

*"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."*

--- Helen Keller

## The Shillong Times

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### Politics sans ideology

POLITICS is no more what it used to be here. Ideology has taken a back seat and personal gains are upper-most in the minds of leaders across the spectrum. As politicians jump ship, find sanctuary in rival camps and win positions, the people – the central core of democracy – are fooled to their bones. Ruefully, such turncoats get elected again and keep serving their own causes. This is why there are those who say Indians vote with their feet.

CPI's national executive member and the Communists' poster-boy Kanhaiya Kumar has joined the Congress; Captain Amarinder Singh who lost the CM's post is reportedly negotiating with the BJP to let down the Congress party that gave him power and positions for many years. Navjot Singh Sidhu is reportedly seeking to ditch the Congress and join the AAP if a CM's post is assured to him. Communists in West Bengal joined hands with the Congress that they fought against for decades, so as to upset the BJP appellation in the last assembly polls. Leaders left Trinamool Congress to join the BJP and returned to Mamata Banerjee with the same ease for a re-entry into TMC if only to share the spoils of power in the state. Top Congress leaders were welcomed into the CPI-M in Kerala in similar circumstances. Mamata Banerjee is seeking out disgruntled Congress leaders to set up her party's units in Goa and the North-East to gain a wider national party status for TMC and win the PM's post. BJP is happy getting anyone to its side. Ideology, thus, is the casualty while pragmatism and personal benefits rule the roost. Regional satraps are engagingly promoting family rule; and this is the case even in a politically enlightened state like West Bengal. Corruption and loot of public money are the bane of all regional political entities. Bureaucrats taking a cue from politicians, are having a whale of a time.

This shameful scenario raises question marks on the sustainability of democracy as a political system. Trust in politicians is eroding fast. Yet, India is a nation where 37 per cent of the globe's total illiterate adults exist and exercise their franchise. While most people are leading a hand-to-mouth existence, just 10 per cent of the people appropriate 75 per cent of the national wealth, hold a matching clout in public life and are the real movers and shakers. There is no serious attempt at top levels of governance to change the scenario for the better; short-cuts are rather the norm for them to grab or retain power.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Breakdown of pipelines at Umkhen

Editor,

Whenever there is a heavy downpour, rate payers are told that there is breakdown of pipelines at the source at Umkhen which supply water to Laitumkhras areas. On September 28 and 29 though there was some rain but not to the point of causing breakdown of pipelines coming from Umkhen. But on the above two days no water was released, leaving us high and dry. We request the concerned Departments to ensure that the rate-payers are not deprived of one of the most essential commodities to sustain life, which is water. Over and above that let me also inform the authorities that earlier we used to get water for 30-40 mins but now the time has reduced to just 20 mins, sometimes with interruptions in between. This is not done and the MLA concerned has to address this single most critical issue as far as families are concerned.

Yours etc.,  
Elisha Syiemiong  
Via email

#### Jio the boss

Editor,

My wife had taken a

Jio Fibre connection (364 356\*\*45) a few months back. It was horrible and it broke down. After repeated requests to Jio via Twitter/ phone etc., Jio has not repaired the fault. Their helpline is one of the most atrocious and one would be lucky to get to talk to an operator. I was twice fortunate and on one occasion I was told that my recharge date had expired hence they cannot take up a service request. On calling the Call Center executive I recharged via Google-pay for a connection which was not working in anticipation that the fault would be repaired. But lo and behold the recharge expired but for an entire month the Jio-fibre didn't work. Imagine life without a working internet connection at this age and that too for startups. The problem with the repair was that the 'Process of Jio' didn't allow them to repair the connection. They wanted us to relocate. We are not shifting anywhere, yet they can't help us if we do not go for relocation of the connection. (In one of the correspondences they even asked us to get permission from some authority to get repairs done.) Hence the Babus of Jio needed documents again. Now tell me if I am wrong.

For their internal process, are they a government

# A Lady Chief Secretary on Meghalaya's 49th year

By Patricia Mukhim

It has taken forty-nine years for Meghalaya, known for its matrilineal tradition to produce a lady Chief Secretary in Ms Rebecca V Suchiang. This year or early next year we are also scheduled to see a lady Director General of Police (DGP) – Ms Idashisha Nongrang. Much before these two ladies we had Ms Jordana Pavel Diengdoh who started her career with the Indian Railways Traffic Service where she served from 1975 to 1978. Jordana Diengdoh happens to be the first woman in India to have joined this service which is a male preserve. That's quite an achievement but one that is so little known and celebrated. Jordana then got into the Indian Foreign Service in 1979. As a career diplomat she has served in different capacities and retired in 2009 as the Consul General of India to the UK at Birmingham. In all, therefore, we have just three women from the Khasi-Jaintia community to hold these high offices.

In Meghalaya, we have had just two lady Chief Secretaries. The last one was Ms PP Trivedi who served as Chief Secretary from 1983-85 and is remembered for enforcing discipline among the rank and file who were used to strolling to work only after 11 am. These were discussions we would hear about every incoming Chief Secretary; of their character traits and peculiarities. It will be no different even with Ms Rebecca Suchiang who has always remained free from controversy of any kind. She will, of course, have to be more visible and audible as she leads the bureaucracy in the State on a mission to govern Meghalaya.

At present we have Isawanda Laloo the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills from the Khasi-Jaintia community who got into the IAS in 2013, exactly 24 years after Rebecca Suchiang. The question then is - why do so few Khasi women make it to the elite services (IAS, IFS) in a society that is supportive of women's education and social mobility. What could be the problem that so few women aspire for a service that gets them prestige and respect and also gives them the opportunity to serve the public in ways that can empower the people and bring up their living standards? I guess this is a question that has several disquieting answers.

It is natural to expect women bureaucrats and politicians to have a better understanding of the problems that Meghalaya faces and is

indicted for regularly by different survey reports from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the NSSO. These surveys have consistently pointed to the fact that there is very high stunting and wasting among children in Meghalaya. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) 2016-2018 had found high stunting among children in Meghalaya with 40.4 per cent of children from birth to four years suffering from stunting



while the national average is around 35 per cent. Meghalaya is just below Bihar (42 per cent) when it comes to the percentage of prevalence of stunting among children in the above age group the survey had stated. The next stage after stunting is wasting after which there is no reversal.

Stunting is defined as low height-for-age. It is the result of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poverty, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness and/or inappropriate feeding and care in early life. Stunting is hugely problematic because it prevents children from reaching their physical and cognitive potential. It means they don't gain height as they should but the worst part is that it affects their cognitive development which means their ability to think, explore and figure things out. The cognitive domain is where knowledge, skills, and problem solving happens. It is the cognitive domain which helps children to think about and understand the world around them. Brain development is part of cognitive development.

When a child that is

stunted does not receive the required nutrients over a long period it leads to wasting. Once wasting happens the situation cannot be reversed no matter how much nutrients or multivitamins a child is given. Wasting is defined as low weight-for-height. It often indicates recent and severe weight loss, although it can also persist for a long time. Wasting usually occurs when a person has not had adequate quality and quantity of food and/or has suffered

from prolonged illnesses. Wasting in children is associated with a higher risk of death if not treated properly apart from also affecting the cognitive potential of the child.

Studies indicate that one of the reasons for stunting in Meghalaya is because a large population of families in rural Meghalaya cannot afford to give milk to their children. Children aged 4-8 years require 700 mg per day of calcium which works out to about 600 ml of cows' milk to completely fulfil this age range's calcium needs. I was discussing with Mr KN Kumar, Chairman Farmers' Commission the other day as to the reasons for stunting and wasting of children in Meghalaya. He said that while children elsewhere drink at least 200 plus ml of milk daily, in Meghalaya it is only about 80 ml. Most parents, he said, pleaded that they could not afford milk. Mr Kumar argued with those parents that if they can afford to have betel nut and betel leaf and the men can afford cigarettes/bidi/ liquor why could they not make sacrifices for their kids. The Milk Mission in Meghalaya

is meant to address this nutritional gap in children. There are all shades of IAS officers in Meghalaya. Some don't belong to this state but have made it their own and the concerns of the people here also concerns them even as they try out different strategies to address these nutritional and other anomalies through various interventions. Might it not be that if we had many more local/ indigenous women IAS officers that at least a few of them would also be alarmed by the problematic development indices in the state? The reason why the educational outcomes in rural Meghalaya are so dismal is largely because of the under-nutrition which is known to directly affect thinking, reasoning and other brain activities. Of course, the quality of teaching and the learning environment also matters but more importantly it is the child's own ability to absorb the learning processes especially juggling with numbers that yield positive learning outcomes. It is in this context that one wishes that we had many more committed civil servants who would take the human development indices and the educational surveys with the seriousness they deserve and also show single-minded devotion towards addressing these and ensuring that the next survey shows some improvements due to their interventions.

There will be many expectations from a home-grown Chief Secretary. I am not sure why Chief Secretaries don't step out of their offices more often and mingle with the world outside their offices. Granted that the bureaucracy is a mountain of paperwork, much of which can be delegated to junior colleagues. Perhaps better time management and using weekends for rural visits would help the new CS grasp the key problems of the State better. I recall travelling with former CS Y. Tshering who happened to be the Chairman of the Supreme Court monitored, Special Purpose Vehicle created specially to oversee how the funds realised from Lafarge Umiam Private Ltd which sources limestone from Shella and Nongtra, are utilised for the purpose which the apex court has clearly laid out. It made a huge difference for the people of those areas to meet the CS in person. It also educates the CS first hand on how funds are utilised for various projects.

On this note, hope springs eternal in the human breast.

partnership. As for India, AUKUS is not good news. It raises questions about the significance of the Quad. AUKUS creates an impression that the US is concerned only with pushing back against China. India's concerns about Pakistan and the Western Indian Ocean remain unaddressed. During the Quad summit, Indian Prime Minister Modi discussed the priority areas for Quad with US president Biden and Japanese and Australian PMs. Biden clarified the roles to be played by Quad and AUKUS. It is obvious that Quad will act as a socio-economic organization and the region's defence will be led by AUKUS. Given that India's concerns about Chinese aggression in the North China Sea are unaddressed, the new roles of Quad and AUKUS will not do it any good. On the other hand, if India makes best use of the strategic opportunities to strengthen its partnership with France, it could bring tangible benefits to the country.

Yours etc.,  
Rupsa Marak,  
Tura

#### AUKUS undermines India's role

Editor,

The formation of a new defence agreement known as AUKUS with no precedent in the diplomatic world has created confusion among observers. As the regional power of the new alliance is already covered by an old alliance, Quad, the formation of AUKUS raises doubts. AUKUS named after Australia, the UK, and the USA reveals that the US views the Chinese activities in the South China Sea and adjoining islands very seriously.

China expressed its displeasure at the formation of AUKUS. Chinese president Xi Jinping has warned against "interference from external forces" in the region. Global Times described Australia as "a pawn of the US." AUKUS has caused consternation in France and EU as well. The reason for it is that they were kept out of the new military

partnership.

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# Benami Business: Who is to blame?

By Rupert Lyngdoh

This write-up is based on several others that were earlier penned down regarding a serious poison that has found its way into our society and that we as clans always cry and crib about but do absolutely nothing other than keeping silent or simply ignoring its prevalence. This poison has blended well with our operational system and concerned authorities have no interest in dealing with it.

It is rightly said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing and it seems to have aptly come down to that now as the many attempts made by several individuals in the past have only resulted in false promises and the Ministers and the Department concerned have turned a deaf ear to the matter.

I want to bring up the MUDA menace that has come and gone in the past and now seems to have been forgotten for some time now. When we look back to the months of May to November 2016 we have had several individuals pointing out to this grave menace through letters to the editor of Shillong Times and I would like to mention a few



names that have come up in the past of like those of Beckstar Tariang (03rd May 2016), Jonathan Lyngdoh (October 14th, October 27th and November 17 2016) and P.K. Dwivedi (October 19). These individuals have pointed out several evils of this ongoing sub-letting system that is prevalent in the MUDA complex. On the November 4, 2016, the editor herself did come up with an article based on the letters received under the caption, "Is clean business possible in Meghalaya?"

If we read the statement of the then Minister I/c of MUDA, Dr M. Ampareen Lyngdoh that came up in an article in Shillong Times dated April 29, 2016, it has clearly been mentioned that the project was implemented primarily to cater to the unemployed youth of the State with an assurance that the matter will be dealt with and resolved. Having read the letters that have been addressed to the editor, we clearly understand that the allocation of the stalls at MUDA complex were based on different parameters and not with the objective of addressing the unemployment situation that is growing by the day. The editor's article clearly mentions that allocations were made to relatives and friends of those who were in power (elected representatives) back then. I feel that this in itself has violated the guidelines and proper implementation failed at the initial stages of the project.

There is absolutely no point in digging up how allocations were made in today's date. However, what concerns me the most is that it is not run by the individuals who were allotted these stalls as on date. There is a clear understanding that they have been sub-let to non-tribal vendors who pose as managers or stalls in-charge when there is an inspection by any Government Department or by pressure groups and/or NGOs. The letters in the past have clearly stated

that if the need arises names and stall numbers indulging in BENAMI business can be shared and revealed. Perhaps the person had faith back then that the concerned Department that is stationed within the complex would do the needful and set right these outrageous anomalies.

It is disheartening that our very own people are involved in quick money-making techniques by selling out their clan name by sub-letting and posing as owners of businesses they have no clue about. This is a HUMBLE REQUEST to the genuine owners of the stalls to think of our own people and the JAITBYNRIEW first before bowing down to easy and quick money and sublet stalls with no moral conscience. Have you ever sat back and thought about the overall impact that your decision has had on the growth and development of our very own JAITBYNRIEW? Do you realize that a non-tribal vendor operating behind your name in the heart of the city is evading huge amounts of tax money that actually would have come back to the people of the State through central schemes for the overall de-

velopment of the state and its inhabitants? Who is supporting tax evasions in this case if you are selling your name and clan and encouraging non-tribal vendors to execute businesses unnoticed by the Tax authorities?

This ongoing pandemic has hit the people of the state in many ways. Let us consider our very youth who have returned from different states across the country after having lost their jobs. Most of them have been left unemployed after having returned. The State Government has not been able to address the concerns faced by these youth. We have a young man who recently returned from Bangalore and has started selling fruit juices and other refreshments early morning to joggers and morning walk crowds in areas around Golf Links and Ward's Lake and his operations are carried out of his scooter as highlighted by different media houses. I am sure there are many more returnees who would have in some way or the other started up small operations at their own capacities to make a living. Don't they deserve a fair chance?

MUDA needs to pull up its socks and get things in place before they get out of control. If the authorities cannot find the irregularities, they need to approach the higher authorities like the CBI, Income Tax or even get an order from the High Court to get matters resolved. There are numerous ways that this can be dealt with and of course, as mentioned in the earlier letters, if need be, the information can be published in newspapers so as to make things easier for the authorities to carry out their duties.

I feel it would be right if a check is carried out to analyze if the current owners truly are in need of what has been allocated to them or is there a NEED to screen and re- allot the stalls to deserving unemployed youth so that things fall in line with the INITIAL OBJECTIVES of the entire project.

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

*"You can find peace amidst the storms that threaten you."*

--- Joseph B. Wirthlin

**The Shillong Times**

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**Loss-making PSEs**

THAT there's not a single profit-making public sector enterprise (PSE) in Meghalaya is no surprise. A PSE must be run along the model of a corporate organisation which means that it must yield enough profit to make it sustainable. A corporation is run by a board of directors elected by shareholders. In the case of PSEs since the Government is the main shareholder, it nominates its own people. Some of these nominees are politicians, others are bureaucrats. While some bureaucrats with a degree in business management can read the balance sheets and audited accounts analytically, politicians mostly don't care. Yet most of these corporations are chaired by politicians. In fact, the PSEs in Meghalaya have all gone into the red because politicians treat them like employment agencies where they can appoint their camp followers. They don't care whether the corporation swims or sinks. They are happy to draw their pay and perks even when the Corporation is incurring losses. They know the State Government will pump in more money to keep the ship afloat.

One such loss-making Corporation is the Mawmluh Cements Corporation Ltd (MCCL) which is also the first cement producing company in Meghalaya. MCCL had been doing well when its Board consisted of those who cared to ensure its profitability. This PSE has no business to sink into a debt burden of Rs 234.79 crore against a paid-up capital of Rs 197.51 crore. Despite major capital investments in the MCCL, the CAG report says the Company could achieve only 22 per cent capacity utilisation against the projected capacity utilisation of 60 to 75 per cent which was mainly on account of excessive machine stoppages, idling of machineries/equipment and absence of skilled staff. What's ironic is that all the private cement producing companies are faring well, making profits and expanding their businesses. Considering that Meghalaya has the key raw material for producing cement which is limestone in abundance and it also has coal to run the cement producing furnaces there is no reason for the MCCL to be losing money. Bad corporate governance is the only reason and that goes for all the other PSEs too.

The CAG report also points to the fact that 97 per cent of the losses incurred by working PSEs during 2019-20 was on account of the four PSEs in the Power sector and the MCCL. Accumulation of huge losses by these SPSEs had eroded public wealth, which is a cause of concern. The State Government needs to review the working of these SPSEs to either improve their profitability or close their operations, the CAG had categorically stated. The Government is already looking at disinvesting the MCCL but on what terms is the question.

**Of peace and rest**

By D Kitbok Rynthathiang

Browsing through the pages of newspaper each morning, one gets lost in the myriad of voices being spread about by all and sundry. From the screaming news headlines to the jottings and opinions; the local newspapers fill their pages with government actions or inactions, with politics and political party matters; down to administrative success or failures. Then there is news of deaths and rapes that seem to occur every other day. As an individual of pre-independence India, what we avail today even without social media is mind boggling. The vernaculars media are plenty and so too other language media. It reminds me of what was available at that time. A newspaper must come all the way from Calcutta (as it was then known, not Kolkata) to be delivered to the house by the delivery boy as early as 5:00 PM or even later than 8:00 PM extending even to the next day when flights do not land in Guwahati. The only daily paper available at that time was "Hindustan Standard" and "The Statesman" in English.

The main news that one got through the media at that time was mainly the national news and not much local news. It must be mentioned here that it was only at that time and after the adoption of the Sixth Schedule, that the Khasi States became united and known as the united Khasi & Jaintia Hills otherwise the Khasi states were fiercely independent, and no such unity was there. In fact, if one was to read the writings of Pemberton and others it could be seen that the English rulers did not recognize the independent Khasi States and it was only the Jaintia Kingdom that was recognized as a state, and those living in the west of the Jaintia Kingdom were known only as the marauders and wild people who made life miserable for the rulers. These hill people would every now and again foray into the plains to loot and kill.

It was believed that post-independence, the euphoria of freedom and self-rule as it was known, and the land and its people would have all the peace and rest we needed to make our lives prosperous. Change will come but, as John Kotter in his book 'The Heart of Change', says "the core of the matter is always

about changing the behavior of people, and behavior change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people's feelings". Now that the country is free, people will themselves build and innovate to bring peace and prosperity. It was a change everyone in free India was looking for, and expectations were sky high. However, it may not be out of place to mention here that freedom for the Khasi States was a misnomer possibly, as they have never been colonized by the British till then, but the colonization of Jaintia Kingdom had taken place as the Jaintiapur Kingdom

"Why Nations Fail" wrote, "The most common reason why nations fail today is because they have extractive institutions" like in Zimbabwe. In January 2000, Fallot Chawawa oversaw drawing the winning ticket in a lottery organized by the partly state-owned bank. As the public statement of Zimbank puts it "master of ceremonies Fallot Chawawa could hardly believe his eyes when the ticket for Z\$100,000 prize was handed to him, and he saw the name of His Excellency RG Mugabe written on it." President Mugabe had won the lottery. This after

the most admired companies in the world, (it even had the footprints in India) at the trials of Jeffrey K Skilling who had built the company, who after his lawyer had said "he was innocent of every one of these charges, the judge called Anne Beliveau, Senior Administrative Assistant in Enron's Tax department, who had been asked to address the sentencing hearing. Her statement went like this, "How would you like to be facing living off sixteen hundred dollars a month, and that is what I am facing" she said to Skilling. Stating that her retirement benefits had been wiped out by the ENRON bankruptcy, she also said, "And Mr. Skilling, that is only because of greed, nothing but greed, and you should be ashamed of yourself". Another witness said, "while you dine on Chateaubriand and champagne, my daughter and I clip grocery coupons and eat leftovers". No peace and no rest for them because of extractive behaviors.



had been colonized by the English through outright win or deals as the English were famous for.

The very adoption of the Constitution in 1950, caused much discontent when the provision that Hindi shall be the official language by 1965, phasing out English was added to it. This clause caused alarm and rebellion in the non-Hindi speaking states in

he had awarded himself and his cabinet salary hikes of up to 200 per cent. Extractive institutions!"). The pension provided after one term; the self-raising of the salary are prime examples of extractive institutions and this includes all the NGO's of today!

Peace and Rest are therefore an elusive dream for the public in general as it belongs to an exclusive group,

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the 1960s. Hence parliament had to adopt an amendment to allow English to continue. It can be said that language was what united India at the time for the freedom movement. Now it was language that ended that unity, and caused unrest. It saw the beginning of regionalism in the nation and thus extractive institutions were created. (Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson in their book

defying the Constitution's preamble that says ".....to secure to all its citizens JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY AND TO PROMOTE AMONG THEM ALL FRATERNITY ASSURING THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND INTEGRITY OF THE NATION". Malcolm Gladwell in his book "What the Dog Saw" wrote about the bankruptcy of ENRON, one of

ing our State, it can be said there are now more extractive Institutions than inclusive ones. We need to look at the more finite behaviors and why we have come to the present situation. To emphasize, at independence the nation was looking to flourish, rest and obtain peace but by the mid 1950's the clamour for, "No Hill State No Rest," broke out. Now "No ILP no Rest" comes to the fore. What really causes these? It is more like a house without windows that will kill us all except for the privileged few, where dynastic politics has crept in. It is sad to see that after 74 years of freedom, and 49 years of statehood, the demand and the desire for peace and rest seems greater than ever. Perhaps there is a need to examine the reasons even as the youths seems lost, politics has shattered their dreams of a utopia, religion has not delivered; the educated are jobless. Some have a degree but no education and that cry for peace and rest grows louder.

Would it be possible through these pages to examine and bring hope to a nation that seems rudderless and which is plunging headlong into an abyss? There must be a hope, a silver lining, a rose among the thorns, not just a land of the clouds.

**BJP govt in Assam makes a mess of eviction drive**

By Sagarneel Sinha

The ongoing eviction drive in Assam turned violent when the police team was attacked by a large mob with sticks resulting in the death of two persons, which included a 12-year-old, due to police firing in Dholpur falling under revenue circle of Sipajhar of Darrang district. It was horrific. More shocking was the stomping of the dead body by the photographer accompanying the police team. The chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had ordered an enquiry on the firing incident and the photographer was arrested by the police.

The police firing could have been avoided. This is not to deny that police personnel received injuries when they were attacked with sticks and stones by the mob and police also have the right to save their lives. That doesn't, however, mean police should resort to firing first. The onus is on those too who attacked the police.

never be denied by merely dismissing their concerns as their own imaginations. How can one ignore the reality that vast areas of land have been illegally captured in the state? In 2019, then state parliamentary affairs minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, according to the Indian Express, said that 22% of forest land was under encroachment.

Although figures remain ambiguous, illegal occupation of government lands and also of many Xatras or the Vaishnavite monasteries, the prominent religious and cultural hubs of Assamese society, is a harsh reality and can't be ignored. This is the reason that even the main opposition Congress is supporting the eviction drive. Importantly, organizations like Sadou Asom Goria-Moria-Deshi-Jatiya Parishad, an indigenous Muslim body, have been supporting the eviction drive. What the "intellectuals", who are



Himanta has blamed the Kerala radical Islamic organisation Popular Front of India (PFI) for instigating the people to attack the police force. If PFI — or any other organisation — is responsible for instigating the people to be evicted to take the law into arms, then definitely the government has the right to take as much as possible strong action against it. This isn't the first time that PFI has been linked. During the anti-CAA riots too, PFI's senior leaders were arrested by Assam police.

Coming back to the horrific incident, there are legitimate concerns of communal harmony being disturbed. Society has already been divided by ethnicity, language and religion. These divisions have strengthened in the past the growth of sub-regionalist militants. There had been efforts in the past to heal the wounds of the communities to restore communal har-

desperate to give communal colours, ignore is that indigenous Muslims too have been affected by encroachment.

Having said this, the horrific incident of Dholpur should be a concern for Himanta and his government. This showed a police team at ease using guns against its own people. After all, there are methods to overpower the angry mob and in a democratic system, guns should be the last resort for the police to fire on the angry mob.

Notably, if the eviction drive, as claimed by the government, was done after reaching an agreement with all the stakeholders then how come there was opposition? In The Wire's report, All Assam Minority Students Union president Rezaul Sarkar pointed towards the government's failure to show the rehabilitation areas before the execution of the eviction drive in Dholpur.

*The saffron government, however, shouldn't forget that it has the responsibility to ensure that the eviction campaign shouldn't be used to vilify the entire Bengali Muslim community.*

mony. Presently too, these are continued. The present dispensation laying importance to bring militants to the mainstream and stressing on the crucial issues closely related to saving lands, language and culture of the indigenous communities are a part of those efforts. Eviction drive is also one of those issues.

The influx of Bengali Hindus leaving their homeland East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) facing persecution at the hands of the Islamic fundamentalists to settle in Assam and the illegal immigration due to free borders supported by then ruling governments for their political interests have undoubtedly affected the lives of the indigenous communities. However, there is a section of intellectuals who have been trying to interpret the eviction drive completely through the lens of communalism. This section has always ignored the issues of the indigenous communities of the state. Even worse, some of the intellectuals have never shied away from calling the entire Assamese society "xenophobic".

The woes of the indigenous communities can

Clearly, there are lapses from the government side too, apart from the involvement of a notorious third party. Agree that the clearing of the illegally occupied lands had been a poll promise of the BJP and the saffron government led by Himanta has the right to execute the eviction drive. Already the eviction drives — barring Dholpur one — have been carried out without any violence.

The saffron government, however, shouldn't forget that it has the responsibility to ensure that the eviction campaign shouldn't be used to vilify the entire Bengali Muslim community. It has to always ensure that all the stakeholders be taken into confidence before the execution of an eviction drive, particularly related to the issue of proper rehabilitation of the evicted families. At the same time, elements are working to stoke the fire of violence in the state by encouraging communalism and the BJP government has to be cautious and vigilant. Eviction drives shouldn't be disturbed by the communal elements and the onus lies on the state government. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**First Tribal Lady Chief Secretary**

Editor, I thank the Shillong Times (Oct 1, 2021) for the splendid introduction of our new Chief Secretary, Ms Rebecca Suchiang. It is noteworthy that a woman has risen to this high office, no doubt through hard work and efficiency. Though the tribal community seems to pride itself on equality of the genders, this has hardly been reflected in the proportion of legislators, ministers and high-ranking bureaucrats in the tribal states of the Northeast.

There are many fine examples of women in leadership positions in India. Many polls and political experts have shown Indira Gandhi to be one of India's most admired prime ministers. Certainly she was one of the strongest. In countries such as Germany and New Zealand, the best records of good governance have occurred with women at the helm of government.

Other research data consistently show that women are better leaders in a crisis, and in enabling economic development. With women CEOs, even corporate profits are higher. Countries led by women are managing the Covid crisis better than their male counterparts in other countries.

An important advantage of women leadership is that health and education indices are given more attention and social justice is high on the agenda. In her interview with the Shillong Times, it is noteworthy that Ms Rebecca Suchiang has highlighted the upgrading of government schools, increasing expenditure on health, and ensuring progress in the Sustainability Development Goals.

So having a woman at the top is just not a matter of gender equality, it means better governance and shifting priorities in the right order. Women in leadership positions are inspirational role models for young girls of our state and region. We are all proud and we wish Madam Chief Secretary all the very best.

Yours etc., Glenn C. Kharkongor, Via email

**Disheartening comments against Pine Mount School**

Editor, It is indeed very disappointing and disheartening to

read the allegations pointed out by Mr Donald Swer; in your esteemed daily, which has left us wondering as to whether he is a concerned parent or one who is merely trying to put the school's fair name in poor light. Ever since the COVID pandemic had derailed normal life, the school under the directions of the Government, had initiated online classes via, the services of CR School besides google apps and Whatsapp from Friday, the April 3, 2020. It is also rather surprising that while Donald Swer says there are no classes taken, some parents of the higher classes have complained that online classes are too taxing because the students have classes from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm regularly.

Apart from the online classes for seniors, teachers connected with their respective students through Whatsapp, google apps, power point presentations, zoom classes besides audios and videos. The teachers engage them with lessons, assignments and tests using the various apps.

When the Government permitted offline classes for the senior classes last year the school followed the directions and students came to school batchwise. Teachers were always available for consultations and clearing of doubts of the children in their respective classes. One fails to understand the motive of Donald Swer, as the school has abided by all Government directions and advise. Mr Swer is welcome to verify his observations from

the school authorities. Yours etc., Aiom Diengdoh, Principal Pine Mount School Shillong

**How a virus has changed our world**

Editor, At the end of 2019 we were suddenly introduced to a virus that turned all of our worlds upside down. Nothing is sure yet about its existence. While some blame it on China and the lab at Wuhan, with several conspiracy theories surrounding it, nobody can actually say where it came from. But this little virus is here to stay and has crippled the lives of many.

Humanity today is facing one of the biggest challenges with the novel coronavirus having spread rapidly to the extent of it being declared a pandemic across the world. People from all walks of life are in dismay about what is happening and are disturbed to see how this has change peoples' lives. There is a sudden shift in people's daily routines that has led to a rise in fears, anxiety, sadness and a sense of irritability all piling up. We have all seen how the year 2020 went by with the lives of students being affected because of educational institutions having to shut down for almost a year. The lives of those associated with the tourism industry has been crippled because of the lockdown and curfews imposed. Farmers are

struggling to earn a meagre amount to feed themselves and their families because they cannot sell off their produce and the list goes on. Unfortunately, several lives were lost, which included young infants and children. Families suffered loss of their loved ones, especially in not being able to perform the normal rites and rituals that have been followed for centuries.

Indeed the COVID-19 pandemic has been instrumental in creating a dramatic shift in the lives of people, but the biggest shift that it has brought about is a shift from people's desire and need to live in mutual association to that of stigmatizing those that have contracted Covid. The stigma of Covid manifests itself in the exclusion of those who are perceived to be a potential source of the virus and who may pose a 'threat' to the society. The stigmatization behaviours seem to be guided by the famous adage, "better safe than sorry". But how safe can we be by stigmatizing others around us? Stigmatization is dangerous because it triggers many emotions along with it and puts everyone at risk. Recently, I came across a neighbour who had contracted the virus and who narrated the story of the stigmatization they had to endure and are still enduring only because they turned out to be Covid positive. Them catching the virus has just made people look at them like they are some sort of untouchables or people who have committed a grave sin. Another incident

I came across is also related to someone I know who was afflicted with the seasonal flu all thanks to Shillong's ever-changing weather. Unfortunately, they too are being looked at askance only because the symptoms are like those triggered by Covid.

I don't think there is anyone in this world who would willingly give an open invitation to a virus to come and live inside them and affect them. We all love ourselves and our lives so much, up to the point of being selfish. Why is it we forget this, then? We have been known to be loving, kind and generous people, willing to go out of the way to help others. "Ka Ri Tibbriew Tipblei" is what we are known as, so where then is this, all gone? Have we lost all humanity that now we have begun to stereotype those affected by Covid? For years, we have been pointing fingers at others and also at people in other parts of the country — calling them racist and for stigmatizing us from the North East. Unfortunately, the seeds of the same have been planted within us too and that is over-shadowing our very own conscience and sense of humanity.

Your etc., Cassandra K R Gathphoh Shillong — 14

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

# Vibrant botanical art in lavishly illustrated tome

By Vishnu Makhijani

Term it colonialism in reverse. A seminal book brings together the striking botanical art of Indian origin spanning a period of 300 years drawn mostly from original works held in the collections of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (London), that showcase the richness and variety of art commissioned from talented, mostly unknown, Indian artists who made a substantial contribution to the documentation of the flora of the Indian subcontinent.

"I hope this book will help the public to enjoy the wide range of Indian plants, and even find pictures of plants now used in traditional medicine. Of course, when the paintings were made, nearly all medicines came from plants. Even aspirin, which we now think of as a white chemical powder or pill, was extracted from willow and other plants and not produced artificially until 1897," Martyn Rix, one of Britain best known horticulturalists, told *IANS* in an interview of "Indian Botanical Art" that has been published by Roli Books in association with the Royal Botanic Gardens.

"The book shows how much Indian paintings were valued in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many people working in India in the early 19th century brought back collections of paintings; some of the most valuable are now in the museum in Exeter in Devonshire, but, sadly, their history and the names of those who commissioned them have been lost," Rix added.

As most of the original paintings shown in this book have never been published before, the book gives an idea of the different styles of painting and especially how botanical illustrations are both artistic and scientific in the portrayal of plants.

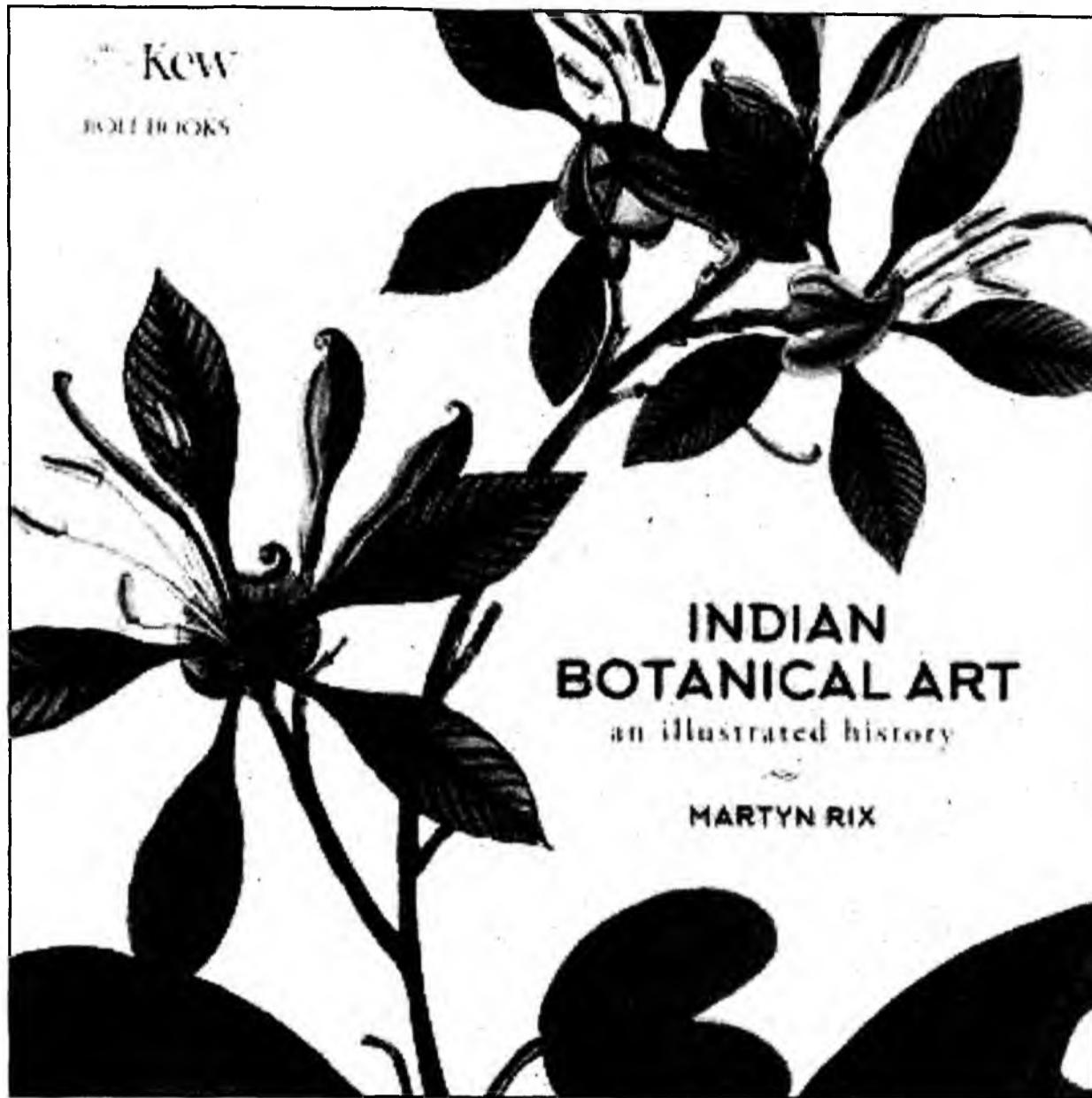
The book has its genesis in the author's deep study of the roots of botanical art.

"My interest in botanical art began a long time ago, and I made paintings of flowers as a child: this ceased when I bought a 35 mm camera and could record flowers on film. But I kept my interest in botanical illustration, and the first book I wrote was 'The Art of the Botanist' (1981) which described botanists' travels and the work of the artists associated with them," Rix explained.

This was based mainly on the books in the Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Library in London. Some of the most beautiful of these volumes were lithographs of flowers of the Himalaya, based on paintings by Indian artists for doctors and botanists who went to India from Scotland in the early 19th century; notable amongst them were William Roxburgh's "Plants from the Coast of Coromandel, Nathaniel Wallich's "Plantae Asiaticae Rariores" and J.F. Cathcart's "Illustrations of Himalayan Plants".

"One of the most memorable travels of my youth was a visit to Kerala and Tamil Nadu in 1970 to study the African pile (*Salvinia molesta*) a floating fern which was smothering the waterways; at the same time, I saw many other exciting plants, and used Robert Wight's books to help identify them; his two artists, Rungiah and Govindoo, made hundreds of drawings from 1828 onwards which were printed, hand-coloured and published in Madras," Rix added.

As a research associate at Kew, he was able to study the original paintings for many of these publications in the library, and they form the main



**"My interest in botanical art began a long time ago, and I made paintings of flowers as a child: this ceased when I bought a 35 mm camera and could record flowers on film. But I kept my interest in botanical illustration, and the first book I wrote was 'The Art of the Botanist' (1981) which described botanists' travels and the work of the artists associated with them."**

part of this book.

Writer-scholar-museum curator Sita Reddy notes in the foreword that due to Indian botanical artists of the 18th and 19th centuries remaining rather unknown, contemporary Indian artists have "inherited a hybrid botanical art tradition whose artists were invisible, then and now". To that extent, the book has actually corrected a historical wrong. How does Rix feel to be a pathfinder?

"It was unfortunate that one of the first of the Scottish doctors to publish Indian botanical paintings, William Roxburgh, did not name his artists and the paintings were not signed. Even in Europe at that time most artists were considered mere craftsmen and not valued as much as the academic botanists. (The exception to this was the French botanical artist, P.J. Redoute who started his own publishing company, made his fortune but spent it and then died in poverty.)

"Later Indian artists however were mostly given full recognition, and that has enabled some such as Visnupersaud, who worked both for Nathaniel Wallich in Kolkata, and for John Royle in Saharanpur (UP) to be recognised as one of the great botani-

cal artists of the 19th century. Other artists from the late 18th century, such as Sheikh Zain al-Din Ram Das and Bhawani Das (originally from Patna) have been recognised recently, and their work now fetches great prices (around 15,000 pounds, and much more for birds and bats!) in London; they painted not only flowers, but birds, mammals, fish and snakes as well, working mainly in Kolkata," Rix explained.

In the book, he has tried to show how the Indian artists, trained in the Mughul tradition were able to produce works closer to the European 18th century tradition. "From the 17th century onwards, rich Mughals possessed European illustrated books and asked their artists to copy them. Some of these copies can be seen in an album painted by the artist Mansur around 1615," Rix said.

How would he term the state of botanical art in India today?

"There is a resurgence of botanical painting in India, which is particularly valuable when it focuses on wild and rare plants and on forests and other habitats threatened with destruction by modern developments; the contrasting styles of Hemlata

Pradhan and Nirupa Rao could form the beginning of a huge flowering of Indian botanical painting.

"As in the past it is necessary for botanists to encourage artists and provide them with good specimens to illustrate, so that the paintings have lasting scientific as well as artistic value," Rix said.

"I hope my book may inspire more people in India to take up botanical painting and exhibit their paintings in America or in London as have Hemlata and Nirupa. The Royal Horticultural Society in London, and the American Society of Botanical Artists and the Hunt Botanical Institute, all have regular exhibitions and welcome artists from all over the world. Indeed, some of the most highly regarded artists now exhibiting in London are based in Korea and Japan, he added.

In addition, Curtis's Botanical Magazine (of which he is now the editor), publishes articles on interesting plants, especially those newly discovered, and relies on botanists and artists to combine their talents. "This has been the purpose of the Magazine since it began in 1787 and continues today, and it would be good to receive contributions from India," Rix concluded. (*IANS*)

## BOND'S MAGIC



The steam engine shot out of the tunnel, snorting, and puffing like a green, black, and gold dragon, a beautiful monster out of Ranji's dreams.

Fascinated by the midday train, Ranji would find himself waiting near the tunnel to catch a glimpse of the engine come roaring out of it. But the tunnel has more surprises for him. From a jungle full of lush green trees, comes a timeless tale of unexpected friendship, curiosity, duty, and wildlife.

Peppered with delightful illustrations and woven as a heart-warming story, Ruskin Bond, in "The Tunnel" (Penguin) is a charming chapter book intended for intermediate readers aged seven upwards — a perfect introduction for beginners to the world of India's favourite writer for children.

Written in Ruskin's inimitable charm, this chapter book has a unique cast of characters and is a timeless story brought to life through a simple and endearing narration and gorgeous illustrations highlighting the nail-biting scenes making readers fall in love with nature and wildlife.

Born in Kasauli in 1934, Ruskin Bond grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun, New Delhi and Shimla. His first novel, "The Room on the Roof", which was written when he was 17, received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. Since then, he has written over 500 short stories, essays and novellas (including "Vagrants in the Valley" and "A Flight of Pigeons") and more than 40 books for children.

He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for English writing in India in 1993, the Padma Shri in 1999, and the Delhi government's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012. He lives in Landour, Mussoorie, with his extended family. (*IANS*)

## Do you think you are Mother Teresa?

For a dozen years as one of the world's most admired CEOs, Indra Nooyi, redefined what it means to be an exceptional leader. To the extent that when she once pitched a revolutionary strategy to introduce healthy products, she was asked if she was Mother Teresa!

Her prescient strategic thinking, insight into consumer behaviour, and wisdom on managing a vast, global workforce make her one of the world's most sought-after advisors to entrepreneurs, executives, and governments. The first woman of color and immigrant to run a Fortune 50 company — and one of the foremost strategic thinkers of our time — she transformed PepsiCo with a unique vision, a vigorous pursuit of excellence, and a deep sense of purpose.

Her memoir, "My Life in Full: Work, Family, and Our Future" (Hachette India), offers a firsthand view of Nooyi's legendary career — a story of exemplary resilience, courage, and leadership. Generous, authoritative, and grounded in lived experience, the book delivers a blueprint for 21st century prosperity, peppered with masterful insights.

For instance: "I believe that a company's impact on society needs to be written through all business planning, and that this cannot be an afterthought. What's good for commerce and what's good for society have to go together."

The rewards were fulsome. "One foggy Tuesday in November 2009," Nooyi writes in the book, "after hours of meetings in Washington, DC, with two dozen top US and Indian business executives, I found myself standing between the president of the United States and the prime Minister of India."

"Barack Obama and Manmohan Singh had entered the room for an update on our group's progress, and President Obama began introducing the American team to his Indian counterpart. When he got to me, Prime Minister Singh exclaimed, 'Oh! But she is one of us!'"

"And the President, with a big smile and without missing a beat, responded, 'Ah, but she is one of us too!'"

"It's a moment I never forget — spontaneous kindness from the leaders of the two great countries that have given me so much. I am still the girl who grew up in a close family in Madras, in the South of India, and I am deeply connected to the lessons and culture of my youth. I am also the woman who arrived in the US at age twenty-three to study and work and, somehow rose to lead an iconic company, a journey that I believe is possible only in America. I belong to both worlds," Nooyi writes.

When Nooyi took over as CEO of PepsiCo, one of her pivotal — and controversial — ideas was to steer the company toward healthier products, reinvent its environmental profile and lead the company into a future where they championed "Performance with Purpose".

The strategy met with immense backlash from

he asked me, 'Mother Teresa?'"

Nooyi went on to lead PepsiCo for more than two decades. She has been consistently ranked in Forbes's 'The World's 100 Most Powerful Women', Fortune's 'Most Powerful Women' and was twice named on TIME magazine's list of the '100 Most Influential People in the World'. She has held a unique role among the world's top executives, often as the only senior woman in the halls of global corporate power.

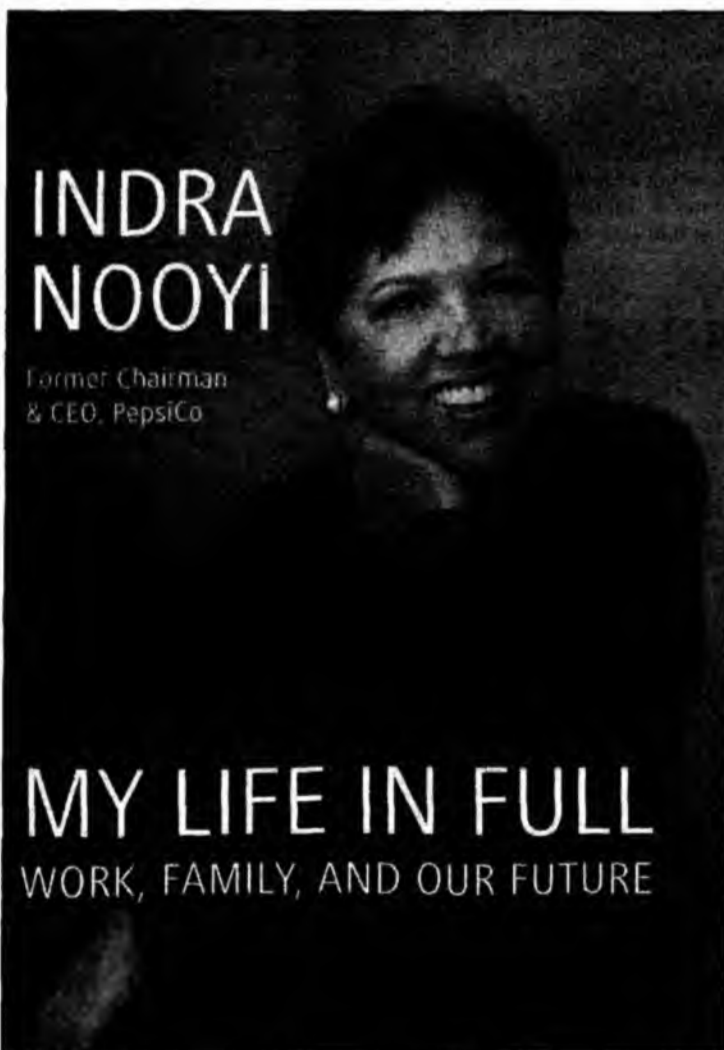
In this no-holds-barred narrative, Nooyi recounts the events that shaped her, from her childhood and early education in 1960s India, to the Yale School of Management, to her rise as a corporate leader. The book lays bare her distinctive leadership style, learnings from her far-reaching career, that inspire generational diversity and inclusivity.

With a stunning cover shot by legendary photographer Annie Leibovitz, the Hachette India edition of the book comes with an epilogue written especially for the Indian audience.

"As India emerges from the devastating impact of COVID-19, the country must rethink some of its economic priorities under the umbrella of Atmanirbhar Bharat. I hope whole new ecosystems around next-generation industries emerge, and new investments in core infrastructure, including roads, the railways, water and sanitation, and healthcare. I also hope to see more predictable framework in support of foreign direct investment, and a massive commitment to improving education for all — from kindergarten to grade 12 and beyond — so that the country has all the talent in place to realise its terrific ambitions.

