, called Iewduh. It is therefore, precisely on the basis of such enviable economic advantages that the residents would go to extraordinary lengths to secure themselves in Them Metor for good, come what may.

The above assertions are backed by my personal observations when decades ago I was with one of the Central Govt. establishments in Shillong and was tasked with carrying out a socio-economic survey in these very locales. While proceeding with house to house listing and collecting data queries, I could intuitively grasp that several of the inmates were tenants being sub-let at exorbitant monthly rents by the actual Municipal appointees. Furthermore, the bonafide allottees also engaged in varied business enterprises in and around the localities, being adjacent to the financial hub of the city and thereby making a quick buck. In view of such opportunistic fortunes, I can't see why these dwellers would want to be relocated elsewhere. Hence, much water shall flow under the Mawlai bridge but things would invariably remain as they have been as far as the shifting of Them Metor is concerned.

Yours etc,,
J. K. Diengdoh,
Via email

Sohra district justified

Editor,

Apropos the news item "Pynursla headmen want Laitlyngkot Headquarters of Sohra District" (ST.October 22, 2018), it was reported that the Sirdars of Raid Shabong, Raid Lyngkhat, Raid Rangnah, Raid Mukertilla, Raid Mawlam, Raid Mawshun, Raid Mawkhlieng and Raid Umniuh Tmar have endorsed that Laitlyngkot should be the headquarters of Sohra District. Their demand is fully justified because of geographical reasons. In other words the whole of Pynursla Civil Sub-Division will agree to be under Sohra District if Laitlyngkot is made the headquarters of Sohra District. Indeed, the people residing under Pynursla Civil Sub-Division would find it difficult to reach Sohra if it is made the HQ of Sohra District because of the roundabout distance (geographical connectivity). They will find it easier to come to Shillong than go all the way to Sohra. But if Sohra District, is created even though the geographical area is small then Sohra would still qualify to be the District HQ because of its name and fame and its historical importance.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Let justice prevail!

Editor,

Any form of militancy cannot be condoned by any government be it the Centre or State. The Meghalaya Government had earnestly been working towards the dissolution of the militant outfit the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) for more than three decades now. The initiative of the governments in the past had been to welcome and rehabilitate those cadres of the outfit who have returned to mainstream living. October 18, 2018 saw the surrender and return of Cherishstarfield Thangkhiew, the former General Secretary of HNLC. Fair enough that the man chose to come back to his land, family and friends and wishes to start life anew. However one fails to understand the tribute, accolades, red carpet welcome that was given to Mr Thangkhiew on his surrender. If one had only looked at the picture in the newspapers and social media without going through the news report one would have surmised that the man had been given all the above tributes after having achieved something glorious for the State. It seemed as if he has come home victorious from a battlefield. Well, the real intention of the piece is on The Shillong Times poll, (October 23, 2018) where 905 people voted that Thangkhiew must be tried for numerous criminal charges that he was guilty of as a member of the outfit. After all no one is above the law. If justice is to thrive every citizen of the country must be measured by the same yardstick. Only then will the legal system be upheld. Ordinary citizens have no one to rely on but the laws and judicial procedures of the country. So let justice prevail!

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
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.

" Women who accuse men, particularly powerful men, of harassment are often confronted with the reality of the men's sense that they are more important than women, as a group."

-- Anita Hill

The Shillong Times

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Parrot's plight

HEADS are rolling in the CBI and understandably so. The tough action, though, has come a bit late. The events of the last few days have exposed the fault-lines in the nation's premier investigating agency. At the height of an internal feud and corruption charges flying thick and fast the agency ordered a raid on its central office and suspended a senior sleuth. The "caged parrot" is left with egg on its face. The sacking of the CBI chief and ordering his deputy to go on leave, besides transfer of several officers out of the capital, were the minimum that could have been done to stem the rot.

Embarrassed is also Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah, though the allegations crossed political boundaries and cast a shadow over the Congress leadership in the past, as well.

At the core of the problems in the CBI now was a personality clash between the head of the agency Alok Verma and his deputy Rakesh Asthana. This led to a free for all. The two are obviously poles apart, and Verma is believed to have a soft corner for the Congress while Asthana of the Gujarat cadre is reportedly a favourite of Modi and Shah. Verma, formerly a senior cop with Delhi police, is set to retire shortly and Asthana was expected to succeed him.

Both Asthana and Verma are accused of bribe-taking; the sums running into crores. There are other key personalities involved, including top meat exporter Moin Qureshi who "bribed" CBI top brass and "escaped" income tax raids by drawing support from Congress leadership in the past. There also are RAW officials who got involved in bribe-related aspects, and a host of middlemen. Worse, Asthana alleged his boss was trying to scuttle key investigations in the railway bribery case involving Bihar leader Lalu Prasad. He also says he had been taken out of investigations into this case as also the INX Media probe involving former Union finance minister P Chidambaram and family.

Curiously, Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power with the promise, among other things, to end the corruption Raj – a phenomena of the UPA II period. With the general elections fast approaching, he will be called upon to explain what he did to fulfill his promises. Corruption pervades all segments of the society and all governmental departments. The Modi dispensation made little difference to this scenario, except perhaps at the top level. Total eradication is difficult, but it could also be argued that Modi has not done enough to check this trend even as he personally is not seen to be corrupt. But, so was former PM Manmohan Singh. This in itself was not good enough.

#Me Too Singes

India says times up

By Poonam I Kaushish

Last week India was agog to Her Story. Two diametrically opposite tales which showcased the dichotomous position of women in 21st century India. One, wherein she emerges victorious; the second where she is victimized. Both, culminating in victory with the God or devil taking the hindmost!

In a landmark 4:1 majority verdict the Supreme Court did the unthinkable: It allowed menstruating women between 10-50 inside the over 800-year-old Sabarimala temple abode to the eternally celibate deity Lord Ayyappa. Asserting a dualistic approach in religions and prohibiting women entry as a form of untouchability which results in lowering dignity of women, it added, "Subversion of women under garb of biological and physiological factors can't be given legitimacy and can't pass muster of constitutionality and religion can't become a cover to exclude and deny basic right to worship... nor can physiology be a reason."

Yet, despite the judgment, none from the "banned" age group could make it to its hallowed precincts amid a welter of protests, chaos and violent clashes. This on the fallacious plea that entry of women of menstruating age was an age old tradition and antithetical to the celibate nature of the deity. Big deal if it stereotyped women as seductresses and stripped India of open-mindedness, equilibrium and tolerance!

As the fight between Hindu Renaissance and Obscurantism rages another battle front exploded of hundreds of instances of courage which singed male celebrities in the #MeToo inferno. From journalist-turned-junior Union Foreign Minister Akbar who was forced to resign, Congress NSUI President, actors Nana Patekar, film director Vivek Bahl, music composer Anu Malik, author Chetan Bhagat, adman Suhel Seth, male journalists, stand-up comic was accused of sending explicit images, another filmmaker accused of masturbating on a colleague, one more of sexual harassment and assault etc.

It all started with a small-time actress Tanushree Dutta recounting her story of being sexually assaulted by Patekar in 2008 on a film set. When she objected the actors/goons misbehaved making her quit the film, industry and country. Twenty women journalists named Akbar for propositioning them, groping their breasts and violently assaulting them. This raises a moot point: Why are women viewed as sex objects? A plaything of males to satisfy their libido and massage their egos? Why are we so complacent when it come reporting sexual crimes?

Clearly, in a society which lives with the regressive mindset that freedom and equality for women tantamount to promiscuity, we swing between two extremes. One where a girl child is bad news and nurtured on a "conform" paranoia: Not to rock the boat, be fearful of what lies around the corner and subjecting them to countless restrictions in the name of women's protection.

For many girls even talking about periods is taboo and life freezes for five days: confined to a room, disallowed from entering the kitchen and temples lest they dirty it. And in all of this fathers make the rules, husbands enforce them and male bosses reiterate them, speaking out against someone's wrong doing is tough.

We need to change our approach to sexual harassment. One option is radical feminism to make a social impact and safety of women should be an important article of faith with people, society and Government. Along-with dignity, equal opportunity and independence of thought and action.

A girl raped by one of her male relatives in locked in the precincts of her home, is told to keep quite to avoid repercussions on the facetious pretext of 'what will people say' and 'nobody will marry you.' Several women who face sexual abuse at work stay quite in order to avoid further harassment and unwanted attention. Or are hesitant to speak out fearing they will be dubbed 'loose charactered' at best or ostracized at worst. Either which way the damage is done. Getting married and raising kids is the core of female existence. Sic.

Not a few women complain that they are viewed as sex objects and mince-meat for male lust camouflaged as human animals to either comply or reconcile to battling it out at every level. To rise professionally they need a 'godfather' who can make or break them.

A profession where sexual abuse is rampant is the film industry. Actresses complain of "couch" tactics where it is extremely difficult to land a film. Not only are actresses asked to show lot of skin but visit the director, producer, actor after shooting. In the advertising world colleagues' comment that women should wear things that make them look luscious, some pinch while greeting you,

Perhaps it has something to do with our patriarchal lineage and misogynistic culture where we show utter disregard and disrespect for women.... rape, marital rapes, sexual assault and systemic harassment et al. A culture that believes that the worst aspect of rape is the defilement of the victim, who will no longer be able to find a man to marry her — and that the only solution is to marry the rapist.

Pertinently, till date Prime Minister Modi has never been held to account—by an increasingly pliant mainstream media or the public—for his behavior toward women. He has maintained a calculated silence in the face of countless rapes across the country. Be it BJP colleague, MP or MLA accused of sexual harassment or molestation he has chosen political opportunism over the rule of law. Rape accused Unnao MLA is still in the BJP. When he speaks it's vague, calling it "shame of daughters establishing his patriarchal thinking of a woman's place in a 'man's world.

Alas, despite umpteen promises of empowering women, the Government has failed the Women's Reservation Bill reserving 33% of seats in Parliament and State legislatures for women. Neither has he taken proactive measures to improve female labour force participation, which stood at a dismaying 24% in 2015-2016, down from 36% in 2005-2006.

All eyes are on what happens in the Akbar defamation case. However either which way, women have identified their predators and they will determine what happens next. True, lies have no legs but truth is the best defense.

Notwithstanding the #Me Too campaign, in a culture where the national narrative conditions people to think that sexual harassment has no consequences; where sex crimes are dismissed as result of an imbalanced sex ratio; and where women have little or no cultural respect, it is going to be a steep uphill to change what is just par for the course.

Where does one go from here? Given that this oppressive atrocity against women will get worse, not better. Clearly our leaders need to pay heed and address this seriously. For starters why haven't our policing laws been strengthened? Laws tightened which would deter men to think thousand times before they commit crime?

Our education system needs to emphasise the importance of gender equality and eradicate the sick male mindset. We need to change our approach to sexual harassment. One option is radical feminism to make a social impact and safety of women should be an important article of faith with people, society and Government. Along-with dignity, equal opportunity and independence of thought and action.

To that end, we need stricter laws that ensure that those found guilty of workplace harassment are punished. The Vishakha judgment guidelines provide many safeguards, like having an "appropriate complaints mechanism with a complaints committee" at all. Political Parties should constituted a Internal Complaints Committee.

Tough times call for tough action. A revolutionary change is needed. The Constitution has given equal rights to women. Merely mouthing platitudes of freedom will no longer work. We need cry a halt to women being playthings of voyeuristic men. Will women continue to constitute the weaker gender? Continue to rot at the hands of lecherous, predatory or pedophile men? Will we break new ground and unshackle women? A time to introspect and say TIMES UP. Enough of sexual harassment! ---- INFA

Sangh Parivar's Sabarimala slip is showing

LDF Govt. must shed its ambivalence

By P. Sreekumaran

The Sangh Parivar's sinister agenda to whip up communal passions on the Sabarimala issue and extract political mileage thereof has been exposed. Also laid bare is the double game the Parivar has been playing right from the beginning. As a Parivar detractor put it, it is duplicity of the deepest dye.

There are tell-tale signs of the Sangh's method to madness. Caught in the act, the various Hindu outfits agitating at the behest of the parivar are blaming the violence vitiating Sabarimala on 'Ayyappa bhakts' and CPI(M)-sponsored goondas!

The fact that the media persons, especially women who were threatened, intimidated and abused in the most profane language belonged to TV channels and news agencies favouring the entry of women of all ages to the Sabarimala demolishes the Sanghis' argument. Why would the CPI(M) or the LDF Government intimidate women reporters of these channels, especially when they are in agreement with the Government's stand on the issue?

The fact that the media persons, especially women who were threatened, intimidated and abused in the most profane language belonged to TV channels and news agencies favouring the entry of women of all ages to the Sabarimala demolishes the Sanghis' argument. Why would the CPI(M) or the LDF Government intimidate women reporters of these channels, especially when they are in agreement with the Government's stand on the issue?

The undeniable reality is that it is not genuine Ayyappa devotees who are indulging in violence. Violence is the handiwork of members of various Hindu outfits in the garb of devotees. An audio clip released by the Devaswom Minister shows an appeal by a Sangh Parivar leader exhorting Parivar activists to rush to Sabarimala in the guise of Ayyappa devotees!

That the Sangh Parivar is running with the hare and hunting with the hound is clear from the latest developments. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs has written to the Kerala Chief Secretary asking him to take firm steps to ensure law and order in view of reports that right-wing organisations are likely to foment trouble. The order shows that the Central government is supportive of the Kerala Government's stand that the Supreme Court order has to be implemented. But this is at sharp variance with the stance taken by the Kerala unit of the BJP and the RSS-affiliated Hindu outfits. True, the Modi Government has every right to ask the State Government to maintain law and order. But it must also direct the BJP and the RSS-affiliated bodies to refrain from violence marring the peace at Sabarimala. That the Central government has not deemed it fit to issue any such appeal is self-explanatory.

The double standard of the BJP is clear also from its reluctance to file a review petition on its own. If the party feels so strongly on the issue, it can go ahead with filing a review petition the way the Nair Service Society(NSS) has done, for instance.

Nor has the BJP cared to persuade the Modi government to intervene in the matter and solve the problem through the ordinance route. Instead, the party is misleading the devotees by repeating ad nauseum that the Kerala Government should come out with an ordinance, conveniently forgetting that the Pinarayi government is simply not in a position to do so!

A word about the Kerala Government's blow-hot-blow-cold attitude is in order. The Vijayan Government has rightly taken the consistent stand that the SC order must be implemented at any cost. But when it comes to implementation, the Government has shown itself to be indecisive. The Police have been told to ensure protection to anyone visiting the hill shrine. But when two 'activists' wanted to visit the temple, the police first took them within shaking distance of the shrine. But they were stopped and persuaded to return in the face of strong opposition to the move. What added to the confusion was the Devaswom Minister's directive to the police to direct the activists to return. Activists have no business to be there in Sabarimala, thundered the Minister, only to be corrected by CPI(M) state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan that the party has not barred activists from visiting the temple! The prevailing confusion within the party shows that the Government needs to be more proactive in exhibiting the will power and resolve to implement the apex court order. A flip-flop approach simply won't do.

Meanwhile, the tantric (chief priest) has added to the confusion by threatening to close down the temple if women activists in the 10-50 age group manage to reach the temple precincts. In fact, the 'parikarmis '(those who help the chief priest) resorted to a protest against the police action in escorting the activists to the temple. The question is: does the tantri have the power to shut the temple down unilaterally without the permission of the Devaswom Board? Also, there is an opinion that the tantri's action amounts to contempt of court. In fact, there is a growing demand that the Devaswom Board must ask the tantri and the 'parikarmis' to explain their stance. Will the Board summon the courage to do so?