"While this goes on, I also believe it's time to unleash the superb capabilities and ingenuity of women across the country, in every strata of society. Corporations, governments and NGOs working in the country must come together on this. And, most importantly, men and women must join forces to create a more inclusive, more productive, more caring nation. Only then will India be truly on the road to sustainable prosperity," Nooyi concludes.

This truly is a blueprint from a woman who has been there, seen it and done it all! (*IANS*)



some shareholders who wouldn't stand for anything that affected the company's short-term profitability targets.

In the book, Nooyi narrates a particular conversation in the face of tremendous resistance: "The most memorable comment came from a portfolio manager in Boston — 'Who do you think you are?'"

# Bright Skies: The Colour of the Year

## There's so much more to the Heavens than Blue

The colour of 2022 will be "bright skies", according to paint manufacturer Dulux. This mellow light blue may certainly seem familiar. Depending on where and at what time of the day you look at the sky, you might well expect to catch a glimpse of a similar colour.

Yet take the time to watch the sky from the horizon to the expanse above your head, during all weathers and from dawn to nighttime, and of course you'll see that it is filled with many colours. Over hundreds of years, physicists have worked to understand why the sky holds so many shades, from a myriad blues to red and even green. Here's what we've learned, and what to look out for while contemplating "bright skies" and immersing yourself in skywatching.

The Sun's light is made up of different electromagnetic waves, and their various wavelengths are associated with a different colour. Shorter waves are seen as blue, slightly longer waves as yellow, and even longer as red.

When these waves are seen together they look white. But this light has to travel through our atmosphere before it gets to our eyes, and atmospheric molecules are much smaller than the wavelength of the Sun's light. As the light hits these molecules, they scatter it in all different directions. This effect is called Rayleigh scattering.

In this process, more of the bluer light, which has shorter wavelengths, is scattered, resulting in the sky becoming blue wherever you look. Meanwhile, the Sun becomes more yellow looking since the light from it is now missing those longer blue wavelengths.

### Adding white

But the daytime sky isn't the same blue all over. You're more likely to find the Dulux bright skies colour closer to the horizon where the blue is more washed out or lighter.

This is the impact of Mie scattering, which is a similar process as Rayleigh scattering but caused by larger particles (such as water vapour or fine pollution particles in little droplets). These types of particles remove the red, yellow and blue colour components from a white light beam in equal measures and do not alter the colour of the light passing through the atmosphere or being scattered back to an observer. This leads to the sky turning whiter in addition to the blue caused by Rayleigh scattering.



The influence of white within the blue of the sky becomes stronger towards the horizon where the light has to pass through much more atmosphere to arrive at the observer. The various tones and shades of blue observed become nature's visualisation of what the atmosphere is currently composed of. The whiter it appears, the more extra particles are present.

A tool to measure just how many particles are suspended in the sky was developed by



Horace Bénédicte de Saussure, an 18th-century Swiss geologist and alpine explorer. Called a cyanometer, it is a colour wheel featuring 53 different colours for the observer to compare to the sky.

### Ozone blue at twilight

If you skywatch at dusk, you'll see a brilliant display of colour that captures intense red tones especially close to the direction of the setting sun. Since the Sun's evening light travels through much more of our atmosphere than when the Sun is higher in the sky, by the time it reaches us it has lost much of its blue component through Rayleigh scattering. If aerosols are present higher up in the atmosphere – for example caused by volcanic eruptions – this can become far more extended and colourful.

Once the sun is below the horizon, you will see a strong blue colour in the sky again. This cannot fully be explained by Rayleigh or Mie scattering. Instead, this is due to the presence of ozone (a colourless or pale blue gas), which does not scatter the light but absorbs it and breaks it apart.

Its impact is only noticeable when the rays of the sun have to pass through even more atmosphere to reach us (like when it travels from beyond the horizon). The ozone then strongly absorbs red and orange light, making the small amount of light we see in the twilight sky

blue.

### Red and blue-green night

Venture out at night in a place free of light pollution and its orange sky glow and you might notice that, despite the lack of sunlight, the nighttime sky is not black at all. Instead, we can sometimes observe what is called air glow, which is our own atmosphere radiating a faint light. This is caused by atoms – mainly oxygen and nitrogen – forming molecules at an altitude of 100km-300km.

This glow is always present but usually too faint to see. But it contributes to the sky turning a very dark red or blue-green colour. You can capture it with cameras that are more sensitive than the eye. But at low light levels, our eyes lose their colour vision and merely see a grey blackness.

In these ways, the colours of the sky show us ways light can interact with our atmosphere. And through this science, we've even learnt how to recognise and explore signs of life in the skies of planets beyond our solar system (exo-planets) by analysing the light from them. Traces of an atmosphere were first measured in 2001 for the exoplanet HD 209458 b – sometimes called Osiris – in the constellation of Pegasus. In 2019, scientists even discovered traces of water in the atmosphere of an exoplanet (K2-18 b) that has temperatures that could support life as we know it. (*The Conversation*)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhami

Sunday, OCT 3, 2021

Venus is apogee on your solar return chart and it will give very favorable benefits. It is going to be a progressive and hope enhancing week for you. Your tasks will get completed. Those people who are in media, drama, fashion, writing, entertainment etc. will make lot of progress and also get good name and fame. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. You will enjoy a good health. All family disputes will be resolved through the mediation of some senior family members. You will also buy a new plot or commercial property. Those who are single will get suitable marriage proposals. You will be successful in matters of love and romance. But you will not trust anyone in monetary dealings. Your friendship with the high and the mighty will come very handy and helpful. You will remain committed to your partner. Your boss and colleagues will be happy with your work efficiency.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your own people will support you a lot and prove to be your biggest strength. It is appropriate time to do some productive work. Because of favorable placement of Mars things will keep going smoothly and you will have gains. You need to keep your anger in check. You will get money and will have financial gains. You will have profits in your business. It is time to add a new chapter in your love story. You will think about the possibility of getting married to person you love. Your government related works will be accomplished smoothly. You will have to work hard, but you will also get the results in the same proportion. The problems that students were facing for a long time will get sorted out. They will get success in exams/interview.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Finally people will acknowledge your capability and talent. You will get lot of appreciation and will be rewarded for your efforts. You will have monetary gains. The graph of your popularity will also go upwards. You will get support of your seniors. Your business will also prosper and flourish. And you will have good profits. You will also get the blessings of your elders and parents. This is the biggest asset of your life which helps you in coming out of your hurdles. You will be lucky in love and romance. Your spouse/partner will be your biggest strength and will keep guiding you. There are chances of meeting an important personality which will prove beneficial for you. Someone can influence you with their sweet soft talks and get their work done.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Something of great importance will get done. Your popularity will suddenly rise and you will also enjoy a very favorable phase in your life. People will also have lot of trust and confidence in your words and deeds. It will also send a good message to your competitors and employees. Your confidence level will be high. You will have financial gains. You will also make new investments. You will also have economic gains in your business. You will also receive a good news from somewhere. Your hurdles will get removed. You will also have a good time with your family members. Husband and wife will have better understanding. Property related disputes will get resolved. You will take interest in some welfare work.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your influence will be high. You will get promotion in your job and your prestige will rise. Your colleagues will also listen to you and cooperate with you. Jupiter will surely bring lot of financial gains. All work related to money and property will be resolved. You will also travel a lot and they will prove to be treasure. But you will make lot of money through travels. Amidst hectic work schedule you will also spend some quality time with your family. It will help you to relax, feel happy and cheerful. An important family matter will also come into discussion. You will seek a consensus. You will take important decisions in business and that will be far reaching. You will enjoy wonderful health.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is time to have gains. Your business will prosper and you will make good profit. Income will be good. Your contacts will also prove beneficial. You will also make new contacts. Your gift of the gab will help in getting your work done. You will get opportunities to invest your money. You will be able to establish your dominance at your workplace. Your superior skills will be acknowledged by one and all. You will impress people with your skills and efficiency. You will pull yourself up to give final touch to your plans and activities. Love birds will have a wonderful time. You will come closer to your partner. You will be engaged in financial activities like insurance, investment, shares and funds.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The time is favorable. You will get promoted in your job. You will also have financial gains. You will get support of your bosses. You will feel a change in your relative's behavior and get good news from their side. You need not be worried about the health of your elders. The situation at work will be under your control. You will also be stable in your job. You will be busy but will be happy that your desired work is completed. In the field of politics/media you will establish contact with new people. The time is good from all perspective. You will be successful in whatever

The words of your partner will bring music to your ears. You will have an amazing time with your love mate. You will also plan to get married. People will appreciate your skills. You will do introspection. You will also get some important information and news. You will also plan a major expansion of your business. Matters of dispute will become more complicated, though you will be the winner. Some government related work that had got stuck will be resolved with the help of some official. You will see a major improvement in your health. Your influence in the society will be high.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

There will be an increase in your happiness. Income will be good. Your work will get completed with ease. You will be meeting lot of new contacts. Your time will be well spent with your family members. Your children will listen to you. You will have a good understanding with your spouse. You will also be a lot more creative and develop new interests. You will also watch movies and internet for entertainment. Your business will show signs of revival. Those who are unemployed for a long time will get job offers. Your time will be spent in travel, reading and meeting new people. The time is appropriate to start new projects. In your work you will do something that will make everyone praise your efforts. Be careful of your enemies and don't trust strangers.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Your dialogue with people will improve. You will have financial gains. The circle of friends and contacts will increase. You will also spend quality time with your family members. Relations with spouse/partner will be cordial. You will get job/business opportunities. The time is quite appropriate for financial dealings. You will also complete your pending official work. The attitude of your partner will keep your hopes alive. Those who are unmarried will plan to get married. In your domestic life you will do something that will make everyone to praise you. There will be change in your lifestyle which will make you feel happy. You will also borrow money.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is going to be a week you will fulfill your obligations with diligence. Your involvement in official matters will increase. Your financial position will get better. You will get involved in new projects. You will make contracts with new people. You will also manage the most difficult situation with ease. You will also tackle difficult problems with your self confidence and will power. You will make dedicated efforts to complete tasks that had been stalled. Your misunderstanding with partner will come to an end. You will have gains in business. There can be some new business contracts. You will come out of domestic problems. The tide of time is favorable for you. You will get lot of fame and respect. You will also set a new goal in your life.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It is time to make best use of a very favorable time period. Students will get results according to their expectations. Those who are planning to get married will be able to do so. The placement of Saturn and Jupiter will open the doors of profits for you. Your relations with seniors will become cordial and from time to time you will get good benefits. Do not take any financial decision in a haste. You might remember an old incidence and will be lost in old good memories. It will make you sentimental a bit. You will witness a sudden jump in your luck. New job/business offers will keep coming. Your colleagues will help you in your work.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The first half of the week is going to be very grand in terms of results. Your tasks will get completed. You will also get your government related job done with ease. Your health will also get better. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. You will have financial gains. You will regain your prestige. You will also interact with lot of people. You will also fulfill your commitments made to friends. You will be full of self confidence. And will also establish a balance between your earnings and capabilities. You will also help the needy people. People will take your advice seriously. You will discharge your responsibilities with great ease. You will witness general progress in your life. Travels abroad are indicated.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A special work will get done. It will make you feel happy. You will also feel light at heart. The works that had been planned will be successfully completed. Your professional growth will be phenomenal. Your name and fame will increase. You will have financial gains. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance. Love birds will have a wonderful time. They will develop good understanding. Your seniors will be happy with your work. Your elders will guide you and your path will become easier. The results of works that is done carefully will be great. You will also visit your relatives. You will also enjoy a feast at someone's house. The time will be spent peacefully with loved ones. The youth will be enthused. You will make more profits in business with your intelligence and capability.

# Career option in Habitat Management

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have published different articles related to conservation and management of natural resources. In today's edition we shall publish about habitat management or conservation as the habitat is important for every living being on earth be it flora or fauna. The United Nations designated the first Monday of October of every year as World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of our habitats, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter. The Day is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of our cities and towns. In 1985 the United Nations designated the first Monday of October every year as World Habitat Day. This year the day is observed on 4th October.

The theme for this year's World Habitat Day is Accelerating urban action for a carbon-free world. The theme recognizes that cities are responsible for some 70 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions with transport, buildings, energy, and waste management accounting for the bulk of urban greenhouse gas emissions. Events and activities during World Habitat Day will explore how national, regional and local governments and organizations, communities, academic institutions, the private sector and all relevant stakeholders can work together to create sustainable, carbon-neutral, inclusive cities and towns.

When it comes to habitat then terms that come to our mind include forests, coast and marines, grasslands, farmlands, mountains, freshwater rivers or lakes, urban cities and towns, etc. We must understand the importance of all habitats as that would give us an idea to choose a career in this field. As we have seen climate change as the most serious concern, we can think of activities



related to habitat management which also helps us in combating climate change.

There are courses related to habitat management but there are courses which can be opted by aspirants if they want to work in the field of habitat management.

Habitat management is mostly about land management. In this career option students learn how to analyze and manage the complex ecology of an area for multi-species habitat in the face of disturbance and multiple uses. Aspirants may study life sciences, geography, soil science, ecology, eco restoration, etc. People from science backgrounds are eligible to take up special courses. There are few short-term courses which are allowed for students from other streams apart from science.

There are many agencies around the world working in the field of habitat restoration or management. When we mention habitat restoration it also means an opportunity to work for the wildlife

or other flora and fauna which are important for our bio diversity.

This year's Habitat Day's theme brings more opportunity for urban planners who can plan in such a way that carbon footprint is minimised. Carbon-free world is a challenge but it needs innovation to make it happen where aspirants from engineering or technical background may take opportunity.

Working for habitat management to make our habitat carbon free is a new area which needs to be explored as this will ensure sustainable development for us. As these are new areas of working, we need to explore more about it and we can work for different international agencies or nongovernmental organisations. There are few short-term online courses which give an idea about these new areas of work.

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

"Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen."

— Albert Einstein

## The Shillong Times

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### Rich Asians, poor Indians

TWO top industrialists from Gujarat, though controversial, have raised India's pride through their positioning at the top of the Richest Asians list by a wealth tracking agency. While billionaire Mukesh Ambani retained the top position, Gautam Adani edged closer to him and took the second richest Asian slot. In the process, he outwitted top Chinese businessman Zhong Shanshan, who made his money mainly from the bottled water business. The listing done by IIFL Wealth Management India was the 10th in a series. The survey also noted that India has as high as 1,007 high net worth individuals, each carrying with them a wealth of over Rs 1,000 crore; and 13 of them hold over Rs 1 lakh crore each. An Oxfam report recently stated that 10 percent of Indians hold 75 percent of the nation's wealth. It is well-established that the gap between the rich and poor in India is steadily widening and governmental policies are manipulated in ways that would facilitate this. Most of those in the rich-list are based in Mumbai and Delhi, the two cities where economic and business activities are of the highest order. Fact is also that Delhi steadily absorbed larger economic clout while Mumbai saw activities slowing. Delhi as the administrative capital helped in the growth of the business class there in the age of free-wheeling corruption and slush funds.

Other than the IT industry, and the spirit of enterprise apart, the business growth in India is happening largely with the selective backing and policy manipulations by the governments in power. The Tatas and the Parsi community as a whole brought with them wealth from outside and crafted success with Mumbai as their base. They invested in textile mills, steel, etc, giving these sectors the initial fillip. The Birlas based in Delhi grew with patronage of Congress governments; and the Ambanis of the next generation too followed suit since Indira Gandhi's terms. The Adani group too grew with governmental backing all along. Those like the Mittals made huge fortunes in the UK. The IT tzars took advantage of the global growth in the information technology sector and played by the rules. In the age past the Socialistic pursuits, India is encouraging entrepreneurship. Yet, the manufacturing sector, for one, is down in the dumps with our deadly dependence on China. Things would have been better had corruption and nepotism been less, and deals transparent, so that more people would have been encouraged to create big success stories. If so, not individuals alone but India too would have grown more rapidly.

# Understanding the Instrument of Accession in India

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Discussion on the Instrument of Accession signed by the Indian native States for joining the modern Indian Democratic Republic has always been an interesting engagement. For a proper understanding of this complex issue, we need to go into the historical and constitutional implications of this Instrument. The British ruled India through two administrative systems: The British Provinces which were directly administered by the colonial Government of British India; and the Princely States which were ruled by native rulers, but were tied through a system of subsidiary alliances to the British Crown. There were 565 Princely States in India during the period of British rule. About 60 per cent of the territory of India was under British India, and 40 per cent under the Princely States.

In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the British misunderstood the Khasi Syiems as Kings or Rajas with supreme territorial authority. Hence, the Syiems were addressed as 'Rajas' in all agreements, formerly signed with the British. But from 1867 onwards the Syiems ceased to be classed as Rajas and the title 'Syiem' was officially recognized. In Khasi traditions, the real authority in a Khasi State was the Dorbar (council) of the heads of the clans called the Lyngdohs or Bakhras of independent villages or Raids, who established the Hima. The Syiem was installed by the Bakhras to function as a figurehead and a rallying moral centre. But through agreements and administrative actions, the colonial rulers drastically reduced the authority and status of the Bakhras, and raised the authority and status of the Syiems unprecedentedly for their own colonial interests. Moreover, the authority and power of the Syiems over the people in the Khasi States were strongly protected by the British Government. There are documentary evidences to show that all efforts had been used by the colonial rulers to put down people's resistance to the increasing power and authority of the Syiems. As seen from available documents, the British colonial officers had provided the Syiems of the major Khasi States with royal attires, guns, swords, Mauser Rifles, Mauser Automatic Pistols, Double-Barrel Breech Loading combined guns and rifles. These arms were evidently not for fighting against external enemies, but to impress the authority of the Syiem in relation to the people.

The Indian Independence Act, 1947, proclaiming the Paramountcy of the British Crown over the Princely States stood automatically terminated with effect from August 15th 1947. All rights surrendered by the States to

the Paramount power would go back to them, and that Paramountcy could not be transferred to the Indian Union. This implicitly meant that the Princely States would be completely free to become sovereign States or to join with India or Pakistan. But the Congress under Nehru's leadership clearly expressed that Independent India would not accept the Divine Right of Kings, and that any Princely State which refused to join the Constituent Assembly would be treated as an enemy State. He also made it known that no Princely State could prevail militarily against the army of Independent India.

The Interim Government set up a Ministry to deal with the problem of Indian States, with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as the Minister in charge along with V. P. Menon as the Secretary. With the exception of Hyderabad, Junagarh, and Jammu and Kashmir, Sardar Patel was able to persuade all the 562 Indian States to sign the Instrument of Accession. But by force of circumstances or by coercion all the States ultimately signed the Instrument of Accession.

Coming to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, available documents show that the process of integration of the Khasi States to the Indian Union was coloured by a nasty tug-of-war between two parties with opposing ideologies. On one side, the Federation of Khasi States led by the traditional rulers argued that from time immemorial, the land has been ruled by indigenous democratic Syiems, Lyngdohs, and Sardars who are not hereditary, but elected by the people (?). Moreover, they expressed that the traditional rulers, who they claimed to be fully democratic in nature, had for so long been enjoying all the rights and privileges under the British rule. It was argued that the Sixth Schedule does not guarantee the traditional rights and privileges of the Khasi people. Hence, they fought for the continuance of these traditional hereditary institutions as well as the protection of their sacred rights and special privileges. From December 15, 1947 onwards all the Khasi Chiefs signed the Instrument of Accession on behalf of their own respective States. On the other side, the United Khasi Jaintia Federated National Conference, led by Rev. J J MNichols Roy advocated for the union of the Khasi States and the British Areas into one United Khasi Jaintia State through a popularly elected democratic structure, and vied for a separate United Khasi Jaintia State under the Constitution of India.

Rev. Nichols Roy had opined that the Federation of Khasi States did not have any legal cohesion. This is true

because the Federation was only a voluntary association of the Chiefs of the States. The individual Rulers have not surrendered the political sovereignty of their States to the Federation, so to say. Hence, it is not a politically binding entity. Any State can opt out of the Federation any time; it all depends on the will of the incumbent Rulers of the component States. But Sardar Patel and his team took advantage of the Federation as an agency or instrument to facilitate the signing of the Instrument of Accession by all the heads of the 25 individual Khasi States. The signing of the Instrument of Accession by the President of the Federation of Khasi States has a moral value, but it has no legal value to the Government of India. That is why efforts were made by all means to get all the Chiefs of the Khasi States to sign the Instrument of Accession. It is the signing of the Chiefs individually on behalf of their own States that has a legal value.

The Instrument of Accession was a legal document first introduced by the Government of India Act, 1935, wherein it was provided that a Ruler of a Princely State could accede his kingdom into the 'Federation of India'. The same instrument was used to get the native States accede to the Indian Union after Independence. A misinterpretation has been going around that even if a State had signed the Instrument of Accession, it does not become fully part of India if it had not signed the Instrument of Merger. But the reality is that the signing of the Instrument of Merger does not signify that a State has completely merged with India. The signing of the Instrument of Accession is in itself an act that signifies that a State has perpetually acceded into India unless otherwise, altered by subsequent revolutions or wars.

The Instrument of Merger was used for the merging of small States and for ending the princely status of the States, and the establishment of republican democracy. After signing the Instrument of Accession, the smaller States were merged either into neighbouring Provinces, or with other Princely States to create new Provinces, through the Instrument of Merger. This process involved the dissolution of the Princely States and the removal of the Rajas from authority. By the Instrument of Merger, full republican democracy was introduced, and the Rulers of the Princely States were no longer rulers, though the existence of such princely dynasties had been guaranteed in the Instruments of Accession - that has been a hard fact of the actual course

of history! For Jammu and Kashmir, the Maharaja did not sign any instrument of merger. But in 1952-53, the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, which was elected by the people, framed a Constitution for the State that put the Maharaja out of the scene. After a lot of pressure, the Maharaja relented and stepped down in 1952, and the princely status of Jammu and Kashmir ended without the need for signing the Instrument of merger.

The aspirations of the Khasi leaders were not fully accommodated, but a conciliatory formula in the form of the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution was constructed which guarantees the preservation and protection of traditional institutions and customs of the tribals of North East India. Hence, through the door of the Sixth Schedule the Khasi States and their traditional Rulers found a constitutional recognition, and they were placed under the supervision of a democratically elected constitutional and indigenous Autonomous District Council.

It is very interesting to note that the only native States in India that have not signed the Instrument of Merger or merged by any other means, are the Khasi States. The Khasi States had not been merged with the State of Assam. If they had been merged, then the hereditary Syiems and Lyngdohs of the States would have all been abolished and modern democratic republican structures like in Mizoram, would have been established all through the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Within the State of Assam, the hereditary Syiems, Lyngdohs and Dalois had existed to exercise their traditional authority under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule and the supervision of the Autonomous District Council. Without this protective mechanism in the Sixth Schedule, the Khasi traditional hereditary institutions cannot exist. The Instrument of Accession had not been able to preserve and protect the existence of powerful Princely States and the dynasties of their Rajas in spite of all the flattering provisions therein. But the Sixth Schedule was able to preserve and protect the existence of the Khasi States, and the dynasties of their Rulers till today. Hence, there is no constitutional way by which the hereditary Syiems and Lyngdohs of the Khasi States can independently and directly exist without the protective provisions of the Sixth Schedule because the Constitution of the Indian Democratic Republic does not recognise the Divine Rights of Kings.

What is actually needed is honesty, sincerity and uprightness of character among the people.

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## Round The States

By Insaaf

### Punjab Drama Political upheaval at worst

The political drama unfolding in Punjab relegates the IPL season to the background. Navjot Sidhu's inconsistent batting in the Congress has queered the pitch for the Grand Old party. Not only has former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh given up his decades-old Congress membership, but jeers are being heard all the way in Delhi, as G-23 starts demanding from Sonia Gandhi a CWC meeting. The events indeed have caught the umpires by surprise. Amarinder is asked to resign as CM and he does, Navjot as PCC President glees and then slugs putting in his resignation after a new Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi takes oath. Navjot said he wouldn't take back his resignation but Channi says he has and all is sorted out with the aim to work together. Amarinder meets Home Minister Amit Shah soon after and the political grapevine says he's joining the BJP, but as of now, says the Captain. The meeting it was said was to discuss the prolonged farmer's agitation.

In all these twists and turns, the Congress central leadership in Delhi remains a silent spectator. However, a group of party leaders who

poll, too had lined up 20 star campaigners, including Hardeep Puri and Smriti Irani. And on polling day, it lodged 13-odd complaints on malpractices, guess making a base for the probable loss. Be that as it may, the big question is whether this by-poll will be the next step for Election 2024?

### Develop LWE States

A vision is not enough, fast track development is key to wean away youth from the Maoists movement. Off-heard but reiterated by Home Minister Amit Shah at a meeting with leadership of 10 States affected by Left-Wing Extremism, adding 'development hasn't reached there... since independence...' Instead of usual passing the buck, he would do better by heeding to States' request of raising security-related expenditure and development funds for LWE districts on the principle of 'cooperative federalism.' As Jharkhand Chief Minister Soren put it: both Centre and States have to deal with the problem; till now bills of Rs 10,000 crore has been raised against the State and these should be written off; Centre should in future decide not to send such bills to State governments including AP, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, Telangana, Bihar,



have been seeking organisational reforms, known popularly as G-23, have seized the moment. They are voicing serious concerns over developments in Punjab and elsewhere. "We (G-23 leaders) are not the ones who leave the party and go elsewhere. Ironically, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal throws a googy, "People who were close to them (party leaders) left and they were nearby. Those who don't think are gone. They are still standing with them.... We are G-23, not Jee Huzoor 23. It's very clear. We keep talking. We keep repeating our demands..." Will their demands be heard? The Assembly elections are not too far and time is running out. AAP is waiting in the wings and already got into a batting mode. Will the Congress umpire, whoever it is wake up and give a verdict? Set its team in order.

### WB To Delhi ?

All eyes will be on counting of votes for Bhowanipore by-election on Monday as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee needs to get elected to the Assembly before November to continue in the coveted seat. With ballot boxes sealed on Thursday last, her winning appears a foregone conclusion, but TMC is aiming at the margin, with target of a bigger vote share and beating rival by over 50,000 votes. This will help didi in her vision of catapulting into the national political arena. Her speeches during an unusual high voltage campaign is a pointer: the voters, a mix of Gujaratis, Sikhs, Marwaris and Biharis, were told 'every single vote counts... if she can win Bhowanipore, she can win the rest of India... If people want to get rid of BJP government at Centre, then vote for her.' Plus, the campaign trail included meeting/greeting people in their language, visiting temples/gurdwaras; asking Cabinet ministers, MPs/MLAs to take charge of different wards; stepping up welfare schemes such as Duare Sarkar (Govt at doorstep), etc. The BJP, which put up Priyanka Tibrwal, who lost in Assembly

MP, Chhattisgarh and Kerala. Maharashtra demanded Rs 1,200 crore for various measures including more police stations and mobile base stations, better roads, railway network, setting up of banks, developing schools etc. Predictably, no commitment was made, but North Block urged States to conduct 'joint operations' as Naxals move across borders and DGPs and Central agencies' officers should hold review meetings at least once every 3 months. Well meaning alright, but it should set its priority right as this review meeting was held after two years!

### Assam's 'Refugees'

Civil society and human rights activists should be seeing red over the misery of 7000-odd homeless in Dhalpur, Assam. Reports reveal that over a week since the ruthless eviction ordered by Himanta Biswas Sarma government took place in Darrang district, they are 'living either in makeshift shanties or under open skies.' Public health experts are said to be worried as crowded conditions, lack of safe water, open defecation could lead to an epidemic in the area. However, district administration claims that toilets and tube-wells have been provided, other than health camps. If that was the case, then why would NGOs, or for that matter the All Assam Minority Students' Union or the All India United Democratic Front reach out with 'ration, tarpaulin sheets, rice, pulses, mustard oil, salt, sugar and biscuits, sending a medical team etc.' Shouldn't the BJP government have planned in advance basic amenities before evicting the people under the ambitious Gorukhuti agriculture project and turning them into 'refugees'? Perhaps it should give a thought that while it plans to spend Rs 960 crore to implement modern farming and scientific animal rearing practices on the land regained, it would do well to spend some funds on their rehabilitation. Is it asking too much?--INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### First tribal lady Chief Secretary

Editor,  
I read with pride and joy your OP-ed piece on the selection of Kong Rebecca Suchiang as the new Chief Secretary of Meghalaya (Oct. 1, 2021). I very much agree with the sentiments expressed in your piece and also in the letter to the editor from Glenn Kharkongor on the very same subject (Oct. 2, 2021). In my own experience around the world and supported by the research citation of Glenn Kharkongor, I am convinced that women must be given a transforming role to play in a world that has been afflicted for too long with patriarchal values which are increasingly marginalising our traditional values of caring, sharing and consensus building.

NESFAS and the people of Nongtraw, East Khasi Hills District were given an international Award by the Hallbars Sustainability Research Organisation of Sweden for contributing to the best Sustainability Book of 2021 which was published by FAO and which contains a study of the Indigenous Food Systems of Nongtraw. The Study highlights the strengths of the local indigenous food systems in Nongtraw as well as some of the challenges these local food systems are increasingly facing. The Report however specially brought out the unique practice of the Nongtraw Village Council where women are Executive Committee Members of the Durbar. The Study also reported the sense of wellbeing and inter-connectedness in the village because of good local governance.

With Ms Rebecca Suchiang and her strategic thoughts of focussing her attention on education, health and for meeting the "leaving no one behind" goal of the SDGs, I hope we will be able to develop transforming policies at the State, Autonomous District Council and Village levels to give women their inalienable right to be part of the governance of our Dorbar Shnong. Let us try to start this transformation and movement with our first

tribal lady Chief Secretary. Yours etc., Phrang Roy, Via email

#### On mockery of education

Editor,  
I am new to Pine Mount School as my daughter joined this prestigious Institute only this year in June for her class eleven (11) in Humanities. Right from the start of the session in the month of June till date, classes in all subjects (Political Science, Economics, History, English and Sociology) go on very systematically and regularly from Monday to Friday and from 8.30 am to 1.50 pm through an online platform (google meet). I am happy with the way the teachers have taken their jobs seriously in conducting classes, class tests and assignments and I see that my daughter gets everything that a teacher could offer. I cannot speak for other classes but if what was written in the letters to the editor on September 30, 2021 is true since then I do not have the time to do a

proper research or investigation, but as far as class 11 is concerned, it is not true. In fact I laud the teachers who have marvelously fulfilled their responsibilities. Yours etc., Basheda Massar, Via email

#### Basic necessity at stake

Editor,  
The residents of Laitumkhras area are faced with severe problems due to unreliable drinking water supply since the last two months. It is expected that the authorities concerned are well-aware that the supply of safe drinking water is a basic necessity. If so, then why is the supply of water stopped after almost every three days in a week and sadly the authorities seem to be clueless. If there is a technical problem in the main feeder line then the residents can always expect that the supply would be restored in the concerned water reservoirs by the municipal tankers. Otherwise the necessity of keeping those tankers is questionable. It may be re-

called that in September 2021 there was a stoppage of water for long nine days and on an average the water taps suffer a drought these days for 3 to 4 days at a stretch every week which has almost become a regular feature. Even if water comes, which is one time a day, it only lasts for 20 to 25 minutes. Thus on behalf of all the residents of the locality I appeal to the concerned authorities to kindly look into the matter and find a solution in whatever way possible and restore regular supply of safe drinking water at the earliest.

Yours etc., B.Dhar Shillong- 3

#### NEHU fails its students

Editor,  
The students of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong have to face the odds of not being able to submit their applications to universities abroad and even within India for pursuing doctoral studies and other higher educational courses. Most of the American and

European universities have completed their round one deadline for submission of applications. Meanwhile, here in NEHU, post graduate students are still awaiting to receive their registration card, provisional degree certificate, academic transcripts, etc. Even to apply for these certificates one has to download the form and submit it physically at the concerned department. All these could have been done away with, if arrangements for online submission were made available that would have rendered the process as more efficient and time-bound. Being a Central University of the State it has the potential to improve upon its IT infrastructure and it would not be wrong for the students to at least expect better service delivery. The concerns of the aggrieved students need to be addressed by the new Vice Chancellor. NEHU should improve both its administrative and academic wings and introduce innovative means of working and using technology to speed up various processes related to students' welfare.

Yours etc., Earningstone R Sangma, Via email

"Opportunity does not knock, it presents itself when you beat down the door."

— Kyle Chandler

## The Shillong Times

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### Of Platitudes & Symbolisms

LIKE every other observance in this country, Gandhi Jayanti - the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi comes and goes without much impact on the minds and hearts of people. The Swachh Bharat campaign was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2014 with much fanfare with the intent of bringing a modicum of cleanliness in this country where dirt and filth are strewn carelessly everywhere and fecal matter emptied into rivers. The concept of Swachh Bharat is to provide sanitation facilities to every family, including toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness, and safe and adequate drinking water supply. Modi's fervent appeal in 2014 was that the above mission was to be achieved by 2019 as a befitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, on his 150th birth anniversary. Its now 2021 but the impact is hardly visible; not in Meghalaya's capital of Shillong.

Prime Minister Modi had said that the Swachh Bharat mission is beyond politics and should be inspired by patriotism and not politics. He also asked people to pledge 'na main gandagi karunga, na main gandagi karne doonga' (I shall not litter and won't allow anyone to do so). Modi emphasized that the Swachh Bharat Campaign is not just a slogan, but a civic responsibility. But government-run missions tend to be reduced to symbolic gestures. A travel to the any of the villages will see signboards galore announcing that the village is open defecation free (ODF) as if merely putting up the signboard is enough to engineer behavioral change in people who don't understand why the idea of open defecation is the worst unhygienic practice. The problem with government run missions is that they are target oriented but don't look at sustainability. Awareness creation has no time-lime. It's an ongoing process, in the same manner that education is a life-long process. The message has to be bombarded repeatedly and if people intentionally violate regulations, then a fine is the only way to deal with belligerence.

This year too Gandhi Jayanti saw several groups emerging to clean up localities and even rivers as if a one-day symbolic gesture will keep the rivers and the city itself clean. This is artifice at its worst and the photo-ops and media blitzkrieg on such occasions are intended to mislead. It might give the people involved in such one day gestures a momentary sense of achievement but it does nothing at all for the environment because those involved in the dirtying process are not part of the cleaning up. How to infuse civic responsibility in every citizen should be the goal of Swachh Bharat.

### Agricultural Infrastructure Fund

# A Primer for Meghalaya's youth

By K.N. Kumar

The Government of India (GoI) announced an Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) in May 2020 to invest Rs 1 lakh crore over the next decade to build specific infrastructure connected to the agricultural sector. An amount of Rs.190 crore was allocated to the State of Meghalaya to implement the scheme during 2020-21. The principal idea of the Fund is to create or modernize agriculture value chains in the country. Most central government schemes are either grant-driven or subsidy-driven, but the AIF is different from them in that it changes the model to a debt-driven one - the Government being a facilitator now instead of being a patronizing provider.

Since Agriculture is a priority sector in India, the Banks are being gently nudged by the AIF to kick up the infrastructure creation in the country through two handles: (i) an interest subvention approach and (ii) providing credit guarantees to the Banks. The GoI will bear these costs to safeguard the project viability, and banks' bottom lines are not hurt. The AIF is a liberal scheme to support the farmer-entrepreneurs, start-ups, FPOs, SHGs, Cooperative Societies to avail medium to long-term loans from the Banks with an interest subvention of 3% for projects up to Rs.2.00 crore.

Typically, agriculture infrastructure means irrigation, rural roads, transportation machinery, greenhouses, warehouses, post-harvest infrastructure like cold chains, innovative and precision agriculture infrastructure, financial institutions, information and communication services, markets, and renewable energy structures. AIF gives a special thrust on developing post-harvest infrastructure on the premise that such a value-addition will tilt the scales favouring the farmers. However, any unique idea specific to the State's requirement can also be pitched by the entrepreneurs.

The AIF is well-founded also because: (1) Most small and marginal farmers (>80% of Meghalaya's farmers) have no cash surpluses to build any such infrastructure on their own. So, public and private investments should be marshalled to help the farming community (2) Public investment in Indian agriculture has been near stagnant for decades now. In fact, the private sector invests far more in the agriculture sector than the state or central governments put together. Through

the AIF, the Government wants to bring in fresh private sector investments into the agricultural sector. The idea behind this Fund seems to cut down the inefficiencies of routing the subsidies through the formal government channels, which to my mind, are incalculably high.

The perceived benefits of the AIF are multiple: (1) A survey report indicates that our farmers are unable to sell up to 40% of their produce. When marketing infrastructure becomes available to the farmers, they may sell directly to a broader group of consumers, and hence they may get better value. (2) When investments materialize in logistics infrastructure in the form of cold chains or warehouses, post-harvest losses will most certainly come down, and the problem of intermediaries will be re-



duced. (3) The farmers will be able to time the markets and sell at the best prices. (4) The Government will have ensured better targeting of the priority sector lending. (5) Wastages of agricultural produce will decrease (6) Agri entrepreneurs and start-ups will push for innovation in the agriculture sector by leveraging new technologies, including the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, etc. It will also create avenues for better collaboration between entrepreneurs and farmers. (6) With Credit Guarantee, incentive and interest subvention, Banks will lend with lower risk and (7) The consumers will also benefit because of better quality and lower prices.

For the benefit of the young readers who want to avail a loan under the AIF, I will briefly explain the process for obtaining a loan: (1) The GoI has created an institution by the name 'National Agriculture Infra Financing Facility' to facilitate the application process. (2) To begin with, an applicant has to register on the online

portal of the National Agriculture Infra Financing Facility (NAIFF) (<https://agriinfra.dac.gov.in/>) (3) Upon receiving the credentials, loan application should be submitted online by filling an application form available on the portal and uploading the soft copy of Detailed Project Report (DPR) (4) The Government of India will send the application along with DPR to the Bank. The Bank and the branch may be opted by the applicant (5) The Bank will appraise the project and decide to sanction the loan or otherwise, based on the project's viability. (6) If the loan is sanctioned, funds will be transferred directly to the beneficiary's bank account. The time taken for completing the process is sixty days (7) Post the loan disbursement to the beneficiary by the Bank, the interest subvention and

the financing under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund. Furthermore, the repayment period covered under the financing facility will be for a maximum of 7 years, including the moratorium period of up to 2 years. Twenty-four per cent of the total funds available under the scheme should be utilized for SC/ST entrepreneurs (16% for SC and 8% for ST). Besides this, lending institutions would ensure adequate coverage of entrepreneurs belonging to women and other weaker segments of society to ensure that the benefits of implementation are inclusive.

The NAIFF has already received 11,165 applications, and Rs 5004 crore have since been sanctioned. Regrettably, in Meghalaya, only one sanction has been issued so far, that too for a meagre amount of Rs. 15 lakhs, for a Mustard Oil Expeller in the West Garo Hills district. The poor response is because (1) low awareness about the AIF among the stakeholders, and that is because there have not been many efforts to organize workshops or awareness programmes across the State. This article is an effort to create such knowledge, so the number of applications will go up (2) The predominant culture among the youth of the State is toward receiving grants and subsidies but not so much to build enterprises. However, of late, this culture is changing thanks to the momentum created by Meghalaya

Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) & PRIME (3) Even when some awareness is generated, handholding support will still be required because, most applicants would be first-generation entrepreneurs. They will benefit immensely if some government organization does the handholding of these applicants end-to-end. Hence I believe the PRIME and the Farmers' Commission should come together to create an ecosystem of entrepreneurship through the AIF, discussions for which have begun (4) The commercial Banks do have their priorities, and the likelihood of their being proactive to create entrepreneurship is low. History is not on their side. Therefore, a Council of Bankers can be constituted by the Commission to bring both the Bankers and the Entrepreneurs together. Meanwhile, the allocation of Rs.190 crore will lapse by March 2022. Who will pick up the challenge?

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission: email [upindia@gmail.com](mailto:upindia@gmail.com))

## Promises for the Masses?

By Joe Oliver Mae Ryan Lyngdoh

And here we are yet again gearing up for the supposed hype of choosing our representatives aka "elections." Another Power Struggle by so called "Leaders" and "Representatives" turned "Esteemed VIPs" - to the very same people who they are supposed to serve. Because why not? They are the face of the people, the ones who sit and make decisions for us the masses (although we can argue as to who those so-called decisions actually benefit).

Wait, did I say "esteemed VIP's"? I often wonder why the term "VIP" is thrown so casually around in our country. I mean a doctor, an army man, a teacher even, who dedicate their lives to

one who can pass the test and an interview drive the man around; and that too if you have "luck" to clear the exam.

Isn't this an abuse of power? All for selfish reasons?

One can only look at how much of "assets" these "representatives" actually gain in the few years they sit in office "assumingly serving" the people. (Selfish?)

Wake up people! Facts and figures speak for themselves.

Or what about the lavish festivals we keep on seeing and enjoying. What actual benefit do the people get? Only a few can reap the so-called benefits. (Covid has put a damper on these in recent times, although one



the people can be respected as important. But an elected official who is supposed to serve us is a VIP? And we have to knock and cover in front of their offices when we actually go and meet them?

Let me ask you, you the reader - educated, born-and-bred brought up here in the humble abode of clouds - Why are we such selfish, opportunistic, simplistic idiots?

Idiots! That is who we are. Why?

Because we see opportunity only for a short term. We are happy being supporters of these so called "leaders" for a few weeks (of course with some perks) and we love to hear the same manifesto again and again - the promise of jobs, infrastructure, safety et al (Although we never see light of any of these).

We don't stop to think - What can this person do in the long run? What did he/she do in the last five years? Did we gain anything? Or have we all stooped to a level of being happy with the freebies given for a short time?

We do see opportunity, it's not that we don't. But what we see isn't for the betterment of everyone but for a select few. And maybe this is engraved in us because most of us fail to see the larger picture and are willing to be happy - momentarily.

And here I thought our people were better, that we serve one another. "Ka im lang ka sah lang, na ka bynta ka man bried long bried". As it turns out we are selfish in every sense of the word.

We are fools to think that we are choosing these "representatives" to represent us. We are not choosing a leader to represent us but we are handing our rights and needs to a single individual who then utilizes that "representative" seat to wield power. Power to do as they please without any consequences. If a person who was an ex-militant who for more than once has threatened and held captive the people he now "assumingly" wants to "represent" can have a seat in office whereas you require a high school certificate, police verification, a written test followed by an interview, for a person to apply and be qualified for a mere driver's job, it makes you think what kind of bureaucracy we are dealing with.

Sure, give a man with a criminal record a seat to represent us, but have a clean, educated and some-

can counter there are other ways to make a quick buck even in these times)

No wonder the term "corrupt" dominates every household conversation.

We the people are too simple minded, taking everything that is fed at face value. We don't analyze, we don't ask questions; we are content if we can survive on our own 9-5 even if it means the rest can drown. We don't see the bigger picture, we don't think. If something works out for the moment, that's what we will follow. But when we see someone else doing something and then prospering, we move to our kitchens and quietly have banter on - illegal immigrants, job dissatisfaction, job-drains and the like; You name it!

But when the time to do something for the same comes, a few will actually stand while the rest move to the side-lines. And when the few who stood fail, quiet banter start again.

Aren't we foolish to be doing that? When we the people don't stand up for our own rights, who will? Our selfish elected "representatives"? The very same people who will use any way possible to get what they want or to get the promises fulfilled to the select few of their overly zealous followers?

But who am I to think along these lines? When aspiring educators and established well respected teachers are offered such meagre pay that it makes you question the value we give to education?

And yet every time we hear education as the most prevalent issue by these so called "representatives".

When we give much more importance to an elected official rather than an educator, I say that we are indeed fools.

That is why we are "Idiots" heading towards "Idiocracy" sooner than later.

-From a fellow simplistic, opportunistic, foolish idiot.

PS- Its high time we also look into why so many prefer to stay anonymous in letters in this newspaper. Maybe because when we say something that goes against the so-called ideals of the masses or if we offer a critique about the ones in power, we the ones who don't wield that power, and the ones who still need to make a living somehow, need to safeguard our identities for the fear of backlash against us.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Lack of social & educational motivation for UPSC exams

Editor,

'Go to school to know how to write love letter and to propose to a girl' (khie leit skul tang-ban nang ban thoh shithi samla ban phah kyll kynthel), my mother told me in my early days of schooling. Likewise, there are many people from rural backgrounds who go to school with the same intention. If such is the understanding of the society regarding the children's education, how can we expect to produce local IAS officers? Who can motivate them to appear for competitive exams? Is our common society aware of such exams? In fact, when we were asked our aims in life during our school days, our usual response as kids were teacher, taxi driver, nurse, doctor etc. None of were aware of the civil services (IAS, IPS, IPS) as a profession. If such

was the situation, how can we produce such officers from our local community? I strongly believe that such attitudes are still common even today. Perhaps only people in the city are more aware of the competitive exams.

I remember asking students in Nagaland about their aims in life, their common response was IAS and IPS. Therefore, is our education system wrong, that our local kids are not formed to aim for such a profession in life? The appointment of Ms. Rebecca Suchiang as the new Chief Secretary (CS) of Meghalaya will certainly encourage many locals to strive for UPSC exams. In fact, she herself in her first appearance to the local news channels as the new CS encouraged the local people to strive for public exams and added that UPSC is not tough provided people work hard and allocate certain number of hours of study every day. However, as a general observation local people are less likely to attempt such public exams and many ended up with the preliminary stage (first attempt).

Patricia Mukhim's article 'A lady Chief Secretary on Meghalaya's 49th year' (ST October 1, 2021) pointed out that stunting and wasting are the big challenges to the children of Meghalaya which also affect the cognitive domain. If the writer observed correctly her write-up, mentioned that research on local children found that poverty and malnutrition affect the cognitive domain of children which is where reasoning and problem solving reside. I do not agree with her views; instead in my personal observation, the lack of social and educational motivation for UPSC exams is the main cause for not having more local IAS officers.

Yours etc.,  
Aiborlang Nongsiej  
Mawkyrwat

#### On grooming our students

Editor,

During the COVID lockdown, most of the students were without school textbooks. As books were not included as essential items,

none of the bookstalls were allowed to open. Many teachers and concerned parents had also come forward to air their concerns through this leading daily. Truly, "idleness" of the mind for long stretches has taken a heavy toll on the minds of the students. COVID might have now receded but the psychological wounds will definitely take a longer time to heal. However, here the SSA management in Meghalaya deserves appreciation for supplying free text books particularly for the core-subjects to students across the state by the middle of February 2021. This has indeed turned out to be a salvation for students following the MBOSE syllabus.

However, some Hindi teachers and parents lamented because they found it very hard to teach the students the Hindi language during the lockdown without the books. Some say since the students from the MBOSE affiliated schools hardly purchase Hindi textbooks from the market, most of them have not read or even written a single sentence in the last

one and half years. But they all got promoted to the higher classes in 2020 and the same will happen in 2021. Another teacher who did not wish to be named said that by neglecting the teaching of Hindi and not providing free Hindi textbooks under SSA the Government is affecting the careers of tribal students should they choose to go out of the state to pursue higher studies.

Needless to say, our tribal students perform abysmally in Hindi and often find it very hard to measure up to students from the plain areas. This fact often comes in the news. The lack of Hindi communicative skills among the students invariably stands as a big impediment in many respects. I have met with several political leaders and bureaucrats who deeply regretted not having even the basic working knowledge of this link language. However, very interestingly, we can take pride in our Chief Minister Shri Conrad Sangma, including the previous CM Dr Mukul Sangma, who not only speak but they deliver the speeches in flu-

ent, impeccable Hindi. So, it is always worthwhile to give little more emphasis on teaching the subject that will help raise the capability of students and thereby enable them to compete with their peers in the plain areas. The current ascendency of Ms. Rebecca Suchiang as the Chief Secretary has puffed up our chests with pride. However, this state should groom "more and more" IAS, IPS, CA, CS, MBBS... who will not just come back and serve in their home state but also outside the state.

Language communicative skills should not be a barrier at all. Each student should be well adorned with all academic achievements. The intellectual splendour of Meghalaya should spread all across the country and beyond its horizons too.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwalli,  
Shillong

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

"Happiness is a byproduct of function, purpose, and conflict; those who seek happiness for itself seek victory without war."