In another U-turn, the Devaswom Board at its meeting on October 19 decided not to file a review petition. Instead, the Board would now approach the SC with a status report on Sabarimala. How it should proceed in the matter will be decided by eminent lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Career guidance for youth - an imperative

Editor,

We live in a highly competitive world where student's career choices and efforts determine the quality of their life in future. The competition is increasing everyday and has engulfed the courses that were once called non-conventional. Some years back the largest chunk of student used to compete for mainstream courses like engineering, medical sciences, commerce etc., other courses like fine arts, hotel management, etc., were opted by selected few and hence getting admission was not a big deal. Today, even these courses have become hard to get and one has to compete with many students to get admission. The competition has become so brutal that there is no scope for mistakes in career choice. One small mistake can push you behind in the race towards your dreams. Now a days the career choices reflected by student's resume is seen as the first impression of their decision making skills. Hence even a small wrong career step can leave a bad impression. Today students are expected to be clear about their dreams and the career path leading towards it. This creates a lot of pressure among students and their parents who find themselves in a dilemma while choosing the right career. Hence professional career guidance services should be the top priority of all colleges in our state which can serve as a rescue mission for the students and parents. A good career guidance professional not only directs students towards their dream but also gives them an end to end support in all the steps involved in the pursuit of that career.

Career and college guidance can help students understand their strengths and weaknesses and then match them with their skills and interests so that they can get the best suitable career choice. One wrong choice can not only cost a lot of money but also amount to waste of some precious years. Career and college guidance can help students effectively in their career choice part but there is no alternative to honest efforts. Career and college guidance matched with hard work, determination and perseverance can ensure a smooth path for our students. Therefore, colleges will need to be encouraged to procure such devices and to introduce Remedial classes/Tutorials/Career guidance classes for students. It is also imperative that Government of Meghalaya under State Higher Education Plan adopts measures to promote and support and introduce career counselling and guidance in colleges.

Yours etc.,
Phrangshai Hynniewta
Shillong - 2

Religious as sexual predators

Editor,

The ongoing debate on the circumstances involving two religious individuals from different religious orders or congregation in a so-called sexual harassment case that surfaced as part of the #MeToo campaign in our state is just another example of how weak our laws are when dealing with such transgressions. Notwithstanding the fact that such allegations have continued to surface within the Catholic Church in the past whether it was on children, young people or even adults, this is not centered just within one sect, religion etc., but it has happened in other religions as well. The Catholic Church does not defend those guilty and it has also in these few months asked priests, bishops and other religious men holding high and influential positions in the Church to resign and allow the law of the land to take over. The Vatican has categorically denounced such sinful, inhuman acts and Pope Francis has asked for forgiveness on behalf of his clergy. Afterall, we are all humans and to err is human. What we need is to stand up to any social injustices and defend those oppressed by those in positions of power or otherwise. Hope the Church defines its ground on where it stands when it comes to differentiating a rapist masquerading as a religious individual or an oppressed victim left alone.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar,
Via email

India and malnutrition

Editor,

India ranks 103rd among 119 countries in the 2018 Global Hunger Index. Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe have jointly published the report that identifies India as one of the countries with "serious level of hunger". It zeros in on India, Djibouti and South Sudan as the countries where child wasting is most prevalent. Children under the age of five who become victims of acute under-nutrition with low weight for their height, are tagged in the group of child wasting. Among our neighbouring countries, India (103) is behind China (25), Sri Lanka (67), Myanmar (68), Nepal (72) and Bangladesh (86) and only ahead of Pakistan (106) and Afghanistan (111) on the Hunger Index. Hunger means the distress associated with a lack of sufficient calories that makes children disabled and stunted forever.

In the 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2017' report, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN has estimated that 190.7 million (14.5 per cent of our population) people are undernourished in India. Ironically, it has also been estimated by the UN that nearly 40 per cent of the food produced in India is wasted or lost. And this cost India one lakh crore rupees every year. Obsolete technology used in infrastructure and transporting food items is the culprit for food wastage in India. Instead of engaging in temple tug of war, city renaming and statue building games or trying to find lives in Mars, we must adopt a better technology to reduce food wastage to save millions of living temples of our country. The government can start shelters in various places to distribute cooked food to hungry people after collecting excess and donated fresh cooked food from local eateries and houses that have sent missed call/ SMS/ WhatsApp requests to a particular number. In this way, wastage of cooked food can also be checked and managed in a proper way.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

"Pessimists are the people who have no hope for themselves or for others. Pessimists are also people who think the human race is beneath their notice, that they're better than other human beings."

--- A. W. Tozer

The Shillong Times

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Automation In India

A survey based on secondary sources reveals that more than half of generic work profiles in India will be disrupted in the next two years because of automation. 52 - 69% of repetitive and productive roles in IT, Financial Services, Manufacturing, Transportation and Packaging will be taken over by automation. Remember Chaplin's Modern Times. There may not automatically be job losses. A new high order of jobs will be created simultaneously. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will come increasingly on the scene which will need workers with higher specialization and critical thinking. The question is whether India is ready for the makeover. It is necessary to invest huge chunks of money in upgrading skill level. Otherwise the advent of AI will naturally lead to significant job losses. The preparation for AI should begin at the school level. China & Germany have already shown the way.

In China, AI education is making great headway. There are plans to set up fifty AI colleges and research institutes by 2020. China is also making great strides in robotics. Youngsters are enthusiastically taken up making of tech-intensive machines and robots. German states have introduced coding for high school studies. Some schools in Estonia are introducing teaching programs in AI for six year olds. These countries are already getting ready for the AI revolution. India has a huge workforce and can achieve a lot if steps are taken in the right direction. That will no doubt enable the government to not merely face the unemployment problem but also tackle the hazards that modernization may lead to. The very notion of education and how it is imparted in India needs a radical shift. This requires teachers that can adapt to quick changes in the curriculum and to move beyond it when the need arises. Flexibility is the new way to learn but that is far from happening. We are still rigidly bound to the syllabi at the risk of reducing the whole learning process into a rigmarole that students are bored with. In fact, the problem with education in India today is that there is a huge mismatch between what the 21st century demands and what the teachers are capable of delivering. With so many untrained teachers who are now being put through a quick capacity building process it shows that India is not quick enough to meet the global challenge even while this challenge stares us in the face. And the biggest challenge is automation.

Challenges of youth today: Are we even thinking?

By Patricia Mukhim

This paper published a letter from a young person who expresses his angst about the shrinking career space and the need for career guidance for young people at the school and college level. This prompted me to read up and feel what the world is really thinking vis-à-vis careers in a world where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking away jobs from humans. There are experienced writers like Daniel Priestly who believe that the world today demands that we be adept at not just one career but that we have to train ourselves to juggle careers because redundancy is so rapid. Employers today want results. They want outcomes. If you don't deliver; if there are no outcomes you are out on a limb. This is when one has tio change one's entire mind space. I have changed jobs three times over and have managed to do so because of a personal interest to grow by learning new trades. It's only in the Government sector where people enter into a career and leave on retirement without much growth along the way. The job is just that – a job that brings the salary. Government employees, by and large are hardly bothered about the impact that their job has on the public. And since there are no measurable yardsticks to assess impacts, Government employees continue to enjoy their salaries irrespective of whether they actually make a difference to anyone. But this culture will soon end as stakeholders in governance – namely the public demand better services and value for money. Besides, the world has changed and the Government's way of doing business too has to change.

Indeed change is the buzzword today. Everything is changing at a frenetic pace, but have we changed with the times? Merely using a smart phone does not make anyone smart. This is a world of ideas – the knowledge economy as they say – and there are angel investors ready to invest in innovative ideas. This requires thinking and experimenting but I dare say our education system has hardly geared us for innovative thinking. We have imbibed the herd mentality. We generally think it's wrong to disagree; to contest ideas; to critique a statement. If we were a thinking, analytical society we would not elect men and women who ride on the bandwagon of populism and rhetoric. We are a society where the blind lead the blind and anyone who differs from the populist viewpoint is called "leh stad," (know it all). Ideas are not respected. And the young learn early that is it better to conform than to confront and contest.

But this is a brave new world. In his book, "Become a Key Person of Influence," Daniel Priestly says, "There is a huge shift from employment to entrepreneurship. The best and most innovative thoughts five years ago have today become baggage. The thought leaders that we followed are now passé. The world of five years ago no longer exists." This change can be frightening but it demands that we gear ourselves for it because if we don't we will be left behind and become redundant. Constant learning and updating is the name of the game. Business models have to be constantly shifted and reconfigured. What's frightening is the state of flux in the global economy. Countries that offered great opportunities for wealth creation a decade ago are now in a state of recession while poorer countries are becoming the engines of growth. US President Donald Trump was elected simply because he promised to turn the economy around. Now nearly two years down the line he has barely succeeded to make good his promises because turning round the US economy means contending with the new economic growth of countries like China and India.

Add to this global economic distress the climate change impact and we have a perfect recipe for disaster. The series of tornadoes and earthquakes that are hitting one country after the other are not unpredictable. They are graphic examples of Climate Change. Writing in The Guardian about the global financial crisis, Larry Elliot says Climate Change will make the next global crash the worst. And even as countries are gearing up to deal with these catastrophes the next one hits them and they slip even lower in terms of their ability to cope with the crises.

And in all of this, the notion of work has also changed. There is no security of tenure anymore. Employers are outsourcing most of the work because they don't want to be burdened by labour laws and striking employees. In my time and my children's time a career was what we could choose. Now the career chooses the best in the business. That's why profiles are so important. When we attend a meeting and look at the list of speakers or the so-called "influencers," and have not heard their names before we quickly Google them and the information we need is right there. Our perception of the person goes up or down depending on how Google profiles that person. And usually Google does best when it is able to read what we write. Hence writing and publishing are important for building our profiles. Alas! We live in a society where very few actually share their opinions on the range of issues confronting us. Quite a few have their pet themes and write only when they feel the urge to. Recently when noted author Jerry Pinto delivered the Convocation Address at Martin Luther Christian University, he mentioned something very important. He said he never leaves the house until he was written at least 1000 words. Writing is as important, if not more important than speaking. With writing you leave a mark; a trail that people can follow. With speaking you are only addressing a select audience.

Our education system unfortunately does not lay stress on creative writing. Most people learn that from workshops when they are well past the formative age and are already out of college. I know of many young people who have made writing their livelihoods and also earned their spurs in the international circles. So is writing a career in the sense that we understand it? Writing is a passion that can also earn you your bread; and if you hit pay dirt you could well live off your writing for a long time, until you produce another bestseller!

It's important for educational institutions to discuss this issue with kids because most of them are clueless about what subjects to take up in order to arrive at a "career." Now we have many more professional courses than we had in the past. Who would imagine that the fashion industry would be a money spinner, but it is today. And we have quite a few young men and women from our own state who never really studied this trade but instinctively learnt it. They are doing well for themselves and are even known in international circuits. You can Google them and they are there with all of their accomplishments. In this day and age if Google has not found you then you are not important enough and have not branded yourself well enough. And since a career is no longer a simple process where you enter into a profession after having gone through the written test followed by a viva voce, it's important for job seekers too to reinvent themselves. Employers are looking at more ingenious ways of identifying bright sparks that can light up their companies.

The game has changed irrevocably and if we don't change then the loss is ours. In fact social media is such a great opportunity to share and discuss ideas rather than to thunder, or shriek or rave, rant and condemn people and call them 'betrayers' of a national cause. There are some who would actually murder people with words. Indeed, if words were daggers, most of us who express ourselves liberally would be dead at the hands of trolls. So much for the wrong use of the internet and the smart phone, when it could be used for trading ideas with those who could pick up those ideas and pay you for it!

Each of us need to discover ourselves and our Big Game. Daniel Priestly says, "My big game is to lead people out of the Industrialized Workforce and into the Entrepreneur Revolution so they can earn money doing what they love and be free to make a difference as well." What a great thought! Our young people need to get out of the stifling atmosphere of the classroom and explore the world outside it. It's my gut feeling that classrooms too will soon become things of the past and I don't wish to be proven wrong because classrooms are not where ideas are born. They are born in the minds of those who constantly challenge themselves.

CBI infighting may lead to loss of credibility

By Kushal Jeena

The current infighting between two top bosses of India's premier investigation agency - the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has virtually brought it to a terminal decline as it is at war with itself. This would lead to the destruction of the federal agency because the director is trying to assert his supremacy whereas his deputy is throwing a challenge at his authority by flouting his orders.

The situation in the premier investigation agency has come to such a pass that government seems to be working overtime to defend one officer to get him exonerated from charges of corruption and subsequent departmental inquiries. That the decision to send both officers in the agency on leave was taken at the highest level is reflective of the desperation on the part of the government to fix CBI director Alok Verma because he is reported to have asked for some files in connection with the Rafale aircraft deal.

Instead of intervening in the ongoing tussle between the two top officers of the CBI, the government seems directly intervening in the departmental affairs of the agency as indicated by the fact that all officers assigned to probe the allegations against Asthana have been transferred at the stroke of midnight.

Rakesh Asthana, the officer in question was dealing with high profile cases including Gujarat riots at the Madhya Pradesh recruitment case. After his elevation as special director in CBI, Asthana was assigned to probe almost all cases of frauds by businessmen who fled the country after committing large scale financial irregularities.

Sending two top officers on forced leave and transfer of all who were considered to be close to the agency chief has given a fresh ammunition to the opposition which took on the government on the issue saying the action was arbitrary and illegal because as per an order of the apex court the head of the CBI is to be chosen by a panel that consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the opposition, the Chief Justice of India and Central Vigilance Commissioner. The CBI Director enjoys a fixed term of two years and can only be removed by the same panel only. Verma has approached the Supreme Court challenging the government's decision directing him to go on leave.

It has happened for the first time in the history of independent India that the premier investigation agency of the country is mired in such a deep controversy that has come up as a threat to the very existence of the agency.

The feud that led to the arrest of one of senior official of the agency has refused to die town despite the interference of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who summoned both director Alok Verma and his second in command Rakesh Asthana and asked them to resolve their differences. The war of attrition between Verma and Ashthana took an interesting turn when the arrested officer Devendra Sharma posted as deputy superintendent of police at the agency approached the court challenging his arrest.

The agency feud began two months ago when Asthana wrote a letter to the Cabinet Secretary accusing his boss of taking a bribe of Rs. 2 crore from an accused - a meat exporter Moin Qureshi to grant relief to him in the case under investigation by agency's special investigation team that Asthana headed. The infighting took a serious turn when CBI filed a first information report against Asthana, a 1984-batch Gujarat cadre officer of the Indian Police Service, his junior Sharma and a middleman for allegedly receiving bribes to favour one Hyderabad-based business man Satish Sana in the Qureshi case.

Asthana is considered to be close to Modi and his party chief Amit Shah. He had also headed a SIT constituted by the Gujarat government to probe the Gujarat riots in 2002 in which a score of people from Muslim community were killed during Prime Minister Modi's term as the chief minister of Gujarat. Asthana came closer to Modi and Shah after he exonerated both in the riots case. The BJP president was reported to be instrumental in bringing Asthana to the CBI after Modi took over the reins of power at the centre.

The war between the two started gaining ground when the agency chief objected to the induction of IPS officials into the agency during his absence as he was on an overseas tour. Asthana who was asked to head the agency in the absence of its director also irked his boss when he removed officials at the level of DIG and directors. After the incident of removal of officials the CBI was flooded with complaints against Asthana on the basis of certain mysterious documents and a diary seized by the enforcement directorate.

The infighting reached an alarming point when the country's federal investigating agency issued a statement saying it is probing the role of its special director in at least in six cases. The statement also accused Asthana of making frivolous and baseless complaints against his boss to the government.

"It is unfortunate that baseless and frivolous allegations were being made publicly without proper verification of facts to malign the image of the director of CBI and intimidate the officials of the organization," said the agency statement.

Verma had objected to the appointment of Asthana as special director by promoting him from the post of additional director. The Prime Minister's Office overlooked his objections and proceeded with the installation of Asthana as special director. Asthana has been throwing his weight around the agency headquarters, boasting that he was close to the political leaders in the government.

"The director Verma informed the CVC-led panel that Asthana was under probe in the Sterling Biotech case. But the panel turned down Verma's contention and recommended the name of Asthana for promotion. The Cabinet Committee on Appointments immediately cleared his name," said a senior agency official.

Asthana was also accused of renting out his residential premises to Sterling Biotech. In his defence the CBI special director admitted giving his residential premises on rent to the company in question saying it has duly declared his annual returns to the government.

The tension between the two escalated when Asthana transferred Rajiv Singh, a joint director rank official at the agency. Singh was heading bank security and fraud unit of the agency. He was also entrusted with several important cases including the case of diamond merchant Nirav Modi. It is openly said in the agency headquarters that Asthana was instrumental in the repatriation of Singh back to his home cadre in Tripura. Asthana was also accused of leaking key portions of a draft report in the Aircel-Mexis case.

The SIT that the CBI special director Asthana is heading has been handling several important cases including Augusta Westland chopper scam, bank loan fraud involving fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya and the Quereshi case. The CBI statement against one of its official underlines seriousness of the situation within the agency and reflects how the political interference has completely eroded the credibility of the federal investigating agency.

TO THE EDITOR

Garo Hills forest looted

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Illegal logs seized in North Garo Hills" (ST Oct 22, 2018) it is painful to note that our valuable forests are looted and plundered left and right by the timber smugglers. This is completely unacceptable. We raised forests not to be looted and smuggled by timber barons and gangs. I, personally, have seen the dense and valuable sal and teak forests of Garo Hills which were raised by the Forest Department, especially in East and South Garo Hills and even West Garo Hills. Garo Hills, as a whole, was blessed by the presence of valuable teak and sal dense forests but today, except few patches here and there, there is hardly any forest cover particularly the teak and sal forests. The forest wealth of Meghalaya was largely located in Garo Hills. Where have all these valuable forests gone today?. Is it because of the negligence and carelessness of the Forest Department or by the Government as a whole? Or is it because of the connivance of the Forest Department officials with timber gangs right from the top to the bottom? What has happened to the vast expanse thick of teak and sal forests of East and North East Garo Hills? Do they find their way to the Assam saw and veneer mills? Are they smuggled across to West Bengal and other parts of India? Where are the stewards appointed for the purpose?. Even today truck loads of timber are daily openly smuggled out of Garo Hills just to clean shave whatever little forests are still remaining there. We demand an immediate answer from the Forest Department on this. We also demand that whoever is responsible for this should be immediately arrested and exemplary punishment be meted out to those responsible for this grievous crime.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Fear of #MeToo for the better

Editor,

It is no longer going to be a bed of roses for sexual predators. Now they can scarcely hide the wrong acts under the cover of their power and influence. Even the powerfully naughty and haughty Harvey Weinstein had to give in to the thunder of #MeToo protests some months back, thanks to the bold roars in unison by over 80 victims who could finally corner this lecherous filmmaker. What of Weinstein's castle, of his opulence and social influence now? They all have virtually fallen down like a house of cards! Yes, the formidable jaws of MeToo have already devoured a good many Weinsteins across the world.

In India huge uproars in media and Bollywood have already put the integrity of the entertainment houses into question. Many film actresses are now determined to fight against the sexual advances by their past bosses. But what is shocking is that we now get to see the skeletons tumbling out from the unsuspected holy cupboards too. October 19, was another new dawn for the Northeast. A humble lady from our state could gather enough courage yet again to articulate through social media the evil acts of the devil under the garb of holiness. It is disgusting that those who sermonize about the "hell of eternity," had, in fact, allegedly given the lady hell since she was a 5-year old kid. I don't think any jail sentence or material punishment will ever appease God in heaven for such heartless pedophilic c acts. It is an unpardonable sin.

Its difficult to analyze the ordeal the said lady had experienced all through. However, the pain, anxiety and trauma has driven her to cry for "justice". True, with the "Weinstein effect" worldwide now, the aggrieved victims of sexual abuses can stand up and call out the perpetrators. I am quite sure that what we see now is just the tip of the iceberg. Frankly speaking, MeToo is a frightfully sharp dagger that will slay the evil within the perverts. Not just that, it will frighten away the males from committing any sexual crimes. Let's pray, that more new and genuine cases, come to light and that sanity will descend on society.

I think the stern laws and various punishments existing to prevent sexual misconducts have been quite dwarfed by the worldwide MeToo movement. One would consider this movement truly "successful" when males habitually "fear to touch" females as they fear to touch fire. Indeed, as noticed, the fear "symptom" has already started to run deep into the veins of the males. It is a very healthy development. Hope this will help douse their raging fire of lust.

However, there is a fair chance of this movement being used for the wrong ends too. Its consequence could be very bad for both males and females and society at large. No innocent males should ever be harassed and tormented by females for vengeance. WeTwo should not at all turn into MeToo, else the "sharpness" of MeToo movement itself will be blunted. Let the evil in men be slain, not their gentlemanliness!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

Tribute to a true journalist

Editor,

Those who believe in media freedom should honour the brave journalist Jamal Khashoggi who was killed inadvertently inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. He was a fearless person who had to pay with his life for writing columns critical of the Prince's policies and his repressive measures. He has become a martyr to the cause of freedom of the press and his death is now mourned by the entire world. His death is a fresh example of a true journalist who gave up his life, but never gave up his mission. I appreciate his courage and his tireless efforts to expose the oppressive Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He will be remembered throughout the golden history of journalism whenever it will be written in future.

Yours etc.,
Mohd Faheem,
Via email

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"I simply cannot understand the passion that some people have for making themselves thoroughly uncomfortable and then boasting about it afterwards."
--- Patricia Moyes

The Shillong Times

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Court and CBI

THE events leading up to the Supreme Court intervention in the shameful CBI saga are proof of how things are going seriously wrong with various agencies that are meant to deal with corporate and other crime in this country. This should open the eyes of one and all to the dangerous drifts the long-established institutions of democracy are taking. In the whole episode, neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi as leader of the nation nor his Government have any excuses in allowing things to escalate into a crisis point. There's no point in saying that this is a wake-up call to Modi or his Government because his five-year-term ends in a matter of a few more months. This, rather, is time to evaluate the performance of the PM and his government, in order to help the voters make up their mind. Things inside the CBI were heading for a climax for the past few months, as is evident from special director Rakesh Asthana's listing of charges against his own boss, which is now before the Central Vigilance Commission. Both are accused of taking crores in bribes. Also, the two could not get along well, and took pot shots at each other. This has demoralised the rank and file of the national probe agency and brought a bad reputation to it and to the nation's governance systems.

What brought the CBI to this pass were also the meddling in its affairs by political bosses for many years now and prominently during the UPA regime as well. This had prompted the Supreme Court to call it a "caged parrot." The role of top CBI officials in handling the probe into the coal scam etc., was both unprofessional and shameful. The Congress Party is well within its right to stage protests across the nation as it did on Friday over the way things were shaping up in the CBI. But it cannot hide its own contributions towards bringing things to this level. The allegation that the present cleansing operation in the CBI has to do with the Rafale investigations might, prima facie, be far-fetched. Bofors produced only smoke and no fire. Those in power have their own ways to skirt difficult situations with ease. The Supreme Court intervention at this juncture is justified, but broadly speaking, courts need to give freedom to the executive to do its job. Else, all the other pillars of democracy will slowly crumble and national interests could thus be compromised.

An Open Letter to KHADC

By Gary Marbaniang

I've been contemplating about including my mother's surname in my name for quite a while now. And the reason for my contemplation is not because I'm scared that you might snatch away my identity and erase my Khasiness but rather because I've realised that my mother always felt left out of my life even though she played as important a role as my father in my upbringing and made me who I am today. Word around town is that Khasis who follow the patrilineal system are part of the elite circle. But far from being elites, both my parents grew up in rural areas and they perfectly fit the bill when it comes to the derided Khasi term, "nongkyndong" which in English simply means villager.

My mother's village, Lawkhla is tucked away in the middle of nowhere. Before my mother met my father, she worked as a domestic help for two families in town for a few years but she returned to her village fully convinced that city life was not meant for her. But as the story goes, she came back to Shillong to attend a funeral and a twist of fate resulted in her meeting some people who later became my father's relatives and they pleaded with her to fill in as a helper for a few weeks since they were in desperate need of a babysitter at that time. My mother reluctantly agreed and that's how she met my father and as the saying goes, "The rest is history."

My father came to Shillong to study and carry out the family's business activities at the same time. Since my father's maternal uncle was already staying in Shillong he found it convenient to stay close to him. All was well when my father married my mother. Even though my father's family was one of the most reputed family in the village of Mawsynram, his entire immediate family overlooked my mother's impoverished background and accepted her with open arms. As years went by, the size of our family increased and when I was born, our family was complete. By the time I was born, my father was already one of the top Chess players in the state of Meghalaya and my two elder brothers had started playing the game competitively. As for me, I picked up the game at a very young age and at the tender age of seven, I had the opportunity to represent the State in a national chess competition in Calicut, Kerala. That's when the spotlight fell on me.

When I returned home having done quite well in the tournament, I was the toast of my locality and everyone was awestruck by my sporting prowess since I was equally proficient in a host of other sports, one of them being badminton, a game which was cherished by both young and old alike in our locality in those days. My other two brothers were also inclined to sports and they also excelled in all kind of sporting activities. So naturally it became known to the whole world through our sporting achievements that we as a family had taken the road less traveled and abandoned our cherished tradition. When our family decided to follow the patrilineal system, everyone was in a state of shock and disbelief. The general opinion among our relatives especially from my mother's side was that my father bulldozed my mother into accepting the patrilineal system and ignored her opinion on this matter. My father had to face some harsh criticisms from our relatives but I must say that he did take the heat rather well. I remember vividly one Sunday afternoon after attending a church service at Mawkhar Presbyterian church, my maternal cousins came rushing to our house armed with the pastor's sermon that Jesus followed the matrilineal system. It was some sort of vindication for them about the ill-conceived judgement of my father's decision. One of the richest men in Shillong in years gone by even reprimanded my father's maternal uncle during a clan gathering for allowing my father to supposedly go haywire. My mother was the one who was caught in the crossfire in the war of words that ensued after my father chose to abandon our cherished tradition.

Even though my father had explained his ideological inclination thoroughly to my mother, yet I have to admit that it might have been really difficult for my mother to come to terms with his decision to stray away from accepted societal norms. To be fair to my father, I've got to grant it to him for being one of the fairest and most reasonable persons that I've ever met in my entire life. My eldest sister reverted back to taking our mother's surname when she was in Class 10 and my father didn't raise an eyebrow over it. But unfortunately, as we grew up, my mother increasingly felt left out of our lives. Almost every one of my siblings had a much closer connection with our father than our mother. Our father's soft spoken nature was the main factor that tilted our affection more towards him and the fact that he never ever raised his hand against any one of us did make him more endearing to all of us during our growing up years. Our mother on the other hand was the one who gave us tough love and did all the beating when needed.

Fast forward to 2018, I am now a grown man and looking back at my childhood days, I've realised that the deep love and affection that I had for my father prompted me to ignore the warmth, love and affection that my mother had for me. I've recently discovered a few things about my mother that I've never known before. For one, I was absolutely sure that we inherited our chess playing skills from our father but last year after playing a game of chess with my mother, I realized that she has a sharp mind if not a sharper mind than my father's. And the one thing that impressed me to this day is the level of general awareness that she possesses and the ease at which she is able to read, write and calculate. For a woman who had only basic elementary schooling in a village in the middle of nowhere, it is nothing short of extraordinary. Every little intelligence that I possess, I owe to her.

For now, easing the uneasiness of my immediate relatives is something which is long overdue. They have become extremely worried in recent years about my intentions; they think that I'm doing everything that I can to steal my sister's birthright. My two elders brothers have already got married and left home and they have been integrated again into our matrilineal system, so they don't pose a threat anymore. My father from time to time, does flirt with the idea of me staying at home even after I got married. But I want to reassure them and the whole world that it will not happen in a million years. I know that deep down in my father's heart, he stills feel a strong pull towards matriliny and he still has that deep yearning of wanting my sisters to take care of him and my mother in their old age.

I really do admire our MDC's (Members of District Council's) undying love for matriliny but they must respect and accept the fact that there are Khasis who genuinely feel that the patrilineal system is best suited for their family. I would also like to remind our respected MDC's if they have already forgotten(it's human nature to forget),that there was an eminent politician in the not so distant past who left an indelible mark on the Indian political system. I guess the name Rev JJM Nichols Roy rings a bell in the ears of our MDCs. Without Rev JJM Nichols Roy there would have been no Sixth Schedule and without the Sixth Schedule there would have certainly been no KHADC. So before our respected MDC's pass any legislation, they should have kept him in mind since he and his family followed patriliny, because passing any legislation that contravenes his cherished ideals is a classic case of "BITING THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU".

Surrendered militants are not heroes

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The saying 'one man's terrorist is another man's hero' is argued in many quarters as the genesis of terrorism. Along with being catchy and crisp, in a nutshell it underlines as to why we have so much of terrorism the world over. Although terrorism is a crime it falls in two categories – firstly, those who die as of the act; secondly, those who surrender at the opportune time. While surrendering is a welcome step, a surrendered militant's crimes cannot be so easily condoned. However, the events of recent years (both under the erstwhile Congress-led MUA and now the NPP-led governments) has set in motion a disturbing trend. Somehow, the surrendered militants are pardoned of all their wrongdoings without any legal charges and fair trial for their past unlawful activities. This article is not purely with reference to Mr C Thangkhiew (former general secretary, HNLC) or Bobby Marwein (Commander-in-Chief, HNLC) if at all, he too decides to surrender; rather it is a reflection (across HNLC, GNLA and others) upon this dangerous precedent that we are currently witnessing. Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, it is important to lay the framework for defining 'terrorism' under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008. This provides a valid and reliable basis for arguments on the current issue of (so called) surrender of militants. Under the said Act, terrorism is defined as 'any act with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India or with intent to strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or in any foreign country'. A terrorist is also one who 'overawes by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force, kidnaps or abducts any person and threatens to kill or injure such person.' In addition, without going into the dire punishments and penalties for intimidation and murder, the said Act provides that for being a member of an unlawful association (The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal banned the HNLC for a further period of five years in 2015) an individual or group 'shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years and shall also be liable to a fine'. Against this backdrop, it is explicitly clear that these surrendered militants are to be booked under some section(s) or the other. However, in spite of all these valid legal clauses why is the state government dodging this issue and bending over backwards to appease the militants? If anything, this matter has thrown our government(s) in very poor light and made them appear pliant.

Secondly, although the state government does not distinguish between 'surrender' and 'negotiation'; the fact is that there is a stark difference between the two. The term 'surrender' implies that a militant(s) submits himself to the government of the day without any effort of reconciliation by the said government. That way, surrender would mean that the militant(s) would be subject to action and penalty as per the rule of law (example – just like a petty criminal surrendering to a local police station). On the other hand, 'negotiation' implies that the militant(s) have come 'over ground' on the basis of efforts and the promise of incentives shown by the government. Hence keeping in perspective the intents of the government it may or may not press charges against the militant(s) in question. However, if there is a negotiation (as in the case of Mr. C. Thangkhiew), then the context of 'collective bargaining' comes in. The government cannot take such a lenient view of the past unlawful activities; rather, it has to put its foot down and be adamant on pressing charges at some grave criminal acts against the militant(s). As such, the concept of 'surrender' and 'negotiation' are different; but both lead to penalty for past unlawful activities one way or the other. Disturbingly, by not distinguishing between the two the state government is taking advantage of a loophole and trying to get away on the basis of a technicality. Critically, Mr. C. Thangkhiew (and all the others so far) are not in actuality 'surrendered' militants; rather they are 'negotiated' militants who have come over-ground. Hence, the state government is at fault by not engaging in 'collective bargaining' towards imposing some form of penalty as a condition.