— William S. Burroughs

## The Shillong Times

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### Farmers at receiving end

THE Modi Government has obviously given a long rope to the farmers who have been agitating against the three farm reform legislations. The agitation has crossed 10 months, punctuated by a politically loaded nation-wide hartal/bandh with limited impact a week ago, and the government was still looking the other way. Yet, the scenario is worsening at multiple levels, as is evident from the highly condemnable act of a SUV running over agitating farmers at Lakhimpur Kheri district in Uttar Pradesh. It killed four farmers while another four persons lost their lives in the subsequent protests. Granted that the running over of the SUV on farmers might not have been a pre-meditated act but the BJP will have a lot of explaining to do as to why such an incident has happened at all, mainly as the son of a junior central minister has been accused of direct involvement in this unpardonable sin.

The minister's son denies he was involved, but accusing fingers are pointed at him. A convoy of BJP vehicles was on its way to receive a senior state minister, and the SUV ran into the crowd. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi, who attempted a visit to the families of the bereaved family and was detained, has asked a pertinent question, "Why has the 'man who did this' not been arrested; and why the minister, Ajay Mishra Teni, has not been sacked from the ministry. Also pertinent is the poser from Priyanka Gandhi to Prime Minister Modi, that, "When the PM sits at the head of an Azadi Ki Mahotsav rally in Lucknow, he must also go and meet the families of the bereaved families." Priyanka was kept in detention for a full 24 hours and then arrested by the UP police. Left to herself she was not making much of an impact after her entry to politics. But it would seem the BJP government in UP is bent on building for her a larger aura. In a democracy, she as a senior leader has the basic right to visit the bereaved farmer families. Her detention and arrest made no sense.

At this late stage, the Modi government is also seen to be in a mood to accept some of the demands of the agitating farmers, short of a wholesale withdrawal of the three reform laws. The farming community would, otherwise, teach the BJP a lesson in the upcoming assembly polls in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Question is, why has the Centre allowed matters to drag so far.

# Reading the Mukul-Pala Conflict

By Albert Thyrniang

The rift between the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee president, Vincent H Pala and estranged Legislature Party leader, Mukul Sangma must have been ironed out and the saga of the fissure may now be part of history. The truce may also be temporary. The intervention of the AICC has placated the upset former Chief Minister and convinced the Garo Hills undisputed leader to work under the leadership of his arch rival.

The genesis of the public spectacle traces back to the announcement of the appointment of the Shillong MP as the state Congress chief late last month. He succeeds the low profile Celestine Lyngdoh. Now, anyone who follows Meghalaya politics knows that the three time parliamentarian is the best person to take up the top job in the state and to lead the grand old party in the 2023 February Assembly elections to success. His own party comrades acknowledge his prowess. Even the opposition secretly admit that the engineer-businessman-turned-politician is the topmost candidate to energise the party that is rather on the back foot. Mukul Sangma himself will concede that the most competent leader at present is the former Assistant Chief Engineer who surprisingly usurped all Congress bigwigs using his clout to be declared a Lok Sabha candidate in the 2009 elections. The names that went round, including those of veteran MLAs, before Pala got the nod from the central leadership, stand nowhere near his status. Supporters and rivals alike will agree that the AICC took the correct decision. A certain amount of aggressiveness was displayed in the choice.

The stunned Mukul Sangma immediately went into communication, prompting speculations of him joining The All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) and even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He came out of self isolation stating that he remained in the Congress but without denying press reports of the speculative shift of political allegiance emphasising that the differences would be solved within the four walls of the party.

Then on September 1 social media went agog and reported that the so called Gandhi family loyalist was to defect to the TMC along with 12 legislators. Reporters frantically looked for sources to back their reports. The shrewd veteran eventually reaffirmed his intention to stay put and termed the speculation to the 'go the Faleiro way' as 'pre-mature'. Who knows, tomorrow or next week or next month or next year may be the ripe time

to jump the into the TMC Bandwagon. Pala and Mukul finally met but without looking each other in the eye. Uneasiness was too visible. The claim by some unnamed Congressmen that the Ampati strongman was only serving a notice to the AICC displaying his even greater sway than the newly appointed president to be able to take two-thirds of the MLAs with him leaving Pala with only a third, could be true. Pala, on his part almost dared his opponent to join the TMC saying he would have little time to prepare for the 2023 polls. It could be a disastrous out-

leader than Rahul Gandhi, the Congress central leadership had to broker peace between the two biggest names in the Meghalaya Congress in New Delhi on Sunday night. The volatile party affairs in the 'Abode of Clouds' may have come to an end.

Mukul was not amused with Pala bringing back former Congressmen, first RG Lyngdoh and PN Syiem and then Billykid A Sangma and Brigady N Marak back to the fold. RG Lyngdoh was a successful Home Minister who tamed the HNLC, but was side-lined during Mukul's Chief ministerial tenure.



come. One doubts whether Songsak, Mukul's present constituency would accept the TMC. Rangakona too will be tricky. Due to his own persona Ampati may return a TMC legislator. Since the press found Himalaya Shangpliang and Mayral-born in their residence of their 'leader' it is assumed they were part of the plot to engineer a considered split in the Congress. Will Mawsynram be open to the TMC? Will Nongpoh embrace the 'West Bengal' party? And life would have come full circle had Mukul followed the footsteps of his former bitter rival, PA Sangma in aligning with the TMC. If he had joined the BJP he would have eaten back his own words because he had accused late PA Sangma of opening the door for the 'communal' BJP via his party, the NPP.

Politics today is truly sans ideology. What is the difference between the Congress and TMC? It is just a question of opportunity. And turncoats from liberal to religious bigots and vice versa are common, all for the sake of greener pastures.

With the Congress failing to make the 'humiliated' 80 year old ex-Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh to retire (the Captain had stated in 2017 pre and post Assembly polls, "This is my last election. Let the younger generation take over") and the former Goa Chief Minister and veteran Congress leader Luizinho Faleiro joining forces with Mamata Banerjee pledging she is a better

reason but the intention was probably to checkmate his popularity. Pala has ended the son of Peter Marbanian's 13-year political hiatus. PN Syiem, Mukul's beta-noire was at a lengthy battle with his Chief Minister on the dual office issue involving even court cases. The then Mawsynram MLA was eventually frozen out in favour of bureaucrat and IAS nominated officer, Himalaya Shangpliang. Among the two former legislators in Garo Hills who have made their home-coming, one was allegedly a dummy candidate of the present Congress boss, against a Congress candidate (read Mukul's nominee) in the 2013 elections in North Garo Hills. Congress candidates that year were chosen based on the basis of family ties. Billykid A Sangma, ex Tura MLA too had irreconcilable differences with Mukul and had to contest elections independently or under the BJP flag.

Now the 2023 polls could be interesting in South Tura. In all likelihood we will see a triangular contest among the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma (NPP), Tura MDC Bernard N Sangma (BJP) and Billykid A Sangma (Congress). Conrad won the 2018 South Tura by-election comfortably thanks to the support of Bernard and Billykid. However, his status had eroded, when in April this year, Bernard defeated the NPP candidate in the MDC elections. Billykid, an MLA prior to 2008 had lost

to PA Sangma by 2,825 votes, on the year the senior Sangma returned to state politics. But the 'no Kid' politician still has a following. If he wins in 2023 and the Congress comes back to power under Pala, the Tura man will surely be a Minister.

Deborah C. Marak is another politician who sees an opportunity under Pala's leadership. The former cabinet minister in the Mukul government lost the Williamnagar seat in the last election complaining that a rebel Congress candidate was put up by the leadership to sabotage her chances. So, the disgruntled Congress workers in Garo Hills are enthused with Pala at the helm of the party. At the cost of being repetitive one can see quite clearly that the best bet for the post of Meghalaya Congress President is Vincent Pala for the whole state. Any other choice would have had the Congress struggling much more to win the 2023 polls. Objectively, he is the most acceptable leader to unite both the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills tribes, as Mukul himself desires.

Pala has reiterated that he has no plans to contest the 2023 elections but was also quick to add that if the party insists he will not shy away from doing so. The options are wide open. As one sees it the parliamentarian will be in the fray. If his party returns with a majority or comes somewhere close, he as a consensus Chief Minister candidate, could be a reality. In the 2024 parliamentary election he could put up one of the recent returnees. With his influence as 'Chief Minister' and multi-time MP his candidate could seal an easy victory who could be heading to Delhi. No wonder Mukul sees red and his role in the state politics will likely be demolished. A just reason for the tale created!

The by-elections to vacant Mawryngkneng, Mawplang and Rajabala seats is a prelude to 2023. If the Congress retains Mawryngkneng and Phulbari and Kennedy Khyriem stops footballer and son of late SK Sunn, Eugeneson Lyngdoh, Pala will be upbeat. But if a poor show emerges his position will take a beating and he will have to put in more than 100 per cent effort. His ambition could be derailed. Mawryngkneng will also be a test for Charles Pyngrupe as he himself and his deceased son, David Nongrum both represented the constituency in the past. Rajabala will test Mukul Sangma as well. A victory will enhance and a loss will diminish his reputation.

Hope you have read the Mukul-Pala saga.  
(Email: albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com)

## AKA-Mahotsav Telecom journey - from elite to essential

By Dilip Singh

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKA-Mahotsav) is an initiative of the Government of India to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of progressive India and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements. One of the oldest and most vital sectors of the country is the Department of Telecommunications. It's the most progressive sector not only in India but beyond and offers robust services in highly undulating geographies at reasonably low tariffs. The history of Indian Telecommunication Sector began in 1851 when the British Government laid down the first operational landlines in Kolkata. The British started telecom services for their own ease of administration and military control. We have had traditional ways and means to communicate our concerns either through newspapers or via tangible objects/artifacts. The method of communications used in Quit India movement was like encoded information in roti and flowers, passed around to other nationalist. The message is decoded and action plan executed accordingly.

Telecommunications penetrate without hurdle of physical, political and geographical boundaries. It works indiscriminately in all socio-geo-economic spheres with the ultimate aim of reaching the hearts of millions of people across urban and rural areas, rich and poor, high or low social status etc. In the ongoing covid-19 pandemic it's the telecom sector which actively helped people to feel socially connected while remaining physically distant. It's the telecom or digital connectivity which fosters love and happiness in times of crisis by facilitating celebration of online family functions, marriages and birthday celebrations, education etc. Hence telecom has transformed life and lifestyles while Covid-19 has taken away the lives and livelihoods of people.

In times of crisis, when people have connectivity they have been socio-psychologically comfortable while those devoid of connectivity are facing multiple challenges like livelihoods, education, loss of unskilled labour jobs as compared to other job workers who have been working from home via use of technology. Digital divide badly affects rural Meghalaya, where approximately 1164 census villages have been left digitally uncovered out of 6459 villages of Meghalaya as per available official records of Department of Telecommunications, North East Licensing Service Area (NELSA) Shillong, till August 2021.

One of the objectives of the Government of India is that no one should be left uncovered by telecommunications services. On the similar lines the state government also prepared a road map under the Shillong Declaration in 2019. The Shillong Declaration talks about the improvement of telecommunications connectivity in Northeast States by addressing issue of Telecommunications and implementing a comprehensive development plan.

North East Region (NER) is the one of the lowest in infrastructure investment, although it has huge potentials which need to be actualized. For fuller realization we need to have a seamless flow of digital connectivity. The biggest constraints in this regard is the geography of the region which is highly undulating. In the hilly areas only installing mobile towers is insufficient for seamless data connectivity; electrification of uncovered areas is also a prime requirement. Though data connectivity is sinequa-non to comply with the Shillong declaration, public-private parties are working on various technological solutions in order to have telecom connectivity in the

whole of Meghalaya.

M-Governance is most effective because mobile phones have greatly reduced the communication cost, thereby allowing individuals and firms to send and obtain information quickly and cheaply on a variety of economic, social and political topics. An emerging body of research shows that the reduction in communication costs associated with mobile phones has tangible economic benefits, improves agricultural and labour market efficiency as well as producer-consumer welfare. This benefit will be more in a State with huge tourism potentials. According to Earnst and Young (2011) Indian Telecom is an economic miracle in the making. Mobile phones also have the potential to bridge the gap between haves and have-nots and is one of the tools to eradicate poverty. An article in the economist (2008) says that "A device that was a yuppie toy not so long ago has now become a potent force for economic development in the world's poorest countries."

India announced a New Telecom Policy (NTP)-1999 for support to Telecom Service Providers according to the mandate of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations specialized agency for Information and Communication Technologies - ICTs. Article 1(d) of the ITU seeks to extend the benefits of the new telecom technologies to all the world's inhabitants. Accordingly, the Indian Telegraph Act was amended in 2003 and gives statutory status to Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) whose main objective is to enable rural Indians to achieve their fullest potential and participate productively in the development of the nation by being effectively connected through a reliable and ubiquitous telecommunications network, access to which is within their reach. Accordingly, provision for mobile coverage in Meghalaya under a special and dedicated project of the Department of Telecom's Universal service obligation fund (USOF), through which Meghalaya State will be covered at village level but for the fuller development of State is on but we need to equally focus on rapid electrification of villages and expansion of roads. Then only will residents of the State harness the fruit of developments in all walks of life. All the three goods are complementary to each other for all round development - Electricity, Telecom and Road sector. They need to develop and expand in order to celebrate the true spirit of AKA-Mahotsav.

The office of Sr. DDG (NELSA) has jurisdiction over six states - Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh for monitoring of resource deployment and compliance of instructions received from the Government of India from time to time. NELSA is a specialized office divided into verticals like rural connectivity, technology, compliance and security. Apart from monitoring and enforcement of the telecom sector we also create awareness about the benefits of mobile phones for their lives and livelihoods. Recently three towers were commissioned in uncovered Village of West Khasi, West Jaintia, Ri Bhoi Districts. It's an ongoing journey until the last man gets mobile coverage.

Unified Mobile Application for New Age Governance (UMANG) being a part of Shillong declaration, it's our duty as well as responsibility to encourage good use of telecom facilities so that social benefits are maximized at minimum social cost.

(Author is an ITS officer working as Director (Rural), NELSA-Shillong, Meghalaya. Views are personal)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Students at the receiving end

Editor,  
Due to the Covid-19 situation, schools and colleges have been shut for months. Learning has been like a rollercoaster ride for many students especially with the online mode of education. However, things have got a little bit better day by day. Just in the month of August, the Education Department of the Government of Meghalaya has announced that schools can be reopened for students of classes X and above and also for colleges. However, the Government has given the heads of different institutions the option to decide on their reopening. I find this absolutely ridiculous on the government's part. Firstly, allowing heads of institutions to decide leads to a lot of inequality. While some institutions decided to reopen, some are still closed which means half the students are getting better education through offline mode while students of those institutions which are still closed continue to have difficulties learning everything online; because let's be hon-

est you gain just about as little as thirty percent of knowledge through online mode compared to almost ninety percent you get from offline mode.

Secondly, why can't the Education Department direct the institutions to reopen uniformly or are they too fearful of taking full responsibility? If the Government which was formed by us, the people, does not want to take responsibility for us, why did they want power in the first place? Many students are frustrated with the decision of the Government and with their institutions. I, for one am quite disappointed because my institution has still not reopened. Yes online classes are held but it is not as productive as offline classes. I often wonder if my classmates and I are lagging behind because every day I see students of other institutions going to their campuses, getting the proper form of education while some of us struggle due to online classes.

This is an appeal to i) the Government and ii) the Heads of Institutions. To the heads of institutions, please try to find means of holding offline classes for all streams

whether Science or Commerce or Humanities/Arts because not only students of the Science stream are important and require the offline mode of learning. Commerce and Humanities streams are just as important. As for the Government, if you still do not want to take responsibility just issue an order to close all the institutions, because only then will it be fair. Finally I kindly request the teachers to stop assuming that we don't want to sit for their classes so we lie about having network issues. Not all of us lie, we really face connectivity problems and yes, we get stressed which severely affects our mental health when we miss classes due to our inability to control the network.

Yours etc.,  
A. P Nongrum  
Via email

#### Infrastructure woes in new Shillong township

Editor,  
The infrastructure that is required to sustain a township is important to the people living therein and to their

quality of life. However, the slow developmental pace in the new Shillong township area is something to be noted. It is putting the residents into great difficulties. For the past many years, MePDCL has been unable to provide regular and uninterrupted power supply to the township. Hardly a day passes when there is no power shutdown, whether deliberate or accidental. Two years ago there was power outage for 40 hours. For the past few weeks, there has been a compulsory random power outage for several hours in a day which is making the lives of people living there extremely difficult. Be it household chores or professional work, electricity shutdown has completely disrupted them. Several attempts to complain about the power outages have not been successful as the phones are not attended to.

What is the point in setting up a new township, when basic necessities like electricity are not provided regularly? Similarly, the main narrow road in the township is horrible now and the vehicle drivers have to take risks in negotiating huge potholes on the road.

The sides of the road were quickly broadened last year but no work has been initiated in the last one year to pave the road which is in a mess now. Water supply is of course another story which perhaps may take decades to reach here. In summary, the township has little to offer to the people given the poor infrastructure development concerning electricity, road and water supply which the State has failed to seriously consider as its priority.

Yours etc.,  
H. Singh,  
Shillong

#### Bane of plastics

Editor  
Plastics constitute an important place in our modern life across the globe. If we take a look around us we will find at least 10 different items made of plastics inside our home. It has transformed into a part and parcel of our life; however, little do we realize how plastics products are entering our oceans and destroying our marine ecosystems. Due to poor management of solid waste products as well as

loopholes in our recycling system; the bulk of waste plastic products are finding their way into our seas and oceans. Dumping of plastic waste directly into the marine environment has also turned disastrous. Several marine birds, mammals, turtles, fishes as well as invertebrates have been found to consume microplastics directly or indirectly from their surrounding environment. This is killing them in large numbers through the process of bioaccumulation, as well as deposition of plastic waste on surface water blocking sunlight damaging production of phytoplanktons and zooplanktons. This in turn has serious consequences on the marine food chains and webs with disastrous short and long term impacts on our highly sensitive marine ecosystem.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge Alberta  
Canada

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*"Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator and change has its enemies."*

— Robert F. Kennedy

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 58 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2021

### Revisiting the IOA

THE Instrument of Accession signed by the 25 Khasi syiems (chieftains) between 1947-48, categorically stated that they have acceded to the Dominion of India with the intent that the Governor General of India, the Dominion Legislature, the Federal Court and any other Dominion Authority shall by Virtue of this Instrument of Accession, but subject always to the terms thereof, and for purposes only of the Dominion, exercise in relation to the said Khasi States such functions as may be vested in them by or under the Government of India Act, 1935. Often we have heard political aspirants and those desirous of riding the bandwagon of historical anomalies raise the issue of the Khasi states not having signed the Instrument of Merger and therefore not having fully acceded to India. The question then is what is the Instrument of Merger? Sardar Valabhai Patel and VK Krishna Menon realised that it was necessary to merge the smaller states/principalities as they were non-viable administrative units. It was pointed out by the duo that the smaller states were very small and lacked resources to sustain their economies and to support their growing population. Besides, each of the states imposed their own taxation rules and other restrictions that impeded free trade. Patel and Menon were of the opinion that in a united India there could not exist such variations in administrative control. Hence the merger was sought to be effected by merging smaller principalities to neighbouring provinces to create a sort of "princely union." The Instrument of Merger therefore meant that some of the smaller states would be dissolved with the larger states for the purpose of better administration, although this violated the principles of the Instrument of Accession where those states/principalities were recognised as individual states.

The Khasi states were in no way royalties and neither did they have the standing of "kings" or "rajahs." The Khasi administrative unit begins with the family (ka dorbar iing), the clan (ka dorbar kur), the village (dorbar shnong), the cluster of villages (dorbar raid) and lastly the cluster of raids (syiemship). The Khasi system is not arranged in the shape of a pyramid but its opposite, like the Khasi khoh (basket) from the bottom up. In that sense it was a democratic arrangement. It's a different matter that this system became subservient to the Constitution of India. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution ensured that the traditional governance structures would be conserved. The fact that these administrative arrangements of the Khasis were not well understood by the Constitution makers is also one reason this important point is reduced to paragraph 3(1)(g) of the Sixth Schedule which only says the District Council has power to make laws with respect to the appointment and succession of Chiefs or Headmen which naturally includes the power to remove them. The Instrument of Accession is a valid document for the Khasi states to have become an integral part of India and the Instrument of Merger is a red herring.

Letters to the Editor

### Instrument of Accession

Editor,  
One fails to see how the question of accession of Khasi States can be reopened. The accession of Khasi States was an issue arising out of the partition of British India and the negotiations preceding it. It is not within the competence of other bodies to reopen this question. The only party/parties which might have a right to demand it are the Rulers (the Syiems/Chiefs) of Khasi States who signed the Instrument of Accession or their successors.

The only documents relevant to the accession were the Instrument of Accession and the Indian Independence Act, 1947.

Yours etc.,  
Morning Star Sumner,  
Shillong - 2

### Hollow explanations

Editor,  
This is in response to a reply to a letter from the Prin-

icipal, Pine Mount School, Shillong that appeared in these columns on Oct 2, 2021. As expected, the Principal has provided attractive replies to the concerns raised by me through my letter that appeared on Oct 1, 2021. Well, she has to defend the school as there are no alternatives for her. As an employee, it is natural to be myopic to see that things are going normal. But we the parents are watching from outside and know very well the state of education in the school. It is not true that online classes started on April 3, 2020 as no such information was provided to the parents or the students then. Being a parent, I know much more as to what is happening in the academic front of my daughter. The point is that the school is totally irresponsible when it comes to education. The teachers were merely asking the students to read and understand by themselves by providing only instructions on WhatsApp and not online teaching.

I don't know which classes are referred to where the students are apparently tired

The appointment of Prof. Prabha Shankar Shukla as the new Vice-Chancellor of North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong two months ago marked the end of a fruitless and distasteful regime of SK Srivastava and his cronies, under whose misguidance, the University touched a new low on every front. In his tenure of about 6 years in NEHU, Srivastava has tried and succeeded to a great extent to misguide and manipulate every statutory body of NEHU through his nefarious designs and malafide intentions. With the support cronies with misplaced ambitions, he has destroyed and dismantled all set provisions and practices that were necessary for the smooth functioning of the University. He failed to understand and follow the NEHU Act, Statutes and Ordinances in letter and spirit and disregarded established norms and practices in the day-to-day running of the University. The end result was that he was like the most unwanted weed of NEHU Campuses and the State of Meghalaya as a whole. There has never been such an unceremonious exit of a Vice-Chancellor in NEHU as we saw in case of Srivastava which he rightly deserved. In his entire tenure, he practiced and propagated lies and mediocrity at every level and in doing so he was emboldened by some of the bona-fide members of NEHU community which was very unfortunate. While completely vitiating the working and academic environment of NEHU, Srivastava, has left several challenges for the new Vice-Chancellor (VC)-Prof. Shukla. Let me dwell upon some of the vital ones.

Firstly, the present VC has to instill and bolster the confidence of faculty in the University's administration which had eroded during the previous regime. Transparency and accountability have to be accorded utmost priority among the NEHU community. So far, Prof. Shukla seems to be hitting the right notes and working towards improving the working atmosphere of NEHU and gradually gaining the confidence of university's stake holders. Shunting all those who were hand in glove with the previous VC to damage the reputation of NEHU would send the right signals and some of these names are known to all. Some of them even went to the extent of barging into the residence of a faculty member along with the previous VC to threaten him which was highly uncalled for and unbecoming of the VC and Pro-VC. Such goons should have no place in the functioning of the University or in any democratic system.

Secondly, bringing the students back to the campuses in a phased manner should have been the priority of the incumbent VC taking all due precautions and fol-

lowing SOPs of Covid-19. It's good to see the VC has taken some initiative in this direction and by the time this article is published, perhaps we will have students in our campuses. Thirdly, the financial discipline has to be enforced in order to strengthen the functioning of NEHU. In an academic institution, the bulk of 70-80% of its funds cannot be spent on non-academic activities such as infrastructure development including its beautification or fortification akin to defence establishments, leaving only about 20% of funds for academic activities as done by the previous VC. Focus has to be on students' welfare, teaching and research that will improve our stature as a university which will ultimately benefit the community, particularly the State of Meghalaya.

It is time to bring in financial discipline and to

By Dr. Lakhon Kma



demand accountability and transparency in the functioning of the Community College in Wahajer which was deliberately ignored by the previous VC. The Community College is NEHU's asset. Its development should be a concern of all stakeholders of Meghalaya. A white paper is necessary which should be placed before the NEHU community and perhaps the public of Meghalaya on how much money was spent in the last 6 years and what is the outcome from the Community College. It is equally important to know from which Head of Accounts money was diverted to the Community College and if the funds were duly sanctioned and expenditure audited. Similarly, the functioning of the Campus Development Department needs intervention. During the previous VC, it was in the limelight for all the wrong reasons including anomalies in the tendering process, etc. Similarly, the appointment of Chief Vigilance Officer by the previous VC was in gross violation of the criteria and procedure laid down in the

Central Vigilance Commission Manual 2017 which has been reiterated by Ministry of Education, Govt. of India. Moreover, the outgoing Vice Chancellor's dubious roles in the tendering, procurement and recruitment processes raises a big question mark on his neutrality, honesty and integrity which will only harm the reputation of NEHU.

Another big challenge for Prof. Shukla is to complete the filling-up of vacant positions and the promotions of teachers under Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) for different levels. The previous VC has neither completed the promotions nor appointed a single new faculty in NEHU in the last 6 years although there were more than 150 vacant teaching positions. Timely promotions and new appointments will go a long way in motivating the teaching community and strengthening the teaching-learning

the National Education Policy 2020. It will be a huge task to mould our curriculum as per the NEP 2020. While there is a general agreement that the NEP is a game changer, the difficulty is its implementation vis-a-vis the existing curriculum, particularly at the UG/PG levels.

In order to overcome these challenges plaguing NEHU, the new VC has to act swiftly and decisively keeping the welfare of NEHU as a priority. In his endeavour, it is imperative that members of statutory bodies-the Academic Council, Executive Council, University's Court, Finance Committee and Board of Research Studies, particularly the Executive Council, act responsibly. Certainly, the Associations such as NEHUTA, MeTTA-NEHU, MeCAW, etc. will provide necessary support and the checks and balances in the smooth functioning of NEHU.

I have highlighted only few challenges out of a long list of ills that are staring at the present VC. No doubt, Prof. Shukla has inherited unpleasant challenges, over which he had no choice and which require immediate and simultaneous attention. However, he has all the choices to decide what kind of legacy he would like to build as a VC in the next 5 years. Unlike the previous VC, who treated NEHU as his private enterprise where he was guided by his impulsive nature and whims and fancies of a few, we do hope that the present VC will be different. While the VC can take some time to understand the nitty-gritty of the functioning of a large University like NEHU, he can't afford to take too long. Five years is too short a time if a person has to restore the credibility of NEHU and make a name as a VC. Five years was too long for someone like Srivastava to do time-passing business and bring shame to the office of VC.

In order to clear the mess created by the previous regime and to move ahead with the rebuilding process, the incumbent VC will certainly need more than a pair of helping hands. This begins with the appointment of Pro-VCs who understand NEHU and command the respect and faith of all stakeholders. To those he can delegate powers and responsibilities to assist him to achieve the goals and aspirations of the NEHU community and the State of Meghalaya at a much faster rate. To this end, a widely accepted name with enough good credentials has been suggested by the majority of the stakeholders which is awaiting its coronation by the VC. We are desperate to see NEHU rise up and build again to its earlier glory and achieve much more in order to benefit the State of Meghalaya in particular, the region and the country in general.

(The author is President of Meghalaya Tribal Teacher's Association-NEHU (MeTTA-NEHU).)

## Outage during whistle-blower's hearing has ominous portends

By K Raveendran

It is ominous that the Facebook outage, which denied over a billion users of their favourite social media platform, coincided with a hearing attended by insider whistleblower Frances Haugen before the US Senate Commerce, Science and Transport Subcommittee. What transpired at the hearing remains largely unreported. That Frances was armed with thousands of secret internal documents, which she has apparently shared with US Securities and Exchange Commission, members of the Congress and some newspapers, is highly disconcerting to founder Zuckerberg, who saw his fortunes shaved by not less than \$6 billion as the company

board. The company insists that it does not allow hate speech, but it has woefully inadequate mechanisms to enforce this principle. In fact, Frances Haugen's most important complaint against her former company is that it is grossly understaffed when it comes to auditing for undesirable content. In short, the supranational outfit has grown into a Leviathan, which is not amenable to any kind of control.

That is only one aspect of the problem. Indians have been significantly exposed to another dangerous tendency by the platform to treat those who are in authority, or those who wield control over by far its biggest market, differently than the rest of the



share price dropped nearly five percent in the space of a few hours that had seen the platform go down. This was in addition to tens of millions of dollars in advertisement revenue that the platform lost during the outage.

Frances Haugen's complaint that Facebook 'prefers profit before people' has by now become famous as a one-liner indictment against the social media giant, which has over the years grown into a supranational power, wielding usurped authority over 1.6 billion people, a real threat to civilized human progress and democracy. Using far more powerful algorithms that Zuckerberg had employed while founding his Facemash to provide

people. More specifically, it has been accused of going soft on the BJP, while showing less sympathy to the opposition parties when it comes to inflammatory content. Facebook's former top public policy executive Ankhil Das had even communicated to the staff that harsh treatment of violations by the ruling BJP would be detrimental to the company's business in India.

The 'policy' led to a public outcry after a Wall Street Journal report exposed favouritism towards BJP which ensured that certain anti-Muslim posts by some of the saffron party leaders continued to appear although these would have straightaway qualified to be

**India is of course one of the most important markets for Facebook, which by itself is a huge worry, given that the social media giant has been involved in many unseemly controversies. With more than 300 million users for Facebook and another 400 million for its messaging platform WhatsApp, the company is a top influence peddler in India.**

a tool of students of Harvard University, where he was a second year student, to shame each other and the members of the faculty, Facebook is almost back to the original sin and perhaps more, by helping create division among people, proliferating fake news, and undermining electoral processes and by implication democracy. A Facebook executive even claimed that the company was responsible for Donald Trump being elected as the US President.

India is of course one of the most important markets for Facebook, which by itself is a huge worry, given that the social media giant has been involved in many unseemly controversies. With more than 300 million users for Facebook and another 400 million for its messaging platform WhatsApp, the company is a top influence peddler in India. And this influence has often been used, or allowed to be used, if you will, for purposes that have not been entirely above

considered hate speech. The platform has also been used to spread fake news, many times directed against vulnerable people and political parties which are not necessarily in the good books of the platform due to their poor utility in terms of preserving the market.

The social media platform has also been used by interested parties to whip up communal tension in different parts of the country. Wittingly or unwittingly, Facebook has had a role in certain lynching incidents being enacted, as the perpetrators hijacked the platform to spread fake news and panic about possible child abduction and harm being done to cows in different parts of the country. Similarly, Facebook-owned WhatsApp has become a major vehicle for misinformation and fake news, particularly during election times, which clearly amounts to a threat to free and fair elections as well as the proper functioning of democracy. (IPA Service)

and their future. Moreover, the Principal has to be active and far-sighted to sustain and provide quality education to the school where parents like us send our daughters to learn by proper means. The Government must do an academic audit of the school so that the students don't suffer and quality education is provided.

Yours etc.,  
Donald Swer,  
Shillong

### Open up educational institutions for all

Editor,  
Through your esteemed column, I would like to draw your attention and the attention of the appropriate authorities to the issue regarding the opening of educational institutions in the Shillong agglomeration. Many colleges have boldly confronted the risk of opening their gates to students on alternate days, following the regulated SOPs. Some are yet to do so and are skeptical of it. But isn't life all about risk-

taking and making the best opportunity out of it?

Some institutions have been biased towards their students and make exceptions for students of Science or Commerce streams while they have taken students of Humanities/ Arts for granted. They have left them to the mercy of the teachers in the online mode thereby gambling with the lives of these students. Yet, we all are made to bear cumbersome amount as course fees which are hard-earned by our parents. And many students have been inoculated in anticipation of having offline classes.

Even so, online classes are frequently disrupted either due to connectivity issues or other technical problems and even due to negligence of the students or even, in fact, the teachers. These mediums are often taken for granted by many and I believe we shall bear the negative impacts in the near future. Of course, this can be rectified. One way is with the resumption of educational institutions for all students with the required SOPs without any bias and with utmost urgency.

Someone once asked me

why I enrolled myself in a reputed college and still bear this huge course fee for studying online and enduring the financial crisis, while IGNOU or other open learning sources are available in the market with much less course fees. I was left dumbfounded.

Here's some suggestion to those institutions that are on tenterhooks about opening up. Bring your students, all of them, on alternate days and see them off to their future without any bias and don't leave them at the mercy of online classes. The phrase "Students are the pillars of tomorrow" is just as bleak as your skepticism.

I hope the concerned authorities will take their students into consideration and take appropriate action. I also urge the city's Parents' bodies and Students' Bodies to take heed of this matter.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

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"Strategy is about making choices, trade-offs; it's about deliberately choosing to be different."

-- Michael Porter

## The Shillong Times

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### Modi past twenty

WHEN Prime Minister Narendra Modi completed two decades in office, first as chief minister of Gujarat and later as Prime Minister for repeated terms, the euphoria in the BJP rank and file was markedly low-key. This has less to do with the Covid curbs and more to the fact that the government he heads failed to enthuse the general public. Modi, by far, is the most-acceptable leader across the country today, and those who seek to grab the PM chair are pygmies compared to his national appeal. Modi, at the personal level is not corrupt. He has earned his high aura after he was named the PM nominee of the BJP at the Goa conclave months before the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. He retained a part of this goodwill over the past seven years, but a caveat is also that his popularity is dwindling because of his low-key governance styles.

Modi failed to nail the errand or discipline the wayward. This is critical to national well-being. This, despite the massive mandate the people gave him in two successive parliament polls. Reforms were not high on his agenda though the GST, brought forward by the UPA, was pushed through after a long struggle in parliament; and the farm reform bills are stalled in court. India badly requires administrative, judicial and educational reforms. Modi has hardly ever made a mention of these in his Mann Ki Baat, which dealt, typically in Sangh Parivar style, about the past "glories" and little about the present or the future of India. India cannot grow at the pace of a snail, with the Hindu Rate of Growth, when economies in Asia -- as in China and Bangladesh -- are expanding fast. Thus, to praise Modi or his government beyond a level is unjustified.

The central government would need to perform better and an elected leader of the nation must be more energetic and engaging. India cannot walk; it has to run to catch up with the growth elsewhere. Corruption is eating into the veins of the nation in scary ways as is also reflected in the mess-up and loot in the PSU banking sector or the appropriation of national wealth by politicians and bureaucrats across the spectrum. Most regional party leaders are hugely corrupt. Modi as PM is caught in the labyrinth of the archaic systems that work to the advantage of the vested interests and the corrupt in India. Results are not showing up. Unless the Augean stables are cleaned, growth or progress for the nation is impossible.

### Letters to the Editor

#### On the Mukul - Pala conflict

Editor,  
I want to congratulate my known friend Albert Thyrniang for his splendid article, "Reading the Mukul - Pala Conflict" (ST October 6, 2021). I am sure fellow readers got further enlightened about the personal hidden ambitious political agenda that both these two Congress bigwigs play to outwit one another. Though Albert Thyrniang, the writer, is not the subject here, he is known for his all-round incisive analysis on any subject that he writes and he does not delight in superfluous verbosity and expressions. But he loves brevity in message delivery.

If we are to believe the media that at the instance of the Congress High Command Dr Mukul Sangma and Vincent Pala have sunk their differences and discord then let them prove that through their actions on the ground between now and 2023. For now, let us watch and see the drama that will unfold soon in the run up to the game of thrones in our state between them.

It is a fact that the political cum business rivalry between Mukul and Pala will not go away easily. Politically Mukul has a sizeable following not only in Garo Hills but also in Khasi and Jaintia

Hills as well. After all, he was the cabinet minister for long years and Chief Minister for nearly eight years and possesses vast experience in state administration. He knows by heart every nook and corner of administration, policy and programme. However, Pala too cannot be underestimated in the political arena because he is the third time MP and a Union Minister of State for a brief period. He is quite popular in Khasi and Jaintia Hills but he is yet to prove himself in the Garo Hills. He is quite acceptable among the political spectrum in Khasi, Jaintia Hills but not yet in Garo Hills. Moreover, he has no experience in running a state government unlike Dr Mukul. He and his coal baron colleagues and other business magnates might have been instrumental in the making and unmaking of governments in the past in Meghalaya but to run the state government as CM is a different ball game though money is the enabler.

As far as wealth is concerned both Dr. Mukul and Pala are comparable. In strategies and diplomacy too both are comparable. On public relations this varies from person to person but Pala has a better PR according to the general public. But on cunningness, craftiness, wit-tiness and egocentricity, Dr Mukul is far ahead of Pala. However, if Pala, Mukul and

We are a society that believes everything in the past was good; the present is problematic. But how far into the past can we go back and is it possible to translocate the past into the present? What purpose will it serve and who will it benefit? Isn't this like driving in reverse gear? Recently, Congress MLA Ampareen Lyngdoh raised the question about the MDA Government's stance on the Instrument of Accession (IoA) and Annexed Agreement (AA). My genuine question is why are we overly worried about the past? Is the worry an honest attempt to understand the past or some kind of a bandwagon to ride on and gain international fame by projecting us Khasis as victims of history? One can understand that an insurgent outfit needs an alibi on which to base its demands on but for an MLA to ask these questions shows that the person gives credence to the contentions demands made by the HNLC that because the 25 Khasi sylems have not signed an Instrument of Merger with Government of India so they are not fully annexed and that India, therefore is an occupation force.

Even the astute Wickliffe Syiem, the Deputy Syiem of Hima Nongstoin who was against the signing of the (IoA) by his uncle Sib Sing Syiem never raised the issue of the Instrument of Merger because he understood the status of the Syiems which is not akin to that of the rulers of kingdoms in the rest of India. He understood that the (IoA) is a final agreement to accede to India. It was because Wycliffe Syiem disagreed vehemently with his uncle on the signing of the IoA that he decided to leave his Hima and country, India and settle in Rajai village in Tahirpur Upazila of Sunamganj, in the then East Pakistan, later Bangladesh until the time of his death in 1988.

The Khasi society has never had an academic debate on the issue of the Instrument of Merger and whether the Khasi states have not fully acceded to the Indian Union as claimed by HNLC and the few claimants to being exclusive interpreters of Khasi history. If there have been such academic discussions I am not aware of them. But a close reading of David R. Syiemlieh's book, "Layers of History: Essays

their cohorts combine and stay united within the Congress, it will be a formidable force to be reckoned with by other political rivals.

If we judge the political situation that prevails now, the mood of the people is inclined towards the Congress. But if the Congress top leaders, especially the Pala lobby and the Mukul lobby, are at loggerheads the people's blessings will reluctantly go towards the NPP, though the NPP led MDA government has performed miserably so far.

Amidst the gloom of this worthless MDA government, the UDP could not make political capital out of this aimless and directionless government. Being in the government, it should have exploited the situation to the hilt for its political gains to enable it to spread out its potential regional force to enhance its tentacles not only in Khasi and Jaintia Hills but to pluck the empty cracks and crevices in the Garo Hills. For doing so the leaders of UDP should not only be Khasi Jaintia centric but should reach out towards Garo Hills which needs healing a touch from penury of leadership, the drudgery of poverty, absolute neglect and exploitation to the core. For this the Party must be dedicated and work hard and be backed by resources and be committed and ready to shell out even from its

pockets and also from the accumulated wealth of its leaders.

How many UDP leaders ever thought that (late) B B Lyngdoh and his former colleagues from Khasi hills had travelled the length and breadth of Garo Hills, made friends with the people there, enrolled members into APHLC/HPU/UDP and selected many of them to contest elections and then inducted some of them into the cabinet then. They did that with love and mutual understanding and they got much respect and love. They were humble; they did not have much money then but they were accepted widely, welcomed everywhere and never went hungry. They got the best accommodation that the people there could afford. Yes, to you UDP leaders and members including the President, give your 100%; be committed party workers, always give up your comfort zones and people will respect and accept you wherever you go. Perhaps someday you will see people will embrace and flock to you. But with a cold attitude, narrow outlook and stingy hearts the party will not reach far. Yes, you can do it, if you will.

About other smaller regional parties, the lesser said the better. They come and go like shooting stars. They have not ploughed anywhere so from where will they reap?

## HNLC, Instrument of Accession and Politics

# Why is the past always better?

By Patricia Mukhim

on Khasi-Jaintias," gives a very unequivocal explanation of why the Instrument of Merger was not signed. Syiemlieh writes, "The Khasi states had acceded into India but refused to merge on the grounds that the chiefs were elected heads of their respective states." Sardar Valabhhai Patel visited Shillong in January 1948 to sort out the merger issue but it ended in



a stalemate for the Khasis said that only a constituted durbar of states could arrive at such a decision. Accordingly, the Dominion Agent drew up rules for constituting the Khasi State Constitution Making Durbar which took nearly 16 months. This Durbar was inaugurated on 29 April 1949.

Perhaps the confusion vis-à-vis the Instrument of Merger lies in the fact that at about the same time Indian Constituent Assembly was also preparing the final draft of the Constitution. According to Syiemlieh, J.M. Nichols Roy was a member of both Constituent Assembly and Khasi States Constitution Making Durbar. Nichols Roy urged the Khasi states Durbar to accept the broad framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. A report by the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, the Premier of Assam, had stated that the Khasi states had comparatively little revenue or authority and seemed to depend for a good deal of support on the Political officer in their relations with the people.

It appears that Sati Raja the Syiem of Myllem had filed a case against the Dominion of India and the Assam Government asking that his state had recovered or was

entitled to recover sovereign rights, power, functions and jurisdiction over his state. Syiemlieh writes, "This must have been quite an embarrassment for the governments of India and Assam. Sri Prakasa the Governor of Assam met Sati Raja and others on December 31, 1949 and was able to make the Syiem withdraw his case."

Another surprise that

provisions contained in the Sixth Schedule which were to apply to the administration of the Tribal Areas in the State of Assam. Hence the Instrument of Accession stands superseded with the coming into force of the Constitution whereby the tribal areas of the State of Meghalaya today are governed by the provisions of the Constitution of India. Further the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had in the matter of T. Cajee v. U. Jormank Siem, (1961) 1 SCR 750, had settled the law on this matter.

Going by the Constitution therefore it is a well settled case that the Khasi states have acceded to India and there is no point raking up this issue today because it only exposes the faultlines in the Khasi society. Besides, we need to take into account the fact that Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills were territories under British subjugation and had therefore naturally acceded to India after the British handed over all territories to India on August 15, 1947. The Khasi states without the Jaintia Hills would not have been administratively tenable. Those bringing up the past today should realise that Meghalaya is a state and the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people make up an indivisible unit and attempts to create divisions now are fraught with undesirable consequences.

Its important at this juncture, when technology is taking people to new heights that we speak of the future and get our young people to be future-ready rather than push them to look over their shoulders to a past that is built on an incubator of disillusionment. Ironically the past always seems full of possibilities while the future wanes by comparison. That's because we need to do a lot of grunt work to create our paths to the future. It is neither easy nor as romantic as the past. The present and future are real. Unfortunately, the past is subject to manipulation and nearly always involves memory trafficked into an inflammatory myth. We need to look at the past with our eyes wide open and with objectivity leaving out the romantic bits because as pointed out by Roger Cohen in a well-argued essay, "When the past overwhelms it can turn victim into oppressor. While history illuminates it can also blind."

With the adoption of the Constitution the power of the chiefs so far as administration is concerned, came to an end. Article 244(2) of the Constitution makes special

#### Bumpy road ahead for NEHU

Editor,  
In recent memory, not a single day would have passed with NEHU not being in the news. This brings into question the public perception of the university when we talk about the NIRF rankings methodology in which there has been a gargantuan drop for the university. And does this vindicate the fact that NEHU is actually performing well, and the frequent coterie who have been the disruptive forces from time immemorial have suddenly grown all silent? Absolutely not! To give you an example, my brother passed out from this University last year and the marksheets for the same were only issued after almost a year. This brings to light the fact that a premier institute like NEHU does not have the infrastructure and capacity to print out an A4 sheet paper advocating the provincial degree of a pupil! And, to make matters worse, when we had a distinguished and intellectually competent professor being the frontrunner for the top job that was brazenly

overlooked and a person was sent in with zero knowledge of tribal ethos and sentiments to handle such a large university. Two and a half months have passed since we the stakeholders had looked for the new regime, to bring in some changes but what do we get? The only thing which is visible in campus is the daily cutting of grass which had earlier provided a much needed succour from the vile pollution of the city whenever we visited the University. I hope the new VC being an Agriculture graduate realises that ecosystems are the need of the hour and what the University actually needs is academics inputs, motivational and dynamic officers, respected and thought provoking lecturers instead of guest lecturers, timely promotions for those who deserve it and last but not the least, meaningful visits to Delhi and elsewhere to bring in new ideas and funds for the University than just official leave. I hope the stakeholders gain some insight as to what is expected from the new regime.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Senior Journalist,  
Via email

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## Roller-Coaster ride for the Congress

By OJ Thabah

The past few days particularly the last week of September has been quite an eventful one for the Indian National Congress and from a neutral standpoint, the signs are less than stellar. The entry of two young leaders, Kanhaiya Kumar and Jignesh Mevani, is a welcome move for the party which is in need of fresh and young blood after the departure of many of its 'Young Turks' in the recent past like Alpesh Thakor, Dhaval Singh Zala, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Sushmita Dev, Jitin Prasad and most recently Lalitesh Tripathi citing 'lack of ideological clarity'. But, the Gandhis and the supporters of the party were left staggered on September 28, by PCC chief Navjot Singh Sidhu, who posted a letter of resignation that indicated his displeasure at the changes in the Punjab administration. Sources indicate that

Kumar, P.S. Prasanth and recently PV Balachandran who were unhappy with the style of functioning of the new leadership headed by KPCC President K Sudhakaran and LoP V D Satheesan. One time rivals of the two factions within the Kerala Congress Oomen Chandy and Ramesh Chennithala came together to voice their vexation for not being consulted in the selection process of 14 DCC chiefs by the troika of Sudhakaran, Satheesan and AICC general secretary, K.C. Venugopal.

In the recently concluded, West Bengal by-polls to Samsanganj, the highly-magnified Bhawanipur, and Jangipur assembly seats the Grand old party decided not to contest for the latter two seats. Not putting up a candidate against Mamata Banerjee in Bhawanipur was understandable as the chances of not winning and

definitely losing its deposits is extremely colossal. But, not fielding a candidate, in the Jangipur seat has to surely go down as a massive blunder on the Grand Old Party's West Bengal unit. Having been elected the most times since 1951 from the seat and securing 19.41% of the vote share in the 2016 State elections, the Congress decided to leave the seat for its Left ally, the RSP and its candidate Jane Alam Mian who secured only 4.5% of the vote share. Surely, a Congress candidate would have fared really well and would have boosted the demoralized morale of its supporters to prepare well for the next polls in the seat than the Left which has become nothing more than a spent force in West Bengal politics. Meanwhile, Murshidabad is the only district where the Congress has a viable presence with its leader in the lower house of the Parliament Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury representing the Berhampore constituency. If the slide isn't arrested sooner then the chances of the party fading into oblivion are sky-high and the state might just become Congress mukth -- a dream of both the BJP and TMC.

As Punjab bubbles, in other regions, where factions are busy fighting among themselves, the scenario is really no different. The main leadership's weakness has led to the Congress' breakdown. In contrast, the BJP with a strong central leadership has managed to tide over unrest effortlessly in Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Gujarat. In less than a year these states witnessed a change of Chief Ministers (4 times) and cabinet without many entanglements. The Congress' lack of vision has discouraged party supporters and workers inevitably, prompting many to seek viable solutions. More significantly, the party really hasn't excelled in opposing the BJP with its style of Hindu nationalism in intellectual terms which has managed to capture the attention of the public.