Thirdly, this issue of pressing charges against such negotiated militants is a dicey one. In reality, the state is divided on this. While one group believes on punishment irrespective of surrender/negotiation; the other believes on 'atonement through complete condoning' of past activities. Keeping in mind the division in perception one cannot help but wonder on the middle way out. Alas! We have one and it is the age old tried penalty termed as 'community service'. It is basically an alternative sentencing or non-custodial sentence to punish a defendant apart from custodial sentence or capital punishment. This may take the form of unpaid services at schools, hospitals, charitable institutions, house arrest, suspended sentence and so forth. In addition, it also includes 'tendering an unconditional apology to the victims'. True, 'community service' is not a British concept hence, it is not an Indian concept (as the Indian legal system is derived from the British); rather, it is American. As such, 'community service' as a penalty is not popular in India. Moreover, it is primarily used as punishment for petty crimes. Nonetheless, it is better to have some form of penalty rather than a generl amnesty. To this end, if 'community service' seems plausible as penalty for these negotiated militant(s); then so be it! Moreover it is the duty of the legislature to pass a law laying down the penalties and leave it to the judiciary to award the penalty. Significantly, 'law and order' is a state subject; but will the Legislature act on it? In addition, under Article 142 of the Constitution of India 'the court may give any order that it feels is essential for justice to prevail' (example – Sanjeev Nanda who was convicted in the BMW hit-and-run case was asked to do two years community service in 2012). That way 'community service' is indeed one of the possible middle way punishments for these militants.

Lastly and in relation to the above, these people are not heroes. It is time to stop treating them as such. Ironically we are now entering into the theatre of the absurd; whereby Mr Thangkhiew is on the brink of being appointed as the 'negotiator' between the HNLC and the state government. That makes him an 'agent' marketing the terms of the HNLC to the government and vice versa. As a result of all this, we are again likely to see no charges and no possible trials. Finally, to the Conrad Sangma Government which says that 'the youth will never take to the path of militancy when they come to know that nothing was achieved by those leaders who walked that path and found it a futile one as is visible from the cases of surrendered members,' Sir, if there are such youth (as per the distorted perception of the state government) then please know that on the other side of the same coin there are youth (disillusioned and depressed) who are watching these developments with keen interest. To this end, it is sad and scary to note that Meghalaya will not be far from experiencing another cycle of militancy before long!

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

TO THE EDITOR

Water crisis in Meghalaya

Editor,

Apropos the article "Water crisis, Govt's Ostrich like approach" by Dhurjati Mukherjee (ST.Oct. 24, 2018), I would like to state that water crisis in India is indeed very grim not only in the metropolis but also in many cities, towns and rural areas as often reported in the media. We often see people in long queues waiting with their jars for hours together just to fetch water for cooking and drinking. We have also witnessed people getting into physical fights while queuing for water. Again we have often seen in the media rural folks walking for miles to fetch just few buckets of water drawn from almost dried up low level wells or ponds. The population keeps on increasing by leaps and bounds in the metropolis, in cities, towns and villages while the water demand not only for drinking but also for various purposes keeps on increasing.. The water sources are shrinking and springs are drying up while the ground water level keeps sinking deeper and deeper owing to rampant unregulated ground water exploitation. On the other side we have a lot of people wasting much water thoughtlessly without any qualms. Then the used waste water remains untreated and is directly released to the drains, streams and rivers. Again some of that water is toxic. The situation is really grim and it calls for a multi-pronged emergency like solution or else the people will not survive and the environment also will be destroyed.

Here in Meghalaya, especially in Shillong and in many other towns and even in villages, we have water problems even during the rainy seasons due to various reasons. Water sources like springs, streams, wells, ponds and rivers have either dried up or the water levels have sunk while some of them such as in the coal mining areas are highly polluted. The reasons for this is mainly man-made and to some extent owing to climate change. People wantonly destroy the catchment areas by cutting down trees and whatever vegetation that is there and also by sand mining and stone quarrying. Again polluted water, often toxic, is released directly into the streams, well, ponds or rivers making the water unfit for drinking, washing and even for irrigation. The stark reality is that we are facing very serious water crisis. Water is not everywhere and we are afraid that in the near future we may find it easier to get blood than water, especially in Shillong. The situation is indeed very grim and unless the Government adopts strategic action plans and finds quick solutions to the water crisis, we will all be in deep trouble. We earnestly urge the Government and the public at large to work in co-ordination and co-operate wholeheartedly and unitedly in averting this water crises.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Continued plight of teachers

Editor,

I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble bench of Judges of Meghalaya High Court for the historic order to the State Government to provide pension to the teachers of Deficit schools and colleges and also the other categories as per the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission with retrospective effect.(as published in your esteemed daily on October 12, 2018). In this connection I appeal to the Hon'ble bench of Judges to pursue this order until it is executed, so that teachers can live a normal life with dignity after retirement and contribute to the society with their maturity, experience and wisdom for the development of the human resources of the state. Senior counsel GS Massar has clearly pointed out that-Govt.pays pension to the legislators who only serve for five years, whereas teachers are neglected despite being the 'backbone of the society. May I mention here that in our country MLAs and M.Ps don't require any educational qualifications. Even an illiterate can become the Chief Minister!(for example Rabri Devi in Bihar)

Surprisingly our MLA.s whom people elect as their representatives in the assembly are deaf and mute to the plight of teachers for the past 45 years. This attitude is extremely shocking to the entire teaching community of Meghalaya. The Hon'ble High Court has honestly reminded a forgotten truth - "Teachers are the backbone of the society and it is their contribution, dedication and hard work which has moulded us to become a Judge, a Minister, a Lawyer, a Doctor, or an .IAS officer. As such we can never forget the justice delivered by the Meghalaya High Court which has also mentioned about the 'uncomfortable and inhumane life' that the retired teachers are forced to live without pension. Here in Meghalaya our Government is quick to make excuses about financial crunch whenever the question of expenditure arises for paying teachers their dues. But this is not true. "Where there is a will there is a way." When will our legislators be willing to secure the teachers in their old age? The court has rightly said - "Management of fund is totally in the hands of the Govt."

The court of Justice SR Sen has clearly observed that the Govt. cannot wash its hands off the responsibility of paying pension to the retired teachers.. I heartily congratulate the members of "Greater Phulbari Area Deficit School Teachers and Employees' Association of Meghalaya",- for initiating this serious social cause. Today I saw the report that our Govt.has already started to trot out the clichéd excuse that the state is passing through a financial crunch and cannot pay pension to the retired teachers. Will the High Court condone and read down its own judgment? I wish that our retired teachers get their pension before they die .

Yours etc.,
Reeta Ghosh
National Awardee
Teacher
(Rtd vice principal
,Laban Bengalee
Boys'Higher Secondary
School, Shillong--4.

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

A struggle in Nagaland

Director Akashaditya Lama recalls the adversities while shooting *Nani Teri Morni*



Akashaditya Lama has a subtle connection with the North East though he never visited the region before 2015. While his forefathers are from Arunachal Pradesh, the film and theatre director had trained in Thang Ta, the martial art form of Manipur, from a member of the royal family. With his new film, *Nani Teri Morni*, Lama, who was born in Ranchi and spent a part of his childhood in Kolkata, only strengthened his association with the region that is still a mystery to the people in most parts of the country.

The director, who is known for his critically acclaimed play Mohenjodaro the script of which was allegedly plagiarised by Bollywood director Ashutosh Gwariker, tells the story of a girl child in Nagaland who had received the National Child Bravery Award in 2015.

The story revolves around Mhonbeni Ezung and "her imagination". She was the youngest recipient of the national bravery award for children. She saved her grandmother from drowning and triumphed over her fear.

After taking necessary permissions, Lama had approached the Children's Film Society India (CFSI), then headed by television superstar Mukesh Khanna. The script was approved but it was only the beginning of Lama's struggle.

"Initially, we wanted to make a full length feature film but financial crunch forced me to cut it short. My crew members wanted to shoot the film in parts of Assam and other states but I insisted on Nagaland because I was telling the story of that place and people there," said the 41-year-old director over phone from Mumbai.

However, the 41-year-old artiste had to struggle for the premiere of the film in Nagaland. After CFSI told the director that they can premiere in the northeastern state under the 'Children Film Bonanza', the team contacted the state government through email. But there was no response. So two of the team members, including line producer Rebecca Changkija Sema, approached the government. But talks progressed in a snail's pace. "There was no help from the government even during the shooting," said the director.

The film crew wanted to shoot in the interiors of the state and had sought help from the government but it did not pay heed. "We asked for helicopter but did not get though we were ready to pay. We asked for transport as the areas were really remote but did not get... we asked for accommodation for the crew but no help came our way," recalled Lama and added that the ordeal was despite the fact that his film was the first Nagamese film.

Lama explained that the film was "technically the first Nagamese film" because it is certified and was shot with proper camera. "There are some Nagamese short films on YouTube but they were all shot on handycam. Nani Teri Morni is also the first film shot entirely in Nagaland by someone from the mainland. Before this, only tourists who would come for the Hornbill Festival would shoot videos and post on YouTube," he said and added that 20 per cent of the film is in Hindi because "there are two imaginary characters, the sutradhar (compere) of the film, who speak in Hindi".

The script of the film was written in English by Lama that was later translated to Nagamese by co-writers in the team. "Nagamese is more like Bengali with a mix of Assamese. I can read, write and speak Bengali because my mother is Bengali and I grew up in Kolkata. So understanding Nagamese was not difficult for me. It won't be for any Bengali," the director said.

The ordeal for the crew did not end there. The government had initially agreed to screen the film both in Kohima and Dimapur but later backed out and settled only for Kohima.

"First they said Kohima has no infrastructure so it will be in Dimapur. Most of my actors are from Dimapur so it was a good proposition. Then they said both places. Later again they said both places and once more changed it to Kohima. The road connecting Kohima and Dimapur is terrible and it was not possible for the crew members to travel. Also, an official (Abhishek Singh) shouted at a crew member who was coordinating with the government for the event," said Lama and added that talks should have been between CFSI and the state but "things were not moving" and he and his team had to intervene.



(Top) Akashaditya with the actors; (above) the director and (inset) the poster of the film. Image courtesy: Akashaditya Lama

The film was supposed to be released for the Children Film Bonanza. The state government's dilly-dally was based on various excuses. An official in the Nagaland government pointed finger at CFSI for demanding tickets. "But the CFSI cannot ask for it. All they want is an auditorium, a projector and children. Now it depends on the state government in what way it wants to hold the festival. It can be a Rs 50-lakh festival or a Rs 5-lakh. The film was all about Naga people and their land and yet the response was tepid," explained Lama.

Lama — who was the writer of additional dialogues for the film Lahore that won two National Film Awards, co-writer of Chanda Mama Door Ke, writer and co-producer of Hindi play Mohenjodaro — informed that Abhishek Singh, the home commissioner in Nagaland, insulted the line producer and one of the writers after which the crew refused to attend the festival.

The director did not get any invitation from the Nagaland government for the festival though he had written to it a few times. "I was told that there was no provision for the cost of my ticket in the budget. But my crew was not attending the festival so there was no question of me attending it. So I did not pursue," said Lama.

This was not the first struggle in Lama's career. Earlier, he was embroiled in a long legal course to fight Gwariker for stealing his Mohenjodaro script and after losing the case, had to beg on the streets of Mumbai to raise the penalty money.

He is the writer and co-producer of the Hindi play. Lama wrote the play when he was only a teenager.

Lama, who has a strong theatre background and has been involved with the stage since 17 years of age, started his career as an assistant director in the Bollywood film Gadar. After that he joined Balaji Films as a writer and has years of experience in working on television scripts, including for Indonesian soaps. He has worked with several big houses, including the Suraj Barjatya production house. "But when it comes to creativity, you can list theatre, film, television in the ascending order," he said.

He has a theatre group in Mumbai and frequently participates in drama festivals across the country. "My play Mohenjodaro has Thang Ta and Chhou. It is a critically acclaimed drama," he said.

But the experienced director believes that for a writer or technician, television is the best option to make money. Asked how he balances between theatre, film and television, Lama said he works with television for some months and after he earns enough money, he takes a break and focuses on films.

Talking about his career, Lama said he is keen on directing and was never "quite passionate about acting".

After a personal introduction, Lama reverted to his new project Nani Teri Morni. He said the team was planning to have a commercial release of *Nani Teri Morni* in other parts of the country "may be this winter vacation or summer vacation next week".

Before signing off, Lama, who is well-versed in Bengali, could not resist speaking in Bengali. "*Bhalo laglo kotha bole* (It was nice speaking to you)," the director said and informed that he is planning to visit Shillong for a shoot.

~ NM



The story revolves around Mhonbeni Ezung. She was the youngest recipient of the national bravery award for children. She saved her grandmother from drowning and triumphed over her fear. Mhonbeni won the award in 2015. Nani Teri Morni is the first Nagamese film shot completely in Nagaland by a film crew from outside the state

Homosexuality not normal in Slovenia: Darko



Slovenian director **Darko Stante** *with his debut feature film,* Consequences*, created history as it became the first movie from his country to screen at the Toronto International Film Festival in nearly a decade. The film deals with homosexuality among young boys at a youth facility. Mainly shot with an inexperienced cast,* Consequences *has collected rave reviews, drawing comparison with the cult film* Rebel Without a Cause*. In a conversation with Stante and Matej Zemljic, the lead actor,* **Suman Das** *and* **Sudipto Maity** *find out their experience. Excerpts:*

First and foremost, congratulations on your debut feature film. Tell us about the journey.
I used to work in a youth facility, I'm still working there, but I was a regular teacher before. I got the inspiration for this movie while working there. While coming up with the story, I thought, well, what will be the scenario if some of the people in the youth centre are homosexuals, what will be the reaction. That is how I started writing the script and it got made.

Among other themes, the film deals with homosexuality. How's the Slovenian attitude towards homosexuality? Do you think this movie will cast a new light on the subject?
On a formal basis, homosexuality in Slovenia is accepted. But practically it does not work that way, not outside the big cities. In smaller communities, homosexuality is still a problem, because people still don't accept the LGBTQ people as normal. I wanted to present it like that. Even now, people in Slovenia still don't know what the film is about. We will try to sell it in a different way. I don't know, but (pauses) a few of them will surely be shocked.

How did you meet Matej?
I knew Matej for a long time. We had done a few short films together and I knew he was great. So, I told him that I was going to shoot this film and invited him to come.

Was he the first choice to play the lead character?
I tried some other actors for the part. I wanted to see if others could bring me something new, something different. After a few auditions, I decided Matej was the one. We connected very well. He too auditioned for some other roles (in the movie) as well.

Matej, tell us about your experience of working in the film.
I was a bit scared to be honest when I was offered the role. I wasn't sure if I could pull it off. I am primarily a theatre actor and this is my first major role. Talking about my character, I am not at all like him, I am a totally different person.

How's Darko as a director?
Darko calmed me down. He gave me the confidence and having worked with him for long in other projects, I was confident about his directorial abilities. Darko also managed the other actors very well. I also feel that acting in this movie is better that it is in other Slovenian movies. It was very organic.

Matej compared to your other works, where does this one stand?
Like I said, I am mainly a theatre actor, so, this was a huge opportunity. In Slovenia, you are mostly typecasted. This role was against my expectation. So I enjoyed doing this film.

Finally, why did you decide to showcase your movie at the Tiff?
It is a big festival and I am happy that the movie premiered here. Having your movies premiere at the TIFF is like wow! It is a great opportunity. (IBNS/TWF)

Images: Radha Bose/IBNS
Movie still: TIFF.net



(Top) Darko Stante (right) with Matej Zemljic; and (above) a scene from the film Consequences

You can start own venture

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the last edition, I told you how one can become a hair stylist. In this edition, we are publishing more about hair stylist as career option. Interested youths may become hair stylist or hair dresser for which they need some training. The best part is any one with less academic qualification may also become an expert in this profession.

At present, there are many skill training centres which providefree training with placement assurance.

There are paid courses available but interested individuals may start with skill training courses and later they may choose to take admission in advance courses. These centres are available in different parts of the country.

Leading chain of beauty parlours also conduct training and courses for hair dressers.

With the growing trend parlour has become a trend in every society and even in villagesand sub-urban areas. For their own personal beauty, girls, boys, women and men visit beauty salon or parlour.

Every profession has some traits that are absolutely necessary to have in order to ensure success. The hairdressing profession is one of those fields that has these types of requirements.

For a hairdresser, some of the qualities, knowledge, and skills necessary for success are interpersonal skills, love of learning, patience/ tolerance, problem solving skills, self-confidence, endurance, creativity, time management skills, stress-management, scent and chemical tolerance, marketing skills, business management skills and also skills related to basic first aid.