(The writer is a graduate student from St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata)

The Congress experienced dual regressions, with Sidhu resigning from the post and former Goa Chief Minister, Luizinho Faleiro, leaving the party. The 70-year old Faleiro eventually joined the ambitious Trinamool Congress along with 9 other leaders in the presence of AITC national general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP, Abhishek Banerjee. The representation of Congress is currently reduced to four in the Goa Vidhan Sabha, whereas in the last elections the party gained 17 members and emerged as the single largest party. TMC's expansions in Goa, Tripura and Assam have all come at the expense of the Congress. TMC along with AAP have positioned themselves as "better alternatives to the BJP" than the Grand Old Party albeit their national credibility is yet to be tested to the fullest outside their citadels. The Gandhi siblings, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi - eager to assert their authority against the old guard - decision to back the mercurial skipper Sidhu over Captain Amarinder proved tragically detrimental as the Punjab unit has been left rudderless and yet to appoint a new chief with elections due to be held early next year. The latter had the last laugh with an "I told you so...he is not a stable man" twitter jibe.

The Gandhi siblings probably felt their involvement would settle the internal strife in the Congress and reinforce it ahead of next year's Assembly polls. The Gandhi siblings themselves have failed to quell the struggles in different state divisions most notably in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Odisha and Kerala. Kerala unit's infighting came into the open with an outbreak of resignations which included V.M. Sudheeran, K.P. Anil

Sidhu was angry with Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi's modifications to his cabinet by people perceived to be close to him. Although Sidhu was commonly seen to serve as "super-chairman" in several choices, in subsequent appointments he was allegedly overlooked as contentious.

Sources indicate that

"When you close your eyes to tragedy,  
you close your eyes to greatness."

— Stephen Vizinczey

## The Shillong Times

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### Media-Government interface

REPORTS of government functionaries unwilling to share information with the media in West Khasi Hills District is troubling. Those in Government tend to forget that the media plays a critical role in keeping democracy alive and in keeping checks and balances in governance. The media is as important to democracy as the three other pillars namely the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. Those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear from the media. In fact, media and government functionaries ought to have a working relationship and a healthy respect for each other. It's a different matter that those in Government today and that starts with the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, are disdainful of the media. This example from the top does not bode well for democracy in India. Also, the culture of reprisal against media persons for reporting what those in government want to hide has only muddied the ecosystem in which the media operates. No wonder India's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index, 2021 is at 142 out of 180 countries.

Without media scrutiny the government could drive itself down a precipice. The media is the bridge between state institutions and the public. It is through the media that people are informed of government programmes and policies and public spending. The media is as much a social audit body as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is a public audit institution. Above all, media is informing the public what they ought to know about government functioning so that they can make informed choices while voting in a new government. But it appears that those in government want to continue their untrammelled rule by hiding the truth of their actions from public glare. Studies have shown that countries with a higher degree of media performance show higher levels of political participation and less corruption. They also tend to have a more lively civil society even while elected representatives seem to reflect the preferences of citizens more adequately. These findings illustrate that media performance is clearly related to at least some aspects of the functioning of a democratic regime.

It is not without reason therefore that the media is called the fourth pillar of democracy. India has proven that whenever a democratic government tries to be autocratic, the media plays its role to the hilt to safeguard the interests of citizens. Unfortunately, it seems to have become the norm in Meghalaya that bureaucrats including police officials refuse to divulge information to media persons as if such information is state secret. Even the Right to Information Act has not been able to bring transparency in governance. This hesitance to provide information is a contentious issue that must be addressed in the right platform.

# Online education in India – the good, the bad and the ugly!

By Dr Amiya De

With educational institutes closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has been encouraging online education to achieve academic continuity. Most high-end private and public institutions have made the switch smoothly using online platforms such as Zoom, Google classrooms, Microsoft teams, etc., while many still find it a herculean task. The challenges of online education are multifaceted. It is time that we Indians, as a society, understand the realms of online education – in India, for India.

### The Good

Online education allows for learning something beyond the norm. A learner has access to unlimited topics and global experts in niche subjects – something otherwise not affordable or imaginable for many. Online programs allow people of a wide age group to learn at their own pace, without inhibitions, and without compromising on their other responsibilities.

With the emergence and spread of COVID-19 in India, online education has trickled down to the most basic level – schools and colleges! When asked about their experience with online teaching, a student from a college in Shillong said, "The online option is a need in this pandemic situation. It has brought education to us without us going anywhere, and it is more flexible". Probably, students are finding it a welcome change from strict schedules and long-distance commutes to attend classes. For some others, who find learning in large classes intimidating, this may be a less stressful option. Many teachers are making the best of this situation by exploring new methods of teaching and assessment.

This is encouraging. But the moment online education moves from an optional to the only form of learning, and that too long term, the bad and the ugly slowly become evident. India is beginning to get a taste of this now.

### The Bad

Using the internet for entertainment is common, but for online lessons is a big challenge. Teachers may not be well-versed with creating digital content, and conveying it effectively online. A sudden expectation from them to upgrade, and from students to adapt, is unfair.

Body language and eye contact, which are important cues for the teacher, are difficult to perceive in an online class. "I do not receive continual feedback in the

form of students' reactions during online sessions, which reduces the effectiveness of teaching", says a college teacher in Shillong. How many students have paid attention in a class? Of those, how many understood the lesson? Is the teaching pace alright? Are some students getting left behind? These questions arise even in traditional classrooms, but they are harder to address in online classes. A parent of an 8-year-old attending a private school in Shillong says, "There shouldn't be online classes for such young kids. Their concentration span is small and they do not pay attention after a while." The 8-year-old

device and connection they have. Around 5–8 students are completely absent till date and rest are fluctuating", says a school teacher in Shillong. A teacher in a government-aided school from Shillong says, "It is a frustrating experience to engage students of lower classes in online mode. There are network issues on both teachers' and students' ends".

To deal with internet connectivity and device availability issues, 'classes' in many places are happening via sharing of videos by teachers over WhatsApp or YouTube, so that students can watch them at their convenience. This too, however,



added, "I hate them (online classes)!"

Even college students seem to value the in-class physical learning experience much more than a virtual one. Many acknowledge that phones can be very distracting. In addition, science and technology programs often include hands-on laboratory sessions, dissertation projects and field trips to complement theoretical studies. This aspect of learning is severely limited in online education.

Finally, education is not just about subject knowledge but also about developing social skills and sportsmanship among the students, which is built over years. Relying solely on online education may hinder the holistic development of children, and many may underperform later in their professional and personal lives.

### The Ugly

While India enjoys a wide geographic and cultural diversity, it also suffers from a huge socio-economic divide. Only a small part of the Indian population has access to online education right now. Interrupted power supply, weak or non-existent internet connectivity, and unaffordability to buy necessary devices are major concerns. "In a Class of 40 students, after two months of online classes, around 20 students regularly attend class with whatever

comes with difficulties in understanding the lessons and promotes rote learning. The same is true of pre-recorded sessions aired on the television (e.g., Swayam Prabha DTH channels) and radio (audio lessons, through All India Radio), although they do cater to a wider student population that cannot avail live online classes.

That is not all. With limitations of livelihood in a family, the first ones to receive a blow are often girls. In a recent survey of 733 students studying in government schools in Bihar, only 28% of the girls had smartphones in their homes, in contrast to 36% of the boys. These smartphones almost always belonged to male adults, often being lesser accessible to girls than boys, and half of these families could not afford internet data packages. Therefore, lessons aired on television was the main option for a majority of the students participating in this survey. However, girls were found to spend a disproportionately longer time on household chores than boys, which often overlapped with the time of telecast of these lessons. Such gaps in education could worsen the already wide gender gap in employment in India.

Students with disabilities are among the most dependent on in-person education

and hence least likely to benefit from distance learning. A survey by Swabhiman (an NGO working mainly in Odisha), in association with the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, indicated that 73% of the students with disabilities had concerns regarding the availability of study material in appropriate formats. Also, 79% of their teachers were apprehensive about teaching effectively without use of touch to students with learning disorders, autism and low vision. The lack of effective education may further aggravate the high dropout rates of these children from schools (nearly 50% pre-COVID) in developing countries.

*Uniform and effective online education in India—what is being done and what more is possible?*

There is a global recognition of the need for inclusive education policies during the pandemic. To make online education more effective, accessible and safer, various online resources, training programs and schemes have been developed by the Government of India for students, teachers and educational institutions.

The teaching community has come together to form a nationwide informal and voluntary network of teachers, called the Discussion Forum of Online Teaching (DFOT), to discuss different aspects of online teaching, and create repositories of essential resources.

Cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) could open new possibilities for innovative and personalized approaches catering to different learning abilities. IIT Kharagpur has collaborated with Amazon Web Services to develop the National AI Resource Platform (NAIRP), the future possibilities of which include monitoring eye movement, motion and other parameters for better teaching and learning. Google has also indicated future support in AI based education in India.

### Parting thoughts

Online education opens up a lot of possibilities for students and teachers alike. Yet, it may also widen the inequalities in the socio-economic fabric of India. All our policies and interventions with regard to online education should strive to be inclusive. Good vision, sincere efforts and time will show India the way ahead.

*(The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Raid Laban College, Shillong, Postdoctoral fellow from JNU. Email: amiyasindhudey@gmail.com)*

## Kashmir tourism season turns into terror season

# Hindu bonhomie with Narendra Modi has ebbed

By Sushil Kutty

Scrapping Article 370 gave the Modi Government much to crow about. But it did not stop the terror attacks. Or the Kashmir killings. Today, the Kashmiri Hindu is back in his hellhole of the late 1980s. There's a new strain of terrorists stalking him and killing him with a bullet to his head. Women are not spared.

They say it's the retribution of "The Resistance Force". Should we conclude, then, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah failed to read the errors of their way when they scrapped 370? The answer is in the sudden spurt in targeted killings of

attention – equal parts heroism and equal parts notoriety – for scripting the takeover of Kashmir. Much was expected of the move. Kashmir shut down and unarmed Kashmiri rendered incommunicado. Not the armed terrorists though. They had the ammo to spare and spray.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is his usual silent self; worse than even Maumoon Singh. Modi hasn't spoken on Lakhimpur-Kheri nor has he condemned the targeted killings of Hindus in Kashmir. It's time Modi is disabused of the notion that people vote for him no matter what.



Hindus in the Kashmir Valley. In the state's impotence to perform against them!

The b@#t@\*ds are not sparing even harmless 'paani-poori' vendors. A high school Sikh principal and a Hindu teacher were pulled out of a line-up of teachers and shot dead. The two had made the mistake of answering "Hindu" instead of "Muslim" to a pointed question. It wasn't murder, it was brutal execution.

Now, there's the familiar trope that the victims are heroes! From the elderly Kashmiri Pandit chemist to the taxi aggregator, all the five killed in cold blood in Kashmir are being hailed as heroes. BJP spokespersons are skirting the hard questions. Instead, they're talking of the "gaurav of dying for the tricolour" and the unsung bravery of the unheralded victim!

Modi and the BJP must be conveyed that he/BJP cannot anymore count on a Hindu vote-bank. That the situation has changed since 2014 and 2019: The Hindu bonhomie with Modi has ebbed. The honeymoon is over. The Hindu has seen through Modi's camouflage.

Narendra Modi's confidence that he stands no risk probably stems from his belief that there's no alternative to him. That the West Bengal outcome did not disturb his ratings and nor will a setback in Uttar Pradesh in 2022. He believes his hardcore Hindu will vote for him irrespective and regardless.

But the BJP is rattled nevertheless by recent events: Whether it's the appointment of a Dalit Chief Minister in Punjab or Congress victories in local elections in several states, including in Maharashtra, the BJP is sagging

*They say it's the retribution of "The Resistance Force". Should we conclude, then, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah failed to read the errors of their way when they scrapped 370? The answer is in the sudden spurt in targeted killings of Hindus in the Kashmir Valley. In the state's impotence to perform against them!*

It's nauseating. This repetitive ode to the State's failure to bring to heel a new strain of terrorism. The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90 was hastened by bone-chilling calls from the mosque, to get out or face the consequences. Now, it's the silent bullet to the back of the head; no warning, no ultimatum. Far more scary; far more bone-chilling.

Every Hindu in Kashmir now knows he is in the crosshairs. The CCTV footage of one killing is particularly shocking. The perpetrator is seen silently step up behind the 'Hindu' and shoot him dead from less than a foot away. Can anybody make sense out of such martyrdom? The victim died on his feet!

August 5, 2019 Amit Shah gained worldwide at-

against the ropes.

The not so random targeted killings of Hindus in Kashmir may trigger a renewed exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley. The 'State' has no clue who the terrorists are. With anger boiling over and the Uttar Pradesh elections slated for Jan-Feb 2022, panic has set in. Amit Shah has sent a team of counter-terror experts to help the local police.

This is the tourist season in the Kashmir Valley and "Hindu tourists" make up the bulk of tourist arrivals. Pakistan-based terror groups are on a high after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Amit Shah will have to prove he is better than his junior MoS (Home) Ajay Kumar Mishra in every which way. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

## Common sense and the common man

Editor,  
Well, the time for self-aggrandisement (google defines it as an act undertaken to increase your own power and influence or to draw attention to your own self importance), chest beating, accusing your rivals of deceit and incompetence (forgetting that they are probably doing the same to you), making grand promises that both the speaker and the listener know for a fact are fundamentally flawed and false, is once again upon us. I call it the festive season of falsehood! Political parties, their supporters and candidates themselves have once again suddenly woken up to the fact that the season for putting their best well heeled foot has once again arrived. Yes, I am speaking of election time, a period when one is supposed to give serious thoughts on issues of governance, leadership, development and prospects for the future but when instead we waste our time, vigour and energy on identifying who is the most winnable

candidate or to put it in other words, who is the guy with the most amount of cash to purchase votes.

Election time is usually a time for feasts, picnics, car rallies, free food, free drinks and almost everything is on the house. Money is usually distributed as if it comes as manna from heaven. A festive air of expectations pervades the whole constituency where the election is to be held. The electorate is openly encouraged to gossip, discuss and talk about who is the most lavish of all the candidates so as to establish his credentials as the best person to serve the people of that constituency. As a voter this is my biggest grouse against all the political parties of Meghalaya – that they openly encourage the electorate to vote for the person who pleases the most rather than enlighten the electorate about the proven quality of the candidate to serve the people. The Congress, the NPP, the UDP, the BJP and all the other chutput parties who swear by the Almighty that they are here to serve the people, all of them are hypocrites. They are simply there to win; to purchase votes; to come to power and after the elections, to hell with everyone. We have seen all

of this before and I challenge anyone in these bye elections to prove me wrong. May God help all of us.

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

## What have we become?

Editor,  
The political parties have all started their jamboree of claiming they will win the bye-elections. Candidates from the young to the has-beens and the tried and tested are all doing the jumping jack flash leaving one party to join another just because they can't get a ticket to ride (the famous Beatles song). And we are talking here of only three seats to be filled due to vacancies arising out of the death of the MLAs of those constituencies. And this is only for a period of 15 months after which the 2023 elections will be held. Sometimes these candidates think the electors are fools. If those that had jumped fences to join Party A or B fail to win this time and then fail to get tickets in 2023 which other political party will they join. And what will they peddle to the voters? It is a

fact that politicians in this state have never bothered about ideology. All they care about is winning and then feathering their nests. It's our collective foolishness that we fail to show these candidates their place.

Of course it is also true that voters care more about how much money we can pocket from each candidate. There was a time when we took money from one candidate and openly showed our support to him/her. Now we try and convince all candidates that we will vote for them and get our share of the moolah. That's what we have become and there's nothing shameful about that because the candidates have taught us this shamelessness. Now we are tutored to be the worst version of ourselves so it's all squared up. Does it make any difference to our lives if candidate A or B or C wins? The poor will remain poor or destitute and the few wealthy people with political clout will continue to become wealthy. That's our fate. We were never destined for greatness. No hill state, no rest was that war cry in the 1960's. Now we have a hill state but many of us are striving harder than ever before. When will we see hope?

Yours etc.,  
JL Nongrum,  
Via email

## COVID death toll

Editor,  
It has been estimated that there have been around 16 million pandemic excess deaths worldwide. In other words, 16 million deaths occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic over and above what normally might be expected. It indicates that the global toll of the pandemic is more than three times the official toll of Covid-19 deaths. Experts estimate that India's pandemic excess deaths could be a little under 3 million to around 5 million, that is, India could account for around a quarter of global pandemic deaths.

In India, around 9 million people die during normal times each year. An extra 3-5 million deaths indicate that India is one of the hardest hit countries in the world. The estimate points to the fact that India has experienced its greatest mortality since independence. Official Covid-19 deaths do not give explicit information about the grim reality of the pandemic.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G.S.,  
Kollam

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

# Craving an international vacation?

By N. Lothungbeni Humsae

While travellers are looking ahead to booking trips to stunning locations around the globe, as the festive season approaches, their desire is still a dream far from reality. Travel from India to certain countries is still restricted, and there are still strong safety concerns for international trips. But here's what you didn't know: India has many stunning tourist spots which have a heritage, beauty and feel of International hot spots.

Right from the picturesque hill stations, stunning beaches to peaceful getaways among nature and culture, there is an interesting choice of destinations across the country that can give stiff competition to international counterparts. So, for your next vacation, visit one of these unique gems that can give you an essence of an international destination curated by EaseMyTrip.com:

## PONDICHERRY

Known as the French capital of India, Pondicherry has an Indo-French culture and has a lot to offer travellers. With beautiful beaches, enticing food, colonial architecture and historical monuments, Pondicherry has been long known as the Paris of the East. The French colony in Pondicherry has a row of vintage old houses and colourful walls which remind travellers of Italy and France. The White Town area of the city is known as the French Quarter, you will have a hard time distinguishing it from an actual street in France. Many of the structures were built by the French during their rule, and are deemed as heritage sites today. Pondicherry is also known for its authentic French cuisine, jazzy nightlife and lively marketplaces.

## ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLAND

The striking beaches and turquoise waters of Andaman make it one of the most sought after holiday destinations. The unique island provides a scenic view, secluded beaches, and a range of activities, which give tough competition to their counterparts in Thailand. The island also provides travellers with an opportunity to explore totally untouched sites and experience an amazing culture like no other. The heavenly beaches in this region provide



the opportunity to try exciting water sports such as sea walking, jet-skiing and snorkelling. The region is also one of the most prominent destinations in the country for underwater diving. Apart from exotic beaches, the territory also has rich flora and fauna, vibrant corals, and scenic landscapes with an intriguing colonial past.

## AULI, UTTARAKHAND

Auli, known as the mini-Switzerland of India is one of the rare skiing destinations in India. Located at an elevation of 2,500 meters, Auli is known for its vast stretches of clean, snow-clad mountain slopes, and is surrounded by coniferous and

oak forests, which provides its striking resemblance to the Swiss Alps. The slopes in the region are suited for both professional and amateur skiers, and there are several centres in the city that offer training to prospective skiers at affordable rates. The quaint hill station provides an exquisite view of the mighty Himalayas along with its peaks, including Nanda Devi, Kamet and Dunagiri. In the summer season, hikers can enjoy walks around the picturesque roads or even explore mountain bike trails.

## MALANA, HIMACHAL

Popularly known as 'Little Greece in Himachal Pradesh', Malana is a charming and serene

village in the state. The topography, unique hilly terrains and pleasant weather in this pristine village will remind you of the beautiful landscapes in Greece. Malana village has unique characteristics which make it different from other cities in the country. The village follows a local system that is more Greek than Indian in both style and system. It has an overwhelming sense of seclusion from the rest of the country, because of which it looks absolutely different from any other city. It is a perfect location for tourists to enjoy hiking, surrounded by green lush and snow-clad mountains. It is also a perfect destination to camp and spend a night under the bright stars.

# Literature & More...

## Anecdotal, though-provoking memoir on India's banking system

This is a highly anticipated account of some of the critical periods in the history of India's financial sector by one of the country's most talented and established banking professionals in the country, Rajnish Kumar, former Chairman of State Bank of India (SBI), India's largest commercial bank.

"The Custodian of Trust" (Penguin) is the story of Rajnish Kumar's incredible journey as a banker. Debuting as a writer with his memoir, Kumar shares his stories - from being a probationary officer in SBI to becoming its chairman in 2017 - capturing the many changes he witnessed in India's banking sector during his career. Recounting his experiences about the aftermath of demonetization; challenges in YES Bank; the crisis in Jet Airways and NPAs, this book is anecdotal, engaging and thought-provoking, and will attract a wide spectrum of readers.

"I am pretty excited to share my journey of 40 years with State Bank of India and offer glimpses of my personal life," Rajnish Kumar said.

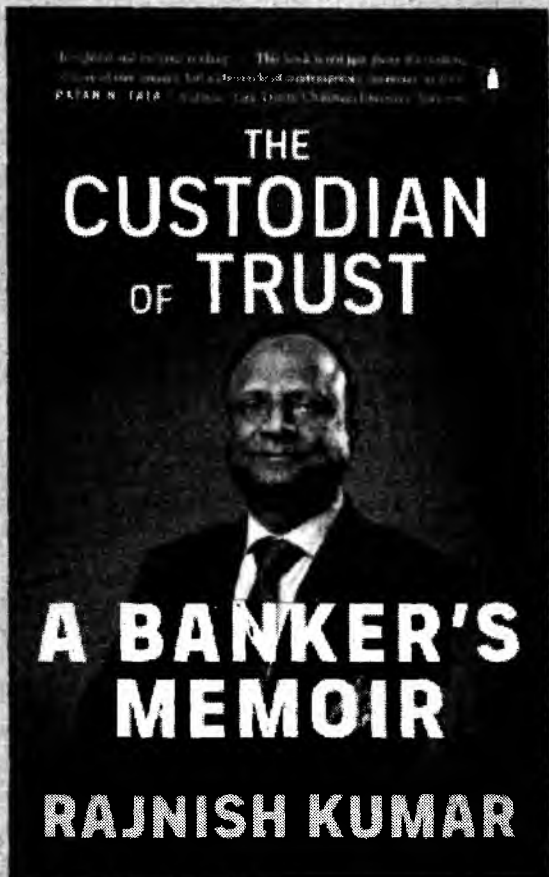
"SBI is considered a proxy to the Indian Economy. In that sense, the book is also an account of the tremendous progress made by the country as well as the banking and financial system in the last four decades. The removal of poverty has been the biggest challenge and banks have played a critical role in the fight against poverty. There are many untold and unknown stories in the book, which I am sure readers will find interesting and inspirational," he added.

Even before its official launch, "The Custodian of Trust" has received generous praise and endorsements from the stalwarts of India Inc. and the banking industry. Ratan Tata, Chairman Emeritus, Tata Sons, remarked that "this book is not just about the banking system of our country, but a chronicle of contemporary economic history". Uday Kotak, CEO, Kotak Mahindra Bank, said about the book: "It has the potential to be a Bollywood blockbuster."

Premanka Goswami, Executive Editor at Penguin Random House India, said: "Rajnish Kumar assumed the responsibility to lead the country's biggest commercial bank at a critical time when India's financial sector was going through a turmoil. 'The Custodian of Trust' opens a window to these times. We, at Penguin House Random House India, are excited to publish Kumar's memoir."

Rajnish Kumar joined SBI as a probationary officer in 1980. He served the bank in various capacities across the country and overseas. Prior to his appointment as Chairman, he was Managing Director (National Banking Group) at the bank overseeing the Retail business and Digital Banking. He was Chairman of the Indian Banks Association and served on the boards of many other companies while serving SBI.

Currently, he is a director on the boards of HSBC Asia Pacific, L&T Infotech Ltd and Lighthouse Communities Foundation. He is also an exclusive advisor to Kotak Investment Advisors Ltd and senior advisor to Baring Private Equity Asia Pvt Ltd. (IANS)



# Dressing for Navratri

Navratri, the Hindu festival of nine nights, has begun. This nine-night Indian festival celebrates the triumph of good over evil. According to the Hindu lunar calendar, this day is one of the nine auspicious ones.

Every day of the festival has a different significance because it honours Goddess Durga's nine incarnations. It commemorates the Goddess' victory over evil. A different auspicious colour is associated with each day of the festival, honouring the Goddess' many incarnations.

Wearing the appropriate colour on festive days will add to the celebration's atmosphere, says Designer Kavita Gupta.

Here are the nine colourful dresses suggestions of Navratri 2021 by her, so that you can enjoy the festivity already under way in full elan.

**\* Day 1:** The first day of Navratri is dedicated to Maa Durga's first incarnation, Goddess Shailputri, the mountain's daughter. She represents strength and power as a feminine version of Mother Nature. Choose a grey that is somewhere between black and white in terms of colour temperature. Gorgeous ruffle lehenga will have you turning heads in grey. If there's an embroidery or silver accent, it makes it even more appealing.

**\* Day 2:** Brahmacharni is revered on the second day. Mark her arrival in wearing the newest drapery styles. Allow the flowing layered drapes to transform your look into something seductive. For the perfect dandiya night look, pair an A-Line Kurta with a long jacket. It's also less cluttered because there are no dupattas, and it draws attention to the women's figures.

**\* Day 3:** Devi Chandraghanta, the goddess with the half-moon



on her forehead, is honoured on this day. Nothing compares to the timeless elegance of a white Kurti paired with a phulkari or bandhej dupatta. Wear this with oxidized silver jewellery for the dandiya night to look stunning.

**\* Day 4:** The fourth day is devoted to the Goddess Khushmanda so welcome her by dressing up in a red saree. A red saree is a must-have for any Indian woman's wardrobe. However, wearing a red ruffle saree will draw attention to you on a festive night.

**\* Day 5:** Day five of Navratri is for Goddess Skandamata. Please her with a royal blue hue. The colour royal blue is associated with aristocracy and looks stunning on people of all skin tones. Our Navratri Dandiya Raas Lehenga Choli with Dupatta will put you in the mood for Garbha right away. Makeup, silver jewellery, and festive flair will all brighten

your festive spirits.

**\* Day 6:** Celebrate the sixth day in worshipping Goddess Katyayani, the sixth incarnation. Wear MARIGOLD yellow, which is an auspicious colour for Indian celebrations because of its meaning. There are numerous trendy ways to wear a bright and cheery colour. Bring the modern look to your wardrobe by wearing an asymmetrical flared kurta with foil prints. Indulge in glitzy golden metallic prints for a glimmering look.

**\* Day 7:** Kaalratri is worshipped on the seventh day of Navratri or Saptami. Enjoy this day with spirit in this season's fashion trend for voluminous sleeves. Wear a dress with oversized sleeves to make a statement. Turn all eyes on yourself in this vintage-inspired bell-sleeve kurta. Aside from that, the stunning shade of green will instantly

elevate your style game.

**\* Day 8:** Goddess Mahagauri, the eighth manifestation of Durga, is worshipped on the eighth day. Embroideries have always been a major fashion trend, no matter what time it is. Each one is unique and adds a fun, carefree vibe to your ensemble. Choose a soft Lucknowi saree or kurta in Peacock Green. Adding extra sequins or zari in a soothing colour for Navratri will enhance the charm.

**\* Day 9:** Spend the ninth day of Navratri in adoration of Goddess Siddhidhatri. Kurtas with a modest and clean-cut receive a festive makeover. Opt for a traditional purple kurta that's been given a modern makeover. There's a funky vibe to the embroidery at the top and bottom of the shirt. Your Navratri wardrobe will look effortlessly stylish with this Side Split Long Flared Anarkali Suit. (IANSLife)

## The turbulent connection between religion and terrorism

A recently divorced doctor looking for seclusion relocates to an isolated house on a riverbank. The following summer, dead bodies start turning up in the river, on the roads, in trains and on city crossings. Everybody calls it the 'Punjab Problem', as if it was a stubborn crossword puzzle. The doctor is kidnapped and nearly killed, once by terrorists for helping the police and once by the police for helping the terrorists.

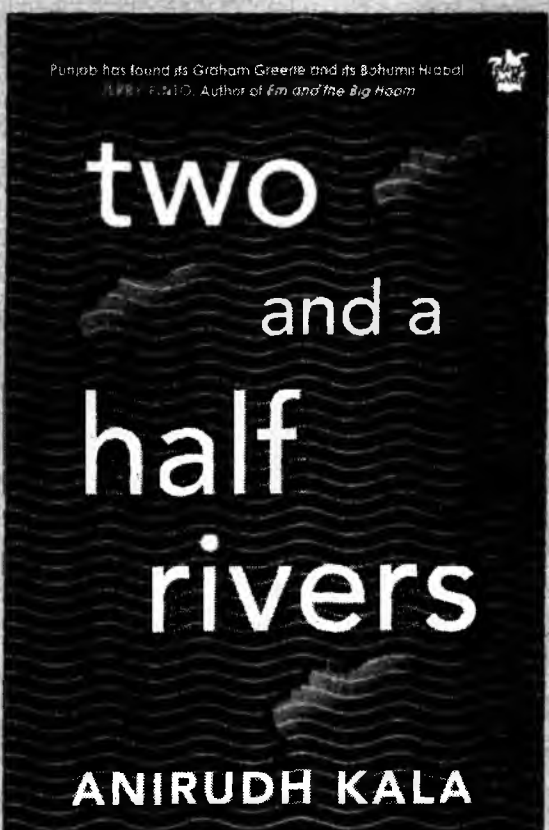
A young Dalit girl, with the dream of becoming a dancer in her eyes, and her soul mate Bheem leave their caste-ridden existence behind and relocate to Bombay. They have learnt the hard way that the preaching of oneness by their religion does not work in the real world.

Drawing its title, "Two and a half Rivers" (Niyogi Books), from the historicity of the Partition which has left in its wake only half the rivers to India from the land of the five rivers, Anirudh Kala's novel offers a poignant commentary on the turbulent connection between religion and terrorism.

Reflecting on the telling of this story, Kala said: "Since I was writing about Punjab militancy, the worst large-scale violence perpetrated on the people of Punjab since the Partition of India, I felt a sense of responsibility. I, along with friends, neighbours and many others, including my patients, lived through that dark decade and a half. The other main narrative of the novel is that of caste - one more unpleasant fact about Punjab that people outside know little of. What I attempted to write was truth in essence, but fiction in details."

Anirudh Kala is a Ludhiana-based psychiatrist whose experience shows in how he sketches out his characters and their personality traits. This is his second book as a fiction writer, the first being "The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness" (2018).

His focus is always to educate people about mental health and mental illness, focussing on eradicating stigma, labels, and prejudice. Besides his professional passions, Kala also likes reading Urdu poetry, hiking, and listening to Indian semi-classical music. (IANS)



# JOURNEY TO THE MOON AND BACK

Here's a look at the most extraordinary journeys migrating birds make

Every year, millions of birds criss-cross the planet, soaring above our heads in search of food, warmth and mates. From pole to pole, here are some of the most remarkable journeys made by our feathered friends.

So-called "summer migrants", like the common cuckoo, are bird species which spend roughly October to March in warmer climes than that of the UK, such as those of Portugal, Senegal and the Congo Basin.

In the UK's summer months, there is such an abundance of airborne insects - their diet of choice - that these birds are not only able to feed themselves but can successfully raise a family too.

But in the autumn, when it's too cold for many insects to fly, the birds return south where the weather is warmer and there are flies available all year round.

Believe it or not, some birds come to Europe in winter for its milder weather. Species such as barnacle geese breed in the Arctic, where there are full days of sunlight and plenty of grass on which to feed during the spring and summer. When the cold weather sets in, they migrate south to take advantage of the warmer winters.

## LONG DISTANCE

The Arctic tern, which holds the record for the longest migra-

tion of any bird, breeds in the very north of Europe and Asia during summer before migrating all the way to the Antarctic Ocean at the time in the southern hemisphere.

This journey across the entire globe covers a distance of about 35,000km. The oldest known Arctic tern survived for 31 years, which means it travelled over 1.6m kilometres in its lifetime - more than the equivalent of travelling to the moon and back twice.

Lots of species follow a section of the Arctic tern's route by going from north to south and back: but the red-necked phalarope offers a twist in this classic journey. This bird, which weighs 27-48g - the same as between one and two small bags of crisps - flies west from Scotland to Peru and back each year.

A study has shown that one red-necked phalarope, which bred on the Shetland Isles, flew west to cross the Atlantic Ocean before stopping over at the border between the US and Canada.

The bird then flew down the east coast of the US and crossed over onto the Pacific coast of Mexico. From there, it continued south until it reached the coast of Peru, where it spent October to April. This marathon flight is typical behaviour for individuals breeding in Scotland, Iceland or Greenland.

## TOP SPEED

Although the peregrine falcon is known to be able to reach the fastest speed of any animal, reaching up to 322kmph during one of its steep dives or "stoops", its average speed in level flight is between 65-95kmph: enough to comfortably keep up with a standard car. Now, imagine a bird able to keep that speed up for 6,760km.

That's the feat achieved by tens of thousands of great snipes each year. This brown wading bird looks unassuming as it feeds at the edges of lakes and in soft mud, but when it's time to migrate it can fly non-stop for almost seven thousand kilometres at an average speed of 97kmph. This extraordinary journey takes individuals from Sweden, where they breed, to sub-Saharan Africa, where they spend winter.

## HIGH FLIERS

One of the more fascinating aspects of bird migration is the extreme heights at which birds often choose to travel. Cooler air is thinner, requiring less effort to fly through. The coolness also prevents birds from overheating whilst using their wing muscles so much. But the downside to this is the much lower oxygen levels in upper regions of the Earth's atmosphere, resulting in increased risk of hypoxia: where the levels of oxygen reaching the body's tis-

sues are insufficient, potentially causing damage.

Birds counteract this by producing more red blood cells, which help carry more oxygen through their body. This is the same process that occurs in human athletes training at high altitudes.

Astonishingly, there have been reports of bar-headed geese flying above the highest Himalayan peaks - which can reach over 8km. This species' unique physiology, including larger lungs and brains able to tolerate low carbon dioxide levels in the blood, has long fascinated researchers.

Smaller birds, such as pied flycatchers, also use cooler air to travel, often flying at night so that they don't have to fly as high to reach sufficiently cool areas. Because of this, they're called nocturnal migrants. These birds navigate using the stars, only landing to refuel during the day. We know that they travel by night by recording their in-flight calls as they pass overhead during the hours of darkness.

(The Conversation)

(Top right) The Arctic tern, which holds the record for the longest migration of any bird.

(Right) The barnacle goose which breeds in the Arctic and migrates south in winter.



## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCT 10, 2021

Moon sextile Saturn on your solar return chart and it will show good effect for the whole year. You will enjoy a good health. You will conduct your business carefully and will not take any decision in a haste otherwise it may boomerang against you. Your business expansion plans will be fruitful. You will remain in demand among your colleagues. You will make best use of technology and internet to enhance your business profits. You need to show a wise head and not get emotional in love matters. Otherwise, you will have a feeling of being let down when it matters most. You will act in good tandem with your spouse. Peace and harmony will prevail in family relations. You will get a promotion in your job and some important assignment too may be given to you. You need to take care of your health and what you eat. You will remain happy and cheerful.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

There will be a complete turn around. Your luck will start favoring you. Your own people will start giving lot of support. You will get lot of positive vibes. A legal matter will get sorted out. You will emerge a much stronger person. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. There will be lot of caring and support. You will come much closer to your partner. You will also take your own decisions in business. Your financial position will also get better but suddenly some secret will emerge much to your dislike which will upset you. But you will take it seriously and make progress in general. You will listen to the words of your boss and take it seriously. You will be grateful to God. It is a gainful time for students. They will get success in exams/interview. You will have profits in partnership.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will suddenly find things turning in your favor. You will have a lot of interest in social activities. Your image will improve and people around you will start giving lot of respect. You will have financial gains. It will appear to your life is simple only we make it complex by our own actions. Yet, you will be much loved person and will help people a lot. Colleagues will get your help. You will have new job/business offers. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance. You will have good understanding with your spouse/partner. Your influence and fame will increase manifold. You will also refresh old memories. You will also get out of troubles that you were having. It is going to be a pleasant week where you will enjoy wonderful moments with your family.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It is going to be a week which will bring you lot of happiness and prosperity. You will have financial gains. You will also get work orders from abroad. You will also make plans to travel abroad. People will pay attention to what you say. Your peers and bosses will be happy with your performance. You will be given added responsibility in your job. The graph of your fame and prestige rise use day by day. Matters in court cases will be decided in your favor. Husband and wife will have good understanding. House-wives will remain busy in their work and also will have time for recreation. New plans regarding the future will be made. You will focus on the renovation/ decoration of your house. Monetary situations will be strong and favorable.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will be having lot of fun and entertainment this week. You will plan to go out with your family on a short trip for peace and joy. You will have pleasant time in the company of your close ones. You will refresh old memories. You will remain in high spirits. Peace and harmony will prevail in family. You will balance your domestic life and professional life well. Money inflow will be continuous. You will also be given importance in your job/work. But desist from interfering in others matters. You will have to pay a heavy price for it otherwise your differences with brothers will get resolved. Your boss will be happy with you. Marriage of a family member will get fixed all of a sudden. It will completely change the atmosphere of your family for good.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

There will be an increase in your work efficiency. You will plan a major expansion in your business. Those projects which were lying in limbo for a long period will get a kickstart. You will complete your pending issues at work. You will also receive additional bonus, incentives and increments. You will also plan to invest your money. Those who were thinking of buying a new property, house or flat can do so. You will also have a gala time with your family members. You will remain busy with friends and relatives. You will also share same wave length with your partner. Love birds will have a wonderful time. The work that you had wanted to get done for a long time will get done. Avoid getting into arguments with anyone. Otherwise, you will lose your peace of mind.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It is going to be an amazing week for you. The situation at work will remain under your control. Your graph of popularity and respect will rise. Your boss will be happy with your performance. You will bring every matter favorable for yourself. You will also have gains in your business. You will easily obtain your objectives. Avoid tiff with your spouse. Your maturity and wisdom will be visible in your day to day dealings with people. You will face your

opponents well and will appear stronger. Love birds will decide to get married. In your home and office the atmosphere will be remain congenial. Do take care of your finances. And don't take any decision in a rush. You need to avoid being emotional.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

You will be getting lot of help from colleagues and bosses. Even your family members and friends will support you a lot. You will get lot of success in your work. Victory is written for you in whatever task you undertake and perform. Clearly, you seem to be on a role. You will also spend a lot of time with your family members. There will be love and bonding in family ties. You will miss a close and special person and get emotional about him/her. You will also get interested in occult sciences and want to know the truth of life. The life seems to be a big puzzle for you with its twists and turns. But you enjoy this fascinating journey which throws new challenges daily. You will make progress in your work with your own efforts. Do not take decision by being emotional. Your superiors will appreciate you for some great achievement.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will move ahead with a positive outlook. Luck is also favoring you a lot. You will also make plans to buy and sell property. You will do your work with the utmost dedication and sincerity. You will take some work to completion with a methodical and planned approach. You will be successful in matters of love and romance. A very special and charming person will come in your life all of a sudden. You will receive a good news from somewhere. A legal matter will get sorted out. But do not sign any document without reading it. You will take work as if on a mission and complete it with lot of sincerity and dedication. The results of exams and interview will be in your favor. You will extend a hand of help to those in need.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

The planetary situation is very favorable this week. You will gain lot of confidence with your efforts. Your task will also get completed. You will also be lucky in matters of family inheritance and property. And you may get satisfied financial benefits too. The work atmosphere too will be favorable. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will also enjoy good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will be successful in your love life. You will meet an important personality. He/she will guide you well. You will also clear some major competitive exams. You will also be busy in prayers and meditation. You will get the blessings of your elders. Your professional contacts will expand. You will have success in your business/work. Your financial side will be strong.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

There are strong chances of gains in your profession/work. You will also remain mentally strong and not afraid to face challenges. You will discharge your responsibility well. You will get success in official matters and your opponents will get defeated. It is time to take a clear stand on an important issue. You will be lucky in love matters. You will treat your partner well and will understand his/her feelings well. You will feel a new energy inside. Students will get success in exams. You will also be offered a job of your choice. There will be an increase in your prestige and respect. You will get the support of your colleagues and boss. Money will keep coming. You will also help the needy. You will also do something for the society. You will spend your time in yoga, meditation and prayers.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It is going to be a week which will give wonderful results. You will come closer to your partner. The misunderstanding of past will get removed. But keep away from controversy otherwise it will create a lot of tension in the family. But you will show a lot of intelligence and maturity. You will also enjoy wonderful relationship with your parents. You will look after them well. Focus on your work, otherwise it will not be finished in time. There will be a change in your daily routine and habits. You will defeat your enemies. New job/business offers will come. You will also undertake business/work related trips which will prove to be very beneficial. You will meet higher official and somehow get your work done. Situations will be favorable for working women.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It is going to be favorable week in terms of money. But health of a family elder may be a cause of some concern. However, you will manage this with patience. Whatever you do you will get success in it. You will be watched minutely by your bosses. Your conduct will come in for lot of praise and appreciation. Your child will behave nicely with you. You will also make plans to watch movie with your family members. You will perform all your tasks in a new way. Your personality will be fearless and inspiring. These are enlightening days. You will be excited about your career. All the doubts in your mind will get cleared. Take advice of an expert in legal/financial matters. Your spouse will try to come close to you. You will trust the traditional way of doing things.

# Career Options in Mental Health

By Ranjan K Baruah

When we are hurt or feel uneasy or get fever or other symptoms then we consult doctors for our well-being. Physical health can be easily accessed and the cause of various health problems can be identified. There is a challenge when it comes to assessing our mental health as we do not have many professionals or experts in this field. Moreover the recent pandemic has brought more challenges and issues which are affecting our mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on people's mental health. Some groups, including health and other frontline workers, students, people living alone, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions, have been particularly affected. And services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders have been significantly disrupted.

Yet there is cause for optimism. During the World Health Assembly in May 2021, governments from around the world recognized the need to scale up quality mental health services at all levels. And some countries have found new ways of providing mental health care to their populations.

There is a focus on mental health around the world and 10th October is observed as World Mental Health Day. During this year's World Mental Health Day campaign, there would be a showcase of the efforts made in some of the countries and encourage others to highlight positive stories which are an inspiration to others. The campaign slogan is "mental health care for all: let's make it a reality".

There are career options and opportunities for many people in India to work in the field of mental health. The scope is not limited to doctors but there are many other designations and job responsibilities which can be opted by our young people. Mental health professionals work with



children and adults of all ages, helping them with things like: stress, communication, aging, self-esteem, divorce and marriage and other family issues like parenting, grief, anger, depression, addiction and substance abuse and other serious mental illnesses.

Aspirants may take up courses like psychology to be in the field of mental health. As there are different job roles or designation, academic qualification may vary like someone may come from the field from nursing, social work, sociology, etc. But to be a professional counsellor in the field of mental health profession one can choose psychology which is offered by different educational institutions in India and abroad. This subject is taught from senior secondary level as well as in masters level and there are special diploma and certificate programmes available.

This field is very challenging for which other skills are also required. Skills which are required include compassion, empathy, critical thinking, active listening, effective communication, etc. Patience is a must as one needs to work in different situations which are very challenging. One must remember that as a mental health professional, one needs to examine people with mental health illnesses and help them to deal with their illness by various methods. The methods which may be used include medical, psycho-

therapeutic, psycho-social or as a combination of various methods depending upon the person.

There is a confusion regarding two designations in this field which are related with psychiatrist and psychologists. Both psychiatrists and psychologists will be studying the behavior patterns of the patients. The psychiatrist will be conducting various tests and provide the diagnosis based on the symptoms. Psychiatrists are trained medical doctors and therefore they can prescribe medicines and psychologists focus on therapy sessions or other counseling sessions for the patients. One must get admission into medical colleges to become a psychiatrist and there are very few psychiatrists in the country which brings more options for doctors who do their specialization in the field of mental health.

There would be more demand for mental health professionals as people are facing challenges due to different family issues and other similar issues which are affecting them negatively. Apart from joining government or other areas one may be self employed and earn if they are qualified, trained, skilled and passionate to work in the field of mental health.

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

*"The secret of a good life is to have the right loyalties and hold them in the right scale of values."*

— Norman Thomas

**The Shillong Times**

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**Caught napping again**

THE nation is faced with a serious power crisis due to non-supply of coal to thermal stations. The Union coal and power ministries are hard at work to solve the problem, but it would take time. The crisis in the power sector unfolded just as the nation was somewhat back on track after the derailment of life in general during the Covid pandemic term lasting a year and a half. Industrial activities have regained the lost pace and this was only to be expected. As had happened in the time of the handling of the second Covid wave, the government was again caught napping. A dispensation does not function on the lines of a hand-to-mouth existence; and advance planning is integral to governance. It involves anticipating what is coming. Clearly, in both these times, the governmental agencies were found wanting in adequately responding to emerging situations.

After power sector reforms, India's power sector held high promise and a scenario of surplus power emerged. Now, state after state is faced with a power crisis and sending SOS to the Centre to reach sufficient coal to thermal stations. A reason cited by the Union Government for the present crisis in the power sector is that the coal prices in the international markets have surged and that this led to a cut in imports and an increasing dependence on domestic coal. Also, the domestic coal production and transportation were "affected due to rains." The claim that industrial activities peaked after the near-end of the second Wave could be true. This should have been anticipated and action taken to meet the emerging requirements. India is the second largest importer, consumer and producer of coal; the first being China. China's ban on coal import from Australia came in between. The price of coal in the global market surged also due to the heavy intake by China in the post-Covid scenario because of heightened industrial activity in the world's central production beehive.

Thermal power takes care of half of India's energy requirements today even as there is a stress also on renewable energy sources. Hydel projects are largely discouraged due to resistance from environmentalists. In this scenario, the rise in the prices of imported coal will have an adverse impact on prices overall. Steel plants, for instance, see a four-fold rise in their production costs. This will raise steel prices and construction costs. So is the case with other sectors. Lack of adequate advance planning added to the power sector crisis.

**State of affairs in the State**

By H H Mohrmen

It is said that a week is a long time in politics because a lot can happen in seven days. Indeed stories and the twists and turns to the stories that have developed in the last few days and quite revealing. Take for example the story of the Grand Old Party in the country after the two Congress stalwarts Vincent H Pala and Dr Mukul Sangma met the Congress High Command in Delhi. It looked like everything is settled and the party is ready to hit the streets now to campaign for the bye-elections. Or at least that is the impression that the party was hoping to give to the public in general and the party cadres in particular.

**The GOP is not out of the danger zone yet**

But the question that still hangs like a guillotine on the neck of the Congress party in

a group of politicians, but it is not like there is no opportunity for conflict resolution. The only thing that is required for the two leaders is to bury their hatchet and sacrifice their personal ambitions for the sake of the Party. Post the bye-election to the three constituencies, the Party needs to embark on a confidence building effort to bring the party to its past glory.

It is also a fact that Pala in his effort to strengthen the Congress is only targeting the old guards of the party. Well there is no harm in bringing experienced hands to rebuild the party and with their maturity and experience they can bring stability. But the party needs to bring in new blood if it is to attract the young

government for mishandling the situation. It has failed to capitalise on the gains that the previous government was able to achieve in tackling the menace. It is obvious from the ability of the organisation to plant bombs at strategic locations and serve demand notes to targeted individuals that it has lots of overground worker. The mere fact that HNLC is active should be a cause of concern for those in the government.

The only consolation in the recent development is that the HNLC cadres were caught almost immediately after planting the bombs which indicates that they are fresh hands. The militant group or their supporters who help them were not as well

also testifies to the fact that regional parties come and go and many have lost their way in the sands of time. Only two regional parties in the state, the UDP and the HSPDP are the parties which have survived the test of time.

The VPP would argue that it is a party with a difference and that was also how it was introduced to the public. The very fact that the only name in the list of leaders of the party who had previous political affiliation is Ardent Basalawmoit is an effort to sell itself as a party with a difference. Undoubtedly, the fact that many of the leaders of the party are highly educated with many having a doctoral degree is another indication that the party is trying project itself as a party with a difference.