To be successful in this profession is not so difficult if aspirants possess all required skills.

Individuals may start their own venture or join others and start their career. Some independently working experts may also take up assignment as there are many occasions in our society. Whether fashion shows or marriages, individuals are keen to style their hair.

There is a need to change the attitude of people as many do not want to join this profession.

Instead of searching for jobs creative and hard working youths may try to take up this profession and start their own venture in Meghalaya and other parts of North East.

Updates:

Israel Government Scholarships: Online applications are invited under Israel Government Scholarships 2019-20. 5 scholarships is for duration of 8 months , to undertake research /specialisations , from the universities which are approved by the Israeli Council for Higher Education and two short term (summer school) scholarships for the students seeking to study Hebrew. Aspirants may apply on or before November 30.

Sainik School Entrance: All India Sainik School Entrance Examination would be held 6th January 2019 in different exam centres including Shillong for admission into Sainik School Goalpara. Application is invited from boys only for admission into Sainik School Goalpara (SSG) for Class VI and Class IX. Online registration for admission shall be open till November 26 and last date for online application is 1st December. SSG was established in 1964 and details may be obtained from the official website.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

'People will think before harassing women'

Saif Ali Khan *is set to portray the character of a Gujarati businessman in Hindi film Baazaar, which is releasing this Friday. The 48-year old Bollywood actor was recently present in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, for the promotion of his film, where he not only spoke about Baazaar but also commented on the #MeToo movement.* **IBNS-TWF** *brings some excerpts:*

What type of business Shakun Kothari (character Saif played in Baazaar) does?
He is an investor. If one watches the film, he will find out that he is a very dangerous person who has no interest in the company, employment but only profits. He is one type of corporate leader. He is a dangerous person who can pose threats to old families and businesses.

How did you prepare for the role of a Gujarati businessman?
I have done a lot of homework. I have seen photographs, lifestyles, looks of famous Indian businessmen. I checked out all of them- like the way they speak- and compiled the features to portray the character.

Any reason behind the Gujarat connection in the film?
We have brought the Gujarat connection simply like the way films are often made on businesses based in foreign countries. This time (in this film) we have chosen Gujarat. Though our film is based in Mumbai, we have focused on Gujarati businessmen. The diamond merchants are very famous in this Indian state. We have utilised it to show the uniqueness of this region.

What is your take on #MeToo campaign which is going on right now?
The workplace must be a safe place. We have to look after our women and protect them from people who are predators and molesters. It cannot happen because it is a disgusting thing. At work places, people are prone to get harassed in various ways including sexually and mentally. I think we are part of a change right now. The mindset is changing. It is going to take time but I think there will be a change.

> One solution is that people are talking about it (sexual harassment). Now hopefully people will think ten times before behaving like this

Do you think there is a solution to this problem of sexual harassment?
One solution is that people are talking about it (sexual harassment). Now hopefully people will think ten times before behaving like this (sexually harassing women) again. I think people will think before misbehaving with a girl again.



A morally challenging picture of #MeToo

By Willie Gordon Suting



Photo courtesy: Google Images

Anna Burns has become the first Northern Irish author to win the Man Booker prize, taking the £50,000 award for Milkman, her timely, troubles-set novel about a young woman being sexually harassed by a powerful man.

The experimental novel is narrated by an unnamed 18-year-old girl, known as "middle sister", who is being pursued by a much older paramilitary figure, the milkman. It is "incredibly original", according to the Booker's chair of judges, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah.

"None of us has ever read anything like this before," said Appiah. "Anna Burns's utterly distinctive voice challenges conventional thinking and form in surprising and immersive prose. It is a story of brutality, sexual encroachment and resistance threaded with mordant humour."

Written with few paragraph breaks, eschewing character names for descriptions, Appiah admitted that Milkman could be seen as "challenging, but in the way a walk up Snowdon is challenging. It is definitely worth it because the view is terrific when you get to the top," he said.

As the award was announced, Burns was lost for words. At the press conference afterwards, the 56-year-old author said her job as a novelist was "to show up and be present and attend. It's a waiting process." She "just had to wait for my characters to tell me their stories".

Asked about how she had filled the long gap since her 2002 Orange prize listing for No Bones, she said she had done commercial events and moved houses. What will she do with the money? "I'll clear my debts and live on what's left."

The win makes Burns the first Northern Irish winner – previous Irish winners, including John Banville, Anne Enright and Roddy Doyle, all come from the republic. It also makes her the first female winner since 2013, when Eleanor Catton took the award with The Luminaries.

Burns beat writers including the American literary heavyweight Richard Powers, Daisy Johnson, at 27 the youngest author ever to be shortlisted for the award, and the Canadian writer EsiEdugyan. According to Appiah, the judges, picking from a shortlist that delved into some dark themes, were "unanimous" in their choice of winner.

Burns, who was born in Belfast and now lives in East Sussex, drew on her own experiences growing up in what she called "a place that was rife with violence, distrust and paranoia".

As the milkman presses his advances on the reluctant middle sister, rumours begin that she is having an affair with him. "But I had not been having an affair with the milkman. I did not like the milkman and had been frightened and confused by his pursuing and attempting an affair with me," Burns's narrator tells us.

Appiah said: "This woman living in a divided society is harassed by a man who is sexually interested in her. He is taking advantage of the divisions in society to use the power he has because of the divisions, to go after her. Sectarianism and divisions in Ireland play an enormous role in the novel [but] Northern Ireland is not the only place in the world with a divided society … TS Eliot said you can't be universal without being particular, and this is particular but brilliantly universal as well."

Milkman also spoke to the concerns of today, he said. "I think this novel will help people think about #MeToo ... It is to be commended for giving us a deep and subtle and morally and intellectually challenging picture of what #MeToo is about."

"She is sustained by her own good sense, by her humour and by her reading. She is a literary person in a rather unliterary society," said Appiah, who was joined on the judging panel by the crime writer Val McDermid, the critic Leo Robson, the feminist writer Jacqueline Rose, and the artist and graphic novelist Leanne Shapton. Burns revealed to the media last week that Milkman has its origins in "a few hundred words that were superfluous in a novel I was currently writing". She tried to craft a short story from them, and they turned into Milkman.

"The book didn't work with names. It lost power and atmosphere and turned into a lesser – or perhaps just a different – book. In the early days I tried out names a few times, but the book wouldn't stand for it. The narrative would become heavy and lifeless and refuse to move on until I took them out again. Sometimes the book threw them out itself," she said.

Read: #WeToo in Sunday Shillong

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, OCTOBER 28, 2018***

Sun sextile Saturn on your solar return chart denotes a good year. You'll have a chance to heal old wounds with regards to love this year. You're also bound to find new ways of making money. You'll be expressing yourself more clearly this year and you might help guide or instruct others quite successfully. The current astro-setup will make you dynamic, friendly, focused and optimistic. You may get a promotion for your smart work and efficiency. You will be enjoying a better relationship with your partner or beloved.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Get involved in some good venture at your work place or in business. Professional gains are likely to be profitable. You will be in a position to attract a good response from colleagues and friends due to your magnetic personality. This week you may have some conflicts or uneasy circumstances so avoid the company of bad elements. This period is good for individuals and intellectuals engaged in education, research and study. Vitality and courage will take you towards new horizons. Solve family and other interrelationship problems politely and in a friendly way. Your personality and communication skills hold the key of progress of your success, utilize it to have better relations in public.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The combination of stars will prove to be very favorable for you. Luck will favour you in material and professional related matters. You may find new prospects to boost your income. Sudden money gains could also be expected. You should take caution in family relations by having a more amenable behavior as children and friends need attention. Health of some elder person at home needs care. You may have sudden chances of increase of your business or career. Take care if someone is hurt by your spoken words or harsh attitude. Change your behavior and abstain from bad habits. It is in your favour to keep away from any conflict.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Professional matters will be settled now in your favour. Being over courageous and hasty in dealing with people at work place and in family should be avoided to have amicable relations among them. This week you may invest in real estate or some other fixed assets which will turn to be beneficial in the long term. You may make up your mind for a foreign trip where you get better response. For stable thoughts and positive mood you may insist on meditation and elevate the environment around you. Take precautions in travel and be cautious about your belongings.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Sudden gains in profession related matters are expected. There is a time when your wits will be helpful along with new opportunities to be successful in making new contacts which prove to be helpful. Happiness comes to your door by a new loving relationship and a harmonious atmosphere in your family. This is a good time for entertainment and romance for you. You can expect to look forward to joy and happiness this week. People will admire your positive approach in some matters and your decisions will be appreciated.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Amidst some practical uneasiness this week brings mixed results for you. Insist upon slow gains in money matters. Construction work may be a delayed process this week. Health of self or mother may be affected so care must be taken. To have a harmonious relationship with friends be more forthcoming. On the family front you should spend some more time with them. A property deal may get finalized which would prove to be profitable. Right now you need to take care and avoid indulgence in any type of negative relationship.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The week is good for your career and the stars are favorable in the field of education, research and related matters. You will enjoy some creative or educational travel or some activities in the publishing field. You are expected to get long term investment opportunities which will give you profits and financial gains. You may get financial aid from some near relative or a friend. Avoid stress and take care of your health. Meditation will be helpful to have peace of mind. You may visit pay a visit to relatives or friends.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This is a good time to improve interpersonal relations. You may think of finalizing a pending aspect in matters related to property. Undue expenditure is expected for travel and in domestic affairs. Avoid conflict with youngsters and friends. You may get sudden news or a message through phone which may affect your daily routine. You may feel some problems in family life and relations with spouse. This is a good time to invest in real estate. Sudden monetary profits may be expected. Health problems may be solved during this time. Utilize the priceless time for bringing your plans to reality.

Scorpio:(October 24 - November 22)

Some mixed results are predicted from the position of stars this week. Amongst your financial profits you will try to get early gains. You can expect to come across some persons who may bring about an increase in your social activities. You will be full of courage, understanding and glamour. Health of an elderly person may need attention. Think wisely which aught to win popularity in public and this may bring you new ventures in the field of finance. Your desire for love and romance may be fulfilled. To refresh yourself, spend time with family.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

As depicted from your stars position this week your progress in public relation will be improved. You will be expected to enhance your social contacts. Your progress may be slow at your work place and you may gain marginal profits. Regarding your career and material matters, you are likely to get engaged in matters of property but take care of all costs before you finalize a deal. Keep watch on you health and take care during travel to avoid injury. Good chances to go for a foreign tour may emerge now. Affection within the family and with friends and children is expected.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There is a good possibility of progress in career, finance and public relations. Financial matters may be solved for now with good returns. You will enjoy an outstanding personality with wise decision making power and of which you are surely capable. Success and happiness comes to your door with material gains. This is the time to go ahead in career matters. You may enjoy a good time in love and romance. Take advantage of this favorable time. Material profits will boost suddenly. Health will be good along with freshness and energy. Happiness and enjoyment are yours for the asking. With your good communication skills you will have a fine image in public and this will be very useful in future in achieving your goal.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

According to the stars position this week you will have mixed results. Your progressive, decisive and focusing nature is going to prove beneficial for you. The impression you leave on people around you is remarkable. Now there may be matters related to money decided in your favour. Your old financial problems will be sorted out soon. Think positive and be polite while talking with children and family members. To maintain peace of mind and positive frame of mind take light exercises and make it a daily routine. Keep your presence of mind in dealing a problem related to property. You will have a good time with friends.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

New contacts will be helpful in your progress regarding career and financial matters. You may choose to have some relaxation at home. Your family environment needs some attention. Social image will be fine. You may face some sudden expenditure at home; spend wisely. If you give a new look to your work place you will gain more profits. Take care of your health. At present your focus will be on personal freedom and making good friends. It will be beneficial for you in long term. This week you will go for some compromise and will be able to solve a pending or disputed matter. You would plan for a brighter future.

Myth of head vs heart

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



It is common to hear people say that their head leads them in one direction and their heart in another. In yoga, the fundamental basis we establish is this: you are one person, a single, unified being. There is no separation of head and heart; you are one whole.

Let us first understand what is being referred to as the "head" and the "heart." You usually assign your thoughts to the head and your emotions to the heart. But if you look at this carefully and with absolute sincerity, you will realize that the way you think is the way you feel. But it is also true that the way you feel is the way you think. This is why yoga includes both thought and emotion as part of the same manomayakosha, or mental body.

What you normally think of as "mind" is the thought process or intellect. But in fact, the mind has many dimensions: one is the logical aspect. Another is the deeper emotional aspect. The intellect, as we know, is termed buddhi. The deeper dimension of the mind is conventionally known as the heart. But in yoga this deeper emotional mind is known as manas. Manas is a complex amalgam of memory that molds emotions in a particular way. So, the way you feel and the way you think are both activities of the mind.

For example, if I think you are a wonderful person, I will have sweet emotions toward you. If I think you are a horrible person, I will harbor nasty emotions about you. If you make someone your enemy and then try to love him or her, that is hard work. Let us not make hard work of the simple aspects of life.

The way you think is the way you feel, but thought and feeling seem to be different in your experience. Why is this so? Because thought has a certain clarity and agility about it. Emotion is slower. For example, if today, you think this is a very wonderful person and you have warm feelings about him. Suddenly, he does something that you don't like, and you think he is horrible. Your thought tells you he is horrible, but your emotion cannot change immediately. It struggles. If it is sweet now, it cannot turn bitter at the very next moment. It takes time to turn around. It has a wider turning arc. Depending on the strength of your emotion, maybe it will take three days or three months or three years, but after some time, it will turn around.


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There is no need to create this conflict between head and heart. Emotion is just the juicier part of thought. You can enjoy its sweetness, but it is largely thought that leads the emotion, whether you recognize it or not. Emotion is not entirely steady. Your emotion also chatters, goes this way and that, but it is less agile than thought. Since it takes longer to turn, and its intensity is usually substantially greater than thought, it often seems as though thought and emotion are different. But they are no more separate than sugarcane and its juice.

Thought is not as intense as emotion in most people's experience. (You usually do not think as intensely as you get angry, for instance.) But if you generate an intense enough thought, it can also overwhelm you. Only five to ten percent of the population may be capable of generating the kind of thought that is so intense that there is no need for emotion. Ninety percent of the population can only generate intense emotions because they have never done the necessary work in the other direction. But there are people whose thought is very deep. They don't have much emotion, but they are very deep thinkers.

It is best not to create polarities within yourself. That makes for civil war and schizophrenia. Thought and feeling are not different. One is dry. Another is juicy. Enjoy both.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)

"When a person cannot deceive himself the chances are against his being able to deceive other people."

--- Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Indian Emigration

SEVENTEEN million Indians had left the country in 2017 according to an Asian Development Bank report. That makes the number of emigrants from India the highest in the world. International migrants from India doubled in number in the last two and a half decades according to the UN. One of the causes of the migration is reunification of families. In India, the reason however is distress and discrimination, economic and social. The UAE and the US offer an El Dorado to them. A large number of Indian emigrants are Christian and Muslims. Ethnic and religious discrimination therefore trigger a substantial part of the exodus. Governments in New Delhi run by different political parties should have taken note of the phenomenon. New Delhi does not much care. It is happy with the remittances from the Indian Diaspora. India receives more money from its emigrants than any other country in the world.

Emigrants come from varied social strata. They comprise students, families, skilled employees as well as manual labourers. Their needs differ, so do the odds they face abroad. The government also takes a variable attitude. Indians with social status and economic resources have a good time abroad. But unskilled migrant workers get a raw deal. The BJP government takes a lenient view of Indians emigrating overseas. But when it comes to even offering temporary sanctuary to a small number of Rohingyas, it can get awfully sticky. Perhaps the reason lies in the religion of the Rohingyas because the same BJP-led Government is considering pushing in the Citizenship Bill 2016 ostensibly to accommodate and give citizenship status to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs et al who are persecuted in Muslim countries – meaning Pakistan and Bangladesh. While it can be argued that India is already bursting at the seams as far as population is concerned and hence allowing the Rohingyas citizenship rights or even treating them as refugees is not tenable when millions of Indians have no access to basic needs such as shelter, food and toilets.. Its a tough call for any Government to make considering the economic stress. The flip side, however, is that India is losing some of its best brains that could have helped provide this country the much needed technocratic, economic and medical support. Today all these jewels in the crown are adorning other countries which easily accept them as citizens because of their sterling contributions. It's time that India creates the ecosystem where the best Indian minds can flourish irrespective of their caste or creed and add value to this country.

DRDA: A Hub in the Wheel of Rural Development

By HH Mohrmen

More often than not we hear murmurs over the lack of development in the rural areas and the complaints are not unfounded. There is indeed much left to be done in villages of the State. Villages in the state are a neglected lot is a common refrain but this can change if we have a proactive District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) at the District level. Change can happen if government officials do not confine themselves to a work schedule of 10am to 5pm, but instead go an extra mile if need be to complete the job. More importantly we can bring change only when we have people at the helm of thing who think out of the box, to achieve the goal.

West Jaintia Hills District (WJHD) is one of the eleven districts of the state which came into existence after the erstwhile Jaintia hills district was bifurcated into East and West Jaintia hills on July 31, 2012. WJHD with Jowai as its headquarter has an area of 1693 square kilometers and it is bounded by Assam in the North, East Jaintia Hills in the East, East Khasi Hills in the West and Bangladesh to the South. The district comprises of one civil subdivision that is Amlarem and three Community and Rural Development Blocks, namely Amlarem, Laskein and Thadlaskein.

As per the last census the District has a total population of 2, 70,352 of which 1, 34,406 are males and 1, 35,946 are females and the density of population is 159.69 per square kilometre. It is believed that the total population of the district has now crossed the 3,00,000 mark and only 63.23 % of the people are literate. The district is therefore ranked as one of the most illiterate in the state.

Talking about development there are no dearth of schemes and projects at the state or the country designed at improving the lives and the economy of the people in the rural areas. But the problem is to arrive at the correct methodologies to implement the same so that it reaches and benefits the people for whom the plans or projects are intended for. The state on its own already has various missions like mission on agriculture, horticulture, pisci-culture, apiculture, green campaign and others, but the big question is whether it reaches its intended targets or not.

The crux of the matter is the delivery mechanism which is used by the respective DRDA to reach its targets. One such mechanism used is the convergence of different government schemes wherever it is feasible. Earlier departments implemented their programmes in silos and there were cases where only certain individuals received all the benefits provided by various departments. Now with the implementation of MGNREGA the Village Employment Committee (VEC) using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method identified the 20 poorest of the poor in the community known as Bottom -20. This is the concept introduced by State Rural Employment Society (SRES) and the goal is that the B-20 will come out of poverty in 3 years time.

It is a known fact that MNREGA has had a huge impact on the villages which have successfully implemented the scheme, and it was a pleasant surprise to see in the newspaper that now Universities have awarded PhD to scholars who researched on the implementation of the scheme. MGNREGA is therefore a game changer and the successful implementation of MGNREGA in WJHD was because of the vision to bring the government to the doorstep of the villagers by using MGNREGA as the rim and the grease which help move the wheel of progress in the villages. This is an innovative idea which the DRDA in the district devised to help different government departments and agencies to work together to achieve maximum benefit to the target groups.

The foundation of this vision was at the grass roots level when villages (represented by their VECs) come up with their own mission statement which is also part of the implementation of MGNREGA. Each village particularly the award winning VECs are encouraged to start a Knowledge Resource Centre (KRC) of their own which will document stories related to the village and also serve as village library.

The KRC also have in its custody village resource maps which provide detailed information on the resources available in the village which they have to prepare as part of the implementation of MGNREGA program. And the resource map can be used by different departments for reference in effective implementation of their respective schemes and projects. Under MGNREGA all VECs are expected to prepare a shelf of projects for 3 years and a perspective plan for 5 years but the DRDA WJHD went one step further by conducting regular block, cluster and VEC level meetings for better planning, evaluation monitoring and implementation of the schemes.

If DRDA is the hub of the wheel of progress in the rural areas then the office of the respective Block Development Officers is like an axle which holds the two wheels together because everything happens at the Block level. To ensure smooth and speedy implementation of the various government schemes and project, DRDA WJHD introduced a face time concept in which the BDO interacts with all MGNREGA, PMAY, NRLM and line departments every Tuesday.

To create livelihood opportunity for the villagers MGNREGA was converged with the Meghalaya State Livestock Mission (MSLM) and the District has achieved 100% of the target to construct 4348 sheds for the year ending 2017-18. In an effort to achieve the twin objectives of going organic and creating livelihoods in the community, MGNREGA was converged with Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Program (IBDLP) and also with Agriculture and Horticulture Departments to train the farmers on 18-day composting. In a major achievement for the district, Laskein C&RD Block has recently supplied 10 tonnes of the compost it produced to Raj Bhavan, Shillong.

The other innovative idea of the DRDA is encouraging VECs to start community nurseries in convergence with the District Basin Development Unit, WJHD and they have not only been able to supply saplings for planting in the entire district but more importantly the saplings were indigenous trees, endemic to the area. The success of this project encouraged DRDA WJHD to replicate this idea and MGNREGA was converged with other departments like Soil and Water Conservation, Water Resources, Agriculture and Horticulture to start community nurseries for planting of fruit trees, spices, agriculture crop and even coffee.

Different government departments organise awareness about the various schemes and projects at their own convenience, but now they are encouraged have inter-departmental interaction; to coordinate with each other and jointly organise their programs with the VECs so as to save time and resources for both the government and the community. To ensure inter-department cooperation a district level implementing agency was instituted in which the DC is the chairman and is assisted by the Project Director DRDA and District Planning officer and all district heads of various departments as members of the committee. The BDOs are chairpersons of the meeting at the block level.

The other unique effort made by the DRDA WJHD is to have a thumb-impression-free muster roll and it was successfully implemented by Amlari Model VEC which is under Amlarem sub division. The idea is to indentify beneficiaries of government scheme who still use thumb impressions and the VECs are tasked with the job of mobilising teachers or youth to help teach them basic skills like writing names, filling up forms and reading newspapers. To achieve this objective MGNREGA is converged with the Education Department and the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) wherein teachers and even students and youths are encouraged to voluntarily help teach the beneficiaries to at least learn how to sign their names.

The DRDA WJHD through its Project Director has been able to give a sense of direction to all the different departments working for rural development in the district. Like a hub it has helped move the wheels of progress by making departments realise that they all work for the same purpose and they need to work together.

No wonder DRDA WJHD was the only district from the State to receive the Award for effective implementation of MRNREGA from the Ministry of Rural development this September 2018. In the 9 categories of awards only Meghalaya represented by DRDA WJHD and Mizoram received awards this year from the entire North Eastern region. In a major achievement, it is calculated that the district will receive an amount Rs. 92,96,23,200 (a little less than one hundred crore) for the implementation MGNREGA this financial year. This is possible because DRDA is like a well- oiled hub which helps move the wheels of rural development in the district.

Asuras and Atheists in God's own country

Shah in Kerala to whip up passions

By Aditya Aamir

BJP President Amit Shah arrived in Kerala on Saturday last, the "maiden passenger" on the "maiden flight" to the "maiden airport" in Kannur, and warned Chief Minister Pinnarayi Vijayan that "perpetrating Emergency-like atrocities" on "ready-to-wait maidens", mothers and sisters of Kerala will be fought with all the might at the BJP's command and nothing that Pinnarayi can do will stop the BJP.

Asking Pinnarayi to step down from the CM-ship of Kerala, Shah couldn't have come to Kerala on a more tumultuous day. Earlier, in the wee hours, the ashram of a "Swami" aligned with the CPM was attacked by unidentified person(s). Vehicles parked inside the ashram were set on fire and a "wreath" placed there, symbolically signally that Swami Sandeepanand Giri was "marked for death."

CM Pinnarayi Vijayan was at the ashram premises and he put the blame square and plain on the BJP and RSS, stating that the "police will get to them", whoever were behind the arson at the ashram. Swami Sandeepanand Giri also named BJP and RSS, besides Rahul Easwar, the lead Ayyappa activist protesting the Supreme Court verdict, for the attack on his ashram. "They want to kill me," he told media.

The Chief Minister's warning to the BJP and RSS came on the heels of the Kerala High Court directive that "unjustified large-scale arrests" of innocent people will not be tolerated and it could land the state police in a difficult situation from which it will be very hard for them to wriggle out. The Kerala Police has arrested close to 3,000 people, hundreds on non-bailable warrants, in the last week – after six failed efforts to place "fertile women" in the temple – and the arrests are continuing despite the high court warning.

The state police has drawn up plans to deal with the law and order situation in Sabarimala, which will be reopening in a couple of weeks and there could be another spell of confrontation between the police and the 'bhakta protestors'. Shah warned the "communist government of Kerala to come to its senses" because BJP cadre from all over the country were solidly with the aspirations of the "Ayyappa devotees."

Shah did not talk of the different approaches to the issue taken by the BJP at the Centre and the State, with the verdict in New Delhi and against it in Kerala; nor did he breathe once of chances of a Central government ordinance to settle the issue. True to speculation, he upped the ante for a confrontation to push Kerala to the inflexion point of Hindu consolidation. The BJP president said neither the LDF nor the UDF can put a halt to the inevitable. The Congress has so far not taken a proactive role in the protests though it says it's with the "ready-to-wait".

Incidentally, Kannur is home district of Pinnarayi Vijayan and Shah was also there to inaugurate the brand new district BJP office. Arrayed on the stage with him were family members of 120 "martyrs", who met their end at the hands of communist rivals. Kannur, said Shah, was the gateway to Kerala, from where the right-ideology will take off to all places Kerala.

The BJP chief later flew to state capital Thiruvananthapuram to "welcome" politicians from rival parties into the BJP fold, quite aware of the effect his visit has left on the already boiling cauldron that is Kerala today. Maybe, he was even in the know that Rahul Easwar, the public face of the tantri-family "guarding Sabarimala traditions", had the other day revealed the protestors' "Plan B" to derail the government's "planned takeover of Sabarimala.

Simply put, 'Plan B' is to fight fire with fire, desecration with desecration – a self-inflicted wound and let a drop of blood drop in the sanctum-sanctorum – defile for an excuse to force closure of the temple. It's a dangerous game of "what-you-can-do, we-can-do-worse" and Kerala is poised on the brink of police-people confrontation. The police have booked a non-bailable case against Easwar, who is out on bail in an earlier case, but is not in a hurry to arrest him though Swami Giri and Rahul Easwar are sworn enemies and there are people who say Rahul leads the "asuras" out to create mayhem in God's Own Country. (IPA Service)

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TO THE EDITOR

Stop defiling the precious environment

Editor,

The festival of lights – Diwali – representing the symbolic good over evil, light over darkness, and victory of righteousness and knowledge over ignorance, is approaching. The colourful display of fireworks are popular traditions during major celebrations, not only in India but also in advanced countries. Despite its popularity, the air and noise pollution emitted by fireworks contribute to the degradation of our precious environment. Also, the harmful effects of chemicals and metallic particles used in firecrackers adversely impact human lives.

Although fireworks are a universal part of most celebrations their use is limited to occasions. But, in India, particularly during Diwali, we celebrate this popular "festival of lights" predominantly by bursting fireworks. We set off rocket bombs thinking they vanish into thin air but Newton's law of gravitation brings them all back in the form of smoke and toxic ashes.

India is one of the most polluted countries in the World. Our extended periods of use of fireworks cause irreparable damage to our whole animal kingdom. In the name of Diwali, our children play with various types of fancy firecrackers almost two weeks in advance causing deadly pollution, both sound, and air. For new born babies, each burst of firework is a "nightmare". They can't even cry against the frightful noise. This is nothing but our uncaring cruelty towards them.

Fire hazards are common occurrences. Needlessly to say, smoke from fireworks containing metallic particles cause severe health risks. Is this the "price" one has to pay for this mockery of enjoyment by bursting crackers? Are we aware that the different colours and light effects produced in the firework displays are achieved only by mixing "poisonous" metal powders to gunpowder? Cases of burn injuries are very common among children during fireworks displays as they do not keep safety tips in mind while playing with deadly firecrackers, rockets, and sparklers.

The rotten egg smell that one gets during fireworks emanates from burnt "sulphur" which is the main ingredient of many fireworks. The fireworks that explode producing purple colour basically contain some amount of explosives and potassium compounds that cause extensive pollution in a very short period. Barbarous fireworks leave metal particles, harmful chemicals, smoke, and toxins in the air. These dangerous toxins do not disintegrate or break up for several days. They remain in the environment, poisoning the surroundings. People vulnerable to lung and respiratory illnesses are at high risk. Children fall sick with fever, skin irritation, vomiting, etc. Noise pollution is even more dangerous than air pollution. Noise limits beyond 120db on all consumer fireworks are illegal in many countries, but in our country, since there is no voice of protest from any quarters, the products sold here are far above the permitted decibel.

Is it not a sheer stupidity that dangerous bangers, air bombs, and jumping jacks are indiscriminately produced and set off senselessly, thereby turning the festival of lights into a festival of disaster? Is this the way we welcome our Goddess Lakshmi and seek Her blessings? Now the firecracker industries have been put on notice by the Supreme Court through a verdict on October 23, 2018 restricting them from manufacturing harmful fireworks. We should all welcome it. Further, the judgment on the "reduced time" of two hours between 8 pm and 10 pm for bursting crackers during festivals like Diwali and 11.55 pm and half past midnight during Christmas and New Year is doubtlessly a very positive move. Since the environment has been intensely battered by the toxic heat from our senseless consumerism, now is the time that a "clause" should be incorporated within our "CONSTITUTION" that Government and each and every citizen and the business houses should ensure sincere participation in cleansing the environment. We have to change our lifestyles. We have to reform our culture and tradition for the sake of saving the beautiful creation of God. HE will bless us with more bountiful and nourishing vegetation. So, let's pledge to restore our pale and sickly environment to its vibrant greenery. We can't throw caution to the winds and let our "activities" end up in "smoke" any longer!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

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

" Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

-- Pele

The Shillong Times

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LOOKING EAST

INDIA and Japan are, in recent years, edging closer. Yet, there's a mix of warmth and caution in the way this bilateral relationship is developing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's present visit to Japan marks a new high in these ties. Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are seen to have developed a strong personal bond through the several meetings in the past. Thus, the 13th India-Japan Summit in Tokyo this time is watched with considerable interest by observers of the geo-political developments in the region.

The rise of China and the resultant military power bordering on high-handedness that it exercises in the region have put both Japan and India on the alert after the turn of the present century. There is a progressive rise in China's belligerence, off and on. The more its economic growth, the more the military muscle that it could display, be it in the South China Sea, or along the land borders. While a closer Japan-India cooperation can put China in its place and force it to mind its own business, this is not happening. Japan has constitutional constraints in the matter of military offensives, it having learnt lessons in the past and having adopted a pacifist constitution. Besides, it has a military pact with the US since 1951 that makes any other security alliance difficult to fructify.

At the same time, there are other areas where closer cooperation between India and Japan are possible such as regional and international diplomacy, trade and technology support, for instance. Japan has extended help in the matter of upgrading India's railway system through projects like bullet train. It has also shown a readiness to offer soft loans for such projects. There's larger scope for improving bilateral trade. India has a large market for Japanese products. India is well-endowed in the area of human resources though it has a deficit in cutting-edge technology. Japan is reticent about transfer of technology to others, and it is protective about many other matters as well. There still is scope for a substantial presence of Indian workforce in a land where the population is thinning even as the economy retained high steam.

Holding frequent discussions is good, but there have to be spectacular results as well. The base that Modi and Abe built in the past nearly five years need be strengthened and edifices of lasting benefits built over it. This is time to move further forward, and with speed.

LOOKING BACK

May 25, 1989

Jamir apprises PM

Nagaland Chief Minister Mr S C Jamir today apprised Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi of the steps taken by his Government to defuse the "tense situation" along the state's border with Assam. He is understood to have informed Mr Gandhi about the recent meeting he had with Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta to review the situation arising from the massacre in the Rajaphukari area in Assam in April 7.Assam and Nagaland have decided to launch acoordinated scheme to apprehend those responsible for the massacre under an agreement arrived between the two Chief Ministers a few days ago in Guwahati.