While it is heartening to



the state is whether Dr Mukul Sangma and Vincent Pala were ultimately able to bury their hatchet. Is everything hunky dory in the party now? Some would say that the high command was able to bring the two leaders to an understanding so it is a win-win situation for both the doyens of the party. The duo's role and responsibilities in the party have been clearly defined after Pala made it public that he is not interested in joining state politics. But the events that were planned but failed to materialise altogether gave a different twist to the story. For instance the appointment that Dr Sangma made with the Speaker or the Assembly secretariat which was later cancelled tells a different story.

The question that is being asked is, whether it is true that Dr Sangma made a volte-face and did not leave the Congress party because he did not have the required numbers in the House to defect from the party? If that is the case then is it true that he is just buying time before he and his group leave the Congress for good? All parties and organisation have their crisis especially when there are two alpha males in

voters of the state.

The proof of the pudding like they are in the eating, so the people of the state will have to wait and see the outcome of the Congress's effort to reorganize itself. The immediate test of the Congress rejuvenation will be the result of the by-elections in the state. Whether the Party is united will be proven if it at least able to retain the two constituencies that it has won earlier.

**HNLC influence gaining ground**

The fact that the militant group was able to raise its ugly head in the Khasi Jaintia region of the state is a cause of grave concern for the ordinary citizens. Bombs were placed and some in cases were detonated in different locations and demand notes were served to targeted individuals. The banned organisation has obviously reclaimed its lost ground. How come the organisation which was in a dormant state for so long suddenly came back to the limelight? How is it possible for an organisation which the police had at one point of time condemned as a spent force, all of a sudden get a new lease of life?

The blame is on the MDA

trained and equipped as the organisation cadres during its heydays.

**VPP: The new kid in the state political block**

Ardent Miller Basalawmoit in his new political avatar recently introduced to the public a new political party called the Voice of the People Party. Like any new broom the party promises to sweep the political landscape clean and the clean politics campaign is not a new agenda for Ardent. In fact if there is anything that is consistent about Ardent it is his call to clean the political system in the state. The story that did the rounds is also that he is not somebody to squander his hard earned money to buy votes or woo voters during election.

When the new party hit the public domain, people wondered why there is a need of having another regional party. In a small state like Meghalaya where we already have not less than three active regional parties, are they not fighting for the same small piece of cake. Is it not a case where regional supporters in the state (which is already a very small percentage of the population) are going to be further divided amongst the regional parties? History

see that all the leaders of the party at least have one university degree, it is, however, sad that there is no female name in the list of the leaders the party introduced to the public. The fact that no female made it to the list of the leaders of the party only proves that it is no different from the other parties when it comes to respecting the fairer sex in the society. It is obvious now that the party has a long way to go to be a gender inclusive party.

There are many who agree with the fact that the ills in the current political system are mainly because of the kind of influence that money had on the public particularly during the election. Many wish that the state could do away with this illegal practice, but the question is how will the community rid itself of the practice? Now the VPP can say that they are providing an alternative for those who want to see change in the way elections are run by candidates and their parties. The pertinent question is whether this can translate to votes or whether people are going to support the party which promised not to use money during the elections.

(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

**Rabbit farming in Meghalaya: Scope and benefits**

By Serene Roy Lakuna & Cheasa N. Sangma

Rabbit husbandry has a vast potential to improve the socio-economic status of the poor especially in the rural areas and provides food security in terms of low cost protein. One of the major role of rabbit breeding is to improve the food and nutrition requirement in developing countries. The meat is nutritious and there are few social, cultural and religious restricting against it. One of the great challenges globally is the food security. With the growing population the demand for food is also increased.

**Feeding and Housing:** Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are primary monogastric herbivores animals and consume common type of grains and pulses (sorghum, gram, wheat, etc), legumes (Alfalfa, Barseem, etc), and even

ible business, suited to both small-scale(backyard) and to large-scale commercial production.

It is highly profitable and less laborious as compared to other livestock farming and requires less space also.

**Benefits of Rabbit Farming:** The rabbit is the only farm animal that produces meat via offspring ten to fifteen times more of its own weight in a year.

Compared with the meat of other species rabbit meat is richer in protein(21%) and vitamin but less fat(8%). It is also rich in minerals like calcium and potassium.

Their single meal size is conveniently small, thus avoiding the need for storage.

The growth rate is very high reaching a market weight of about 2 kg at 12



kitchen waste and garden vegetables. The meat of rabbit is known as "white meat" as it rich in poly-unsaturated fatty acids. It is easily digestible also.

Housing is an important factor and mostly depends on the climate, location and size of the farm. There should be proper cages or hutches and arrangement for feeding, watering and cleaning. We can also use locally available materials in back-

weeks of age. Rabbits convert forage into meat more efficiently than ruminant animal such as cattle and sheep.

Besides meat, rabbits are a source of fur and skin and even as laboratory animal. The Angora breed of rabbit produce high quality of fine wool which can be mixed with silk, nylon, rayon, sheep wool and other fibres to make good quality handloom apparels.

**The cost of construction of scientific rabbit rearing house was more and not affordable by small and marginal farmers. In the recent past, some of the farmers of the West Garo Hills District had innovated the low cost rabbit rearing house and cage to save labour and time as well as to earn more profit. We can also use low cost bamboo house with thatch roofing and bamboo cage for rearing of rabbit.**

yard rabbitry like tin cans, bamboos, old boxes, bricks, asbestos sheets, etc. The floor and walls may be katcha.

The cost of construction of scientific rabbit rearing house was more and not affordable by small and marginal farmers. In the recent past, some of the farmers of the West Garo Hills District had innovated the low cost rabbit rearing house and cage to save labour and time as well as to earn more profit. We can also use low cost bamboo house with thatch roofing and bamboo cage for rearing of rabbit.

**Scope:** The North-Eastern people are mostly non-vegetarian and people are free from taboos regarding the consumption of meat.

It will increase the employment opportunities for young people and provide an extra source of income.

Rabbit farming is a flex-

**Financial Assistance:** NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) play an important role in the field of agricultural credit.

**Conclusion:** In Meghalaya, the weather and climate is suitable for commercial rabbit farming and also for rearing as pets. Some of the breeds available in Meghalaya are Soviet Chinchilla, New Zealand White and Grey Giant to name a few. It is a good source of income throughout the year. We can motivate the youth to give importance to rabbit farming as it will help them in their livelihood. The Animal Husbandry Department, Veterinary or ICAR Institutes can be contacted by interested farmers.

(The writers are 1st Year B.V.Sc & A.H. students College of Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry, Jalukie, Peren, Nagaland)

Letters to the Editor

**Shocking news ever!**

Editor  
Reading the news about a father raping his two daughters (ST October 9, 2021) sent chills down my spine accompanied with a sense of disgust and anger over the heinous act of immorality and wickedness in human beings. Rape has become so rampant these days, that we read and watch the news narrating horrifying stories of girls and women falling prey to rape. Step-fathers violating their step-daughters have been reported many times but to read of a father violating the honour of his two minor daughters repeatedly brings shame and disgrace on humankind as a whole. What is even more shocking is that those who have knowledge of this man's bestial act kept quiet about it. How could a mother do that? How could she turn a blind eye to the evil acts of her husband? Any sane human being, a woman and a mother at that, would have gone to any extent to punish the beast. It makes me wonder

if the father who is the devil incarnate and the mother who is a worshipper of this devil have lost their inner voice and conscience. I wonder if the father feels no shame and fear for what he has done. It saddens me that human values have degenerated to this level. No punishment could be pronounced as the most adequate and befitting punishment for the father, the mother and the uncle that would help wipe out the pain, the humiliation and the scar of the two girls. What sort of punishment will the judiciary pronounce and when?

Yours etc.,  
Jenniefer Dkhar,  
Via email

**Waste segregation: Need of the hour**

Editor  
Giving thought to the recent crisis of dumping of garbage in Jowai town, waste minimization becomes a prime agenda. Waste minimization is an approach to reduce the amount of waste produced. It includes source

reduction, use of recyclable products, purchasing policy, segregation, stock management etc. Out of the five, waste segregation is the key to waste minimization. It is essential for effective waste management, improves public health protection and must be done according to specific treatment and disposal requirements. Waste is either dumped on landfill sites or water bodies. Our landfills are brimming with so much urban waste and the rivers that once upon a time flowed majestically are nothing but oversized drains now. It is high time that we put into practice the method of waste sorting. And it must start at the household level. Each one of us is responsible for what goes into the dump.

Waste must be segregated into: Wet/Kitchen waste, Dry waste and E-waste. Wet/Kitchen waste or biodegradable waste can quickly be broken down by microorganisms in normal environmental conditions and hence, can produce compost to be used as fertilizers and to improve the soil for plantation. Dry waste - Recyclable waste

like glass bottles, newspapers, metal scraps etc. must be submitted to local scrap dealers or recycling centres. Reusing or repurposing items must be encouraged until it has reached a point where it can no longer serve a purpose. E-waste - Electronics, bulky fridge or hazardous tube lights, bulbs, batteries, monitors and anything that contains chemicals, the non-hazardous items like cables, chargers, phones etc. must be collected and submitted to e-waste drop off points or online collection services or recycling centres, following a yearly disposal process or monthly in case of workplaces.

Pharmaceutical waste, medical waste along with sanitary waste can produce numerous diseases. In order to avoid this, such waste must be incinerated or encapsulated rather than disposing them into landfills. Sanitary waste like diapers and pads can be properly wrapped and some marks must be put on them for easy identification.

Once waste segregation becomes a way of life, individual efforts along with

the coordination of the Municipal Corporations/Boards and the Health Department, we can avert the biggest of the garbage crisis.

Yours etc.,  
Libya Wallang,  
Via email

**Sports a neglected field in education**

Editor,  
It was astonishing and mind-boggling too for readers and patrons of your newspaper to read of the systematic failure and deceptive nature of the officials sitting on their salary-driven chairs for neglecting a crucial extra co-curricular activity like sports as an important subject in schools. This speaks volumes of the deliberate neglect of sporting activities among the youth, many of whom have the potential to win medals if well groomed. With around 14, 694 schools in various categories across the state and where most or all of these schools have Physical Education Training PET as an activity, it is shocking to

learn that there are just four physical education trainers in the entire state. This raises many questions about the functioning of the Education Department, especially of those who sit on such crucial decisions. While the Chief Minister spoke so well about the State Sports Policy and also about the youth policy and how sports could propel interested people to take it up as a career, the RTI revelations by HITO are shocking. While under Khelo India the Union Government has assured support to the state for developing and training young sportsmen and women to make them ready for the Paris Olympics to be held in 2024, I wonder how this will be possible when there is such a lacuna in the sporting sector. Time is already running out for us.

Yours etc...  
Dominic Stadlin  
Wankhar,  
Via email

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*"The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives and the dreams shall never die."*

— Edward Kennedy

**The Shillong Times**

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**Women quarantined from politics**

**BARRING** the Congress Party, in Meghalaya, other political parties have muted the voices of women. Politics is a male-dominated domain because the gendered adage that women in politics are equivalent to hens that crow, still lurk in the mindsets of the 21st century Khasi male. Women's wings of political parties are meant to be activated just before elections so that they can go for door to door campaigns and get votes for their male candidates. The lady contestant from Rajabala has been given the ticket only because she is the wife of the former deceased MLA and could possibly win sympathy votes, else she would never be considered a fit enough candidate.

In the political eco-system of Meghalaya today the only person with a political view who speaks on behalf of her Party is Ampareen Lyngdoh. She has earned her spurs after being elected thrice over and having held the post of a cabinet minister. Regional parties like the UDP, HSPDP et al have never had women spokespersons and that's no surprise. Women in Meghalaya don't occupy important spaces in political parties either because of male insecurity lest women carve out their own political niches or because society feels that women already have enough to deal with in their day to day lives and politics is best left to men. Also, it appears that women themselves concede space to the male because they feel that having been given the right of lineage (Ki nongkit ia ka kur), they should not also aspire to take away politics (which embodies more of power and privilege and less of service, responsibility and accountability) from the hands of the male.

It is customary in Meghalaya and perhaps other states too that when election season appears on the horizon, some political parties make their debut. Each of these parties promise change. What no one asks them is what change do they propose to bring and the larger meaning of CHANGE? Is it a change in political attitudes bringing gender justice even in political representation? Is it a change in governance models where women are given space to lead the change and be changemakers? Are any of the new parties including the New Dawn and Voice of the People's Party ready to cede space and give voice to women and their generic and specific problems especially in the health and nutrition sector? One has to be a woman to understand where the shoe pinches and hurts the most. Have the problems faced by single mothers ever featured in the Assembly? Not till date. Hence all gender equitable goals in resource allocations are left undone. Women in Meghalaya must claim their space in politics.

**Livestock entrepreneurship beckons educated youth**

By G.H.P. Raju

Skill formation training programmes are readily accepted by the youth only when they know that employment is assured. Through the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the Labour Department conducted skilling programs and taught conventional skills in the PMKVY listed job roles to about fifteen thousand local youths over the last three years. Although about two thousand youth got placements or were streamed into self-employment through the PMKVY 2.0 skilling programs, the success is not commensurate with the investments made under the Scheme. The existing "Employability gap" between skills learnt and job offers from the markets are critical when formulating future action plans under PMKVY 3.0. The Livestock Sector has enormous scope for skilling, reskilling and upskilling under PMKVY 3.0 and offers enormous employability scope for the trained youth of our State.

Livestock management and entrepreneurship is a window of opportunity that educated youth should explore seriously. I see ample livestock entrepreneurship opportunities in our State, which include: (1) meat production and export to the neighbouring countries under the Act East Policy of the Government of India; (2) creation of a class of para-veterinary staff to take care of the vaccination, insemination, and animal insurance needs of the farmers; (3) emergence of cattle and pig breeders; (4) Commercial Poultry and Goat breeding farms. (5), Cattle feed manufacturing mills; (6) meat kiosks etc., to mention a few economic opportunities.

Livestock entrepreneurship requires professional skills, technology induction and capital. Unfortunately, there are very few professionally managed private Livestock Farms in our State. Conventional Livestock Farms are available mainly under the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department. The commercial Livestock and Breeding Farms for Cattle, Pigs, Goats, Poultry, and meat processing units have not yet come up in good numbers in our State due to lack of awareness about the farmer-centric subsidy schemes introduced by the Government of India, non-availability of appropriate livestock-related skilling programmes, inability to raise capital from the banks, and expensive cattle feed etc.

The educated youth of our State have yet to tap into the Livestock related employment potential of our State. The estimated annual

demand for animal products in Meghalaya is as below:

Sl. No	Meat	Demand (Metric Tonnes approximately)
1	Pork	18,500
2	Fish	33,000
3	Poultry	11,000
4	Beef	25,400
5	Mutton	3,500
6	Eggs	2100 million

In Meghalaya range from Rs 2,200 crores at farm price and about Rs 5000 crores at market price. As of now, the ever-growing local demand for meat and meat products cannot be met with local production. The State has a substantial pent-up demand that will have to be provided for, pending which some imports are unavoidable. About one lakh piglets and

bulls from Andhra Pradesh for crossbreeding purposes with our local cattle. The HF cows yield ten to fifteen litres of milk daily and are inducted into the Dairy Cooperative Societies under the Milk Mission. The Ongole bulls gain about 500 kg weight in about 48 months and are known for disease resistance. With the capital expenditure subsidy schemes under the NLM and RGM, introduction of high-quality breeding bulls by the Department, the cattle-landscape of Meghalaya in milk and meat production is set to change in about three years. The educated youth must venture into livestock management



about the same number of cattle are imported annually from other States like West Bengal, Bihar, UP, Punjab, and Assam. Although there is a huge demand for goats in Bangladesh, goat rearing for export has not yet been taken up by the State or private entrepreneurs.

Commercial meat production involves establishing livestock farms, constructing sheds, water and electricity supply, feed management, and financial literacy. Under the National Livestock Mission (NLM), the Government of India offers back-end subsidies for the construction of piggery, goatery, and poultry sheds to prospective entrepreneurs. Notice inviting Expression of Interest (EOI) is already given, seeking applications from the farmers and educated youth intending to venture into the commercial livestock business. Under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), the Central Government also offers subsidies for the construction of Cattle Multiplier Farms for commercial production of cattle through Artificial Insemination (AI) with exotic cattle breeds such as Sahiwal, Gir, HF, Ongole bulls and others. The Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department procured exotic Holstein Friesian (HF) breed bulls from Germany and Ongole

and entrepreneurship to take full advantage of these rapid developments in the sector.

For starters, there is a convergence between two departments - Labour and Animal & Husbandry. Livestock management skilling programmes will be organized under the PMKVY-3.0 programme by the Labour department, and the financial support to establish the livestock farms, meat processing units, etc., will be provided by the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department. Thus, with adequate farm, livestock, and financial management skills, the youth will be ready to become meat producers and suppliers soon.

Women of the State manage about 85% of the rural backyard livestock farming in the villages. Backyard livestock farming can meet the immediate consumption needs of the rural households, but skilling, reskilling and upskilling of educated women will help augment local meat production and bridge the demand and supply gap. So that would be another vertical worthy of consideration.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister announced a 15,000 crore Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package for

incentivizing investments by individual entrepreneurs, private companies, MSMEs, Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) and Section 8 companies to establish (i) the dairy processing and value addition infrastructure, (ii) meat processing and value addition infrastructure and (iii) Animal Feed Plants. In addition, the National Livestock Mission and Rashtriya Gokul Mission offer subsidies for construction of commercial livestock sheds, and the PMKVY 3.0 offers livestock entrepreneurship. With these positive and empowering livestock-related interventions, the livestock ecosystem is ready to take off in the State, but we need the educated youth to venture into commercial livestock farming.

Cattle feed manufacturing is another critical area that demands immediate attention. Under the NLM and AHIDF, adequate funds are made available for establishing feed mills by individuals, cooperative societies etc. Feed manufacturing offers ample self-employment opportunities for the youth in our State. Maize and soybeans being the main ingredients of cattle feed, the farmers will benefit. The feed cost for the livestock will reduce substantially if the raw material is locally available. At present, cattle feed is expensive and non-remunerative for the farmers.

The Cooperation Department is reaching out to the Dairy Cooperative Societies and Piggery Cooperative Societies to avail interest-free loans under the Milk Mission and Piggery Mission for enhanced milk and pig production in our State. As many as 102 Dairy Cooperative Societies and about 85 Piggery Cooperative Societies are already enlisted in these two Missions. It is heartening to know that over 60% of the members of these Cooperative Societies are women. Therefore, the local banks are being prodded to extend working capital loans to the Dairy Cooperative Societies.

The Animal Husbandry Department has several other initiatives in the pipeline: A Poultry Mission with a proposed investment of Rs. 121 Crore, a Goatery Mission with Rs. 75 Crore investment. Also, a proposal for establishing Goat and Sheep Breeding Farms at Saitsama, West Jaintia Hills and Nongshillong, West Khasi Hills district, at an estimated cost of Rs 25 crores, has already been moved.

The educated youth ought not to miss these opportunities to take up livestock-related entrepreneurship. But are they ready?

(The writer is Principal Secretary, AH & Veterinary, Govt of Meghalaya)

**Amit Shah certifies Prime Minister as a democrat**

By Sushil Kutty

It took Home Minister Amit Shah seven years to tell the country that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the "most democratic leader" he has known in 20 years. But why believe Shah? After all, Shah and Modi are not very different. If Modi is "democratic", then Amit Shah must also be "democratic". Actually, Modi has a style of functioning and taking decisions that insists against all opposition that only "Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai!"

That said, it doesn't matter what Amit Shah says. Shah has a conflict of inter-

est. If Amit Shah doesn't say Narendra Modi is democratic he may lose his job. He could be sent packing to Gandhinagar or wherever it is he hangs around when in Gujarat. Could it be that, heart of heart, Shah knows Modi would take it very autocratically if he's called undemocratic?

Also, the interviewer on Sansad TV must not have asked the glaringly dumb question at all. Even the choice of Sansad TV smacks of an attempt to paint Modi democratic. Why, whatever was wrong with Doordarshan? Is it because "Sansad" translates to "Parliament" and "Parliament" is by definition "democratic". A "palace" conveys monarchy and everybody knows what the "Kremlin" stands for?



Besides, anybody who is building a "New Parliament", hell bent on changing our collective vista against all opposition, must not be an autocrat! Fact is, the only thing democratic about Narendra Modi is that he was elected. Otherwise, his manner of functioning is like that of the Lion King! There are pictures of Narendra Modi with BJP MPs and BJP ministers in conference.

In them, Modi is always standing at the head of the "class". The MPs and the ministers are called and asked questions. Shah, perhaps, doesn't get called often enough to "stand up". That could be because Shah knows Narendra Modi from way back, even before the 20 years that Modi has put in public service. It's but natural that Shah will rubbish allegations that Modi is a "dictator".

The Home Minister, in fact, explained why Modi is a democratic leader and what democratic qualities Modi possesses. One, Shah has "never met a listener like him (Modi)." Two, Modi does not speak much. "Whatever issue a meeting may be about, Modiji speaks as little as required." Three, "Modiji listens to everyone

patiently." Four, Modi understands the value of each person's opinion. "Not the person's importance or unimportance. Only then does he take a decision. So there's no truth to the charges that he is dictatorial." But then nobody should be surprised, by Shah's robust defence of Modi. Shah has been an essential part of Modi's style of governance for decades.

Maybe if Shah was asked "if sucking up to the Prime Minister helps anybody?" he would have given a different answer. But this was Sansad TV and Sansad TV

It's always with Modi, the last okay. No exception, no one-off. Cabinet meetings and collective decisions are part of the perception. The reality is the final decision! Of course, there are experts like Ajit Doval, but weren't there reports that Modi refused to heed an objection of the Chief of Air Staff on the Balakote airstrikes?

Then again, we may all be wrong, i.e., all his detractors. Maybe like Shah said, people are "trying to twist the truth to taint the PM's image". It could be because of demonetization and the abrogation of Article 370. Shah says Modi takes "risks" and the BJP has come to power to "change the country". The question is "Change the country into what?"

Amit Shah says for Modi it's always 'India First'. "He has said many times that we have come to power to change the country, and not just to run a government. Sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishvas is our goal." The question is why doesn't Modi take questions, face to face with a gaggle of brush hacks? Maybe then he could be asked if he is, indeed, "democratic"? (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Shocking incident**

Editor,  
The incident of a man in West Khasi Hills raping both his daughters repeatedly and apparently with the knowledge of his wife and her brother (the children's uncle) is bizarre and reeks of the worst form of incest ever heard in Khasi society. Perhaps such acts also occurred in the past but were closely guarded family secrets. Thankfully now there are activists and others who help victims file an FIR. I believe the police have a duty to create awareness about the need to report such cases. It is important for society to take responsibility to end such crimes. It is difficult to fathom the moral depravity of a person who cannot even respect his own innocent minor daughters. How can anyone sink so low? What have we come to as a society? Is it the influence of pornography which is now so easily available on one's mobile phone? Or what sort of carnal desire would rob a man of his senses that he would not even feel a twinge of conscience? Is it not time for our society to start talk-

ing about these hidden sins which reveal that we are just as good or as bad as any other patriarchal society? Or shall we continue to live in cuckoo land where everything appears hunky dory but is all rotten inside? Times for serious reflection.  
Yours etc.,  
C. Kharbani,  
Via email

**Incest at its worst**

Editor  
The shocking news item "Headman held over alleged incest on WKH" (ST Oct 9, 2021) is an example of a person who lacks control over his lustful desires. The person, under allegation, might otherwise be a good man, but simply because he lost control over his sensuous appetite, has fallen in disgrace. Of late, we have heard many reports where highly respected people have similarly fallen prey to such illicit acts, which is a theologically sinful and legally criminal act. Without naming anyone, we have seen how eminent jurists, journalists, doctors, and even religious heads, were caught being sensually weak. The

Me-Too movement is full of such lustful abuses committed by well-known personalities. Besides condemning such acts and punishing the actors, nothing has been done so far to prevent such sins/crimes. Why is there no medical aid, yogic exercise, or psychiatric clinic to help those males who wish to control/overcome their strong lustful impulses? I am sure many right-thinking men would seek such help. Such help, if provided would go a long way in preventing such crimes and also would be a help in family planning too.  
Yours etc...  
Krishna Chhetri  
Shillong-2

**Is MUDA listening?**

Editor,  
I would like to bring to the notice of Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) regarding the unauthorized construction of adding an extra floor in the building "Barun Apartments" at Lower Motinagar, Shillong, by the owner. They have added an illegal 7th floor without any information to MUDA or seeking

due permission from them. In doing so they are endangering the lives of people and also the homes in the surrounding area.

Since the building is owned by former minister, it appears that MUDA is either intimidated by her or have some clandestine understanding with her, or MUDA is downright uninterested in carrying out the duties they are bound to in order to ensure the safety of the residents of the said apartment.

We had intimated the MUDA authorities earlier too, but they do not seem to be bothered about the safety of the residents in the said building and of the building around it.

We earnestly urge the concerned authorities to take corrective action.  
Yours etc.,  
Vikash Saraogi,  
Secretary, Barun Apartments Residents Society  
Via email

**Much deserved Nobel awardees**

Editor,  
Norway's Nobel Committees that rose above the bar-

riers of racism, prejudices, stereotypes and discriminations and chose the Nobel Prize winners in keeping with the era must be commended. These social evils bring social inequalities. These inequalities are often reflected even in the choice of the Nobel Prize winners, especially winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Above all, the fields to which the quality of the work applied also makes this year's Nobel Prizes special.

Over the years, arguments have arisen over gender inequality in the choice of the Nobel Prize. In fact, very few women had won the Nobel Prize until a few years ago. So the Committee had to strive harder to bring gender equality. This apart, criticisms were levelled against the Committee for showing favouritism towards American and European writers in the choice of winners for Literature Nobel.

At a time when news dissemination faces challenges such as restrictions on reporting news against the rulers, fake news, misinformation and so on, conferring the Peace Nobel on Maria Ressa of the Philippines, cofounder of an online news portal which has shown extreme

bravery in reporting news is indeed in line with the needs of the era. Similarly, Dmitri Moratov of Russia who became the co-winner of the Peace Nobel spent terrible time in Russia as a journalist where speaking truth against those in power brings punishment and even death. And the most suitable choice for Nobel Prize for Literature was Abdulrazak Gurnah, a UK-based Tanzanian writer. He won the Prize for his uncompromising and compassionate depiction of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugees. As for the seven winners of the Nobel Prize in science, the choices were made taking into account the fields to which the quality of their work applied. Issues such as climate change and environmental conservation were taken into consideration for awarding the coveted prizes.  
Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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"Verbal and nonverbal activity is a unified whole, and theory and methodology should be organized or created to treat it as such."

— Kenneth L. Pike

## The Shillong Times

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### Air India -- back to basics

PREDICTABLY, there are those who are happy about Air India going back into the hands of the Tatas and critical about the government losing its ownership. Differences in perception and their airing in public are integral to the cause of democracy. At the same time, there are glaring facts that shame us about the way this vaunted entity was managed or rather mismanaged. That showed up in the balance sheets. The daily loss for the airline crossed Rs 20 crore and the cumulative losses were of the order of Rs 70,000 crore, as per one estimate. This is the sign of the times; that Government has no business to do business." While there is distress about hand-over of PSUs to private entities, fact is also that the corrupt and inefficient creed messed up with most of these entities. PSUs lack the cutting edge, which is what makes private enterprises grow and flourish. The sad fate of India's public sector banks is only a part of this painful saga.

For many years since its inception, Air India was one of the world's most prestigious airlines. It fell on bad days after the turn of the century and began registering substantial losses from 2007. The merger with Indian Airlines was one questionable act. The CAG had, a few years ago, taken serious note of the huge mismanagement of funds during the UPA terms. Allegations were also centred around the purchase of a large number of aircrafts. Also, in another case of alleged graft, priority was given to foreign airlines to run profitable routes at the grave expense of Air India. The Modi government did not seriously follow up on the CAG findings. Air India fell into a rudderless state. Minor attempts like serving good food on flights did not help much in recent years.

India's aviation history started with the first flight from Karachi to Mumbai in 1932, a postal cargo service, operated by JRD Tata after he started his own airline with help from some Royals. Even after the government took over the airline, JRD continued as its chairman till 1977. The Janata Party government removed him from the post. The Tatas now have high stakes in two airlines, Malaysia-based Air Asia and the Singapore-based Vistara. An allegation from the Opposition is that the Centre handed over three aviation companies – full ownership for Air India and Air India Express and 50 per cent stakes in the ground handling entity – to the Tatas for a song. This is worth a serious debate.

# Regional parties' unification: Chasing a mirage

By Albert Thyrniang

The regional parties have started humming the unification tune. But in all likelihood it will never materialise. The recent call by a couple of leaders to unify all regional parties in Khasi-Jaintia Hills looks like a cry for survival. With the danger of being extinct looming large, the urgent need to unify is keenly felt. In the past the same appeal was ignored and instead further fragmentation was engineered at different points in time.

The unity cry was also heard in the 1990s. Parties like the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), the Hill People's Union (HPU), the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC-AM), Meghalaya Progressive People's Party (MPPP) answered to the plea. And so the United Democratic Party (UDP) was formed in 1997 under late EK Mawlong, BB Lyngdoh and others. The Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) resisted the attempt and insisted it must maintain its identity and history of contributing to the statehood struggle. Instead of joining forces with the UDP, the then powerful former KSU leader, Paul Lyngdoh formed The Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) just before the 2003 Assembly elections thinking the student body's political wing would be a force to reckon with. Realising his mistake, Lyngdoh unsuccessfully merged his party with the UDP in 2011 with KHNAM still alive today. Other mushroom parties like the People's Democratic Front (PDF) was founded in 2017 with its founding 'fathers' giving no consideration absolutely to align with any existing regional party. This resulted in another mushrooming of regional parties.

The leaders that have publicly vouched for the UDP's plea for unification of all regional parties in the state are from the HSPDP and PDF. Renikton Lyngdoh Tongkhar has termed it the need of the hour. Is his party now willing to lose its individuality for the sake of the 'common good'? Or is the party stuck in the past? Does the party still want to be credited for the statehood achievement? Or with the founder Hopingstone Lyngdoh no more, is the party now ready to sacrifice its 'glorious past' and move on?

Similarly, the PDF president Banteidor Lyngdoh alias Paidang thinks it's high time that the regional parties amalgamate in the best interests of the people of the

State. According to him, what stands in the way of unification is the ego of leaders for everyone thinks he is a leader. However, for the larger good, individualism should be sacrificed, he urged. Lyngdoh has probably forgotten that only four years ago PDF came into existence because the founders thought they could take over the leadership in the state. Why is the unification song being sung after being dividers themselves? Is the party ready to abandon its 'vote bank' for the sake of unity?

In the 2018 elections the UDP had a vote share of 11.6% and won 6 seats. The party only fared better than the Independents (IND) who amassed 10.8% vote share with three seats. In its inaugural contest the PDF could muster 8.2% of the votes winning in 4 constituencies. The half century old HSPDP attracted only 5.3% fetching them just 2 seats. The Garo National Council (GNC), which will most likely not be part of any unification talk, recorded a meagre 1.4% share and returned empty handed in term of seats. The KHNAM performed identically with NOTA in pocketing 0.9% vote share, the difference being KHNAM won one seat 1 while NOTA zero. Taken together the vote share of regional parties amounts to 28.3 less than the Congress' 28.5% and more than the NPP's 20.6%.

In terms of seats the regional parties (13) came nowhere close to the Congress' 21 and the NPP's 20. The unification call has a point. Regional parties see the writings on the wall. The most alarmed is the 'big' brother, UDP. It has been humiliatingly reduced to 6 seats from 20 in 1998, the first election after it came into existence. Therefore, it invites others to look back to the late 1990s and early 2000s when it formed governments with support of the national party, the Congress.

The decline of regionalism has been steady since 2003. In that election the UDP was reduced to 9 MLAs down by a massive 11, the HSPDP was victorious in 2 constituencies, down by 1, the KHNAM (maiden contest) won 2 seats. Four regional parties in that election have become defunct. The one active today have never recovered from the defining drop. Post-election that year a Weekly observed, "The beginnings of electoral politics in the 1970s in Me-

ghalaya saw a clear demarcation between national parties and regional ones...The split in vote that has ensued has inadvertently aided national parties."

Unification may save further deterioration. But are there obstacles in the dream? It is noted that among all the regional parties, there is no 'Meghalaya party'. Except the GNC (Garo Hills based) all others are in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The UDP is the only one to claim pan Meghalaya status. However, for all practical purpose it is a Khasi-Jaintia Hills centric party. Anyway, at least it stands for a united Meghalaya. The HSPDP and GNC mutually want a Khasi-Jaintia and Garo state, respectively. KHNAM is defined by its very nomenclature. The PDF has not specified its core tenets.

So for unification to stand a chance either thing has to happen. The HSPDP, GNC and KHNAM will have to give up their fundamental ideology of standing exclusively for the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo peoples. Or the UDP has to surrender its 'all Meghalaya' creed. The HSPDP, GNC and KHNAM have to become inclusive and advocate for a united Meghalaya or the UDP will have to become more regional and fit into the world view of the other smaller parties. Such an eventuality is difficult to foresee. To expect HSPDP, GNC and KHNAM to charge their hearts is unimaginable. No one will also bet to anticipate that the UDP will narrow down its 'united' outlook. Hence, we are back to square one.

On the personality clash one can't comprehend the likes of Adelbert Nongrum (KHNAM) and Paul Lyngdoh (UDP) working together. The call for unification has also come against the backdrop of Ardent Basaiawmoit's announcing the formation of his own political party to be christened 'The Voice of the People's Party' (VoPP). Incompatibility with other leaders means that the once FKJGP firebrand leader has to found his own party. It is better to be a boss in a minor entity than a non-prominent leader of a bigger body. Though VoPP, which has composed the 'Para Khasi' (Among Khasis) and 'clean government' tune is yet to prove itself, but the present regional leaders consider VoPP a threat in the congested electoral battle field.

What makes the regional parties specifically different

from the national parties? What elements present in the regional parties are absent in the Congress or the NPP or the BJP? What, in recent years, have they done that the above three national parties have failed to do? The contribution to the statehood cause is acknowledged. But that is a past accomplishment. Now what matters is governance and policies. What do they incisively promise that others reject? Very concretely how are they the saviours of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities? If tomorrow these regional parties disappear will the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo societies be endangered? Will not the indigenous people continue to survive? Will culture, customs, tradition, land, trade and forests be safeguarded despite the regional forces ceasing to exist? The regional parties could not even prevent their partner, the NPP from voting for CAA, an anti-tribal law. Worse they voted for the NPP's Rajya Sabha candidate. How are regional parties then protectors of the Khasi and Jaintia tribes? We need articulate and clear answers to the above queries. The rhetorical proclamations during elections of being guardians of the 'Jaitbynriew' are of little value. Every one, irrespective party affiliation, national or regional, loves the 'Jaitbynriew' equally. The love is not unique to the regional parties. It is not reserved for anyone. Everyone is a 'nationalist'.

When there was an exodus from the Congress in 2018 no notable leader joined the parties that are campaigning for unification now. Most of the deserters embraced the NPP which has now become a national party. Today also the favourite destination is the PA Sangma established party. Is it because politicians see no merit in the regional parties? Are the local parties too tiny to accommodate bigger leaders? Is it a downgrade for the more educated and articulate leaders to associate with the 'Hynniewtrep' or 'Achik' parties? Their future is truly bleak. Fully aware that they are being overwhelmed by the two national parties, yet the regional parties are too full of themselves to act.

We will hear more unification stories. Regional parties may be akin to pressure group leaders who preach unity but go their own way the moment media spotlight is no longer on them. Inherent contradictions among the regional parties mean that unification will be a far cry. [albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com](mailto:albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com)

## Repeal of sedition law & UAPA major demand of Indian Jurists

### Former SC Judge Rohinton Nariman wants sedition law out

By Satyaki Chakraborty

The demand for the repeal of the sedition law and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) has now come to the fore once again with the former Supreme Court Justice Rohinton Nariman forcefully stating that the time has come for the apex court to let citizens breathe more freely by removing both sedition law and UAPA from the statute.

In fact this eminent jurist was most emphatic in pointing out that the Supreme Court should not keep sending the pending case to the Government since Governments come and go and it is not the Government's business to start amending or repealing laws. He said that it is a matter for the Supreme Court and it is important that the court uses its powers to strike down section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code and the offensive provisions of UAPA in the interests of free speech.

Many petitions are pending in the Supreme Court

be misused". "After Shayara Bano, manifest arbitrariness is now a ground you can take—that a colonial law is being brought to oppress free citizens."

Pointing out India's colonial mindset in continuing with the law, Justice Nariman said that "England has matured as a democracy. While during the reign of Edward III, there was a Treason Act, it was recommended to be abolished in 1977 and the same was done. The US also had a Sedition Act of 1798 which expired. After World War 1, they had the Alien and Seditions Act of 1918, which came to be the subject of several US Supreme Court judgements".

Explaining how the Section on sedition was initially present in the draft IPC but had not found a place in the ultimate Code, the former Judge said, "It was rediscovered and incorporated in 1870, and that is how 124A came to be. It was said that the Section was missed by



challenging sedition law as it is an old draconian law framed by the British during its rule to subjugate the Indians and the freedom fighters. Despite demands by the human rights activists and the independent jurists, the present government of Narendra Modi is retaining both the laws and these are being used to suppress dissent. Earlier also many retired judges including Madan Lokur and A P Shah demanded the repeal of the sedition. Leading human

oversight. The punishment under 124A was transportation for life and imprisonment for three years."

Tracing the history of the UAPA to India's wars with Pakistan and China, Justice Nariman said that they "led to the draconian UAPA. There is no provision for anticipatory bail and a minimum sentence of five years, which can be extended to life imprisonment. As regards bail, the prosecution only needs to show a prima facie case. This law should also be

*Stressing how the draconian laws muzzle free speech, Justice Nariman said, "There is a chilling effect on free speech. If you are booking persons, including journalists, under these laws, which come with large sentences and no anticipatory bail, people would not speak their mind."*

rights lawyers like Indira Jaising and Anand Grover have been fighting for the removal of sedition law and UAPA for a long time.

Stressing how the draconian laws muzzle free speech, Justice Nariman said, "There is a chilling effect on free speech. If you are booking persons, including journalists, under these laws, which come with large sentences and no anticipatory bail, people would not speak their mind."

At an event held to commemorate the 109th birth anniversary of late Viswanath Pasayat, Justice Nariman mentioned India's low ranking of 142 out of 180 countries in the Reporters sans frontières' World Freedom Index in light of this year's Nobel Peace Prize-winning journalists Maria Ressa (the Philippines) and Dmitry Muratov (Russia). If the top court repeals these laws, "maybe, then India will move from 142 out of 180 to much higher", he said.

According to the former Judge, the sedition law was "set up by a colonial master to suppress free speech in a colony" and "continues to

examined along with sedition law".

It may be mentioned here that in recent years, a large number of activists are in jail under UAPA provisions and they include the leading human rights activists arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case. They are still in prison and many of them are ailing. In fact, the renowned leader of the tribals Stan Swamy died in prison in ailing condition. Other imprisoned activists like Dr. Soma Sen, lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj are ailing but getting no relief.

Former Justice Rohinton Nariman's unequivocal demand for the repeal of the sedition laws and UAPA has given a fresh boost to the movement for the removal of the draconian laws and this should have some impact on the present bench of the Supreme Court. The CJI N V Ramana is taking a more objective view of the pending cases involving human rights issues and the expectation has grown that the CJI will look at the sedition case taking into account the need for ensuring freedom of speech and activities of the citizens. (IPA Service)

## Letters to the Editor

### Clarification

Editor,  
I was shocked to find a letter published in your 'Letters to the Editor' section in your newspaper on 12.10.21 captioned, "Is MUDA listening?" written under my name in the capacity of secretary Barun Apartments Residents Society. It also appears that the said letter was sent to you by email.

Please be informed that I have written no such letter to the Shillong Times and the same has been mischievously written under my name with some ulterior motive. I am surprised that your newspaper published the same without any verification whatsoever. It is possible that people seek publication of untruths merely out of spite and malice. It is the duty of the newspaper to ensure that such falsities are not provided any platform and due diligence conducted in the matter.

Yours etc.,  
Vikash Saraogi,  
Via email

**Editor replies:** This newspaper exercises due diligence with every letter that comes to us either by email or by post. When a letter comes with the name and phone number of a person and if the contents are

in public interest we usually publish them in good faith. We applied the same yardstick with this letter too that came to us via email and have now provided you a platform to publicly clarify that you were not the writer and someone has impersonated you.

### Indictment of the church

Editor,

The article of Albert Thyrniang (ST Sept 29, 2021) on PGI, SDG rating is a wake-up call for the church. He quoted the stinking remarks made by the official of NITI Aayog which goes something like this, "Nagaland and Meghalaya are two Christian states but they have performed the least. 'Nagaland for Christ' is a popular slogan in the state of Nagaland which has almost 100% Christian population among the tribal groups and on whom political power rests. Meghalaya is not far behind with almost 75% Christian population. Why have these two states performed the least?" The official continued, in Assam and other states there is stealing but in Nagaland and Meghalaya massive looting is going on. The official fur-

ther said about Meghalaya, 'Yours is a state of seams and corruption.'

As a Christian I hang my head in shame that an outsider has indicted the church. The majority of our leaders in politics, administration or business are members of the church. Perhaps most of us have learned to think that corruption and bribery are excusable since it has become normalized and part of our culture. The fight against dishonesty has to be a whole-hearted effort by the church. Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and the prime purpose of the salt is to prevent corruption. The Bible regards bribery as a sin against God, a perversion of justice and an abuse of power to satisfy greed. People of God must be honest. I am reminded of a storm raised by Ratan Tata that he abandoned plans to launch an airline as he refused to bow down to pressures of paying bribe to authorities to secure the necessary approvals. He said he was told by a fellow industrialist, "You people are stupid. You know that the minister wants Rs15 crores. Why don't you just pay up?" Tata's reply was, "I just want to go to bed at night knowing that I haven't got the airline by paying a bribe." The

recent news has made a full circle of six decades when Air India was offered to Tata on a platter. "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them." (Proverb 11:3)

Yours etc.,  
Torist Mark,  
Via email

### Yet another political party launched

Editor,

Perhaps by floating a new state political party by the name 'The Voice of the People's Party' (VoPP) on October 5 this month with brand new dynamic faces led by firebrand Ardent Basaiawmoit, it provides an alternative for the Meghalaya voters, especially the younger generation to exercise wider options to choose from the already eight existing political parties in the state, most of which are not worthy of mention here. It is a fact that many of the twenty lakh plus voters of Meghalaya today, may be fed up of voting for the same old parties and the same frail rugged candidates, and who knows it may be attracted to the new brand of politics of

the VoPP. Of course, anything can happen but voters, including mass leaders and the masses, generally are inclined to vote for known parties and well-known candidates and who can dole out gift packages.

According to media reports the brand of politics that the VPP is going to offer is upright and clean politics without monetary influence or the use of other camouflaged and dirty tactics to get votes during elections. This is really a new brand of politics that is worthy and ideal for our state. In fact, well-meaning people of the state want this brand of politics. We are not sure whether this brand will have takers or whether it will sell in Meghalaya's political market which has been dominated by the politics of money power, muscle power and religion. That is why today the quality of majority of our public representatives does not measure up to the expectations of the right-thinking citizens of Meghalaya.

The drawbacks of the VoPP and its leaders, with the exception of Ardent Basaiawmoit are that they are too new for the whole of Meghalaya. The Party itself and its leaders and its candidates need sufficient time to make themselves widely known to the voters of the different

constituencies. They have to prove that they can contribute and serve the people through their constituencies. The main new office bearers of the party are educationally highly qualified. This is very essential for them in every walk of life including in politics; but politics is a different ball game altogether. Apart from knowing the difficulties of every nook and corner of the constituency and knowing majority of the people there yet till date, in Meghalaya, candidates who have money power to throw around to please the majority of voters before the election and during the election are usually the victors.

As of now, we do not know what will be the fate of this newly floated political party in the coming general elections in 2023. With all its good intentions we hope it will succeed but it has to leave no stone unturned to sell its policies and ideologies if it at all has an ideology.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Sr. Journalist, Meghalaya

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

"A champion is afraid of losing. Everyone else is afraid of winning."

— Billie Jean King

## The Shillong Times

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### Tourism takes wings in Meghalaya

TOURISM is back on its feet with familiar scenes of tourists from across the country flying in to visit the Home of Clouds. Hotel and guest house owners wear a smile as things slowly limp back to normal. Eating places are buzzing with activity and this is what will kickstart the sagging economy where it is of Meghalaya or the entire country and the world. Those employed in the hospitality industry who had to return during the pandemic are travelling back to their former workplaces or have found new beginnings. Tourists wishing to travel to Pdenghshong and Dawki however will have a horrendous journey with all the earth cutting work that is going on which has marred the beautiful landscape and disrupted the otherwise smooth drive on that stretch. This brings us to an important discussion which is about railways and their lower impact on the environment.

The resistance to railways by the Khasi Students' Union and other pressure groups has never been tested against any rationale. The only claim of these groups is that railways will create influx which the state will not be able to deal with; that most workers in the railways, read porters, will be labourers coming in from outside the state. The question that arises is why are the local people not willing to undertake such work. That's the alibi for keeping the anti-railway bogey alive. The fact is that there exists a strong truckers lobby in Meghalaya which does not want railways. Yet those whose business is with food grains and other high-volume items have expressed their concerns in having to rely on trains that come only as far as Guwahati. Their contention is that they are never made part of the debate on railways where they can express their views. It is and has always been a one-sided debate principally because there is no culture of dissent in Meghalaya.

Coming back to tourism, the Umroi airport has seen a rise in footfalls especially from Kolkata. The FlyBig flight between Shillong-Delhi has just taken off and being a turbo-prop Bombardier aircraft with about 76 seats passengers say it is uncomfortable especially when the plane enters into a dense cumulonimbus zone. The question then is when will Meghalaya have a big enough airport for a Boeing to land? Why does it take decades for Meghalaya to have a full-fledged airport? Tourism requires a fully functional airport where aircrafts land daily and not only on scheduled days. The tourism lobby should push hard to ensure that a top-class airport such as that of Guwahati or Imphal comes up here at the earliest.

### A Healthy Coordination

# District Council and the State Government

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The dynamism in the life of the people in the State of Meghalaya has been badly affected by the perpetual conflict of interests between the Autonomous District Councils and the State Government. To put an end to this useless tug-of-war, the people's representatives in the District Councils, and in the State Government, need first of all to understand the constitutional status of the District Council and the State Government. By Article 244(2) and the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Autonomous District Councils have been established. And, by Article 244A and The North-Eastern (Re-organization) Act, 1971, the State of Meghalaya, comprising the territories of the Khasi, the Jaintia, and the Garo Autonomous Districts was created, and the State Government was established. The base Article 244 concerns with the administration of the scheduled areas. Hence, the District Council and the State Government are both concerned with the administration of the Sixth Schedule areas of Meghalaya by virtue of Article 244(2) and Article 244A respectively.

The need to protect the ethnic and cultural identities of the indigenous tribals of the State in the virulent sea of modern social change cannot be taken lightly. The indigenous tribals of these hills dearly hold that the land in which they are living is not the gift of any new constitutional system, but it is the inheritance from their ancestors who lived here since time immemorial. So, they consider this land as their ancestral property, and the way they conduct their social living as ancestral heritage. From these realities flow their ethnic, cultural and territorial identity. This is not a wishful thinking or parochial mindset, but a reality that has made the founding fathers of the Indian Democratic Republic to incorporate these tribal aspirations in the constitutional provisions to enable the tribals to protect their lands and safeguard their tradition and culture as well as to mould their own life and development according to their own genius. The members of the Constituent Assembly adopted the Sixth Schedule not solely on goodwill, but they had been compelled to do so by historical precedents and the diversified nature of the Indian society. Hence, in this light, the Sixth Schedule is not a gift, but it is a constitutional necessity to accommodate and reconcile the tribal aspirations with the tenets of a Democratic Republic.

Speaking of the Khasi society in particular, historical circumstances since the beginning of the British rule, compounded with the openness of the culture has put the society in a peculiar and critical situation not found elsewhere among the

tribal communities of North East India. This situation has always made the people take an exclusive and defensive stance; and this is perfectly natural. The fear of being engulfed by stronger external cultural waves is not unfounded, but true to the ground. The bona-fide non-tribal residents of Meghalaya need to understand and respect this ground reality as no human community whether big or small, developed or undeveloped is free from this natural exclusive and defensive stance. That is why non-tribal residents in Meghalaya still enclose themselves in their own cultural circles, socializing and indoctrinating their own members as distinct, apart from the indigenous tribals; and this is also to be respected as well. But at the same time, we have to accept the fact that expecting for a real cosmopolitan living in a situation of mutually defensive and exclusive mind sets is a distant dream.

Coming back to the main issue at hand, the Para 12A of the Sixth Schedule should in no way be a hindrance to the healthy coordination between the District Council and the State Government. The Paragraph 12A is to be applied only when an act of the District Council is beyond its mandate, or against its own mandate, or that it is in direct contravention to other provisions of the Indian Constitution. This constitutional provision has a rationale to exist for facilitating public interests and as a safeguard against infringement of fundamental human rights of citizens. An incident in 2013 is an example of how the District Council may act contrary to its own mandate. In 2013, the Government of Meghalaya refused to send to the Governor, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Nomination and Election of the Syiem, Deputy Syiem and Headmen of Langrin Syiemship) (Third Amendment) Bill, 2013, on the grounds that the principal Act was intended to serve and protect the indigenous Khasis in Langrin Syiemship, while on the other hand, the proposed amendment by the KHADC to delete the phrase "both of whose parents are Khasi by birth", from Section 2(d) of the principal Act would be against the existing tradition of the people of the Syiemship. Whether it was the truth or party politics that prompted the whole exercise, but overall, this episode demonstrated that under Article 244A, the Government of Meghalaya too has the mandate to conserve and protect the traditions and customs of the indigenous people. While in this particular case the District Council seems to lack that concern. The District Council's Bill in question is not repugnant to any existing law made by the State Legislature, but it

can be said to be repugnant to the fact of a subject matter which the State Legislature also has the mandate to enact laws for had the District Council not been there. The currently popular narrative that the State Government has no jurisdiction in the Sixth Schedule areas, or that the State Legislature has no mandate to make laws on the subjects of the Sixth Schedule is a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the constitutional provisions.

The domain of the District Council is with the maintenance of the social order in the cultural context; it is with the conservation and protection of land and culture, and guidance to the evolution of customs. The District Council should concern itself more with the management of land and its resources and administration of the tribal society in its cultural traditions and social values. The domain of the State Government is with the maintenance of the social order in the legal context; it is in socio-economic development, civic welfare of the citizens, and in matters concerning fundamental rights and gender justice among the citizens. It would be good if the District Council does not get itself involved with the modern civic development of the people which is a concern of the State Government. The ADCs should not compete with the State Government; and the MDCs should not compete with the MLAs in the implementation of modern development projects such as construction of roads, footpaths, playgrounds, bathing places, dustbins and latrines, etc. That is to be left to the State Government and the MLAs with their schemes.

As a suggestion specifically for the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, it would be good if the individual MDC development schemes meant for construction of modern infrastructures in the villages be abolished, and the fund be channelized for the construction of dorbar halls and judicial buildings in every Raid and Hima. We have seen that old and wretched buildings are being used as offices and dorbar halls in many Raids and Himas. Fund should also be provided for the construction of open-theatres for cultural festivals in the Raids and Himas. I have seen such large and beautiful open-theatres in the villages of Nagaland. With its meagre resource and limited financial capacity, it would be a wasteful exercise for the District Council to attempt to clean the Umkrah River; there are no cultural wastes there, but only modern urban wastes. It is better to leave that scavenging work to the State Government. On the other hand, special centres like the dancing ground of Hima Khyrim, the Weiking dancing ground, the Behdienkhlam festival grounds, and other

places of importance should be provided with adequate finance for improvement and beautification as these centres would not only reflect the culture of the tribe and raise its identity and image, but would also contribute immensely to the development of tourism industry in the State.

With regards to village administration, it would be good if the District Council enacts laws for the constitution of the dorbar shngong as a political and judicial authority, limiting to administration of land and social customs. The State Government on the other hand, can enact laws for the constitution of village councils limiting to the implementations of modern developmental programmes, providing civic welfare services to the citizens and maintenance of law and order in the villages and urban localities, without touching anything on matters concerning land and judicial administrations. Presently, the State Government has constituted Village Employment Councils (VECs) in the villages for the implementation of village infrastructures through the NREGS programme. Overall, the programme seems to be successful and the people are happy with the exercise, and the District Councils should have nothing to be suspicious or jealous about it.

As citizens of Meghalaya, we are fortunate to have the State Government for democratic and civil administration; the District Councils which are tribe-specific, and mandated with the constitutional authority to legalize the traditions and customs of indigenous tribes, and we also have the traditional institutions to provide cultural and psychological continuity in the minds of the people in the process of change. However, we must also be wise to adapt ourselves to the new circumstances of life brought about by social change. If we refuse to adapt to the requirements of Social Change according to our own will, then the powerful Social Change will force itself upon us to adapt according to its own will. Hence, let us equip ourselves with relevant attitudes and mindsets to be able to move culturally intact in the waves of social change.

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The lack of clarity on the issue of territorial authority especially in the Khasi Hills where the core concern of the people is the independent private ownership over their lands without any intervention by the Government.

The need to build up equitable, transparent and responsible democratic governance at the grass-roots according to the present requirements of the modern democratic society can no longer be ignored. The Khasi society needs to adapt itself to some healthy changes so that the tribe can survive in a competitive world.

## Modi's defence of human rights record of his Govt ludicrous NHRC chairman functioning as caged parrot

By Sushil Kutty

Human rights are routinely violated in our country. But rarely do ministers' sons drive a jeep over human beings, deliberately. Lynching of human beings, they say, became frequent after 2014. Mostly because of the cow. Lakhimpur-Kheri saw four farmers killed by a rampaging jeep driven by a Union minister's son, and in a "reaction to action" three BJP workers were beaten to death by enraged farmers.

Simultaneously, for altogether different reasons, farmers were set upon by police and a Dalit was beaten to death with lathis and shoes in Rajasthan.

Now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that there's "selective" outrage; that people are "interpreting" human rights violations keeping in mind their "selfish interests". Not surprisingly, the National Human Rights Commission chairperson Justice (retired) Arun Kumar Mishra agrees with Modi. After all, how many times does the NHRC

ter have been "selectively silent" on MoS (Home) Ajay Kumar Mishra. Maybe it's because it will be bad for the BJP, a big embarrassment, if Mishra is terminated from the Union ministry. Isn't Ajay Kumar Mishra guilty of playing around with the human rights of innocents?

Narendra Modi should explain his reluctance to act against Mishra. He cannot let talk swirl that it's Home Minister Amit Shah who is saving Ajay Kumar Mishra from the pink slip. Shah also his human rights! And infringement of human rights cannot be seen through a "political prism." Not taking action against Mishra is "political".

The PMO has "cautioned against the selective interpretation of human rights and using human rights to diminish the image of the country." How does raising Cain over the Lakhimpur-Kheri killings "diminish the image of the country"? If anything, the world will applaud, happy that there is



boss get to catch the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister? Luckily for him, Tuesday, October 12, happened to be the NHRC's foundation day and Modi chose to do the honours of ushering in the day himself.

Let's be honest, political parties haven't been honest and fair in their treatment of human rights abuses. Human rights violations have been "divided" according to ideology and the party - ruling party or opposition party? So, Rajasthan is Congress-ruled and, therefore, for the Congress and the rest of the Opposition not to raise Cain! But Lakhimpur-Kheri is in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh; therefore, fertile ground to go all out against Modi and Yogi.

The surprising thing,

democracy in India and not just a "democratic Prime Minister".

The BJP should be thankful to Modi. He's told his party leaders what to do? Go posthaste to Rajasthan and raise ruckus there. Actually the BJP will not go to Rajasthan, or Chhattisgarh - or Punjab! The BJP is worried stiff about Uttar Pradesh. An "Indira lookalike" is giving Modi and Shah sleepless nights and Yogi Adityanath cannot stay awake enough!

Now, farmer leader Rakesh Tikait says he and his farmers' army will pitch tents in Lakhimpur-Kheri and stay put till Ajay Kumar Mishra is removed. Whatever happened to Delhi "gheraoed" or Punjab and Haryana? All roads are leading to Lakhimpur Kheri

Now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that there's "selective" outrage; that people are "interpreting" human rights violations keeping in mind their "selfish interests". Not surprisingly, the National Human Rights Commission chairperson Justice (retired) Arun Kumar Mishra agrees with Modi.

however, is that while Priyanka Gandhi and Rakesh Tikait and RLD leader Jayant Chaudhary have parked themselves in Lakhimpur-Kheri, top BJP leaders are not out in strength in Rajasthan. Does it mean that none of the political parties are with the Dalit? The Opposition has concentrated its ire & fire in Lakhimpur-Kheri while mum on "Rajasthan".

And the BJP, caught with fingers in the cookie jar, hasn't ventured anywhere close to Lakhimpur-Kheri, while avoiding travel to Rajasthan! So, what's Prime Minister Narendra Modi trying to say when talking of "selective" interpretation of human rights? He should make it clear whether he includes the BJP also among the "selective outrage" lot.

There cannot be two interpretations on who all is outraging. The Prime Minister and Home Minis-

But Narendra Modi wants the Opposition to go to any state/place other than Lakhimpur Kheri! Modi is doing his own selective interpretation of Lakhimpur-Kheri, and the Opposition is loving it. At the crux of Modi's selective outrage at what the Opposition is upto in Lakhimpur Kheri is his reading that the BJP has been rendered toothless in Uttar Pradesh.

That the BJP is rattled and bereft of an issue to rally around in Uttar Pradesh is apparent from the fact that BJP spokespersons are suddenly raising stuff like "What was Sonia Gandhi doing before her marriage to Rajiv Gandhi?" and "what was Rahul Gandhi doing with Sukanya Devi?" The BJP's desperation is showing, and it's clear that deep down the BJP is hurting. Very bad. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Rejoinder

Editor,  
There have been serious allegations time and again in your esteemed newspaper that false installation certificate has been issued by the undersigned to the Turnkey contractor on the alleged non-installation of Smart Meters under the ADB funded project in Meghalaya. This has greatly affected my near and dear ones including myself.

As a responsible officer of a respectable organisation, I deem it necessary to clarify my stand for the information of the general public. That at the time of issuance of the certificate, about 25,000 smart meters had been installed. As on date, more than 28,000 smart meters have been installed out of which, 27,578 numbers have been migrated to the Head End System (HES) as on September 30, 2021. The installation certi-

cate issued was based on facts and figures as per office records and as indicated in the smart meter portal.

Screen-shot of the smart meters portal showing the status of smart meters installed is enclosed for your ready reference.

Yours etc.,  
SB Umdor,  
Chief Engineer (Projects),  
MePDCL

Editor replies: We have spoken to experts on this issue and they maintain that unless bills have been generated from the smart meters, their mere installation does not mean that the terms of the contract are completed. We are also aware that a meeting is being held on October 19 next to discuss the matter relating to generation of smart electricity bills through UGO Billing System of the already installed smart meters numbering approximately 28,000 and generation of normal bills of the consumers already

migrated to the UGO billing system. As of date the bills generated from the homes of people that had installed smart meters are the same one generated by the meter reader.

#### Will MPSC take action?

Editor,  
Through your esteemed newspaper, we would like to ask the Meghalaya Public Service Commission whether it is privy to the allegations and pictures that were circulated on social media, in which candidates appearing for the Meghalaya Agriculture Service, written examination appeared to have books, bags and were sitting next to each other inside the examination hall, at Tura Government College. The examination was conducted from October 6-8, 2021.

The situation at Centres in Shillong is an altogether different scenario, where

even a pencil bag was not allowed inside the examination hall, forget about other belongings. Candidates were subjected to frisking too prior to entry into the examination hall. If MPSC doesn't investigate and take action, then we can assume that those involved in such illegal activities have got permission from the Commission to have an open book examination; in other words to literally cheat!

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Shillong

#### Does Meghalaya need a new counter-insurgency template?

Editor,  
Improvised explosives have become the favoured weapon of choice, and certain groups are seeking a revival. The spotlight again is on the management of

affairs within the security apparatus of Meghalaya. Recently, intelligence took the backseat again on the latest IED, which was found outside the National People's Party office, intending to spread terror and undermine confidence. The crux of insurgency lies in the socio-economic problems which plague a particular area or territory such as unemployment, lack of schools, bad roads, flow of illicit drugs and thereby militants seek support from the local populace by promoting political struggles against the government.

Counter-insurgency is equivalent to learning how to eat soup with a knife. It is about grasping all aspects of the situation in which they are engaging, and then understanding principles from past events administering them thoughtfully. Areas of focus are living among the population, locating forward operating bases

around neighbourhoods and villages. Strategies designed to minimise force, reducing civilian casualties and winning people over. Kinetic action would just exacerbate the problem. A new security doctrine should be crafted, bringing to bear the human terrain involving the need to understand the local culture, religious tradition and customs.

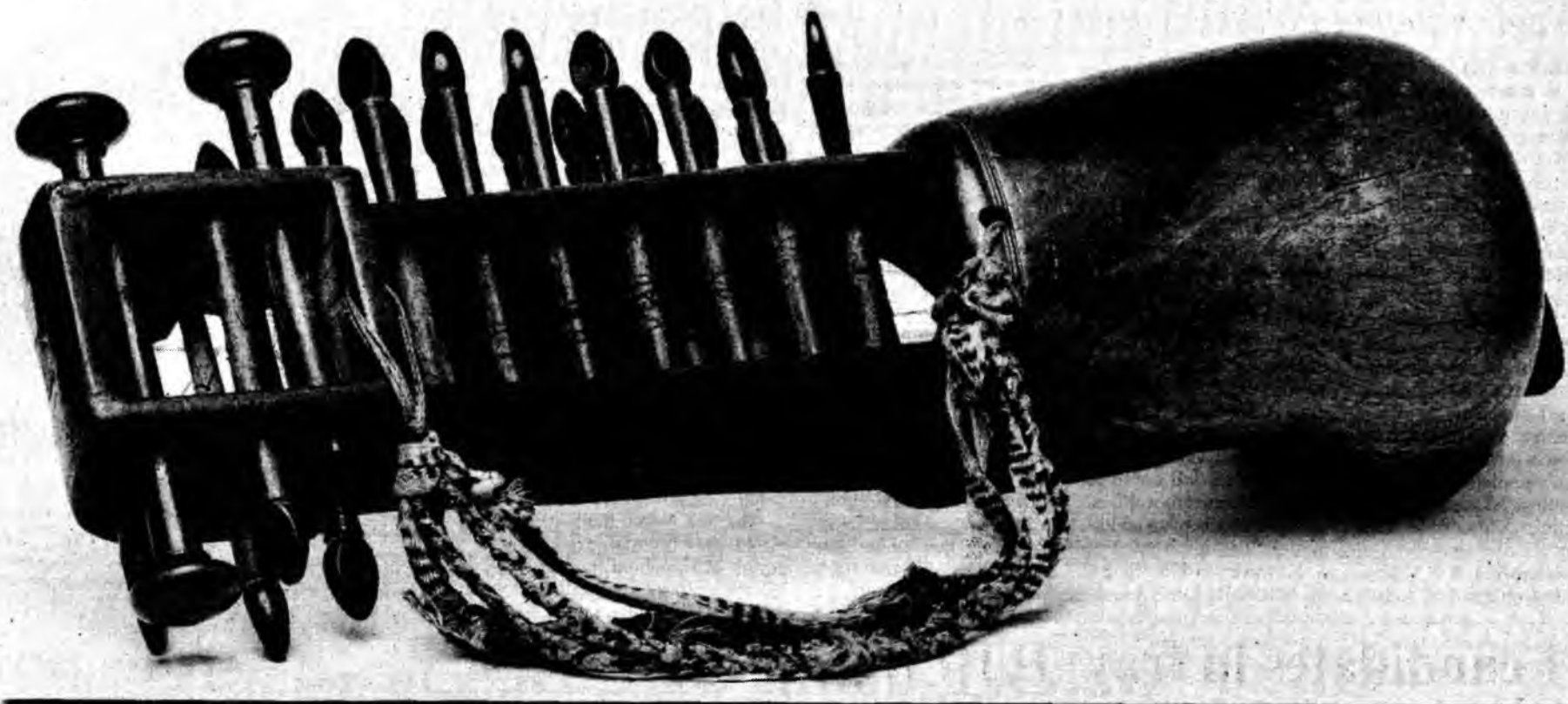
The book 'Sling and the Stone' by Thomas Xavier Hammes, a counter-insurgency specialist, warned that the future battlefield has changed, and the pandemic has shown the way ahead to adapt, improvise and overcome.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Shillong-10

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

# SILENCE ON THE MUSIC FRONT

**The global music community must help Afghan musicians resist a Taliban music ban**



The recent fall of Kabul to the Taliban has raised many concerns. However, the Taliban's violation of cultural rights is not being adequately prioritized, including its stance on music.

The last time the militant group ruled the country in the late 1990s, it banned music. For now, the Taliban has yet to officially take that step, but many musicians are reporting violation of their cultural rights.

During the 76th Session of the United Nations General Debate, Pakistan not only supported the Taliban, but also stated that since the Taliban has already promised to respect human rights, the global community should "incentivize them, and encourage them to walk this talk."

While Imran Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, criticizes colonialism for destroying cultures, he will not concede that the Taliban hurts local cultural expression — particularly when it comes to violating the cultural rights of musicians and pushing religious and sacred practices of Shi'ites and other minority groups into oblivion.

## CULTURAL RIGHTS AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

Cultural rights recognize the right to take part in cultural life, and the right to benefit from cultural values created by an individual or community. They are rights related to language, cultural and artistic production, participation in cultural life, cultural heritage and access to culture, among others — they are recognized in official UN documentation.

The Taliban's stance on music forbids people from enjoying and participating in cultural activities, and violates the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Cultural rights are human rights. In 2003, UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage established that traditional music and heritage are protected globally. As an ethnomusicologist studying cultural rights of Sufi performers in South Asia, my work supports this.

Ethnomusicology is the study of music in its cultural context. An expert ethnomusicologist on Afghanistan, John Baily, author of *War, Exile and the Music of Afghanistan: The Ethnographer's*

Tale, condemned the Taliban's ban on music in the 1990s.

It is important to understand that music is a form of labour for professional musicians. It involves building the craft, not only over a period of individual life but also inter-generationally — it requires practise and innovation that should be valued by society.

## THE TALIBAN'S STANDPOINT ON MUSIC

After the recent takeover by the Taliban, Afghan musicologist Ahmad Sarmast spoke to the BBC about the closure of music schools in Afghanistan, the threats to the safety of the students and musical instruments. He says:

"It is a time of devastation of our dreams, of hope, of inspiration for the future ... The students are very fearful about their future - not just of their education and their [music] program, but also about their life."

The Taliban's standpoint on music as "haram" (forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law) is a historical position that dates back to a narrow circle of Islamic legalist elites in the 14th century centred around Ibn Taymiyyah, one of Islam's most forceful theologians.

The proclamation was not legally enforced because historically, there have been Muslim caliphates who have been patrons of music in royal courts and advocated for people like the Sufis who use sound and movement to experience spiritual

arousal and heightened states referred to as *wajd*, *hal* or *kefiyat*.

There are many sonic practices that are not categorized as "music" within various cultures. For example, Inuit throat-singing was historically a game and not considered a musical practice.

In Islam, the category "music" entered the Arabic language through the Greco-Roman tradition of thought. In Arabic, the words *al-musiqa* (music) and *al-ghina* (singing) were referred to as secular forms of entertainment, and religious sounds such as call to prayer (*azaan*), the Quranic recitation and hymns such as the *hamd* (hymns in praise of Allah) and *na'at* (hymns in praise of Prophet Mohammed) are not referred to as "music."

## THE IMPACT

In the Taliban's violence against musicians — they killed a folk singer in August 2021 — they are not only opposed to secular forms of music but also sacred sounds and practices.

The Taliban are known to use chants called "tarana" to inspire their soldiers. According to Afghan ethnomusicologist Baily, they have also certainly permitted religious singing without musical instruments.

As an ethnomusicologist who grew up in a Shi'ite Muslim minority in Pakistan, I consider the Taliban's problem is not so much with the "illicit" place of music in Islam, but more fundamentally with tolerating diverse interpretations of Islam — including differing positions on the legality of

music, *sema* (audition) and various interpretations of Islamic law.

The Taliban have started their government on a note that has evoked memories from two decades ago. In 2008, the Canadian Center of Ethnomusicology (CCE) at the University of Alberta commissioned an Afghan rubab — an Afghan lute used in art and folk traditions in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Northern Pakistan — for its collection from Abdul Wardak, who lost his profession because of the Taliban's ban on music in the 1990s.

## THE MUSIC BAN PERMEATES OUTSIDE AFGHANISTAN

During my short field-work projects with Afghan Shi'ites in Edmonton, they said community elders stopped them from singing certain religious hymns, *qasida*, in the diaspora. Shi'ite Muslims have historically embraced *taqiyya*, which involves practising their rituals secretly during repressive regimes.

In light of inter-generational trauma that banning music and sonic practices had on Afghans in the 1990s, there is a legitimate concern over that ban being repeated.

The international community, particularly the music and music research communities, must stand with the Afghan musicians as well as Muslim religious minorities to protect their cultural rights. Cultural rights are human rights and should be considered central to ensuring that the Taliban "walk their talk." (*The Conversation*)

# To act or not to act?

By Shashi Bhushan and Radhika Tiwari

Ramlilas' not-so-healthy affair with big names

Ramlilas - a theatrical adaptation of Lord Ram's life that goes on for almost a week and concludes on the night of Vijayadashmi, are a major source of income for thousands of theatre artists during the festival season.

However, with popular actors and politicians like local MPs and MLAs being roped in to play roles, many artists who are already reeling under the ongoing pandemic-induced recession, are left with no choice but to look for other occupations.

Harshwardhan Kumar (name changed), a theatre student at the National School of Drama in Delhi said, "These popular faces are invited by big Ramlila committees, because smaller ones obviously cannot afford them. Now, I will not say that they have a huge impact on the livelihoods of theatre artists or the community at large but they do affect quite a handful of them, especially after Covid-19 when we are not getting many such opportunities to perform and get paid for it. Other than this, such acts discourage struggling artists."

The Bharatiya Janata Party has several leaders who take to the stage to play prominent characters from Hindu mythology in Ramlilas -- from famous actors-turned-politicians like Ravi Kishan and Manoj Tiwari to Leader of Opposition in the national capital Vijender Gupta, Delhi BJP General Secretary Kuljeet Chahal and former union ministers Vijay Sampala and Harsh Vardhan who essayed the role of Janak (Sita's father) in Lav Kush Ramlila at Red Fort in 2018 and 2019.

Recently, Delhi BJP treasurer Vishnu Mittal urged politicians and popular actors who perform annually in Ramlilas not to do so as it takes away the employment opportunities from those whose livelihood is dependent on this



profession.

He said, "I believe that one should stick to one's job. Artists play smaller roles, which are then taken over by these big names. If such stars start withdrawing their names on their own, more space will be created for those who actually need the part."

Praveen Shankar Kapoor, Delhi BJP spokesperson, who agreed with Mittal had some other concerns. "Ramlila committees invite these big names from politics and entertainment industry to please them and gain more traction in terms of audience. Usually, the artists rehearse for weeks for such a programme but when a star politician or actor steps in there is no coordination as they have hardly ever rehearsed together. These big stars with controversial pasts fail

to bring depth to the godly characters as their public perception is already formed."

Reacting to the question, BJP Secretary Kuldeep Singh Chahal jokingly said, "It all happens as per Lord Ram's will."

However, actor-turned-politician and BJP MP from North East Delhi Manoj Tiwari who participates in Uttar Pradesh's biggest Ramlila in Ayodhya, says that even some politicians' households, including his own, is sustained by these plays only. "Hamara ghar bhi toh wahin se chalta hai. Politics toh sirf samaj seva hai (We also survive through such plays and performances. Politics is nothing but public service for us)."

BJP MLA Vijender Gupta, who has been performing since

his college days, said, "I have represented University of Delhi and won over two dozen prizes then. It was only after three long decades that I went on stage. It seemed like a break because an artist never dies."

Sobha Deepak Singh, Vice President of the Bharatiya Kala Kendra in Delhi, told *IANS* that due to the economic slowdown, salaries of artists are being cut. "We hire them on and off as and when there is an opportunity. The community is out of money and we are not getting any kind of help from anyone."

When the Padma Shri awardee was asked what she thought about such an act of hijacking roles, she said, "I do not think this should happen. This is not right." (*IANS*)

# Aesthetically Appealing on Social Media

By Mehar Gulati

Social media platforms differ in functioning and appearance. Hence, it is really important to make sure that their aesthetics are in place so that one can attract more leads, increase sales, and broadcast the message in the right manner to the target audience. To ensure that your social media page is in the correct format and order, this guide can help you:

## Draw Inspiration

Every social media platform can weave a different story depending on the aesthetic you want to present. So make sure that you draw inspiration for your brand from the right sources and for the relevant social media platform. Pinterest and Instagram are more image-driven while content on Twitter is all about crisp tweets. Similarly, Facebook is all about combining trendy content with featured posts and stories. So, make sure that you use all the trending platform-specific updates and features to draw and implement your inspiration.

## Create Content

Conceptualize a board for yourself and start pinning content you like. It may include photos, videos, GIFS, carousels etc, that reflect your brand aesthetic and help you weave the story you want to portray in the right format. If you decide to use a template, make sure to pick one that fits your vision, sensibility, and covers your competitive strategy.

Also, pay attention to the description, content and information of the products you are considering to feature.

## Produce and Post

While planning content may sound difficult, producing content can be even more tedious. Ensure that you use original social media templates, unique formats, and different fonts. Get innovative with design, and feature content on your page with precision and perfection. You can shoot content, use Photoshop, try templates, or maybe combine free images from the internet to feature what you like.

## Set the timeline

Create a timeline to help you remember when you want to post, or when you want to have your content finished. A timeline is like a calendar for your content. You can create a simple timeline in your notes or phone calendar to stay on top of things. This will ensure that you know what to post and when so that you don't get lost amid the chunk of content. Also, do keep a tab on trending and topical posts, events or updates so that you can integrate them into your social media content to feature an aesthetic that you love! (*IANSlife*)



# Discarded cell phones have more gold than ore

How much gold can we get from mobile phones? Leading experts say a tonne of discarded mobile phones is richer in gold than a tonne of gold ore.

On International E-Waste Day 2021 on Thursday, the experts are calling on households, businesses and governments to get behind efforts to get more dead or unused plug-in or battery-operated products to facilities where they can be either repaired or recycled to recover a king's fortune in valuable materials and reduce the need for new resources.

This year's mountain of waste electronic and electrical equipment (WEEE) will total about 57.4 million tonnes — greater than the weight of the Great Wall of China, earth's heaviest artificial object.

Last year's Global E-waste Monitor reported that 53.6 million metric tonnes (Mt) of WEEE were generated in 2019. That represented a 21 per cent jump in the five years since 2014 (with e-waste predicted to reach 74 Mt by 2030).

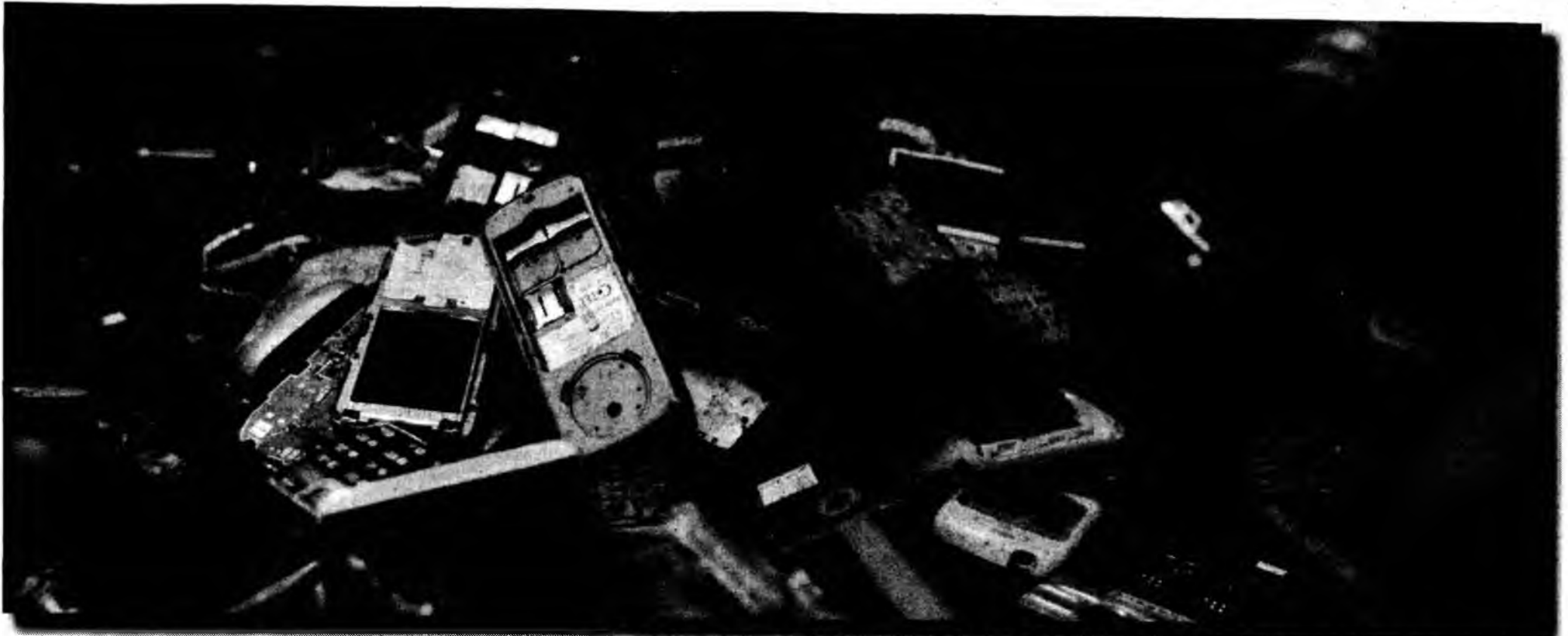
Global e-waste generation is growing annually by 2 Mt, or about three to four per cent, a problem attributed to higher consumption rates of electronics (increasing three per cent annually), shorter product lifecycles and limited repair options.

According to estimates in Europe, where the problem is best studied, 11 of 72 electronic items in an average household are no longer in use or are broken. Annually per citizen, another 4 to 5 kg of unused electrical and electronic products are hoarded in Europe prior to being discarded.

Another study estimates that 54 to 113 million mobile phones alone, weighing 10 to 20 tonnes, are sleeping in drawers and other storage spaces in French homes.

Meanwhile in the US, while many mobile phones are recycled, the EPA estimates that more than 151 million phones a year — approximately 416,000 a day — are trashed and end up incinerated or landfilled.

And an estimated 40 per cent of



heavy metals in US landfills come from discarded electronics.

By weight, however, discarded big appliances such as stoves and refrigerators constitute the largest component of the e-waste problem, which continues despite decades of efforts by governments at many levels.

The EU, for example, has comprehensive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation in place, consisting of targets and legal responsibilities, but member states struggle to achieve them for several reasons, as documented by UNITAR and the Brussels-based WEEE Forum in a report, WEEE Flows study and vision.

Pascal Leroy, Director General of the WEEE Forum, the organisation behind International E-Waste Day, said: "Many factors play a role in making the electrical and electronics sector resource efficient and circular. But one thing stands out: as long as citizens don't return their used, broken gear, sell it, or donate it, we will need to continue mining all-new

materials causing great environmental damage.

"This year's focus for International E-Waste Day is the crucial role each of us has in making circularity a reality for e-products."

Surveys reveal a widely-held public misconception that about 40-50 per cent of e-waste is recycled. However, less than half that — 17.4 per cent — was known to be properly treated and recycled in 2019.

In the case of cell phones, tablets, computers and other small information technology products, factors thought to discourage recycling include data security, product value, difficult-to-reach return points, and uncertainty about appropriate recycling, among others.

Says Ruediger Kuehr, Director of the SCYCLE Programme and Head of UNITAR's Office in Bonn, the value of EEE components in the world's 'urban mines' is enormous.

"A tonne of discarded mobile



phones is richer in gold than a tonne of gold ore," Kuehr points out.

"Embedded in one million cell phones, for example, are 24 kg of gold, 16,000 kg of copper, 350 kg of silver, and 14 kg of palladium — resources that could be recovered and returned to the production cycle.

And if we fail to recycle these materials, new supplies need to be mined, harming the environment."

"Moreover, the recovery of gold and other material from waste saves a lot of carbon dioxide emissions when compared with virgin metal mining," says Kees Balde, Senior Programme

Officer of the UN University's SCYCLE Programme.

He adds that high-value, recoverable materials conservatively valued at \$57 billion — a sum greater than the Gross Domestic Product of most countries — were mostly dumped or burned in 2019 rather than being collected for treatment and reuse. (IANS)

## 'Star Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, OCT 17, 2021

Mars is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Neptune on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. You will do things with logical planning which will prove to be very successful. It is going to be a very favorable time period during which you will achieve a lot. Financially you will remain well off. And there will be continuous flow of money. You could also enter into a new business venture or partnership which will prove to be very profitable. Any project that was delayed due to any official cause will finally get cleared. You will also get loans/finances from financial institutions. Your colleagues and office superiors will provide you ample support and guidance. Relation with your family members will be cordial. Your romantic life will be wonderful and you will also get suitable marriage proposals.

**Aries : (March 21 - April 20)**

It is going to be a very productive week for you. Your creative skills will come to the fore. You will be strong willed and determined. Your targets will get completed. You will be capable of removing obstacles from your path. You will impress your subordinates and boss. You will go to any extent to achieve your goals. You will be ambitious and not like to be dominated or controlled. Your financial position is going to be good. You will always remain surrounded by friends and well-wishers. Favorable conditions will be created in business and trade. Your health will also improve. You will also share good understanding with your partner/spouse.

**Taurus : (April 21 - May 21)**

You will show lot of punctuality in your work. money will keep coming but you need to be careful about it. Do not lend money to anyone. It might get struck. Decisions related to property matters in courts will come in your favor. You will get full support of your peers and bosses. You will work hard in your job and also get the desired results. You will make best use of modern technology to grow your business. You will also get promoted in your job. You will get good news in love relations and future prospects look bright. Husband and wife will have good understanding. Students need to focus on their studies. A situation of any festivity or marriage etc. may be created.

**Gemini : (May 22 - June 21)**

Your attitude will impress one and all. Your gentleness and soberly behaviour will win you lot of admirers. You will be able to get your work done with ease. Your communication skills will be second to none. Even some strangers will help you a lot. You will make new investments. You will be person with imagination and a creative bent on mind. You will be able to implement your ideas and bring them into reality. Your dreams will get fulfilled. However, your emotional nature will prove to be biggest weakness which you need to get over. It will prove to be a hindrance in your road to progress. You will share good understanding with your partner. And could gift him/her an expensive gift.

**Cancer : (June 22 - July 22)**

It will be an amazing week for you. You will plan for some important projects and give it a kickstart. Initially you will face hurdles but with the passage of time you will be able to achieve your goals. You will also make new contacts. You will also make new contacts. You will work hard and toll to bring business on its track. You also need to work sincerely in your job. You will complete your work in time. You need to be careful in financial matters. There are chances of fraud or conspiracy against you. Keep away from strangers. Your spouse will understand your difficulties and provide able support. Your relationship with your relatives and dear ones will be cordial and nice.

**Leo : (July 23 - August 23)**

It is time to make gains. You will be in possession of wealth, wisdom and intelligence with family support. You will also shine at your workplace. You will have all the qualities of a hard working person. You will also win debates and competitions. You will be idealistic, disciplinary and respecting. You will also have monetary gains. Lady luck will smile on you. You will get involved in new romantic ties. Be careful of your foes and opponents. You need to face every kind of situation wisely and fearlessly. You will also have profits in your business. Friends will help you from time to time. You will also take up some special projects.

**Virgo : (August 24 - September 22)**

You will be blessed with a unique personality. People will agree to what you suggest. You will get success in your pursuits. You will not say yes to any proposal without giving it a proper thought. You will not make friends easily. But once you are

committed there is no going back. You will remain loyal to your friends. You will not look for short term gains. You will purchase some property or vehicle. It is difficult for people to understand what goes inside your mind. You will be successful in love affairs. You will also enjoy marital bliss. People will keep encouraging you. You will also develop interest in spiritual activities. You will remain busy in your work and household activities. Working women will get support from their organization.

**Libra : (September 23 - October 23)**

This week will be full of opportunities for you. You will achieve miraculous success in your work. The graph of your opportunities and aspirations will continue to increase day by day. You will form successful situations in your work to earn profit. It will help you in a big way. Your financial position will remain stable. Some borrowed or struck up money will come back to you. You will be more energetic. You will work diligently for which you will be rewarded too. Lovebirds will have a very enjoyable time. They will enjoy each other's company. You will not compromise with your principles. Your parents will be very happy with you. They will give their blessings.

**Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22)**

It will be difficult for people to read your inner and outer personality. You will keep them guessing. They will be unable to read what is going inside your mind. But you will go about your task and achieve your goals. Avoid any rigid attitude. You will get success in business and management. Your capabilities and value will be reflected. Your enemies and opponents will remain active and will try to harm you. They will not get success. You will put in lot of efforts in your job and will become a cause of envy for others. You will enjoy a wonderful romantic life. Those who are married will have marital bliss. The understanding between wife and husband will be good.

**Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21)**

You will not be afraid of facing any difficult situation. You will face every obstacle boldly. You will be materialistic from the outside, but some corner of your mind will be spiritually inclined. You will remain popular and enjoy the spotlight. Your tasks will get completed in time. You will be able to satisfy your bosses. You will pay lot of attention to your family matters. Despite being busy, family will remain your top priority. You will also enjoy good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will have financial gains. It is important you work with lot of patience and dedication. It is vital you do not take any decision in a hurry and emotionally it may prove to be wrong. Your friends and relatives will stand with you through all the thick and thin.

**Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20)**

It is a gainful week. The star of your destiny will once again shine and will help all your struck tasks to gain momentum. You will work hard and perform well in your job. As a result, your work will be appreciated a lot and your self-confidence will increase. You will also have monetary gains. You will receive your loaned money back. You will also get a job offer or get a promotion. It is a very favorable phase for your business. Those who are single will get suitable marriage proposals. Misunderstandings will get removed in your relations. You will also welcome guests at your house. You will also undertake business related trips.

**Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18)**

It will prove to be a very fruitful week. You will be a game changer and your efforts will bring good results. You will perform those tasks which others will be unable to even think of. You will be practical in your approach and will call spade a spade. Put your best efforts to realize your dreams. Planetary position is very favorable. Jupiter and Saturn will give you good results. You can get success in matters related to abroad. You will enjoy a wonderful love life. Those who are married will share amazing bonding with their partners.

**Pisces : (February 19 - March 20)**

This week your chances of monetary benefits are very strong. You will have good relations with your partners and other business people. Your bosses will support you. You will also bring many new ideas into existence. There will be disruptions caused in the completion of an extremely important task. Your loved ones will support you. The husband and wife will have good understanding. You will have new sources of income. Do not sign any document without reading it. New contracts will be made in your business or job. Your senior officials and boss will be pleased with your work. You will feel elated and on top of the world.

## Career in Poverty Eradication

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the worst forms of human rights violation is poverty or hunger. There are many initiatives and programmes launched by different countries and agencies to reduce poverty but the challenge is still continuing as millions live in poverty in different parts of the world. Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. The recent pandemic has brought more challenges as it has reversed the success of the last three decades related to poverty eradication.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have pushed between 143 and 163 million people into poverty in 2021. The number of people living under the international poverty lines for lower and upper middle-income countries is projected to have increased in the poverty rate of 2.3 percentage points. Almost half of the projected new poor will be in South Asia, and more than a third in Sub-Saharan Africa. COVID-19 has already been the worst reversal on the path towards the goal of global poverty reduction in the last three decades.

The observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can be traced back to 17 October 1987. On that day, over a hundred thousand people gathered at the Trocadero in Paris, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, to honour the victims of extreme poverty, violence and hunger. They proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected. Through resolution



47/196 adopted on 22 December 1992, the General Assembly declared 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

It is time for us to build better and move ahead for the future. Building forward means transforming our relationship with nature, dismantling structures of discrimination that disadvantage people in poverty and building on the moral and legal framework of human rights that places human dignity at the heart of policy and action. Building forward means not only that no one is left behind, but that people living in poverty are actively encouraged and supported to be in the front, engaging in informed and meaningful participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

If we want to make our world free from hunger and extreme poverty then we need more dedicated and committed professionals. There are different programmes of Government to reduce poverty, in India it includes Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Pradhan Mantri Kausal Vikash Yojna, Integrated Rural Development Programme, etc. When we look at careers or jobs then one may work with various government departments or work with agencies like the United Nations or other similar

agencies. Aspirants should study subjects like Social Work, Sociology, Rural Management, Rural Development, Development Studies, etc.

Aspirants from the background of law of media may also actively work in careers related to poverty alleviation. Qualified individuals from legal background may work with communities and right holders for ensuring their rights for which they can choose advocacy. Similarly qualified individuals from media background may get involved in various campaigns to generate awareness amongst people. Most of the leading colleges and universities offer courses in graduation and masters' level which can be opted by interested and passionate individuals who dream to bring a positive change by working in the field of poverty eradication. Apart from academic qualification we need to have skills like effective communication and other employability skills and most important is to be passionate. There are many other similar courses which are linked with poverty reduction and one may get opportunities to work in India as well as abroad with leading organisations like different agencies of the United Nations.

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

*"Who controls the past controls the future.  
Who controls the present controls the past."*

— George Orwell

## The Shillong Times

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### Modi's poor India

OFFENCE is the best form of defence goes the adage. That precisely was how the central government fielded its Women and Child Development Ministry a day ago to "trash" the annual Global Hunger Index released jointly by two tracking agencies -- Irish and a German- about the state of the nations around the globe. It put India at the lowest 101th rank in a list of 116 nations, and showed the hunger situation in neighbouring Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal as being much better and China being among the best performers in eradicating hunger. Stuningly, most of those bracketed with India at the bottom level were nondescript nations, like Sierra Leone and Chad; and two 'worst' nations with some size were Afghanistan and Somalia. Somalia has remained as the 'best example' of poverty in the world and India has now joined hands with such African nations. Notably, most nations in Africa are way above India in poverty alleviation and in tracking the problem of malnutrition among children.

The poor in India are fed voluminously with "treats" from politicians, such as the *Mann Ki Baat* series by Prime Minister Modi, which praises the greatness of India, past and present. The poor in India are becoming poorer. Last year, India's ranking on this global poverty index was 94; this time, it went further down. Pakistan, Nepal etc on the other hand improved their rankings. Truth must be accepted and the best way for a government is to introspect and change things for the better. That means a loss of face but that's the price one pays for complacency. When Prime Minister Modi goes on another foreign jaunt he might be looked at askance. Unfortunately, poor Indians continue to be fed a diet of bombasts.

India has to think anew. Every growth index shows even Bangladesh growing at a faster pace. White-collared Indians are now going to Bangladesh to work for higher salaries than they are paid in India. Ten per cent of Indians have appropriated 90 per cent of the national wealth with backing from successive governments. The trickle-down theory propounded by Dr Manmohan Singh's UPA era had also proven to be a farce. What fat, elitist Indians seek is more freedom to "indulge" while the plight of India's disadvantaged sections is worsening. China works in the reverse and the results are there for all to see and fathom.

## Killing two birds with one stone

By HH Mohrmen & Melanie Passah

A few months ago Jowai the district headquarter of West Jaintia hills faced a gigantic problem of disposing off the waste that the residents produced. The problem emerged when the Jowai Municipal Board stopped collecting garbage from every single household in the town. It compelled people living in Jowai town to throw their garbage anywhere and everywhere, but most of the garbage was dumped at the market and waste mounds appeared in many commercial areas of the town. The town's impasse with the waste that it has generated has reached its lowest point when the JMB could not find a new landfill to replace the old one located at Muppyut village.

**Necessity is the mother of all invention**  
The problems we face as the town dwellers compel us to look for solutions to the problems we face. It is also



said that for every problem there is a solution and very often the solution is in the problem itself. We pilot-tested a project which deals directly with vegetable waste generated from households and converted the same to pig feed. This was done at our own household level. There is also a saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention," and although we do not claim that the project is a new invention, it in fact is something people have been doing all along but we did it a little differently.

Studies found that 23% of the waste generated from every household is kitchen waste. Therefore in order to minimize the amount of garbage going to landfills, we need to find ways and techniques to reduce generation of waste from the kitchen itself. Studies also indicate that in India in a town of normal size, each person produce 300 to 400 grams (3 to 4 kg) of solid waste per person per day. Jowai has a population of 28,430 so the waste produces is between 8,500,000 to 1,137,200 gram, or 85 to 100 tons of waste per day. 23 % of 85 or 100 tons of the total waste generated by the town dwellers which is kitchen waste will come to 20 to 23 tons per day.

**Converting kitchen waste to pig feed**

The efforts will not only help convert kitchen waste to pig feed but it will also inculcate in the town dweller the habit of segregation of waste at source. It involves segregating all vegetable waste which is mostly wet waste from the kitchen itself. What is left after segregation is mostly dry waste which can be used for other purposes.

It is a known fact that tribal people like the Khasi Pnar consume meat regularly and the state has to import pigs from outside to reduce the demand supply gap of pork in the state. Although pig rearing is a traditional activity of the people and most in the rural still keep pigs, but it is mostly for self-consumption. Very few take it up as a commercial activity and the main reason is because animal feed is expensive. The business of

is successful the next step is to replicate it elsewhere and hopefully it will in some way help reduce the waste problem in the town. The project is designed on the basis of Waste to Wealth and it will therefore be a business and it will help generate income or create employment for the local community.

**How did it all begin?**  
When the JMB stopped collecting waste from the households in the town, some people started burning their waste because it was the only solution they could think of at that particular point of time. But burning our garbage or domestic waste will lead to other problems. It emits carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which is again an environmental problem. But in order to stop this crisis we need to find a solution

livestock farming is not cost effective. Livestock farmers and pig farmers in particular complain about the cost of purchasing feed to provide for their animals. Based on these facts the process of converting kitchen waste to pig feed was pilot-tested by the authors of this paper.

The intervention will hopefully provide feed for the animals and also cut the amount of money that the pig farmers have to spend on purchasing feed. The fact that farmers have to pay Rs 7 per kg for mere rice husk which has no nutritional value for the pigs, speaks volumes about the problems that they have to encounter with trying to provide feed for their animals. The feed produced will also provide the farmers nourishing food for their animals and at a lower cost. This will then make the business of rearing pigs cost-effective and will definitely encourage more people to engage in the business.

**The three goals of the project**

It will reduce the amount of garbage/domestic waste generated from every household and at the same time produce feed for pigs. The other objective is to help solve the waste problem in the locality and if the project

to it. The solution to this major problem happening in Jowai town is to convert the vegetable waste into animal feed. There is a saying that charity begins at home, hence, the intervention that is proposed here is to deal with household waste only. The idea is to convert this major problem into an opportunity. Therefore, in order to solve this current problem and convert the 23% kitchen waste into animal feed we embarked on the process and were happy with the outcome of the efforts. The process not only converted kitchen waste to pig feed but in the process it also generates income for those engaged in the business.

**The process**  
The method used is called Bokashi. The term Bokashi derives from a Japanese word which means 'fermentation' using 'micro organism' technique. This technique helps in ensuring the hygienic practices and better growth of animals.

On the first day segregate all vegetable waste and put them in the bin. Along with the biodegradable kitchen waste, we add one tea spoon each of the two micro-organisms in the container. We need to stir well every time kitchen waste is added to cook the feed.