No police excess: Assam

The Assam Government today denied of any excess committed by the state armed police on the Arunachalis in border areas as being alleged by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Mr Gegong Apang. An official spokesman told newsmen here that the Assam never violated any agreement in respect of constitutional boundary of both the states nor did it allow its police force to commit excess in other border states. He charged the Arunachal Pradesh Government of repeatedly violating the constitutional boundary of Assam. He said a sample survey by the Survey of India in1979 clearly showed Likabali as part of Assam's territory. Map of the country has been drawn on the basis of the Constitution and law and not mere tradition, he held. Citing an instance, the spokesman referred to the incident when the demarcation party of the Survey of India was resisted by the Arunachal is and local administration in March 1984 although Mr Apang gave firm assurance that he would restraint he people from encroaching and creating law and order problem. The spokesman said the high power tripartite committee constituted by the Government of India in 1979 delineated a new map on the basis of the notifications and the existing map of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The same was signed by there presentatives of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and the Survey of India.

CBI Vs CBI

Which master's voice?

By Poonam I Kaushish

It was an unprecedented midnight coup when in the stealth of night at 1 am CBI Director Alok Verma was replaced by Joint Director Nageshwara Rao. All over an ugly no-holds-barred public battle royale between Verma and Special Director Asthana, both accusing each other of corruption culminating in both being sent on leave. Both moved courts, Verma Supreme Court challenging his removal and Asthana Delhi High Court, seeking quashing of the FIR CBI lodged against him on Verma's directions in the meat exporter Moin Qureshi bribery case. This has resulted in the Supreme Court ordering the CVC to complete its inquiry within 10 days and barring Rao from taking any policy decision. The last word on this conundrum is yet to be said.

Undeniably, the ongoing developments at the investigative agency have reduced it to a mockery and stands testimony to failure at many levels fraught with more skeletons tumbling out of the closet. Indeed, this fracas could have been avoided and prevented by Verma, Asthana and other senior officers sitting together to sort things out. Failing this, CVC or Prime Minister's Office should have tried to solve the problems rather than reducing it to an absurd drama.

Alas, this is not the first time, nor will it be the last. Over the years the agency's fatal attraction for hit-ins, clean chits, political cover-ups and fool proof surety for law enforcers to become law breakers has earned it two ignominious nicknames: Central Bureau of corruption, connivance and convenience.

Witness the sweet irony. As the Opposition cries foul accusing the Modi-Shah duo of compromising the credibility and destroying it, Modi as Gujarat Chief Minister had lambasted the CBI for being biased and targeting the people of Gujarat. "Why are we being treated like an enemy State?" he had queried. Today the boot is on the other foot. As Prime Minister he is being accused of selective targeting of political opponents. What to speak of making a mockery of his procrastinations of the agency's so-called 'autonomy', and 'independence'. Sic.

Unsurprisingly, it raises doubts about the CBI's honesty and integrity of purpose to weed out the corrupt. Raising a moot point: Is the agency more sinned against than sinning? Are politicians the main culprit? Is the pot calling the kettle black?

The truth is mid-way. Both work in tandem in furthering their own interest. As Verma succinctly underscored, "All influence exerted by the political class is not found 'explicitly or in writing'. More often than not, it is tacit and requires considerable courage to withstand."

Regrettably, as oft happens, our netagan continue in legitimizing crime and corruption. Such is the nasha of power that all conveniently choose to merrily make political capital. Consequently, the system becomes self-perpetuating. Over the years, the threatened political elite have given more and more powers to the CBI to get their way and have their say.

Two cases in point are BJP Karnataka strongman Yeddyurappa being convicted by Karnataka's Lokayukta for favouring mining companies in return for gratification and quitting as Chief Minister in 2011. Today with BJP at the Centre, a special CBI court has acquitted him. Also, the blatant manipulations and political twists and turns against former UP Chief Ministers Mayawati and Mulayam Singh in their disproportionate assets cases. All are dictated by political expediency!

> *Witness the sweet irony. As the Opposition cries foul accusing the Modi-Shah duo of compromising the credibility and destroying it, Modi as Gujarat Chief Minister had lambasted the CBI for being biased and targeting the people of Gujarat. "Why are we being treated like an enemy State?"*

The Congress too was no better. In fact, it flagrantly used and abused the agency to serve its political ends earning the ignominious title of a "caged parrot" vis-à-vis the coal scam in 2013, the way it handled the Bofors scandal which was scuttled. At the end nobody was any wiser where the Rs 64 crores went. Never mind that it cost the late Rajiv Gandhi his Prime Ministership.

More. There are as many as 1,300 cases pending against MPs and MLAs in various courts. These include cases being on-off investigated by CBI, thereby, sullying the agency's reputation, replete with its "failure" to back up charges with required evidence. Worse, the CBI seems to have adopted a brazenly opportunistic policy of playing safe with Governments of the day and its willingness and commitment to serve the national cause by putting self before the country.

The crux of the issue now: Who should control the CBI? Needless to say, a Catch-22 question for our power-greedy polity to honestly answer and for us to stupidly expect. As political manipulation and internal sabotage are twin challenges that have dogged the CBI throughout. Recall, Indira Gandhi, was the first to concentrate all instruments of effective power in her hands.

All subsequent Prime Ministers happily followed the tradition, notwithstanding crying foul about the agency's misuse and tall talk of weeding out corruption and paying lip service to making the CBI autonomous and independent. But once in power at the Centre, they turn defensive about charges of interfering in the agency's functioning and unleashing the CBI on political rivals has been a standard practice in Indian politics for years now.

According to former CBI directors and top officials, there is no such thing as autonomy. This is a fallacy. No government body is independent. Despite the Apex Court's 1997 Vineet Narain judgment on the hawala scam relating to probe of allegations of corruption against top politicians and bureaucrats which led to amendments in the Central Vigilance Commission Act 2003 and the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act.

For three reasons. One the agency is directly under the Prime Minister. Two, under Section 389 of the CrPC only the Executive has the power to decide if the CBI should appeal any case. Three, officers are dependent on their political bosses for their careers going north or south. If they "perform" they are rewarded! See how an ex-CBI chief was made member of the Human Rights Commission post retirement.

What next? Prime Minister Modi has oft spoken about ushering in transparency in governance. It is high time the CBI is truly independent, stops being His Masters Voice and prevents abuse of power. Undoubtedly this would be a formidable task given that the agency needs purging of "yes men" and cleansed of backdoor instructions. There is no point in initiating a biased investigation which does not guarantee a fair probe.

One way in line with international best practices, is for the CBI to develop its own dedicated cadre of officers who are not bothered about deputation and abrupt transfers. The CBI did recruit some officers in the past to its cadre, but that effort has gone nowhere, and all senior posts in the CBI are now held by IPS officers.

It is also possible to consider granting the CBI the kind of autonomy that the Comptroller and Auditor General enjoys, he is only accountable to Parliament. An efficient Parliamentary oversight over federal criminal and intelligence agencies could be a way forward to ensure better accountability, despite concerns regarding political misuse of the oversight.

As things stand the dice is loaded against autonomy. Clearly, the CBI drama reflects the emerging truth of Modi's India. Power is all. Arguably, one can say this is what democracy is all about. Or should one say business of democracy. Either which way the CBI must stop being His Masters Voice and prevent abuse of power.

At the end of the day, the powers-that-be must desist from playing havoc with the CBI. It would be Utopian to accept CBI as a free parrot. Time Government launches a clean-up operation before it's too late. They need to answer two pointed questions: Will the CBI be guided by the law of the land only or by the Government of the day? The buck stops at Modi's door. Will he rise to the occasion? ---- INFA

High IT A Myth

This needs to be abolished

By Shivaji Sarkar

Almost 81,000 Indians earned over Rs 1 crore a year, screams Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT). Is there really anything to cheer about? The other side of it is that the number of non-salaried taxpayers has increased but it is the salaried, who bear the tax brunt. The figures also are upbeat on 15.7 percent rise in tax collection. But it conceals the rise in refunds.

Up to 20 October, direct tax collections for 2017-18 was estimated at Rs 4.9 crore against Rs 4.2 crore a year back. The number of refunds almost doubled to two crores and amount increased from about Rs 70,000 a year to Rs 1.1 lakh crore. It means the tax collection cost has increased. That stymies individual expenses and hurts growth.

Each refund has an administrative, compilation and transaction cost. By simple logic as the number of refunds doubled, all these costs have also. It also means the tax department is overstaffed and needs to reduce its flab. The tax administration cost is higher than the cost of refunds.

The effective taxpayer increased, at least notionally because all filers of returns do not pay taxes, from 6.47 crores to 8.27 crores, says Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. In the last two years revenue collected made the Government richer by Rs 90,000 crores, Rs 45,000 crores a year.

The spend towards tax collection at Rs 1.1 lakh crores more in 2018-19 is 4.32 per cent of the total Government spending. The cost has increased by 35.75 per cent. So more the Government earns more it loses too.

A NIPFP study by Arindam Das Gupta in 2000-01 found that compliance cost is high. The cost borne by taxpayers is 6.8 per cent of gross income or 49 per cent of personal income tax collections. If third party compliance costs, like those of employers and banks, are added, this rises to 56 per cent of taxes collected.

The third party costs of deducting tax at source (TDS) amounted to 11.8 per cent. It is borne by the employers. The third party costs constitute 53 per cent of total collections and 60 per cent non-company income taxes 1999-2000, says Das Gupta quoting CAG report 2001. The cost exceeds sometimes even tax paid, says Das Gupta.

An important reason for the "low compliance costs" of salaried employees is because their employers bear the costs of assessing and form 16A.

In simple terms it increases business expenses. All Government departments are spending enormously on this count. So whatever the Government is earning, it is losing on the implementation of an irrational procedure.

The aim of TDS itself is questionable. It is irrational because the Government is realizing a tax that is not due to it before the end of a financial year. It is also not paying any interest on TDS. How can a tax be deducted even before one utilizes his earnings? The worse is it deprives an earner of his right to spend and contribute to the growth of the economy. On an average over four months wages are locked up in TDS or simply put it is never paid.

The TDS is locking up huge direct and indirect finances that could have been utilized for productive purposes and enrich the economy. This loss has to be quantified. In other words, if TDS is abolished, the Government and all other employers would save huge compliance cost that would add to growth.

Das Gupta found that bribe quantum is high especially for non-salary earners but was not less for salaried earners either.

Even now despite online filing it has not been eliminated. There are allegations that post-demonetisation harassment has increased. It has now even engulfed rural and semi-urban areas.

Then there is the commercial cost to the banks. As per Das Gupta commercial costs to the banks is at 11 per cent. The banks however say they spend double that amount or 22 per cent. The banks thus are subsidizing Government expenses. Or the bank depositors are bearing the cost by arbitrary reduction of interest rates on deposits and increases in fees and other charges.

This is retrograde. The direct taxes are leading to indirect levying of charges on the same taxpayer. This apart, by forcing banks to subsist Government expenses it is adding to NPAs indirectly.

Banks are public entities not Government bodies. The Government is only a managing authority and has no right over the deposits or earnings of the banks. Should it have unfettered rights to tinker with its functioning or deny the actual charges?

The estimates, as per the NIPFP study, of compliance costs are high by international standards equaling at the median 130 per cent of taxes paid. With the rising numbers of taxpayers it can only be estimated to have increased. It means the rationale of income tax itself is doubtful, if not retrograde.

This apart there is little to rejoice at the number of crorepati taxpayers. Most of them after paying over 33 per cent IT lose a sizeable sum and do not remain crorepatis.

The tax rates are constant. It does not take into account the inflation, which has risen by over 60 per cent since 2010. Asking someone with low income of less than Rs 3 crores to part with 33 per cent of his income is itself questionable. Even the Economic Survey 2017 found that majority of the new taxpayers is at the threshold level of around Rs 2.7 lakhs. The cost of filing and keeping records is more.

Should not we link I-T to price index? If inflation increases, the benefit should be given to the taxpayer. That further questions the rationale of having such tax.

The 2001 study is clear on bribes. It says that bribes remain an integral part of the tax system whether for the salaried or non-salaried. On silly issues, the I-T appellate is flooded with cases. The irrationality of refusal is there even where the norms are appropriate and clear. Many interest subventions are denied on virtually no ground.

It takes 15 years of toil to be settled by the appellate because the department finds it convenient in not accepting the plea that the date of allotment, an established norm, should be adhered to for such decisions. It is not done to "settle" it. It does not need an elaboration.

So if I-T is abolished, the Government and society saves more and frees it of apprehensions and can spur the economy.---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Well done Sikkim!

Editor,

The tiny eastern Indian state of Sikkim has made the whole of South Asia proud for being the 2018 recipient of the globally acclaimed and highly prestigious FAO-Future Policy Gold Award for her monumental contribution in becoming a 100% organic state. My heartiest congratulations to both the State Government of Sikkim and Honourable CM Mr Pawan Chamling for the sincerity, dedication, hard effort, support, encouragement and outstanding leadership in making Sikkim a historic Organic State on the global agricultural map. The resilient people of a small Himalayan state have demonstrated to the entire planet that through consistent effort, honesty and strong political will no big socio-economic or socio-cultural transformation is impossible to achieve. No matter how hard the existing obstacles are. Sikkim has demonstrated that if we are determined we can live our life through environment friendly practices. It is not just the effort of a single individual but the whole community standing and working together in building their lives. Therefore, in short this outstanding achievement of transforming into a complete organic agriculture state permanently places Sikkim on a global map of inspirational sustainable living. The farmers deserve special mention as they have successfully changed their entire attitude and philosophy of agricultural work through this and believe me this has not been an easy task. Within three decades Sikkim achieved something that even highly pro-environment western nations with billions of dollars worth of investment have not been able to achieve. Today Sikkim serves as an inspirational model not just for South Asia but the entire planet and particularly for the developing and under developed economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Basu,
Via email

Lok Sabha election 2019

Editor,

I find it amusing that the political parties that are part of the MDA coalition are unable to put up a common candidate for the Lok Sabha polls, 2019 both in Shillong and Tura. A divided house cannot stand against the might of a united Congress. Why don't political parties get this basic fact right? The BJP, above all should have aligned with the NPP who at the moment have the largest number of MLAs. But the need to prove their strength blurs their intellect and makes them take wrong decisions. The UDP is buoyed by the win at Ranikor. The coming together of the UDP and HSPDP could make it possible for the regional part combine to win the Shillong seat. But that is a 50:50 chance. Electoral politics is a slippery slope. And much will depend on the candidate that the regional party puts up. Will it be Paul Lyngdoh or Jemino Mawthoh? That is provided the HSPDP does not decide to put up their leader Ardent Basaiawmoit as the candidate. With the regional parties it is difficult to predict anything.

As far as Congress is concerned the candidate is already known. There is no reason why the sitting Vincent Pala should not be given a ticket so Pala could begin to campaign from now on, which he is doing. If the NPP also sets up a candidate for Shillong then the Congress win is predicted. What is the MDA thinking? Do they really want to keep the Congress at bay by setting up separate candidates? This not only confuses the voters but it also shows that the MDA coalition is not based on mutual trust and understanding but on the flimsy need of politicians to be in power.

Yours etc.,
KL Mawroh,
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.

"In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted."
--- Bertrand Russell

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Charge and counter charge

LEADER of the Opposition in Meghalaya, Congress MLA, Mukul Sangma never misses an opportunity to point fingers at the MDA Government. Whether it is in the illegal transportation of coal or the MDA Government's new initiative to offer the olive branch to the now atrophied Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), the Opposition Congress has spared no pains to put the Government in the docks. Does being in the Opposition also mean a daily trading of charges at the ruling government? Is that the only role of the Opposition? The Opposition is an essential part of the democratic process but what is expected from it is effective criticism; not a daily litany of accusations. People expect the Opposition to check corruption, defective administration and other excesses perpetrated by the ruling government. To enable a functional democracy it is important that the Government governs openly and honestly and that it meets criticism by rational argument. The Leader of the Opposition (LO) holds a position of responsibility and accountability too. When he points a finger at the Government he should be sure that his own Government did not tread that same path only a few months ago. The MUA while in power could not come up with a white paper on Mining and after the NGT ban in April 2014, coal has been illegally mined and also illegally carted away while the Congress was in the driving seat. How can it be forgotten that a young police official was shot dead in Ri Bhoi district for opposing that illegal transportation of coal?