**The outcome is positive**  
The feed produced from maiden project pilot-tested by us was given to the farmer and the response is very positive. The report from the farmers is that the pigs which were fed with the feed did very well and went beyond their expectations. About one ton of the fermented pig feed was provided to the pigs since the beginning of the waste imbroglio in Jowai till date and the outcome is very positive. Pig farmers we talked to are hopeful that this will be a game changer and it will help them augment their business and enhance their production.

This project will be successful only if the entire community participates in the process. Hence the next step is to take it to the community level. If the project is successful it will be the first time in the state that waste is being managed and turned to animal feed and at the same time generate income for the stake-holders. The project will definitely be a game changer and it will kill not two but three birds with one stone.

(Melanie Passah is a student of Environment, Ecology and Sustainable Development from TISS Guwahati)

## Strict measures needed for limiting power consumption

By Harihar Swarup

Unprecedented. Unpredictable. A "perfect storm" of high demand, high global prices, and extended monsoons. All of these are common descriptors of how India came to have just four days of coal supplies left at power plants. These are all convenient but incomplete explanations. More than plain bad luck coming together in a perfect storm or any single issue, there was a wide gap in planning, coordination, and risk-taking. This problem also didn't happen overnight or even in a month or two -- it was many months in the making. Until we recognise these issues, this could happen again, and more so as India embarks on a high renewable energy future where uncertainty grows and planning becomes even more complex.

What happened? Globally high prices? It turns out India's power plants don't import that much coal, at least not most of them which are suffering (a few coastal plants dominate imports).

Huge demand for power? Can we blame "unprecedented

stocks at power plants fell from 7 days to four days from the end of August to the end of September.

But no one did enough when in the prior months stocks fell by double, from 13 days to 7 days.

Plants weren't buying enough coal because of many complex reasons. They were cash strapped. The chain is weak as consumers delay payments to discoms who delay payments to power plants, with high uncertainty over demand, it became temporarily wise to use onsite stockpiles FYI. The narrative was one of surplus, not just coal but power of plant capacity, and an individual plant always believed that as a nation, someone else will always fill in. States were anyway wary of stocking coal at expensive plants that rarely made it into merit order of dispatch, more so in conditions of uncertainty. But many individuals thinking on the same lines lead to aggregated problems. If google maps offers us alternative side roads as it's empty but everyone sees



ed power demand", 15-20 per cent higher than the previous year was an outlier. This year's coal power output was 10 per cent lower than in April.

Simple arithmetic will show that power plants consumed more coal than they received, but given that generation wasn't exceptionally high, does this mean that the problem was supply?

The real issue was lack of stockpiles. Supply varies both randomly and over the year, and power plants are meant to maintain a local stockpile. Coal India limited (fuel supply contracts vary by each quarter of the calendar year, with the rainy season (third quarter) only getting 22 per cent of the Annual Contracted Quantity (ACQ). Before and after this, each quarter gets 25 per cent but the January March quarter is meant to be given 28 per cent partly in anticipation of the upcoming summer demand. Power plants fail to draw this share, for a variety of reasons.

During Covid-19, coal was the swing producer, and lower power demand was borne almost entirely by lower coal power generation. This led to "record stockpiles", newspaper reports, to the extent that by April, there were stories expressing concern whether this would put a dent in plans for coal block auctions and even the need for private sector coal mining. What these reports fail to mention was that while total stockpiles may have been very high, most of this was the miner, Coal India Ltd (CIL). Stockpiles at power plants fell over FY21 by half, to about 30 MT.

Even though this fall meant power plants allowed their stockpiles to fall below their recommended levels. No one worried as things stayed stable for some months. The real problem wasn't publicised till the end of September, when we stood at an average of four days supply, and alarm bells ensued.

We panicked when coal

that, it won't remain empty for long.

Power plants changed gear and started asking for more coal precisely at a time when CIL was struggling to increase output. The extension was severe and many piles were flooded. Stockpiles are meant to handle such swings, but we didn't have enough. A small saving grace has been Indian railways, the main means of long-distance transport. Because passenger traffic is down, coal delivery currently takes half the time it normally did in the past.

That still doesn't make increasing delivery easy. Coal is a lumpy commodity, and not very liquid. A single large power plant might require two full train loads of coal every day. We just can't increase delivery by 10 per cent- we have to add a full rake.

In the future process I will discuss what this means going forward, and what we need to do to make sure this doesn't happen again. But one urgent issue I will flag is that we don't have a proper system to get consumers to reduce their demand, which can be done much faster than supply can increase. Voluntary reductions might go a long way toward helping to reduce or even avoid crises. These include steps such as aggressive control, lowering thermostats and colder/shorter bathing, leave alone actions by bulk consumers. Let's not underestimate the potential of this -- we saw huge reductions during the "nine minutes lights out" event last April.

If we voluntarily don't do something about it, the alternative is a return to involuntary load control, or load shedding, that's already started in pockets. With coordination we can lower demand at the peak, which will help even more. No one knows, and it doesn't substitute for more coal delivery, but we should certainly try. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### The danger of looking backwards

Editor,  
Two incidents occurred on the 11th Oct 2021 that brought on smiles of derisive cynicism to the faces of those who frequent social media news channels but who also pay avid attention to the political developments within Meghalaya. The first piece of news relates to Mr John Kharshing attaching himself to the NPP bandwagon. Now that was an anticipated surprise for a political rolling stone, but what followed next was a jolt from the blue as it refers to the statement of the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad K Sangma and NPP leader that his party, a so called National Party was willing to discuss issues related to the historic and controversial Instrument of Accession signed in 1948 between the Federation of Khasi States and the Union of India, whereby the Khasi States individually and collectively acceding to the Dominion of India. Point of interest is, after 73 years of Independence, is the IOA an issue of priority for a political Party with national aspirations?

Now isn't it a bit late in the day and akin to flogging a dead horse to be raising the question whether the

Khasi Hills are really part and parcel of the Republic of India? Claims have been made, to the contrary, that prominent mainland Indian politicians and leaders have forwarded these concerns of The Grand Council of Chiefs to the President of India for his consideration and that such action by these VIPs signifies the authenticity of the claim for review of the IOA. All one can say to such naive arguments is that courtesy should never be equated with political empathy. A review of the IOA now would open up a Pandora's box. What happens to the Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills who were never parties to the IOA? What happens to the state of Meghalaya and the Provisions of the 6th Schedule? Will the map of India have to be redrawn again to accommodate the 25 Khasi Himas and that the entire administration of the Khasi Hills portion of Meghalaya will then revert back to the tender, traditional and customary administrative care of the erstwhile 25 Himas? One shudders to even dream of such a prospect. One can only suggest that for those who still question the validity of the Indian Constitution, to have the courage of (L) Wickliffe Syiem and simply walk away from India. Now that's what I call a principled stand. Any takers?

As a simple citizen of this

state let me on behalf of a majority of people like me express and make clear the real priorities before the state and its people. Our Governments (Not only the MDA) have denied quality education to our people. We have failed to distinguish literacy with education and in the process simply produced graduates with paper certificates who are unemployable in today's world. No wonder there is such massive unemployment where both pressure groups and militants view extortion as the most viable means of livelihood. Efficacious Healthcare, especially for the rural poor is another area of concern and we need to make conscious efforts to increase the doctor: patient ratio for our village folks. Then there is agriculture where 80% of the population depend on for its livelihood. We need to improve our agriculture production; provide our agriculture produce with adequate value addition to make it viable for competitive markets. Our urban centres are crying for attention but sadly we have yet to see an Urban Minister with any initiative, passion or desire to improve the lot of our urban citizens. Despondency is growing all around.

If we want development; our future generations to thrive and survive, the above infrastructural amenities will have to be addressed and augmented. If we don't seriously

address the above lapses no ILP, no IOA, no HPC report on Them Iewmawlong, no Sur ki Nong..... for Khasi unity etc will be able to prevent migration of our people to other parts of the world. We shall simply become, as all of us dread, carriers of water and hewers of wood for others far away from our homeland, for by then this state will no longer be a liveable place under the sun. What we really need is visionary leadership with the foresight for the future not a backward looking leadership that only glorifies an imaginary past for its own selfish political gain. The sorriest part is that we have yet to start a debate on how all of this should come about.

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

#### End of a joyous Durga Puja celebration

Editor,  
The festive season commencing with Durga Puja augured well amid receding Covid-19 pandemic in our state especially in Shillong city. The spirit of festivity limped back with cautious optimism as was evidenced from healthy participation by people of all age groups. The SOPs issued by Government were carefully adhered

to by the Puja committees with only some minor aberrations. The best part of this year's Puja celebration is that the people appeared to have overcome the fear psychosis of the pandemic and have realized that life should go on amidst this new reality. This, however, was not at the cost of safety, as most people were found to be wearing masks and taking precautions against Covid-19 as far as possible.

The District administration was active in enforcing the protocols without stifling the festive spirit, which deserves appreciation. A sizeable number of tourists were also spotted in the capital town enjoying the unique Puja revelry one finds only in 'The Scotland of the East'. Such a peaceful and disciplined celebration of Puja in Shillong needs to be showcased before the entire country to give a much-needed fillip to the tourism industry. Let us all continue to behave responsibly in the coming days so that all of us can enjoy Diwali, Christmas and New Year in a befitting manner.

Yours etc.,  
N.K. Kehar  
Shillong-3

#### No intent from NEHU

Editor,  
It is a well-known fact

that almost all the colleges in the city have been reopened for offline education. One institution which has still not opened its doors is NEHU. It is absolutely disappointing that the authorities continue to offer online classes even when there is a window of opportunity to restart physical classes in a phased manner. What's even more dejecting is the intent on their part. Every time a student raises a query in this regard, his/her concern is brushed aside. Through this letter, I wish to request the authorities to take this matter seriously as online education cannot replace offline classes in any way. Online classes were a temporary solution at a point when going out was not an option. Things now are steadily improving and it is about time to explore opportunities to get life back on track. We are all aware of the importance of physical and social interaction for young boys and girls and thus, the resumption of classroom learning is the need of the hour.

Yours etc.,  
Alex Kharsyntiew  
Shillong-8

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.

*"A good sacrifice is one that is not necessarily sound but leaves your opponent dazed and confused."*

— Nigel Short

## The Shillong Times

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### Sweeper's Lane Imbroglia

AT the heart of the Sweeper's Lane mess is the long-standing aberration of Meghalaya not having an elected Municipal Board. Nowhere is a Municipal Board run by the government officials at the helm. The Municipal Board is the best example of local governance as it addresses issues of sanitation, waste management, electricity, water supply and in some cases even primary health and education. An elected Municipal Board would, unlike the Dorbar Shnong, have legitimate funds at its disposal for carrying out civic governance. Election of ward commissioners to the Shillong Municipality happened in the 1960s before Meghalaya became a state in 1972. The main contention against elections to the Municipal Boards is that the powers of the traditional institutions would be diluted. Attempts to hold elections to the Shillong and other Municipal Boards have repeatedly met with stiff opposition from the bearers of tradition. The question is how long can traditional modes of governance serve the interests of citizens in the 21st century when the very idea of waste management itself has exceeded the competence and capacity of traditional institutions to manage.

If the purpose is to conserve the traditional institutions like museum pieces that have outlived their utility and are mere showpieces, then they should not obstruct the wheels of governance which require modern administration and competence. The reason why Meghalaya has an intractable problem in the form of the Sweeper's Lane/ Harijan Colony/ Them Metor is because since Meghalaya was born no one really cared to do an audit of what is happening in the place. The SMB which is run by civil servants has left the matter unaddressed because they know it is like disturbing a hornet's nest. The British Government had leased that area from the Syiem of Myllem for the purpose of accommodating the Municipal workers then — the Mazhabi Sikhs. At the time they could not have been more than a score of workers. Today the Sweeper's Lane houses hundreds of families, many of them not employed by the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB). They include the children and grandchildren of the first settlers who are now working elsewhere but choose to settle in the same place which they have inherited from their parents/grandparents. If there was proper supervision and accountability by a vigilant and elected Municipal Board the problem would not have festered as it has today. An alternative space for these Municipal workers should have been identified at least four decades ago when the congestion had started showing.

Now when business honchos envision a commercial hub in the place and want the sweepers removed, the issue has turned political with the Sikhs flexing their national and international clout to insist that they remain at the same place despite its decrepit condition. If the Government has created the infrastructure to relocate the Municipal workers and their families then there is no reason why they should resist that move.

# Of Peace and Rest

D Kitbok Rynthiang

It was the 10th April 1970, when news flashed from Delhi where the leaders of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference, were gathered to lobby for granting of the Statehood to the hill regions of northeastern India. It must be remembered that that Hill leader's conference has been reduced to only leaders from Garo Hills under the leadership of Captain Williamson Sangma, leaders from United Khasi & Jaintia Hills, comprised BB Lyngdoh, Prof G G Swell, SDD Nichols Roy, Hoover Hynniewta, Ripple Kyndiah, Hopingstone Lyngdoh and others from the Khasi side, Kistobin Rymbai, Edwin Bareth, Johndeng Pohmen and others from the Jaintia side and it should not be forgotten that then Mikir Hills now Karbi Anglong under the leadership of C S Teron were sitting on the fence as members of the All party Hill Leader's Conference. Nagas had all moved away from the idea of a Hill State as early as 1955-1956 while Mizos moved away from the idea by 1964.

It would not be out of place to mention that the idea was to begin with a thought of all the hills united in the movement for that peace and rest when freedom from colonization did not bring that dream. It was the act of enforcing Hindi as the main language which caused regional languages to raise their hood of regionalism by imposing their majority language as the official language of the province and in case of the hills it would mean Assamese. The Nagas believed they do not belong to India under the leadership of A Z Phizo who was a resident of Shillong, in Jaiaw Laitdom where his family continued to live there till the 1970s, with his wife, the daughter and two sons being the occupants of a house across the present Pearly Dew School. The Mizos followed suit in 1964 under the leadership of Laldenga. What a loss to the cause of a Hill State! The south, particularly then Madras blacked out Hindi.

Freedom from the British did not bring peace and rest and now this brought about the idea of "No Hill State No Rest!" It was the death of a dream twice over with leaders of each hill district choosing their narrow vision and self-aggrandizement at the expense of a higher cause. The proclamation of April 10 1970 resulted in a euphoria in Shillong and Tura the then major towns of the truncated Hill State. What followed was the unbelievable excitement of people leaving Shillong to go down to Byrnihat to pick up their new-found heroes, so much so that Shillong town becoming almost a ghost town. There were no more motor vehicles left in the town and only children and older people waiting at home to join in the euphoria. What happened that day in

Byrnihat, Nongpoh and other villages is a story for another day. That all happens without the present social media but suffice to say it is an antecedent to a consequent.

For any peace to happen, economic growth is important. Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, in their well-researched book, 'Why Nations Fail,' a research spanning over hundreds of years, wrote, and I quote maybe extensively so we can understand context, "All economic institutions are created by society. Those of North Korea, for example, were forced on its citizens by the communists who took over the country in the 1940s, while those of colonial Latin

Coming back to our desire for prosperity resulting in peace, it was like chasing a mirage that disappears all the time. The 'No Hill State, No Rest' became an illusion, as the society found no rest in the absence of peace. There is no doubt that money wise, there is great improvement and people are seeing more money in their hands than in 1970s, but is it possible that the State lives on a false economy? The economy of the State is driven more because of the Government and not that the state has become richer because of the community. Take away the Government funding, you may as well see the collapse of the whole system like nine pins.

*"Young people are either restless or weary of the game and join the club, while the unemployed youth who feel lost in the jungle of 'winner takes it all,' take up arms to loot. Some get lost in substance abuse that cause their early death resulting in no rest for families who have to weep and cry in the stillness of the night are prime examples of that deprivation."*

America were imposed by the Spanish conquistadors. South Korea ended up with very different economic institutions than the north because different people with different interest and objectives made the decisions about how to structure society. In other words, South Korea had different politics."

Politics is the process by which a society chooses the rules that will govern it. Governance determines the prosperity of a nation or the poverty thereof. Prosperity brings peace if governed right but what we see in the world, say USA, today there is no peace no matter how prosperous they are, because governance is 'tòxic'. This is on the macro side but coming to our context which is micro, governance is governed by an uninformed populace albeit they may have schooling or college education that has no bearing with enlightening the choices they can have or the type of governance they can choose. Acemoglu and Robinson also state, "Politics surrounds institutions for the simple reason that while inclusive institutions may be good for the economic prosperity of a nation, some people or groups, such as the elite of the communist party of North Korea, or the sugar planters of colonial Barbados, will be much better off by setting up institutions that are extractive. When there is conflict over institutions, what happen depends on which people or group wins out in the game of politics—who can get more support, obtain additional resources, and form more effective alliances. In short, who wins depends on the distribution of political power in society."

The writer does not claim expertise or scholarly achievement, but only as an informed reader with an interest in forming public opinion and he can be reached at kitbok@hushmail.com

In the government economy, only a few are the beneficiaries even in the best of times but more than likely that extractive institutions created, an unholy nexus lurking in the shadows and like a leech drains out the blood from the sapiens it sucks, causing the same to collapse and die, while the leech grows and multiplies.

Young people are either restless or weary of the game and join the club, while the unemployed youth who feel lost in the jungle of 'winner takes it all,' take up arms to loot. Some get lost in substance abuse that cause their early death resulting in no rest for families who have to weep and cry in the stillness of the night are prime examples of that deprivation.

It would have seemed that peace and rest should be the fundamentals of every citizen irrespective of caste, creed or religion but lo and behold class consciousness was created by having the 'them and us,' where the haves and have-nots come to the fore. The issue of tribal and non-tribal appears where the haves tell the have nots, "I have but you have not."

A State was created for the welfare of all those who live in it but the fact is that those who have lived in the state for generations have even lost their rights to livelihood. Thus, extractive institutions were created for the few only. This is not trying to absolve the non-tribal of responsibility, where their lumpen elements, before any sort of caste violence appeared, on a beautiful evening of the 60's stabbed to death an innocent young man who was on his way home from All India Radio,

after delivering dinner to his mother who was on late duty that day. He was an innocent victim, not a violent person, still in high school, but became an innocent gun powder that triggered the great divide, the death knell to a peaceful co-existence.

As a result of the proclamation, jockeying for the juiciest chair began in earnest. Suffice to say that Captain Sangma was the clear winner as he was the only leader with a clear following to command respect and qualified to take the lead role. The others were too many of them to have a clear lead. In the process, Mikir Hills was forgotten, and Assam Government took CS Teron under its wings and nurtured him. This required for a referendum of the Mikir people to decide whether they would choose to be a Hill State or go with Assam. Both Prof G G Swell and B B Lyngdoh along with the others got busy looking inwards and missed the forest for the trees, resulting in the loss of Mikir Hills as the part of the Hill State as the referendum said they wanted to stay with Assam. C S Teron played his card very well, being the only leader of the Mikir people. The result is loss of the larger Khasi tribe as the Khasis knew them as "Bhoi Mikir" part of a larger Khasi Tribe and the granary of the nation. A division was made between the Khasis who were largely Christians while the Mikirs were largely animist. The failure of Christianity in perspective was because of Calvinism that believes in pre-destination, thus, placing them outside of Christian salvation. A big failure of the church and the State lost a people and their land which could have added to the wealth of the State; the well-being of their people. While Hinduism went on to embrace them under its fold the Khasis lost their place in the horizon to become leaders due to a narrow vision.

We have the border problem, because leaders were too busy jockeying for position to have time to think of looking at their own house where termites have started to penetrate.

In conclusion to this episode, peace loving people were forced to become ferocious. Malcolm Gladwell in his Essay, 'Trouble Makers' wrote, 'Because we don't know which dog will bite someone, or who will have a heart attack or which drivers will get in an accident, we can make predictions only by generalizing. As the legal scholar Fredrick Schauer observed, "Painting with a broad brush", is "an often inevitable and frequently desirable dimension of our decision-making lives"

The writer does not claim expertise or scholarly achievement, but only as an informed reader with an interest in forming public opinion and he can be reached at kitbok@hushmail.com

# Hunger is only one sign of India falling

By Jagdish Rattanani

The government is understandably upset with India's poor standing in the '2021 Global Hunger Index' and has begun an exercise to discredit the report and its findings. The official story that India is shining doesn't fit the ugly fact that people have been severely hit by Covid-19 and related restrictions in India, which is also the nation with the highest child-wasting (low weight for height, reflecting undernourishment) rate worldwide, to quote the 60-page, peer-reviewed report. The report produced by Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e. V., Germany and Concern Worldwide, Ireland, (both noted aid organisations in their respective countries), places India's global hunger index rank in the world at 101, closer to the bottom of the heap of 116 nations ranked, and well behind Pakistan at rank 92, Bangladesh at rank 76, and Myanmar at rank 71.

In the divisive political climate of India, the issue is already relegated to political football status, and will soon be forgotten. It will be buried by an official propaganda machine that knows how to digress and divert attention, and an opposition that will want to score points. Both do disservice to the condition of the poor, particularly children of India, where admittedly and on official count, malnutrition is a contributory factor in 50% of child deaths across the nation.

These are complex and interconnected causes that won't go away in a hurry though they can get worse very soon. Yet, the numbers on the hunger index tell the story of India that is right now so caught up in the glorification and celebration of its imagined stardom that there is not much time to look to the fires that are burning in our backyard.

The report also serves to highlight a longer-running theme of two nations that don't have much to do with each other, presented often as Bharat versus India. This is the divide between the rural and the urban, or the gap between the farmers, blue-collar and the white-collar workers. In the past, this divide exerted its pressures and forced a hearing. It turned politics and policy, albeit in a slow process that was at times frustrating for those laying claims to the power and privilege enjoyed by the other. But protest carried weight; it had political capital and it was recognised as a legitimate demand. The labour unions had a voice. The farmers could gather and the government had better listen.

This is different from where we have landed today. The two Indias' have gotten further apart.

The farmers of India are on a massive protest for a year and there is a disdain and wholesale dismissal of their voice against laissez-faire laws that mark fundamental changes in the way they will live and work hereon. India is weakened by this non-hearing given to farmers who have struggled to be heard. Similarly, India's child mortality rate is the non-hearing of the voices and cries of children and mothers and families who have been unable to similarly ask for their basic rights. It is true that this is not a new problem but the previous governments at least exerted, even if halfheartedly, to address these concerns. Now, we have the face turned away. It is as if it does not matter in the light of a brute Parliamentary majority. It is "them" versus "us".

Thus, the divides of yesterday have widened today along with the further burden of an ugly and sinister care-a-damn signature from an

India that is racing to the top of the world order, as we are led to believe. This divide mirrors across many spheres — the way labour migrants were stranded and treated versus industry captains demanding later that they be forced to return and that labour rights be curtailed; the way ordinary citizens struggled for oxygen at the height of the pandemic versus the way doctors fleeced and charged and made money; the way a fancy capital is being built versus the way infrastructure for ordinary citizens is crumbling; the way hotels are busy and airports are crowded versus the non-discourse on jobs for our youth who graduate every year and struggle to find work; the way more than 100 people die every day of snakebite versus the way we have advanced health care in some of our best hospitals; the way undertrial's languish in jail and Father Stan Swamy died in custody versus the way the former police commissioner of Mumbai Param Bir Singh has gone missing and the police he led once now hunts for him; the way a bullet train will one day run while several current railway stations remain in disrepair.

In this kind of a line up, the hunger index is but one more indicator of how India is slipping even as the noise of India on the march is made to grow and overwhelm all other voices.

For the first time also, we appear to have a government that works with a sense of certitude — it has a way paved not in the need of the moment, the requirements of our times or in response to the pictures of suffering before us. It is cut in its own version of an ideological frame that is being pushed in the belief, it appears, that India's time has come, that businesses will lead, that prosperity will reign and government can take a backseat as a private sector fired by animal instincts and growth hormones like the concessions and sops on offer will take us to a GDP-led nirvana. That is one underlying narrative of a wild ride that India is now being taken on. In its support is an army of propagandists, who seek to divert dissent and paint a diverse, multifaceted nation with one hue of saffron politics. It diminishes the rich legacy of Indian traditions. It builds anger and hate among the depressed and the downtrodden. It is not the picture of India on a path of sustainable growth.

The narrow ideological trap takes it as given that socialism was bad, Nehru got it wrong, Gandhi was not particularly noble and our private sector players (or a few of them) are waiting to unleash their innate potential and drive India into a high orbit. This blind belief is disdainful of history, devoid of context and fired by a toxic mix of ignorance and malice. It drives actions that cross limits and breeds a callousness and dishonesty that wears the false halo of a national cause and a higher national ambition. In these assumptions, everything gets justified and promoted and indeed wears a badge of saffron honour. Any criticism now comes under fire; any action gets justified.

In the end, only balance and wisdom can govern a vast cacophonous democracy like India. The overriding of legitimate claims and demands in the name of a great nation waiting to happen signals not progress but regress. We are headed down and the hunger index report is just one more independent sign of this.

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

## Back to the dark ages

Editor,  
Hundreds of people without masks would gather inside a house in Ri Bhoi district every day to hear from a controversial pastor who has spoken out against face masks during the coronavirus pandemic. Those in attendance were not wearing masks or maintaining social distancing, as required by the state's Covid mandate. Pastor Suting from the Church Of God has amassed a huge amount of followers for his unrepentant defiance of government mandates as the coronavirus spreads across this state.

There is a faction in this state who have taken delight in pushing false narratives with all kinds of issues in our society. The one that are most detrimental centre around COVID 19. Doctors have presented the public with plain information that is understandable regarding risk factors and mitigation measures. The facts are clear: vaccines and masks save lives. Every legitimate study on these issues has shown this to be true. But instead of accepting the science, too many have believed fringe persons, including the infamous pastor, and taken up the cause of bizarre medications and anti-mask fervour.

The idea that wearing a mask is a form of control is ludicrous. Masks help prevent the spread of germs. This has been known for at least a century. Your individual right to not wear a mask does not override the rights of others to stay disease free in a pandemic. The public good is greater than your right to be a non-conformist. Mask wearing is not always comfortable, but when it saves lives, I will do it gladly.

By saying that your religious freedom is being infringed upon raises the

question as to what is your religion? "The Holy Church of I want to get COVID?" If your religion tells you not to wear masks and not get vaccines then why do you go to the hospital when you get COVID and can't breathe? Go on, live out your so-called religious freedom and become a martyr for the cause. There are sick people without COVID who can't get hospital beds because COVID deniers are filling them.

The fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India gives you the freedom to worship as you see fit. But it also forbids the recognition of any particular religion as a state religion. People in contemporary society confuse the lack of a recognition of their beliefs as the official belief structure of the country as being discriminated against.

I request the concerned authorities to take legal action against the church and

the pastor for violating Article-21 (Not wearing masks and endangering others is harming the fundamental right to life) and for not complying with the State's Covid mandates.

Yours etc;  
Josh Nicholls Kharsyntiew  
Shillong-6

## Global hunger index

Editor,  
The latest Global Hunger Index indicates that if urgent measures are not taken, the goal set by the UNO in 2015 to end world hunger by 2030 may become an unattainable target. It has been reported that India has slipped to 101st position on the index of 116 countries and is behind Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. In 2020, India had ranked 94 out of 107 countries.

Weak economy in the wake of the pandemic, climate change, conflicts and

wars have contributed to rise in global hunger. This report comes close on the heels of the UN data showing that the number of undernourished people last year increased from 320 million to 2.4 billion-equal to a third of the world population. Factors such as diet quality, stunted growth among children and child mortality reflect the impact of hunger on people's health. It must be understood that 50 countries around the world are in an alarming situation.

It is a fact that frequent and intense weather conditions increase food insecurity. Some regions of the world experience higher levels of hunger because of lack of preparedness for climate change. Dependence on a single type of crop makes people vulnerable to climate change. Reliance on specific types of crops and loss of biodiversity make matters worse. As climate justice is not dealt with, countries with

less carbon emissions face the consequences of climate change. With regard to the impact of the pandemic on people, it is estimated that the number of undernourished people will rise by 30 million by 2030 and 2.6 million children could suffer from stunted growth between 2020 and 2022 in low and middle income countries. Further, conflicts and wars have contributed to high levels of hunger in several countries.

People have a right to access adequate and nutritious food. Rise in hunger levels of millions of people indicates that their human rights are violated.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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

*"Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."*

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

**The Shillong Times**

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**Failed tit-for-tat policy**

SIX Pakistani terrorists were shot down in Rajouri sector of Jammu and Kashmir after a week's efforts by the security forces following the October 11 attacks in which nine Indian soldiers were killed. While this is one side of the Kashmir story, on the other side is the offensives by terrorists/militants against non-locals in Kashmir, mainly the migrant workers who are sitting ducks there. The Pakistani-inspired idea is to make sure that Kashmir remains in the hands of Muslims. The Kashmiri Pandits who returned to J&K are also being targeted. Put together, a critical situation is at hand in the Valley. Hints are that the killed gang of terrorists in Rajouri had infiltrated from Pakistan under ISI tutelage and carried with them sophisticated guns from the armory left behind by the US in Afghanistan.

After the abrogation of special status of J&K in August 2019, things seemed to be changing for the better in Kashmir. With the Pakistani military intelligence unit, the ISI, achieving its aim in Afghanistan, it could now gain the confidence to take on India in more aggressive ways vis-à-vis the Kashmir situation. Al Qaeda is also being roped in to push the cause of Kashmiris in the Valley. Both Al Qaeda and ISI are working also to extend their devilish reach to other states like Assam to take up the cause of the Bangladeshi migrants there. Having gained the upper hand in Kashmir since late 2019, the Indian government can ill afford to let things drift there.

As a matter of state policy, India is always on the defensive when it comes to dealing with its neighbours. Despite India's stronger might, its leadership allows Pakistan to rub it the wrong way. This was so constantly during the term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi via LoC firings and infiltration of terrorists, who are said to be none other than trained Pakistani army soldiers. While Pakistan is waging a proxy war for so long, what India did by way of its defence were minor "offensives" like the surgical strike or raining of a few bombs on "pine trees" in Balakot. Fact is, India meant much less than a tit-for-tat after Uri or Pulwama. This is being interpreted by Pakistan as a sign of India's weak positioning. The time for even a tit-for-tat is long over. New Delhi must do well to understand this. In the present phase after the unfolding of new events in Afghanistan, the scenario is tailor-made for misery unless Delhi acts in a decisive manner.

# Our political industry needs change

By Lawrence Pherliam Sumer

We have always been hypocritical about the dearth of talent in our political system and that just seems to confirm with each electoral process. A democratic setup like ours seems to have failed in producing competent leaders and instead the abundance of inept and dishonest political leaders is the order of the day. Such leaders exploit people's credulity and prejudices and always thrive on emotion-driven discourses. With every electoral college, Democracy seems to have failed to deliver us leaders of character. In fact, public distrust of democracy is at its highest, with so much corruption at stake. A 27 countries Pew Survey (April 2019) revealed that a majority (51%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working. Most people nowadays find authoritarian figures more trustworthy than democratically-elected politicians, hence, the rise of pseudo cult personalities at the helm of the world's largest democratic country in the world. Bottom line, elections don't deliver the kind of political leaders people want. After a honeymoon period between voters and their winning candidate, often as short as a month, he or she always disappoints. Why? Is it the fault of the voters, for expecting too much? Or don't they understand what is going on — how complex the job of governing can be, how campaign promises can't be kept?

It takes two hands to clap; on one hand the voters generally favour policies that enhance their own well-being with little or no consideration for the future generation or long-term outcomes. We tend to live for the "now" rather than allowing ourselves just that little discomfort for a better future ahead. We would rather sell our souls for a few hundred rupees than make our would-be politicians work to earn our votes. On the other hand, politicians who manage to pander to these "immediate needs and desires," of the voters are rewarded and because democratic systems encourage such short-termism, it will be seemingly difficult to solve the intractable structural issues that slow down our economic growth, unless we choose to overhaul our democratic process, altogether. Winston Churchill once said that: "democracy is the worst form of government — except for all the others that have been tried." His cynicism was perhaps justified after the British people voted him out from his position as Prime Minister within months of winning the Second World War.

There are few obstacles to good governance that can be highlighted here. First, we have too many elections and such frequent polls taint pol-

icy-making, as politicians are driven by the rational desire to win elections, therefore, opt for quick fixes that will undermine long term growth. Secondly, elections have always involved "money;" in essence, the need to spend, apart from the slab as laid down by the Election Commission. This in turn, encourages politicians to respond

and decide he or she wants to contest the elections. Lastly, and the most dangerous one is an attempt by all political parties to turn this profession into a fully professionalised political class, wherein, candidates ought to have a political experience or must come from a political family of sorts. Political parties are exhibiting stunningly little

employment indices etc., must be placed before these would-be politicians. Further, questions must be encouraged from the electorates themselves. Let us not forget, these debates must be conducted with the sole aim to provide information to the electorates of a particular constituency and give them ample opportunity to think before making that 5-year investment.

It is important to test the candidates' knowledge about policy matters, as we are all aware that most of the candidates in the fray are not even aware of what a policy is. It is a different matter altogether, if we can bring these candidates to such platforms, but what matters is the attempt from the media to contribute their bit. As electors, we cannot be swayed by assumptions alone; we need to get a fair bit of knowledge about those we wish to choose to be our representatives and who else can provide us that window of opportunity other than the fourth most important pillar of society. Secondly, we need accountability from these elected representatives. We cannot expect such initiatives from them though, but here is where the responsible civil societies can step in. It is one thing to fight against government policies but a better thing to demand a Performance Report Card from the elected representatives. A simple report card of how much of the MLA/MP Scheme has been used for the welfare of the constituents will do for a start and such reports must be given front page importance for everyone to see and assess for themselves.

Lastly, the Election Commission must do more in restricting "money power" which in most cases influences the outcome of an election result. The law does prescribe about the total election expenditure but actual expense by the candidates at the ground level differs entirely. Or must I say, directing politicians to comply with such rule of law is easy but implementing it has always been a challenge. Yes, lately, the Commission has played its part in encouraging eligible voters to vote, but the same has not really translated into numbers. Hence, there may come a point in time to make the whole electoral process a mandatory exercise for every citizen. If we are allowed to use the Voter ID as a residential document proof, then why can't it be made mandatory for such a noble purpose for which it has been issued for? Nevertheless, every political mishap is firstly a result of our inexcusable non-participation. If this political industry needs change, then such rational change must come forth, else, vocalising it is like sitting on a rocking chair, that gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere.

*"Majority of the voters cling to their own beliefs, facts and assumptions and what's more, in a close knit society like ours, where everyone is a relative of everyone, a voter is compelled to lean towards a 'relative politician' irrespective of his or her credentials."*

more towards their funders instead of their voters. Hence, after the elections are done and dusted, this shall result in the 1% governing the 99%. Thirdly, the ignorance and misinformed electorates does not help the cause. Majority of the voters cling to their own beliefs, facts and assumptions and what's more, in a close knit society like ours, where everyone is a relative of

outside non-political experience, thereby churning out a politics industry.

In order to overcome some of these obstacles and keep away incompetent individuals from choosing this as their preferred occupation, there has to be a way to test the character of those in the



every-one, a voter is compelled to lean towards a "relative politician" irrespective of his or her credentials. It is sad to see electorates still buy into a quote that, "in my advancement will your advancement be." Come on, if at the very start of your innings you are made to understand about putting your own priorities' first before the people, then we are in for a dark future

fray. An entry into the political arena must not be easy. Those who want to serve must be scrutinised as much by the people of their constituency, as their papers are being scrutinised by the district administration while filing for candidature. The electorates have the right to know who amongst their candidates has the knowledge and the capability to lead them forward. The media here has a big role in bring-

*"An entry into the political arena must not be easy. Those who want to serve must be scrutinised as much by the people of their constituency, as their papers are being scrutinised by the district administration while filing for candidature."*

indeed. What is politics after all? Isn't it about servanthood? It's about putting the cause of the masses first, at least from where you are elected before your own.

Fourthly, incompetent individuals with no political gifting enter the fray, anyways. There are no requirements for running for office, none at all; anyone can wake up in the morning

ing about a change. Prior to elections, big media houses, and their celebrity editors who have been very articulate against corruption, must initiate debates, not just mere debates through newspapers but more importantly live debates amongst the candidates concerned. Questions must be asked about the challenges of their respective constituencies, besides illiteracy, unem-

positive change ahead.  
Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Via email

**Step towards gender quality**

Editor,  
Apropos of the news item published in Shillong Times 18 October, 2021 in the front page under the caption "Three Groups take charge of Mawlai 'people's voice,' I wish to share my views here. The three groups have rightly highlighted the issue of women's participation in the dorbar shnong. It is indeed a laudable step that collective efforts is being initiated for taking up the issue of gender equality in the dorbar shnong. In the past there were instances where the affected individuals had raised their voices and sought for legal rem-

edies. The concerned three groups shall not only focus on the rights of the women to vote in the dorbar shnong, but at the same time they should deliberate on allowing women to contest for the office of Rangbah Shnong where under the changed circumstances the nomenclature of the office could suitably be changed. This will ensure a legally enforceable right upon our women, since the social system needs to be transformed with the passage of time and it needs to be in conformity with our constitution and other laws framed thereunder.

Yours etc.,  
Aneeta Synrem  
Shillong-1

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**India's digital services tax is under global scanner**

## DST seems to ignore OECD-led minimum tax deal

By Nantoo Banerjee

India's commerce department seems to be out of touch with the government's intentional tax deals — bilateral or multilateral. In recent times, India has lost all tax cases against MNCs in international courts and tribunals. It also lost large undisclosed sums in fighting these hopeless litigations at home and abroad for years through appeals and counter appeals. Earlier this year, it suffered a massive face loss as a small British firm, Cairn Energy, threatened to seize Indian government assets after a \$1.2 billion award in its favour in a long-running corporate tax case.

The Edinburgh-based energy firm was awarded damages by an international tribunal in the high-profile dispute with the Indian government. Cairn started identifying assets it could seize if the Indian government does not comply with the order. India's retro-tax act had to be finally deleted. Yet, the government seems to refuse to learn. The latest case of India's digital services tax (DST) on foreign companies in India has already upset the Biden administration, specially after an international community of 136 countries, including India, signed a ground-breaking global minimum tax agreement. It now appears that the government may have to withdraw DST unless it is prepared for legal battles in international courts.

Under the global minimum tax agreement, the participating countries are required to repeal such additional levies such as DST, immediately. They are also required to commit that such taxes will not be levied in future. The tax deal for the digital age was initiated by the Paris-based Organisation of Economically Developed Countries (OECD) in support of a much needed international tax reform. It has been stated that between October 8, 2021 and December 31, 2023, or until the conclusion of multilateral dialogue on the international tax system, the participating countries will not impose digital tax on any corporation or enterprise.

The OECD will ensure that multinational enterprises (MNEs) are subjected to a minimum 15 percent tax rate from 2023. However, a legal friction between India and the US seems to have already begun on the issue as India says its DST does not have extra-territorial application as it applies only on the revenue generated from the country. The US, on the contrary, strongly feels that India's DST is discriminatory having an adverse impact on American commerce and is actionable under the trade act. The US Trade Representatives (USTR) further stated that it had consultations with the Indian government on the issue on November 5, 2020. The USTR describes DST as "an outlier" which burdens US companies by subjecting them to double taxation.

India adopted the operative form of its DST on March 27, 2020. It imposes a two percent tax on revenue generated from a broad range of digital services offered in India, including digital platform services, digital content sales, digital sales of a company's own goods, data-related services, software-as-a-service, and several other categories of digital services. India's DST applies only to "non-resident" companies as of April 1, 2020. The USTR said that DST, by its structure and operation, discriminates against US digital companies. The USTR feels that DST is unreasonable as it is inconsistent with principles of international taxation, including due to its

application to revenue rather than income, extraterritorial application, and failure to provide tax certainty.

The USTR investigation report determined that three aspects of India's DST are inconsistent with principles of international taxation. Stakeholders have found the text of the DST unclear and ambiguous. "This amounts to a failure to provide tax certainty, which contravenes a core principle of international taxation," the USTR alleged and said "the DST taxes companies with no permanent establishment in India, contravening the international tax principle that companies should not be subject to a country's corporate tax regime absent a territorial connection to that country." The USTR report further claims that DST creates an additional tax burden for U.S. companies, which could exceed \$30 million per year. A tug of war between the Indian government and the USTR could have been avoided if the union commerce ministry did not insist on DST on foreign companies operating in India at a time when the country was engaged in an international dialogue on the global tax system.

Incidentally, the global minimum tax agreement does not seek to eliminate tax competition. It only puts multilaterally agreed limitations on it. The agreement will see countries collect around US\$150 billion in new revenues, annually. According to reports, 'Pillar One' will ensure a fairer distribution of profits, and taxing rights among countries with respect to the largest and most profitable multinational enterprises. It will re-allocate some taxing rights over MNEs from their home countries to the markets where they have business activities and earn profits, regardless of whether firms have a physical presence there.

Specifically, multinational enterprises with global sales above EUR 20 billion and profitability above 10 percent will be covered by the new rules, with 25 percent of profit above the 10 percent threshold to be re-allocated to market jurisdictions. Taxing rights on more than US\$125 billion of profit are expected to be re-allocated to market jurisdictions each year. 'Pillar Two' introduces a global minimum corporate tax rate at 15 percent. The new minimum tax rate will apply to companies with revenue above EUR 750 million and is estimated to generate around US\$150 billion in additional global tax revenues annually.

Notably, only four countries absented themselves from the OECD-led international tax agreement. They are: Pakistan, Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. It must be accepted that the international tax agreement does not guarantee that enterprises will strictly follow the rules. Tax evasion is a common concern across the world. It will continue to remain so. The US itself is said to be a major victim of tax evasion, costing the country around one-trillion dollar in revenue every year. Traditionally, India's own internal tax administration has been extremely poor. As of February, 2020, there were 88,000 appeals pending before the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), said its chairman, Justice PP Bhatt. Tax evasion litigations pending before India's High Courts are said to be close to 52,000 cases amounting to US\$ 500 billion. DST cases, if come up against foreign companies, may have to be fought in courts both in India and outside. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Wanted a fair deal**

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily I would like to inform you that result for the departmental promotion of Fire & Emergency Service, Meghalaya of different post was kept in abeyance till presently for reason best known to the Department but as per information from sources the promotional result for the post of Sub Station officer from the post of Leading Fire man was withheld due to the complaint filed by the senior Leading Fireman to the Director General of Police, Meghalaya because most of the post of the Sub officers was allotted to the Junior cadres. Secondly, the matter was lying in the High Court of Meghalaya for whatever reason. This led to delay in filling up the vacancies in

various post in most of the Fire stations in the state and this ultimately hampers the smooth functioning of the Department and for your kind information the Department already has shortage of man power.

The departmental promotion of Fire & Emergency Service in the past few years (span of 10-15 years back) has been in controversies for quite sometimes in the matter relating to superseding of Junior personnel. This has deeply affected the morale of the staff. The Seniority cum merit and Merit cum Seniority was changed from time to time to suit the interests of the favoured candidates. This development has greatly frustrated and confused the personnel. This has consequently affected discipline following which respect to the seniors in the Department which is one of the important aspects in the disciplinary force was

compromised. Therefore I appeal to the Government to set up an inquiry against those who frame the guidelines regarding the departmental promotions and due action should be taken against those who manipulate the same because this is a serious matter which affects the personal wellbeing, self-esteem and professional career of an individual and above all this development has brought a bad reputation to the Department.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

**Policy for Govt jobs**

Editor,  
The most important social problem facing society and the state today is not lack of employment avenues but lack

of employment generation of which a substantial chunk comes from government and semi-government sectors. The lack of transparency and failing administrative commitment to redefine what set of parameters or benchmarks define the selection of a candidate apart from the regular personal interviews which in every successful candidate's mind is mostly a skewed interview. So, what benchmarks have those in the Secretariat thought of in generating government employment. My suggestion is that a dedicated job portal covering all government sectors including private sectors would be an innovative step. The number of private offices and business houses here have hardly taken interest in taking locally skilled youths, however, the greatest mishap is lack of a clear-cut employment policy which is why governance suffers. Hope things will bring a

*"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence."*

— Robert Frost

## The Shillong Times

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### UP Cong gives 40% ticket to women

CONGRESS General Secretary, Priyanka Gandhi announced on October 19 that 40% of candidates that the Party would field in the UP Assembly elections would be women. Most of these women, Priyanka said are on social media and would be able to spread their message to voters. The announcement has two objectives. First it is intended to woo women voters in a state where the Congress has a weak organization on the ground and where it failed to make a mark in the last three decades. Whether Priyanka's gambit pays off is a different matter but she has the courage of conviction to challenge the male bastion in a state where patriarchy has dominated its politics and society and where crime against women has risen by leaps and bounds. Priyanka will lose nothing even if the women candidates don't win but the Party would have proven to the world that it believes in women's political empowerment. The Congress campaign poster which reads, "Ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon" (I am a woman; I can fight) was released after the announcement. Of the 14.4 crore eligible voters in Uttar Pradesh, 6.6 crore are women. This means that out of the 403 assembly seats scheduled for elections early next year, the Congress will give about 160 tickets to women candidates if it goes to the polls alone.

For far too long, women have been marginalized in the politics of this country. The Women's Reservation Bill seeking to give 33% reservation for women in parliament and state assemblies moved by the government in 1996 has been hanging fire for too long with no political party willing to bite the bullet and vote for it. But for a while now the growing political mobilization of women has been reflected in turnout figures even if it has had very little influence on skewed political representation. In Uttar Pradesh, where women constitute nearly 46 percent of voters, the representation of women in the state legislature has improved from over 2 per cent in the 1990s to about 11 per cent in 2017. As expected, rival parties have criticized the Congress announcement with some calling it pure election drama, considering the Party could not muster enough support to vote for the Women's Reservation Bill when it was in the driving seat at the Centre. Women had performed very well in the recent UP Panchayat polls, with about 53.7% of successful candidates being women. Of the 75 district Panchayat presidents' posts, 42 are occupied by women against their share of 24 posts as per the one-third reservation norm for women, while men hold only 33 seats. Priyanka's gamble could be a game changer for the Congress Party in UP and in the country.

# Sparing the Government; questioning the Opposition

By Rajdeep Sardesai

It is argued, often justifiably, that a large section of the news media, especially prime time TV, spends far more time and energy questioning the opposition than it does the Modi government. At one level, this reflects the stranglehold of a domineering political executive that is seen to have compromised a pliant media: unlike the UPA years when a weakened political leadership almost surrendered its authority to hyper-ventilating TV anchors, the Modi Government is ruthlessly determined to control the media narrative. At another level, the excessive focus on the state of the opposition does reveal the intense churning that is taking place within the non-BJP political space.

At the heart of this churning is the role of the Congress party and Rahul Gandhi in particular. After 17 years in public life, no one is still quite sure who the real Rahul Gandhi is: is he the 'power is poison' principled idealist who is seeking to revamp the Congress by disrupting the party's traditional elite structures as evidenced most recently in Punjab. Or is he simply an entitled fifth generation dynast who just doesn't have the grassroots connect, political stamina or personal charisma to lift a struggling party out of its deepening crisis.

But pinning the blame on Rahul Gandhi's leadership, or lack of it, for the Congress's decline is a soft option: it isn't as if his possible return as Congress President or replacing him with another leader is going to miraculously alter the party's fortunes. The Congress's problems (or potential solutions) do not lie solely with the steady erosion in the vote catching abilities of the Gandhi family as is often suggested. They also lie in a fundamental shift in the arc of Indian politics wherein the BJP with its aggressive brand of muscular religious nationalism and the Modi style of populist leadership has squeezed the space for a flabby organisation like the Congress with its accumulated baggage of decades in power to offer a credible alternative. Organizationally enfeebled and ideologically compromised, the Congress's capacity to fight has shrunk along with the melting away of its social base in several parts of the country. As NCP leader Sharad Pawar rather sharply remarked recently in

part of the wider Congress 'parivar.' Like eager lion cubs on the prowl, these parties are fiercely competing with each other to take over from a fading king of the political jungle.