Perhaps the Congress Party because of its being in the opposition by a slim minority is even more keen to keep the present Government on its toes and embarrass it at every given opportunity. The LO and the Congress Party have been playing that role to the hilt. Unfortunately, most of the accusations levelled by the Opposition now are the very same ones they had indulged in earlier. The surrender of some factions of Garo militants was a big show held in Tura sometime ago. No one protested then; no one accused the Congress Party and the present LO of making overtures to militants. Hence what is good for militants in Garo Hills should be good for those in Khasi Hills too. That's what the present Government is trying to say. And since all governments have given undue importance to surrendered militants none should be pointing fingers at the other.

Defence Modernisation

Transparency, astuteness vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Restructuring of the Indian Army is being planned in phases and it is understood that its strength (including that of support staff) is proposed to be reduced by 1.5 lakh or 1.5 per cent. The reason for such restructuring has been the report of a Government-appointed committee that recommended making the army a "lean and powerful machine" which means more automation through modernisation. Recently, the Army Commanders' Conference discussed these issues under the chairmanship of Army Chief General Bipin Rawat.

Our whole outlook in various matters is to follow the Western countries and in this case also a similar strategy is to be adopted. But the situation in India is different and a high level of automation and modernisation may entail a high degree of expenditure and strain our resources. On the other hand, 'rightsizing' to some extent may be necessary as it would help using the resources for arms procurement. The balance has to be brought about and according to reliable sources such 'rightsizing' may save anything between Rs 5000 to Rs7000 crores in revenue expenditure.

No doubt, the procurement of sophisticated arms is necessary and the money saved could help the issue. In fact, this March, the Army Vice Chief deposed before a Parliamentary panel and pointed out that the army "neither has enough money nor does it have modern firepower in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Jammu & Kashmir".

Arms purchase for the Armed forces -- Army, Air Force and Navy -- is definitely necessary keeping in view the geopolitical situation of the country, but it is a fact too that big defence manufacturers such as the US, Russia and France have been putting pressure on India to buy their weaponry. While accepting the need to modernise our forces, such purchase, strictly as per requirement, and the price factor have to be kept in mind. As is well known, kickbacks in defence deals should be avoided so that the weapons are available at the best price, the negotiations should be judicious and transparent.

The Rafale deal has kicked up a controversy for escalation in prices, compared to what the UPA government had negotiated, and also due to selection of a new Ambani company as the partner of Dassault Aviation, the French manufacturer of these fighter planes. The enhanced price has quite reasonably generated a debate as also the fact why the vastly experienced Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) was ignored and a relatively new company without any experience made the partner company in India.

The question now is not against defence modernisation but carrying out the same in a judicious manner. For the army particularly, modern gadgets are vital to fight terrorism, which is an ongoing problem, that has been resulting in hundreds of deaths in encounters, specially in J&K.

Apart from this, a $5.2 billion deal has been finalised during President Putin's recent visit to India for purchase of S-400 from Russia. It is understood that this is a versatile system with four different missiles -- the very long range 40 N6(400 km) series, which is ready for deployment, the 48 N6 (250 km) series, the 9M96 (120 km) and the short range 9M96E(40 km). India has an old association with Russian anti-aircraft missiles and their associated radar systems. Moreover, to get the Americans on board there is fresh defence contracts worth $10 billion, including a $8 billion deal to buy 100 stripped down versions of Avenger drones and a $2 billion deal to buy MHp60 Romeo multi-role helicopters.

It goes without saying that India's air dominance is vital for deterrence and stability in South Asia and for preserving the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific region. Though IAF's requirement for 42 squadrons -- some 750 aircraft - may be on the higher side, at least 50 per cent of the figure may be necessary as per defence sources.

Though there is no need to compare India with China in matters of defence modernisation, the army has been somewhat handicapped due to lack of modern gadgets and arms A July 2017 report of the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) revealed that almost 40 per cent of the stockpile in September 2016 would not even last for 10 days. It cannot be denied that the soldiers are desperately in need of state-of-the-art machinery, combat uniforms and equipment.

The most important thing that comes up here is how far India had advanced in building up its indigenous manufacture of weapons. INS Vikramaditya was supposed to be supplemented this year or next, by India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, but this has been pushed back considerably. The problem arises from disagreements about the type of aircraft carrier to be built.

Even regarding the Rafale deal the original proposal was acquisition of 126 combat jets, 108 to be made in India and the rest bought off the shelf, to beef up IAF's depleting fleet strength with the help of Medium Multi-role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA). But this has not happened and the present acquisition of 36 Rafale fighters at a much higher price is far from judicious.

Though this year's defence budget has been increased by 7.81 per cent to Rs 2.96 crores, this may not be enough if indigenous efforts are not seriously explored without any further delay. Moreover, tie-ups with international arms manufacturers, who are ready to set up units in the country and collaborate with HAL, Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers or any other such country -- whether in the public or private sector -- may be explored.

Thus, it is indeed quite distressing that 'Make in India' as regards the defence sector has not been accomplished. The failure in this regard has been a big economic loss to the country as, at one time, there were plans to set up units which could export small and medium arms and defence equipment to developing countries in Asia and Africa.

The question now is not against defence modernisation but carrying out the same in a judicious manner. For the army particularly, modern gadgets are vital to fight terrorism, which is an ongoing problem, that has been resulting in hundreds of deaths in encounters, specially in J&K. This cannot be allowed to happen and the political leaders have to act with urgency in the matter. Financial resources would continue to be a crucial issue in carrying out the modernisation as development needs of an emerging economy are also equally vital.

As such, there is a need to strike a balance in the matter. Equally important is to ensure the need to hard bargaining in arriving at the right price for the weapons imported without getting into controversies. Transparency in the matter is thus very much needed but unfortunately this has not happened. The judiciary could possibly entertain the pricing of imported arms so that corruption does not enter into negotiations. The end result should be that purchase of defence equipment is spared controversy of big money changing hands.---INFA

Cut and thrust between RBI and government

Checks and balances as safety valves

By Anjan Roy

The Reserve Bank of India has plunged headlong into a battle with the government over its independence. Last week, the RBI had a meeting of its board of directors where the government and nominee directors have reportedly strongly criticised the central bank's handling of the liquidity squeeze following the denouement at IL&FS.

The heavy-handed interventions would surely have further soured the strained interface between the government and the RBI. A mildly adversarial relation between government of the day and the central bank is normal and not surprising. Open wars are seldom fought.

But the tensions must have been running really high that RBI's deputy governor Viral Acharya took is first opportunity at hand -a public lecture in Bombay- to hector all concerned (including the government) about the importance of an independent central bank. Delivering the A.D. Shroff Memorial Lecture, Dr Acharya stated at the outset that the topic chosen was at the suggestion of his boss, the governor.

From a high academic pedestal the RBI functionary underlined the importance of social institutions (including, as it happens, a central bank) as an essential part of a liberal order. Dr Acharya is every inch an academic and his lecture was steeped in the literature on the subject.

He cited the plights of countries which dared violate that cardinal principle of central bank's independence, including the experience of Argentina in 2010. Following the departure of its central bank governor over differences with his government on impounding a part of the bank's reserves, Argentina had faced a sliding market and depreciating currency. But that was only the end result of its general economic mismanagement not just emasculating its central bank.

At any rate, it is difficult to find fault with this line of argument. A plurality of social institutions was essential and desirable. The government of the day should not have the last say on every matter and checks and balances were the safety valves. But that does not mean that the individual institutions cannot be criticised at any point of time and criticism is a violation of the independence of the institution.

In some instances, Dr Acharya himself admits this and even suggests some mechanism for sorting out differences between the central bank and the government. There are certainly very valid grievances about the way the RBI has been taking care of its charge.

The proximate trigger for the current fracas appears to be the different perceptions about credit flow after the disastrous defaults of IL&FS. A large swathe of industries - particularly small businesses - have been complaining of almost credit freeze for them. The entire network of non-banking financial companies, which ordinarily provided funds for smaller businesses, had clammed up following the IL&FS defaults.

RBI had been caught totally off guard on this whole affair. Large lenders to IL&FS did not get back their money in time and as a result they went off the market. Similar was the fate of mutual funds. In such a situation, the central bank should have thought of alternative measures to meet the requirements of those who needed the funds. The bank did not think much of this need.

Shortage of funds and creeping credit freeze could seriously derail the entire process and the government was underlining the need for fresh infusion of liquidity. This may not be viewed as intrusion on independence.

Earlier, the public sector banks were accumulating bad debts and they were ever agreeing their non-performing assets to present decked up and misleading balance sheets. Until Raghuram Rajan flagged the issue, RBI did precious little to stem the rot. Aren't these justifiable criticisms? RBI, of course, will point out that it did not have much powers until recently. However, cautioning adequately was its responsibility.

The truth of the matter is that RBI has mostly been found to be behind the curve. Its supervisory role has been found to be somewhat dissatisfying and the markets had got the better of it. What were the qualities of its inspections when major faults were discovered only when things had gone out of control.

Indeed, central banks all over the world are currently going through a fundamental re-think. If anything, rather than being intimidated by the governments of the day, there are instances when the central banks are threatening governments with consequences if they do not fall in line.

The European Central Bank (ECB) regularly pointed fingers at government to follow its diktats, failing which it promised actions which could shut out defaulting countries from say its bond purchase programmes. US president is now bemoaning the appointment of the incumbent chair of the Federal Reserve system.

Milton Friedman, the high priest of monetarism, had publicly decried the US Federal Reserve as an ineffective and blundering institution and urged it to be scrapped. He had blamed the Federal Reserve for blundering into the Great Depression of 1931 and the subsequent prolonged recession. In his Monetary History of the United States he had pointed out the exact policy faults of the central bank, which he felt had harmed the US economy and failed to correct emerging distortions.

A recent issue of The Economist magazine had noted the reverse of the central bank ability to control inflation - a central theme of Viral Acharya's argument for independence. It cited a 1993 paper by Alberto Alisina and Larry Summers, which found a "tight inverse correlation between an index of central bank independence and average inflation".

That strikes at the very root of the cause for central bank independence, so to say. Let no one take that too seriously and rally behind paring RBI's powers. Giving the powers of printing money to politicians could be too dangerous, seeing the efficiency with which they function. But it is also true the central bank should not be too jittery about any criticisms of its handling of its responsibility. The real test of independence lies in the Reserve Bank's ability to robustly face criticism and opposition to its viewpoints and yet drive with its objectives.

It is not as if the RBI has not demonstrated its virility earlier. In its open thrusts and cuts with the then finance minister P. Chidambaram, governor P.V. Subbarao did not mince words and matched the finance minister word for word. Get along with a good fight. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Time is of the essence

Editor,

There was an accident in Nongthymmai today during rush hour and it drove me nuts. The drivers instead of moving their vehicles to the side of the road had an argument in the middle of the road for over ten minutes and had the traffic police not arrived they would have continued arguing. If this had happened in a city like Delhi during peak hours the whole city would have come to a standstill. Every time there is an accident in Shillong people would gather around the scene watching the drama unfolding as if they are watching a Hindi soap opera. We have no concept of time and this laid back attitude of ours is what has been holding us back. But we're too blind to see.

I remember when I was in college, I bunked a lot of classes to be in the boy's common room to play table tennis. I was very proud of my table tennis playing skills back then and the admiration I got from my fellow students. Looking back I realized that the time I spent in that common room almost ruined my life. That's why it is so important that parents teach their kids the value of time and the need to have a goal in life. Modern human civilization wouldn't have come this far had all the great human minds in the past lingered and wasted their time on trivial things during the most important phase of their lives. Our people especially our boys and men need to drop their inherent laid back attitude and take their lives more seriously if we are to be taken seriously by the rest of the country. My niece who is studying Science in class XII in one of the top colleges in the city said that some of our boys are most interested in impressing girls rather than doing well in their studies, whereas, the rest of the boys are hell-bent on doing well in their studies and making their parents proud. Looking at the Indian Super League this year, there are only six to seven players from our State whereas players from Manipur and Mizoram dominate the League. And the question we must ask ourselves is why this is so when at the youth level we produced as much talent as these two foot-balling states.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Criticism for its own sake is meaningless

Editor,

Recently the former Chief Minister of Meghalaya and present opposition leader, Dr Mukul Sangma has criticised the the MDA government for facilitating illegal coal mining and for promising to lift the ban on coal mining. This is not at all true and in fact it is a lie. Where is the proof? In fact, it was the BJP that promised the people of Meghalaya that if voted to power the Party would lift the ban on coal mining. But the party won just two seats, Pynthorumkhrah and Laban. How can the BJP lift the ban? Even if it wants to do so that is not within its power for that power rests with the apex court. Moreover, it was not the MDA government that promised to lift the ban on coal mining, it never did. So why did Dr. Mukul lie to the people? On facilitating illegal mining there is no proof from Dr Mukul Sangma. Why then this wild allegation? On the stand of MDA vis a vis the HNLC the MDA has made it clear to the outfit to come over ground and join the mainstream and that is very clear. There is no stand that is clearer than this. In fact the publicity secretary of HNLC, Sainkupar Nongtraw has made it clear to the MDA that the organisation would surrender if proper and official channels are opened up. We hope that the MDA government will respond positively. In fact the former Secretary of HNLC, Cheristarfield Thangkhiew, had already made clear to the former Home Minister, Roshan Warjri to send proper feelers to facilitate surrendering of the cadres of the outfit but she did nothing and Dr. Mukul Sangma, the then CM, did nothing. He has missed the bus otherwise the credit would have gone to him. And now he is crying foul when this MDA government is trying to bring the outfit over ground. As an opposition leader Mukul Sangma has to co-operate with the good moves made by the Government. When and if the Government falters it is his duty to point out and criticise. Though criticism is well within his right as an opposition leader but criticism for its own sake is meaningless. If Dr. Mukul Sangma chooses to make noise and clamour against the Government only to ensure that his position as a leader of the opposition becomes irrelevant then that is his choice. But please point out and criticise if the Government commits blunders. People of Meghalaya would benefit much more from that rather than from cheap political gimmicks and rhetoric which tends to bore people.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Clarification on Sohra District demand

Editor,

Apropos to the letter captioned, 'Sohra District Justified', (ST Oct 24, 2018) by Philip Marwein, as the Sirdar of the Elaka Umniuh-Tmar, I would like to clarify on these few points: (i) The Elaka Umniuh-Tmar Sirdarship is not like the Raid as mentioned by the writer. Rather the Elaka Umniuh-Tmar is one among the 54 Elakas/ Himas under the jurisdiction of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) as laid down under the KHAD (Administration of Elaka) Act 1991, wherein the Chief is known as Sirdar, which is very different from that of a Headman.

(ii) The general assembly (Dorbar Pyllun) of the Elaka Umniuh-Tmar held on Sep 29, 2018 had unanimously decided not to accept to be part/ included in the proposed new district known as Sohra District. However, the Elaka is not averse to the proposed upgradation of the Sohra Civil Sub-Division into full-fledged district.

(iii) To clear the doubts of people, the Elaka Umniuh-Tmar had decided to remain under the Pynursla Civil Sub-division as per notification of the Home Department, Govt of Meghalaya dated February 14, 2017.

In fact, the Elaka Umniuh-Tmar wanted to clarify that it did not endorse the decision taken by the headmen (Sordars) of Seven Raids (Raid Shabong, Lyngkhat, Rangnah, Mukertila, Mawlam, Mawshun and Nongkhlieng) who wished to be included in the proposed district, should its headquarters be located at Elaka Laitlyngkot. This information was carried by your paper on October 3, 2018.

Yours etc.,
PS Khongbeh
Sirdar
Elaka Umniuh-Tmar
Sirdarship.

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.