**If Mamata has the advantage of being the solitary defiant woman figure in a male dominated arena, Kejriwal's USP is that he is a Hindi speaking bilingual, middle class anti-establishment figure whose AAP party is a political start up not weighed down by traditional regional, caste or community loyalties as yet.**

Which is why a key question swirling in Indian politics in the build up to the 2024 general elections is not so much who is in pole position to be the prime minister but who will be the 'face' of the opposition or, as Hindi news TV would screech, 'kaun banega challenger?' Which is also why, the crisis in the Congress doesn't just give the BJP a clear advantage, but, also opens up possibilities of a political realignment within the opposition ranks. How else does one explain for example the urgency

being shown by a Mamata Banerjee in riding on the momentum of her spectacular Bengal success by expanding her party's presence not just into the neighbouring north east states but also into relatively distant Goa? In this attempted move from east to west is a clear signal from a leader who refuses to be shackled any longer by a Bengal centric 'regional leader' image. Only weeks ago, Mamata was breaking bread with Sonia Gandhi at an opposition leaders conclave. Now, by weaning away Congress leaders considered close to the Gandhi family and threatening to establish a beach-head in Goa, a state

ample, win Punjab next year, then he too can look to spread his net far and wide.

Both Kejriwal and Mamata have one big advantage over Rahul Gandhi: not bearing a famous surname, they can challenge the Modi 'chaiwallah to 7 Lok Kalyan Marg' storyline with the equally evocative story of their own ascent. Their success, like that of Modi, is not based on political inheritance, which makes them more attractive to a new age voter who is looking for inspirational heroes.

Oppositional politics though doesn't just need charismatic leaders, it also needs a compelling narrative of change. With a Modi-led BJP firmly occupying an expanded political space that combines pro poor welfare beneficiary schemes with a Hindu nationalist fervour, the opposition has limited options. Rahul Gandhi for example seems to have clearly pitched his Congress tent with the hard left ideology flag bearers: the recent entry of Kanhaiya Kumar and Jignesh Mevani is evidence that the party will now take its anti corporate, anti Hindutva, anti Modi rhetoric a notch higher. By contrast, both Mamata and Kejriwal, as more astute practitioners of realpolitik, have consciously reached out to Hindu voters without abandoning their 'secular' 'social justice' pro-poor plank. The question is: will these opposition leaders eventually find common ground and unite or will they simply try to knock each other out first? Any answer to that question throws up an intriguing range of possibilities, one reason why the state of the opposition will continue to fascinate in the months ahead.

**Post script:** Since I started the column by raising the concern over a media ecosystem that rarely raises troubling questions to the party in power, let me end it with one such disquieting question that demands a wider debate: can the Centre be allowed to get away with a rather brazenly disingenuous claim that the PM Cares Fund is not a Government of India Fund and hence cannot be subject to a right to information inquiry? Maybe, one way to ensure a more level playing field is to start asking the discomfiting questions of the government that we do so routinely of the opposition?

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

## New Delhi, Central Vista and changing history

By Rajat Ray

It would not be out of line to see New Delhi as a physical representation of colonial India. The body of the city was laid out with the magnificent Viceregal Palace set in a park on the hill with two voluminous secretarial blocks on its immediate flanks. These formed the monumental 'Capitol' or the 'head' on the western end of a long avenue running like a spine. Interestingly at the opposite end of the avenue on the east are an assembly of smaller palaces of the kings of the Indian princely States, who were subjugated to the crown, by battles and treaties. These edifices were arranged in a multi-layered ring around a sprawling hexagonal lawn in the middle called the 'Princes' Park. Eventually in the centre of that hexagon a towering statue of King George V, the father of New Delhi, was placed within the cupola already standing tall in anticipation. This completed the Princes Park as a picture of surrender of the Indian rulers to the King of England standing at the focal centre of a vast monument of victory.

That widest avenue of the city, a ceremonial showpiece boulevard with its tree-lined lawn-scape, acted as the central axial spine about which the city was spread out symmetrically to the North and the South. This axis represented power; military troops paraded up and down this place and a band would perform 'beating the retreat' in front of the Capitol. Before the statue was placed in the Cupola, on this axis was erected the all-India War Memorial Arch. This grand monument of 'remembrance' of the soldiers killed in the world war, is now the India Gate. Farther on the axis near the Viceregal lodge stood the column commemorating the coronation of George V, whose name the avenue was called the Kingsway.

Perpendicular to the Kingsway intersecting it right in the middle was laid the other axis called Queensway presumably honouring Queen Victoria's memory. This axis connected the Connaught Circus Market in the North, the functioning symbol of 'Trade and Commerce'; and the proposed New Delhi Cathedral in the South, symbolising 'Religion'; two arms of the Victorian colonial grip. Such disposition would not be accidental but could only be inspired by the ideology of the Empire.

If this was one monumental representation of the substance of colonial India, concurrently there was yet another, within the same field and in fact at the heart of it. At the crossing of the two axes is 'Orientalists' India' with its four pillars. Documents and Records, Scriptures and Knowledge, Archaeology and History and Ethnography and Culture, the lenses through which the colony was defined, in the form of the four orientalist institutions: the Archive, the Library, the Museum and the Theatre, the respective four corners created by the intersection. With all that the Kingsway would be the 'Central Vista' from the imperial perspective.

The original British Parliament of India or the Council house, now the Sansad Bhawan, was accommodated at the foothill of the Capitol to its left. The new born colonial legislature was still under the gaze of the imperial executive. Turning away from the bi-lateral symmetry of the master design, it was placed on another axial line of vision from the viceroy's palace passing through the centre of Connaught Circus to reach the Jama Masjid in the walled city.

The layperson does not have access to structuralist readings and may not understand the symbolic meaning of European neo classical architecture to denigrate or appreciate it. The less read in this area, may however, experience the grandeur and relate to the beauty of good architecture.

After Independence, the Jawaharlal Nehru-led gov-

ernment did not tamper with the existing architecture. Nehru's vision of a contemporary city, one that united social classes and accepted modernity, was Chandigarh. A symbol of new India, the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier implemented a modern city in Chandigarh according to Nehru's vision. Then again, British architect Edwin Lutyens' Delhi for George V was much akin to the genre of (Pierre Charles) L'Enfant's DC for George Washington, Speer's Berlin for Hitler, or a new Moscow for Stalin by his architects.

But, the new 'Central Vista Redevelopment', does not belong to this class. It's a quick and cheaper alternative of making a new capital. Not quite any big vision, it is a collection of a number of large and small projects. A new parliament off the axis, and new Government office buildings on the axis, each approximately the same size of the new parliament in perimeter, one convention centre, two new very large adaptive, reuse projects, make the new Central Vista core. From the North Block and the South Block, ministers and officers are released from their huddle and lined up along the Raj path in larger new blocks, making it into a modernised 'Mantri & Babu Path'. This is celebrating the legacy of post-independence governmentality and pampering the bureaucracy in service of the State. This is accomplished by demolishing those houses of History and Culture and Records in the centre, and vestiges of the 'orientalist project' are removed in the process. This echoes the current regime's tendency to rewrite the history of India by shuffling both fact and evidence. Collections of the museum that would be demolished will be taken to the vacated North and South blocks and rearranged.

We don't know the proportion of the contribution of the client and the architects in determining this configuration. While Lutyens and company could not stick to their deadline of four years that rolled into two decades, architects in this case have to meet deadlines, they have to be champions of delivery. They are not George's Lutyens or Nehru's Le Corbusier. They may not even have been given a totally free hand, but have taken up this unprecedented challenge. While pushing the latest technology to the forefront, they appear to have intelligently reduced the daunting task of making designs, working, drawing and construction to a reasonably comfortable level by creating one clean block that is repeated twelve times, and replicating a circle into a triangle by stretching corners. There goes a victory against fancy imagination! They have thereby also managed to remain within certain virtual boundaries, not crossing what one kind of keen heritage expert defines as limits. Further they struggle for no ingenuity and waste no time with determining the appearance of the new buildings simply by almost exactly copying the system of the existing structures; and that actually excites another kind of heritage advocate.

Some philosophically-oriented architects and some practicing architects have been fighting losing battles protesting against Central Vista and other changes in historical structures. They keep borrowing weaponry from environmentalists and lawyers, but are not able to locate or reach specific targets. So, New Delhi may give in and go the way the present government wishes. But will Lutyens' Delhi, the Delhi that British architect Edwin Landseer Lutyens built, become any other architects' Delhi?

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where the Congress was the single largest party in 2017, the West Bengal chief minister has made her intentions clear of being seen as a national challenger to the BJP. Another claimant to this

prime challenger's title is the Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. If Mamata has the advantage of being the solitary defiant woman figure in a male dominated arena, Kejriwal's USP is that he is a Hindi speaking bilingual, middle class anti-establishment figure whose AAP party is a political start up not weighed down by traditional regional, caste or community loyalties as yet. Not surprisingly, like Mamata, Kejriwal too is moving quickly into states where the Congress is seen as vulnerable. Should he, for ex-

soon is withdrawing from the country, unpredictable rain continues to cause destruction and disrupt normal life. Floods in Uttarakhand and torrential downpour in Kerala caused widespread destruction and great loss of lives. A large number of people were evacuated from disaster prone areas in both states. Urgent measures must be taken to deal with extreme weather events in these states.

It is a fact that topography of hilly regions makes it vulnerable to landslides. Unscientific construction of buildings, deforestation, quarrying and other land use adversely affect ecology. Although expert committees had warned of the consequences of causing damage to ecologically sensitive areas, they were ignored and now people are paying a heavy price for it. Infrastructure developments in the Himalayas and the Western Ghats must be carried out only in a scientific and meticulous way. Notwithstanding the fact that the Madhav Gadgil committee had recommended that a vast stretch of area that spans Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu must be declared as ecologically sensitive zone, and called for strict changes in the developmental activities in these areas, none of the states agreed with the recommendations. These states objected to restrictions on development activities. The Kasturi Rangan committee report substantially diluted these recommendations and proposed to reduce the eco-

sensitive zone of the Western Ghats by half.

Global warming is causing climate change across the world. Given that more extreme weather events are likely to occur in future, urgent measures must be taken to deal with them. Long-term measures must be taken to prevent climate related disasters. There must be substantial investment in disaster management system. This apart, all development activities in hilly regions and ecologically sensitive areas must be restricted and regulated.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

### Schools need trained physical instructors

Editor,  
As a teacher I wholeheartedly agree with the views of Dominic S. Wankhar in his letter captioned, Sports a neglected field in education (ST October 11, 2021). The great Greek philosopher Aristotle said, "Education is the creation of a sound mind in a sound body." Many other great thinkers expressed that education must cater to the mental, physical, intellectual, social, economic and aesthetic development of the students. 'Health Education', in Meghalaya, is taught as a 'theory paper' with other subjects of the syllabus. I am sorry to say but only

a few schools are able to provide physical training and do justice to the subject. As Mr. Wankhar has pointed out the very fact that there are just 4 physical education trainers in the entire state against 14,694 schools is itself indicative of the state of physical education in Meghalaya. Only a few schools train their pupils by using other subject-teachers who have little knowledge in this field so how much justice can they do to the subject? Children of Meghalaya have natural potential in the field of sports, music and painting but ironically after achieving stardom for half a century, our schools don't have trained teachers and facilities in these subjects. How then can we expect 'all-round development' of our students?

I humbly appeal to our government to form a 'Talent hunt' committee which will search and select talented children from both rural and urban areas and give them special training under trained coaches, so that they can excel in the field of sports, besides appointing trained permanent teachers in the schools. I am sure if our government takes the matter seriously, the day is not too far when Meghalaya too will produce sporting talents like those of Manipur, Assam and Haryana.

Yours etc.,  
Reeta Ghosh, (National Awardee)  
Vice Principal, (Retired)  
Laban, Bengalee Boys  
HS School  
Shillong

### SOPs violated in bye-poll campaign

Editor  
Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to bring to the kind information of the District administration in Tura that the Covid protocols regarding the bye-polls in Rajabala Constituency are in total contrast to the SOP's highlighted by the Administration. Recently, I happened to witness a public meeting in Rajabala where there were around 3000-4000 people gathered in a small field and no one was even wearing a mask. People were sitting and standing in close proximity. As per orders from the Administration we are told that for election meetings a maximum of 500 people are allowed and for Star Campaigners 1000 people with all barricades around the ground. But in reality it was like a big mela with all SOP's and protocols blatantly violated. All kinds of vehicles from Pick ups, Autos were all jam-packed with people with music stereo system blasting and dancing happening beyond the permissible 7 pm deadline. The sad part is that, no one from administration responsible for checking these guidelines were to be seen when this so-called gathering of people happened for almost two hours or so. In short, it was like a ticking time bomb in waiting for rapid spread of Covid. I just hope and pray that the District Administra-

tion gives orders not only on papers but also checks the meetings in person and ensures adherence to strict guidelines as the fever for election campaign will grow stronger as days go by, from now until voting day.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

### Why this farce?

Editor,  
I came to know of the meeting and resolution taken by the Central Puja Committee (CPC) regarding incidents of violence in Bangladesh inflicted on Hindus there. In my personal opinion this is just a farce and will not make any sense nor yield any tangible benefits and is in no way related to welfare and safeguard of non-tribals of Meghalaya. When the KSU and other like-minded organisations dictate terms that violate Hindu sentiments and does whatever they want against Hindus including imposition of restrictions in Ramkrishna Mission and other holy places including the Ichamati incident - this CPC remains silent. When the Government imposes illogical rules and restrictions on celebration of Hindu rituals including celebration of Durga Puja, this CPC remains silent. There are multiple examples of spineless acts of the CPC over the years. Most of the office bearers consist of 'yes men' and their commitment to the cause is in question since

they have failed to protect the dignity, life and property of non-tribals of Meghalaya and to raise the issue in appropriate forums.

This CPC acts as the 'breakdown maintenance team' rather than 'preventive maintenance'. While they can provide first aid box after injury but they cannot prevent the injury from occurring. They are well-trained to maintain and renovate crematoriums. This is just a social welfare organization without any teeth and Government knows this well.

When ISKCON is highlighting the issue in international forums with their strong footage and contact, this CPC is just trying to get some mileage out of the Bangladesh incident - nothing more than that. When they fail to resolve the local issues how they are vocal on what happens in Bangladesh? I challenge the CPC to do some real work to safeguard the Hindu community and ensure their dignity and self respect and also real tangible benefits.

Yours etc.,  
Subhasish Guha,  
Via email

### Climate change distress

Editor,  
Extreme weather events in this monsoon season corroborate the predictions of climate science experts. Torrential rain had caused large-scale destruction in parts of North India and coastal parts of Western India. Even though the southwest mon-

"Kindness in words creates confidence.  
Kindness in thinking creates profoundness.  
Kindness in giving creates love."

-- Lao Tzu

## The Shillong Times

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### A billion covid jobs

INDIA 'celebrated' an 'achievement' on Thursday as the nation crossed a milestone with 100 crore vaccinations in an elaborate exercise that started on January 16 last. A period of desperation starting with the onset of the Covid-19 spread at the start of year 2020 might as well be over by now -- a perception based on the steady fall in daily infection numbers in state after state. The fear of a third wave of the pandemic lingers, though all indications are that India has crossed the critical phase. Chances are that the pent-up energy of the past two years could now result in a much-needed overdrive for various sectors.

A prerequisite to this is the right policy formulation by the central and state governments. On its part, the central government has launched the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, based on an announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 13. Cabinet clearance for this came on Thursday. This would encompass 16 major sectors including the railways, roads, ports, shipping, aviation, gas pipeline projects etc. For the first time, there is the promise of adoption of a "cohesive approach to a holistic growth," rather than various departments working at cross-purposes and slowing down the momentum of various projects. This involves a huge fund of \$1.5 trillion. A sector where the seven years of the Modi government made notable forays was the infra field; and this is the calling of the times apart from strengthening of the national defence initiatives.

State governments too would require catching up with the present mood of optimism. Several states are ruled by the BJP, but hardly any of these states other than Uttar Pradesh is making any significant mark. These state leaders fail to inspire and look up to Delhi and PM Modi for sustenance. This showed-up in assembly polls too, with the BJP losing a big state like Maharashtra and Haryana, and the last assembly polls in Karnataka too went against the BJP. Sectors like tourism and hospitality, aviation, road and rail were all majorly hit during the two years of the pandemic spread. An uptick in all these sectors is quite likely in view of the present overall optimism about the future. This is not time for governments to sit back and lick the wounds left behind by the pandemic, but to unleash the animal spirit to regional and national economies. Big-ticket projects that would generate jobs should be rolled out as in the infra-sector. A good sign is that the global economy is also warming up after the two-year-setback.

# Election is serious business, not a battle of words

By Patricia Mukhim

Election campaigns in the three constituencies headed for bye-elections scheduled for October 30 next goes something like this. "This Party is in power but has not delivered. We did better than them," and the response to that from the other Party is, "We inherited all the problems from them so why should they blame us?" Should elections be reduced to such infantile blame games? Should all the grime be cumulatively vomited out during these campaigns? What about taking up these issues in the Assembly and even beyond the Assembly sessions? Who stops an MLA from raising issues on the slow pace of development in the Constituencies that are election-bound? Take Mawryngkneng constituency. It has to be one of the most under-developed constituencies and perhaps one of the largest beginning from Mawryngkneng, and spanning through Sohryngkham, Mawshbuit, Mawlynrei, Mawpdang, Mawdiangdiang right down to Diengpasoh adjacent the Shillong bypass.

The constituency has decrepit roads which have remained unrepaired for over two years, possibly because it was under an Opposition MLA up until his demise in February this year. An MLA's task is not easy and allows no rest. And that task does not include paying money to constituents for their hospital bills, their children's school fees etc. The MLA's primary function is to ensure that the Government addresses all the lacunae that reduce people to beggars waiting at the MLA's home or office at 7 am in the morning. Now, who do we blame for reducing people to that level of shamelessness? The only difference between beggars that sit and beg on our streets and those that go to the MLA's house to demand money is that the first one is not a voter; the second one is and feels that he/she has the right to demand money from the MLA because he/she has voted for that MLA.

For this very reason, the MLA is compelled to have a second job that yields profit without much investment and that is a contractor's job in the same system that he/she serves as an MLA/minister. Yet no one speaks of conflict of interest here. How can a PWD Minister award a contract to his own firm? Yet this is happening

blatantly in Meghalaya and there is none to call this out. The Meghalaya Special Area Development Scheme too has become like the MLA's personal resource to be spent just five to six months before the Assembly elections. There is no stock-taking by the respective BDOs. Isn't there a clear line between what the bureaucracy should be doing and what an MLA does? Should the BDO of a Block be subservient to the MLA of that area and do his bidding? But what we have seen is that if the BDO does not comply with an MLA's demands he is quickly transferred to another Block or Directorate. Even Deputy Commissioners have not been spared from the shenanigans of the MLAs



of certain constituencies. If MLAs/ministers interfere in day to day administrative governance then it is no wonder why we have the kind of governance we have today which is hugely politicised. Constituents that are unfortunate to have an MLA that is not in the government are doomed to live in the dark ages.

What all the three constituencies going to the polls this month actually need are good roads, an efficient water supply system, stable electricity, a functioning garbage management system, primary health care facilities, schools within the constituency that function well and can be proud of producing good results and students that are emotionally, physically and psychologically sound. This is what society needs to heal itself. The younger generation has unfortunately seen too many bad role models among politicians. I find it difficult to name one politician in our state who is a good role model in terms of (a) punctuality (b) being incorruptible (c) being responsible for pushing reforms and legislating policies (d)

taking active part in the Assembly not just to point out what's wrong with the ruling party and government but to show a better way forward. The easiest thing to do is to blame others even if we are ourselves guilty of the same errors. This is debilitating and a waste of the people's time especially if it is done on a public platform during elections.

And yet it seems as if it's virtually impossible to be successful in creating a political campaign unless you spend all your time and money slating the other politicians, rather than setting out what YOU are going to do. Would it not have been better for everyone if the

have to show the way to the hoi-polloi by rising above the mundane and triggering new thinking. In such debates people must be allowed to ask pertinent questions. They should be efficiently moderated so that such questions do not degenerate into personal attacks.

Why most people want to become MLAs is because of the power and perks. The perks include medical facilities, residence, reimbursement of electricity and phone bills and travelling facilities and other things as deemed fit by each state. Most MLAs don't get themselves or their families treated in the state because they perhaps know the quality of our health care facilities. No MLA would allow his/her family to get treated at a Primary Health Centre. That's why they always have to be informed by the constituents about the poor functioning of the PHCs. Yet they are supposed to be good for the public.

Can we ask which MLA among the current set of 57 sends his/her children to a local Government aided school? If there is one we would be happy to know but I bet there aren't. On the contrary once a person becomes an MLA his/her status is upgraded and so too that of the family. Hence they don't access the services that ordinary citizens have and don't know most of the problems faced by citizens. They have to be briefed about these problems. It would be so good to see an MLA who faces the day to day problems that citizens do including not having access to clean water or their children attending a school where teachers are mostly absent. I would also like to see an MLA that walks not just during the election campaign but on any other day as ordinary citizens do so they can see how badly off the roads are and perhaps feel the pressure to pursue the issue with the PWD Minister.

The problem with our elected is that the moment they win elections they are divorced from life's realities and have aspirations for an expensive lifestyle they would not otherwise have been able to afford. Then it becomes a race for acquisitions - from mansions to swanky, expensive cars and the list goes on. Yet they are the role models of our times. We cannot change anything if we don't change ourselves and our voting habits! Period...

## Milestone that reminds India the cost of unpreparedness Make access to health facilities a basic human right

By Gyan Pathak

India achieves a milestone by administering 100 crore doses, including both the first and second doses, of anti-corona vaccines. The achievement is celebrated across the country, and it was good. However, it still reminds the cost of unpreparedness the country has paid since the first case of COVID-19 surfaced in Kerala on January 30, 2020, and may still pay dearly in future if public health is continued to be ignored, access to health facilities are kept beyond the reach of common people while hoodwinking them with schemes like 'health insurance' such as Ayushman Bharat, that has nothing to do with strengthening the health facilities and infrastructure in the country. Increasing public investment in health and making access to health facilities a basic human right might be the only answer to our predicaments that the present vaccination drive itself has proved.

Around 75 per cent of the adults have been administered the first dose, but only around 31 per cent having received both doses, is still a matter of concern considering the time India took to achieve this level since the launch of the vaccination drive on January 16, 2021. It took nine months and one week to fully vaccinate 31 per cent of the

94.45 thousand crores in the fiscal 2020-21. However, in reality, the amount included the budgets for Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban), Swachh Bharat Mission, Clean Air programme and others. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare got only Rs 73,931 crore as against 69,000 crore for a year before. An outlay of Rs 64,160 crore for Aatmanirbhar Health Yojna was to be spent over six year time frame.

Even the Economic Survey 2020-21 has mentioned that 66 per cent of the spending on healthcare is done by the states, which shows that Modi government still needs to increase health expenditure of the centre to enable the state governments to meet the present challenge successfully. However, we have seen during the COVID-19 crisis, how the centre has been pulling the legs of the states on several accounts while shifting blame on them.

What we need is to improve India's global ranking which was 179th out of 189 countries of the world in the priority accorded to health in its government budgets. Such a low level of prioritization of health in India is "similar to donor dependent countries such as Haiti and Sudan, and well short of its peers in development," the Economic Survey 2020-21



population, chiefly on account of unpreparedness, coupled with adhocism in policy implementation and the faults therein. It delayed the process, created vaccine hesitancy, hampered the production and supply of vaccines, and numerous other problems which also included the faulty eligibility criteria. At this rate of vaccination, India may need 12-18 months more to fully vaccinate all its citizens. Then there is also a possibility of booster dose for those who have been fully vaccinated.

All these indicate how much India needs to do, apart from celebrating the achievement of this milestone, the big number of which must not be allowed to influence our sentiment to astray from the task ahead of us. Modi government do have a political interest in the high pitched celebrations to make the people forget about the lapses and callousness of his government when the pandemic struck the country last year at a time when the whole health sector was suffering from very low budgetary support of only about 1.1 per cent of the GDP in 2019-20.

Even the National Health Policy 2017 had envisaged an increase in India's health expenditure from 1 per cent to 2.5-3 per cent of the GDP. It must be noted that the COVID-19 crisis has made the situation worse on the ground and according to international estimates India's actual requirement could be anything in the range of 9-14 per cent of GDP depending on different scenarios. The real cause of celebration would be if Modi government could enhance the budgetary support to the healthcare to this level to make the country fully prepared to face the present and future health challenges of the country. It should also not be out of place to remind the Modi government that the Union Budget 2021-22 was cleverly made to show 137 per cent increase for healthcare by an allocation of 2.23 lakh crore, as against

has said. As for the healthcare access, the Economic Survey 2020-21 even mentioned India's 145th rank out of 180 countries. The country managed its rank only above sub-Saharan countries and few others such as Nepal and Pakistan.

India also needs to significantly work towards improving its Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) metrics. The hospitalisation rates in India are among the lowest in the world at 3-4 percent while the average for middle-income countries is 8-9 percent and 13-17 percent among the 17 OECD countries. It is still a matter of concern that the aggregate human resource for health density in India is close to the lowest possible threshold of 23 per 1,000 people, almost half of 44.5 to achieve sustainable development goal as prescribed by the WHO. The series of celebrations planned and celebrated included the announcements made on airplanes, ships, metros, and railway stations etc when India achieved its target of administering 100 crore doses. Modi government even announced to go on mission mode to ensure cent per cent vaccination. It would not be a bad thing but it is only one task out of the many that has not been even attended to though those are immediately required to secure good health for all the people of the country.

Our PM has been patting his back for "India scripts history" in vaccination, but we need more than self-praise. The cost of achieving this milestone was too high due to our unpreparedness and callousness, in which India lost more than 4.5 lakhs lives, crores of livelihoods, a reversed economic development with 7.3 per cent contraction in GDP in 2020-21, and an uncertain economic revival. It should serve as a lesson to the country in general and our PM Narendra Modi in particular. We must build on the basis of the lessons learnt. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Clarification

Editor,  
A letter appeared in The Shillong Times (ST Oct 19, 2021) under the caption, "Back to the dark ages", whereby the name of Pastor F. Suting from the Church of God was reflected in the said letter. With regard to this matter, on behalf of the Church of God (Meghalaya and Assam) we would like to clarify that after the Government had allowed re-opening of religious places, the Church has given the instructions to all the local Churches falling under the Assembly of the Church of God (Meghalaya and Assam) to strictly follow the protocols issued by the Government.

However, as regards the conduct of Pastor F. Suting as reflected in the newspaper, I would like to clarify that he did it in his personal capacity in his own house without the knowledge and consent of the Authority of the Church. Therefore, the Authority or the Church of God have no responsibility or liability for anything done by him.

Yours etc.,  
(Rev. Dr.S.K.Syiemlieli)  
Executive Secretary  
Pastors' Fellowship

#### Church of God (M&A) Overburdened students

Editor,  
With the re-opening of schools and the final exams starting at us the ticking time bomb for completion of syllabus starts beeping. Though many schools have shifted towards offline classes many are yet to consider that with parents contemplating over sending their gems to school where they are to fend for themselves. I have to say that both have their own merits depending on one's situation but given Meghalaya's network issue we definitely catch sight of the imbalanced ratio of students with and without the proper facilities, at this point I have to say it's now a game of finding the right mobile network/broadband/WIFI connection.

Even with the best to offer, privileged students ever so often still complain about their school work. Same goes for the ones at a disadvantage. Call it undisciplined, undetermined or negligent, but when homework starts looking like a 9-5 job not to mention the overtime that comes along with it that

is inevitable.

Given Meghalaya's network issue many teachers are using audios, videos, pdfs etc., as their main teaching platforms alongside Google meets, but in my understanding, the problem arises not because of the teachers' methods of taking classes, but the amount of homework sent by them every day, the most common being, copying of notes from the phone/laptop to the notebooks. I presume teachers do this with the hope that students would better understand the chapter through writing notes. But the problem is that majority of students usually either have music playing in the background, or are on a call or conversing with someone in person as they write. Out of 100% of the work only half of a fraction or even less is being done sincerely. The work is done only for the sake of completing it. When it comes to studying almost nothing is accomplished especially since there always awaits a 29,000 ft mountain of incomplete assignments on the table.

No doubt these are the duties of us students but they need to be in moderation. There might be a few even in these times that are able

to bear this and fulfil their duties. You have my deepest respect and admiration. But honestly, most students just can't keep up with the pace anymore. It's going way beyond our comprehension, hardly getting anything done. We often indulge ourselves in overwork in the hopes of catching up. But at times when we do actually catch up exhaustion kicks in and the cycle repeats.

Students' duties are undeniably top responsibilities but what's most important is our health be it social, mental or physical. It should never be sacrificed for the sake of numbers on a sheet of paper.

(I write this from my point of view as a class 8 student, and I do not mean to offend any particular individual or group)

Yours etc.,  
Ilarisa A Lamin,  
Via email

#### Congress could retain its two seats

Editor,  
By-elections to Parliament, especially to the Lok Sabha, and to the Vidhan

Sabha occur quite often due to vacancies of seats to be filled up. This time the Election Commission of India (ECI) took prompt decision to hold the by-elections to fill up the vacancies, especially in Meghalaya. In the past it took quite a long time, sometimes more than one year, to hold the by-elections and unfortunately at times not even before the next election is due thereby denying some constituencies the right to have public representatives. This must be avoided at all costs.

This time, in Meghalaya, the by-elections are meant to fill up only three vacancies in Mawryngkneng, Mawphlang and Rajabala Assembly constituencies. According to present political indications, unless otherwise the winds change directions, by October 30, the first and the third might be wrestled by the Congress candidates and the second might be pocketed by the UDP nominee. The results might not be of great significance or bring about change in the present political equations but it will be an added booster for the coming Assembly elections scheduled for early 2023.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Sr. Journalist,  
Via email

#### Students' plight

Editor,  
With reference to the subject cited above, I am writing to you, in order to raise a voice on the challenges faced by the students in the upcoming selection examination as there was a delayed announcement of the academic annual selection date. Almost all of the courses are incomplete and now the teachers have to rush through them all. As a student I could not take in so many chapters at the same time. The selection examination is near but the courses are still pending. This is causing a great deal of problems for the students. Will the Government consider the plight of the large majority of students or just comply with the requirements of completing all examination formalities?

Let it not be forgotten that many students are already left behind due to the pandemic.

Yours etc.,  
A student,  
Name withheld on request

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

"There are no laws for the novel. There never have been, nor can there ever be."  
— Doris Lessing

## The Shillong Times

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### TMC in Meghalaya

THE Trinamool Congress (TMC) is heaving to become a pan-Indian national Party. It has left its footprints in the small state of Goa and is trying to wend its way to other states too using the poll-winning strategies of Prashant Kishor and his team at I-PAC (Indian Political Action Committee) formed by a bunch of young professionals from IIT Kanpur and Bombay and the National Law Institute University, Bhopal. I-PAC's tagline says, "We have established ourselves as a pioneering platform of choice for professionals to enter the political sphere and meaningfully contribute to the space. We would like I-PAC to transform into an institution for young leaders to partake in grassroots politics and have a strengthening and positive impact on the democracy of our nation." Prashant Kishor is known as the kingmaker after having catapulted Narendra Modi to the post of prime minister. He works with the Congress's Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi and with Mamata Banerjee to heighten their strong points and minimize the weaker ones. I-PAC believes in ground research and the I-PAC team sends out its researchers to different states to capture the political sentiments and nuances of each state; peoples' responses/reactions vis-a-vis their government and its governance model; their political choices etc. It's basically feeling the political pulse in each state and feeding that back to the larger team to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each political party in a particular state. This is as scientific as it can get.

It's expected that an I-PAC researcher would also be traversing the electoral path during the Meghalaya bye-election, especially since word had got around that former CLP leader, Mukul Sangma was hobnobbing with the TMC bigwigs and that he could jump ship because the Congress High Command did not have the courtesy to consult him while appointing the Meghalaya Pradesh Chief. Mukul Sangma did manage to create a ripple and to generate enough heat and dust for the Congress High Command to take notice and work out a rapprochement between him and the Congress Chief Vincent Pala. For now, the two Congress leaders seem to have buried the hatchet so the TMC story goes out of the window. But the real question is whether the people of Meghalaya will accept a political party that was birthed in Bengal. As of now the TMC is highly unlikely to find space in Meghalaya, however hard it may jostle for that space. We would like I-PAC to transform into an institution for young leaders to partake in grassroots politics and have a strengthening and positive impact on the democracy of our nation.

# Are Khasis matriarchal or matrilineal?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Though it may appear to be an academic exercise, the debate as to whether the Khasis are to be categorised as matriarchal or matrilineal is a very crucial one. Within the core of this debate is the tussle between two very distinct ideologies, matriarchy versus patriarchy. Communities who may try to define themselves as being a matriarchy are labelled as either being mistaken or worse as actually just being a watered-down version of patriarchy. The Khasi society is not immune to such confusions with many of its own staunchest defenders

though, it is the husband who represents her. When she divorces the man he loses the authority and she inherits the mantle of the Nokma. She remains the Nokma until she marries again (if she ever does so). In time, the title will pass to her daughter who will do the same. Ultimate authority, thus, rests with the woman but is channelled through her husband. In the same manner, the men in the *Durbar* represent the authority of their mothers who will ratify the final decision. Thus,

The simple reason for this arrangement is because his sister and her children share the same clan, while his wife and his children do not. Among the Pnar, men only have visitation rights which is common in other matriarchal communities like the Mosuo in China. It is highly probable that being of the same stock like the Pnar, Khasi (a common term for Khyntiam, Bhoi, War, Lyngngam, War, Maram including the Pnars) must have a similar system. To those who have got used

to a patriarchal worldview this may seem to be demeaning to the males. In fact, the lack of respect (!) for the husband has been cited by some as the inferior position of men in Khasi society. This is a paradoxical situation.

On the one hand, there are those who swear that Khasis are not a matriarchal society but instead a matrilineal (which means it's the men who hold ultimate power) society. On the other hand, there are those who complain that men have no influence in the society (women are dominant). Obviously, both situations cannot coexist at the same time. This means either both are wrong or at least one is wrong. In reality, both are wrong! As mentioned above, a man's position as the kni holds great importance. A husband is also a brother which means lack of influence at one location (wife's home) is compensated by abundance of it in the other (sister's home). But a female in a patriarchal society has limited rights at her in-laws and none at her parents' place after marriage.

Apart from gender equity, the condition that the *khatiduh* is not the owner but the custodian of the ancestral property highlights another important aspect of matriarchal cultures, custodianship versus ownership (the role of kni in disposal of ancestral property is again very important which shows that all decisions are collective and mutual). In this age of unbridled exploitation of resources which has led to rampant environmental degradation and accelerating climate change, the value of thinking not just for oneself but for others who may not even yet born is the need of the hour. After all who



ST File Photo

succumbing to the idea that it's not a matriarchy but only a matrilineal society.

Matriarchy is defined as rule by women that have to take the form of powerful queens who, like powerful male kings, have ultimate power of life and death in the society. Matrilineal society, on the other hand, are those that excepting the lineage, women are trapped in a patriarchal setting with men holding ultimate power. Those who support the idea that the Khasis are a matrilineal and not matriarchal society take the example of the traditional *durbar* where women are not allowed to participate. That custom is quite consistent in many matriarchal communities like the Minang Kabaw from Indonesia, the largest matriarchal community in the world. On the surface this may look like a very patriarchal arrangement. What is forgotten is the fact that the men who take part in this gathering represent the female's clan. So, although it's the men who take part in the decision making process they do it on behalf of the women (mothers) who have given them the responsibility. In the final analysis nothing is done without consultation and agreement from the female members of the clan. In Minang Kabaw (through personal communication) this still remains very strong. Among the Khasis it can be argued that this feature has declined.

A look at the Garo, though, may give some indication of what the situation may have been in the past for their neighbours, the Khasis. The A'King Nokma is the custodian of all the clan lands in the community and is a woman. To the outside world,

though not in form (outward appearance) but in essence (internal workings), women's participation in decision making was ensured. In time this system has eroded among the Khasis. Still outward appearance does matter and this is where it is very important to understand a crucial feature of matriarchy. Matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy.

Gender equality is the hallmark of matriarchal society which is in complete opposition to the emphasis of gender domination in patriarchy. As discussed above, the final refuge of authority lies with the female/matriarch. But unlike in patriarchy where a similar situation leads to hoarding of power, here it is shared. The men are not side-lined but are given the opportunity to take part in political decision making by acting as the surrogate for the women. In the end the final decision is but a collective one. Furthermore, another instance of gender equity is when a man gets married to a woman he does not abandon his clan. This is in contrast to patriarchy where women are alienated from their family after marriage. He continues to carry his surname while the children get the mother's surname. The man's identity/lineage is not obliterated but allowed to exist along with his wife's. Here again it is not domination but accommodation.

Then there's the marital arrangement. Following matrilineality a man has to take residence at his wife's place. And though a man may not enjoy the same kind of influence in the wife's house he as the kni (maternal uncle) wields a lot of responsibility in his sister's house.

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Apart from gender equity, the condition that the *khatiduh* is not the owner but the custodian of the ancestral property highlights another important aspect of matriarchal cultures, custodianship versus ownership (the role of kni in disposal of ancestral property is again very important which shows that all decisions are collective and mutual). In this age of unbridled exploitation of resources which has led to rampant environmental degradation and accelerating climate change, the value of thinking not just for oneself but for others who may not even yet born is the need of the hour. After all who

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## Round The States

By Insaf

### J&K strategy needs rethink

North block should be in a bind viz its strategy on Kashmir. Civilian killings, migrant workers leaving the Valley, an exodus of dozens of families, including Kashmiri Pandits who had returned after getting jobs under the Special Scheme for Kashmiri migrants, clearly reveals that return of normalcy is a far cry. Shifting migrant workers to safe places or providing security in their areas is not an answer. According to reports there are 3 lakh-odd migrant workers in the Valley, mostly engaged by locals in private construction works, paddy and apple harvesting. The nagging fear among workers of now being targeted should make Raj Bhavan and Home Ministry rethink on its so-called development agenda. With another two non-locals killed on Sunday last, the tally of civilians killed is 11 this month, of the 28 this year so far. Worse, if these attacks persist, which weren't seen during peak of militancy in 1990-2001, the outside work force will have no option but to leave, no matter the promises of safety being made.

Tweaking of strategy is critical as security agencies are gradually realising the shift in approach by militants who now target civilians, particularly members of minority community. It is realised by the police that the killings are being carried out by newly-recruited terrorists or those about to join the ranks, using pistols and this is attributed to "frustration of terrorist handlers" following

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a destruction of their support structures. Majority of the killings are being carried out under banner of "The Resistance Front, although the militants involved in the incidents belong to Hizb and Lashkar." The bid to communalise the Valley is underway, which needs deft handling, as the message from the targeted killing is crystal clear: Pandits and outsiders are not welcome and it's a fight for the rights of local residents. What is the way ahead? Home Minister Amit Shah has held security review meeting with top RAW, NIA and Intelligence Bureau officers; political parties are demanding restoration of statehood and an elected government and LG Manoj Sinha has stated: "We'll hunt down terrorists, their sympathisers and avenge every drop of innocent civilian's blood... We remain committed to fast-paced development and will endeavour to build a prosperous and peaceful UT of J&K." Easier said than done. Action not mere words is critical.

**UP Dragging Its Feet**  
Will Uttar Pradesh stop dragging its feet and act? Or will Yogi Adityanath government continue to be venacious? Signs of exasperation appeared on Wednesday last with a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court, seeking details of recording of witnesses' statements in the dastardly Lakhimpur Khiri case, in which 8 people died. Shockingly, of 44 witnesses only four's statement had been recorded so far—over two weeks since the incident! Prompting the CJI to observe it can't be an "unending story" and his colleague saying "We think you are dragging your feet. So please dispel that impression." Obviously, the government counsel's explanation that courts were closed on account of Dussehra; there were several video clips which needed more asking; everybody was arrested (10 persons including

the minister's son Ashish Mishra) and a status report had been filed in a 'sealed cover', didn't cut much ice with the bench. It's concern was with the FIR regarding farmers' death and not the counter FIR on those who drove the vehicles which ploughed into the farmers were lynched. Besides, it sought arrangements for witness protection as some could be 'browbeaten.' The government has a week's time to complete the process. Will it, is anybody's guess.

**Targeting Christians**  
Hate crimes against Christians are growing in 21 States, particularly north India, in past nine months. A fact-finding report 'Christians under attack in India', by Association of Protection of Civil Rights, United Christian Forum and United against Hate released on Thursday last documents that of 305 incidents of violence against Christians, Jharkhand, UP, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh recorded 169, with Karnataka adding 32. The hate crimes seem to be increasingly compounded by rallies/slogans against the community based on fears or anxiety over 'religious conversions': October 3, over 200 unidentified persons, belonging to local right-wing groups, vandalised a church in Roorkee, Uttarakhand, attacked those assembled for Sunday prayers; October 10, UP police in Mau district arrested several people following complaints from a Hindutva group; earlier this week in Karnataka Hubali dis-

tribut, Bajrang Dal and VHP members entered a church singing bhajans; a local BJP MLA blocked a highway demanding the pastor's arrest; August 29, a group of over 100 people allegedly beat up a 25-year-old pastor at his house in a remote village in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, etc. Time for North Block to protect India's secularism and not be like an ostrich buried with its head in the sand.

**Bollywood Drug Drama**  
Maharashtra's Bollywood gets national attention. With superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son's Aryan arrested by the NCB, among 20 others, though he was not in possession of any drugs, and his bail petition turned down by a Mumbai sessions court on Wednesday last has raised a number of questions. More so as the judge observed "on the face of it", Aryan was indulging in "illicit drug activities on a regular basis" and his WhatsApp chats also showed, prima facie, that he was in touch with drug peddlers. But most questions emanate from NCP leader and Minister Nawab Malik, who on Thursday demanded to know what was the NCB's Mumbai region chief Sameer Wankhede doing in Dubai and the Maldives with his family during the pandemic lockdown and threatened him with jail for "concocting drug cases against Bollywood personalities". He claimed on Thursday last: "It's very clear all this 'vasuli' (extortion) took place in Maldives and Dubai. I am releasing those photos. What was he doing in Maldives-Dubai, he must answer." While photos are awaited, the message that goes out is that attempts were being made to implicate certain film folks in fake cases and parade them before the NCB. The war between NCP and NCB is another addition to the drama, and will be watched for the climax. ---INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### All's not well with smart meters

Editor,  
The report in The Shillong Times (ST Oct 11, 2021) "Power minister directs Satnam to stop smart meters project," came like a bolt from the blue, taking into account the change of guard in the Power Department. It sounded as if the new minister was from the Opposition!

Why I am writing this is because I am unable to understand where Mr Prestone Tynsong's conscience was during those tumultuous times when the MePDCL circles of Shillong and adjoining areas and Jowai were sold to RECPDCL. That finally snowballed into a crisis and controversy leading to the removal of two IAS officers and leaving matters to be handled by the then Additional Chief Secretary, Ms Rebecca Suchiang, presently

the Chief Secretary. Let readers know that for the manufacturing of smart meters in our country, three top world renowned companies are among the ten selected. They are (1) Siemens (2) Schneider (both of Germany) and (3) Genus Infra Power Structure (South India). The Satnam Infra Global Pvt. Enterprise may be at the bottom of the list. There are problems with acquiring land, even M/s Satnam is hired.

At the outset let us study what a smart meter is. The smart meter will allow the power company to distribute power through smart phones. This energy coming to our homes or factories is no longer measured in kilowatts. It is going to be in kilo-volt ampere. To the lay person this means the energy supplied plus the power loss incurred during the transmission. For example, if you boil tea using a kilowatt heater for one hour, in our old meter, be it electric or electronics

your bill will be for 1 KW/hr and if Rs 4 is per unit, you need to pay Rs 4. With smart meters you have to pay Rs. 4.40 paise (more or less). 40 paise is the loss incurred for your boiling tea (which we never had to pay till date) and the cost of messaging on your Wi-Fi. Hence for every unit used, you have to pay 40 paise. So for one-month you could calculate how much that comes to.

In other countries with adequate power, this meter may work as the smart meter needs steady voltage (230 v in European countries), but in our power-starved country India where even at peak time, the voltage is as low as 160 volts, this smart meter is going to shoot your bill to three-fold. Current consumption increases quite a lot, compounded with the efficiency of our electric appliances (best at 220v in India). The voltage thus drops drastically. This is the reason why Schneider got a special prayer for advice from our

Power Departments, including from the Union Power Ministry to please tune their meters at par with the health of power in our country. Whether Schneider could accede to the request remains to be seen. This is the result of opting for modernization of the power sector in a power starved scenario! Its like aiming for the skies.

The message to consumers therefore is that they need to have smart phones to be informed of the balance remaining and date and hour of the power supply cut. In Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the two districts in the pipeline to be fitted with the smart meters, the percentage of consumers with smartphones and who could afford WiFi is a mere 7% only. Even these would face problems of connectivity. And to be informed of the smart meter bills one might have to climb trees or stay uphill.

So, dear readers, the smart meter would make life problematic for all. Yes when the

new Power Minister talks tough on Satnam, I could see NGOs taking credit which is not right. For many months, no NGO complained, though time and again the worry was expressed in local newspapers. On the contrary, few officers acquainted with power scenarios in their countries of service advertised this smart meter to the unmindful people here.

The worst news in the above news report is the very wrong certification of readiness of 25,000 smart meters by Mr SB Umdor and the Power Department. He ought to know that out of the 251 million households meant to be connected by smart meters, only 1.6 million are connected. It comes to only 0.6 percent (6 households per thousand). This news shows that we have a long, long way to go until the whole country is smart metered. And let the readers be informed that in the UK there are many who refuse being connected to these smart meters.

Our meter readers are going to lose their jobs but the rich and powerful never think of unemployment in our country although it is a serious issue. It is no different from our AIs robbing the jobs of drivers. In this world there are two AIs. One with brains and a heart for humanity. The other is of course with the same brain but no human heart. And the saddest part is that the latter dominates Mother Earth.

Be that as it may we need to thank Mr Tynsong for giving us a respite from smart meters at least for now. And experience and history tell us we may not be smart meter connected.

Yours etc.,  
James Kharmih,  
Shilling-1

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

# There's a need for Ghalib's compassion & plurality



By Vishnu Makhijani

This truly is the outcome of a lifetime of devotion to the work of Mirza Ghalib from the time Najeeb Jung's mother recited his poetry to him to the time his daughters helped him with the translation by finding the closest words to do justice to the original.

It's a journey that began when he was four years old but it was only in mid-2010 that the 70-year-old Jung, a former Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia, found the right "Ustad" to guide him through the translation process. The outcome is "DEEWAAN-E-GHALIB - Sariir-e-Khaama" (Rekhta Books), a rendering in English of 235 of Ghalib's poems along with the originals in the Roman script.

"In these disturbed times, Ghalib's open discourse, his compassion and understanding, and his plurality assume huge importance. He demolishes routinely held views on man, and his relationship with God, or the existence of heaven or hell, or man's allurements for heaven and his fear of hell, sin and goodness. For him truth was not the monopoly of any religion or dogma and the path to truth was open to all. To this end he is critical for our times," Jung told IANS in an interview.

"This is precisely why I have done this translation - a step to bring him closer to those who speak Urdu/Hindustani but their vocabulary is limited, or those who know English and wish to read and understand him. The Roman script needs a bit of practice to familiarise and make reading easy, and the translation gives meaning to the words. I have not provided a commentary to the translations because that would make the book too complex and more of a commentary," he added.

It's been quite an inspirational journey and bears telling in its totality.

"As I recall, I was around 4-years-old when my late mother (Ammi) made me learn Ghalib. We also did a bit of Iqbal but Ghalib was her passion. So while my friends in class were reciting English nursery rhymes, I was spouting Ghalib - not that I understood the meanings!! I was a popular child in family gatherings for this. In fact, my mother often told a story how Maulana Azad, who was a family friend and we often visited his home at Edward Road, now renamed the Maulana Azad Road, would insist on listening to Ghalib being recited by a 4/5 year-old child," Jung said.

As time went by and school (St Columba's) gained importance, Ghalib receded into the background "but Ammi and I continued reciting once in a while to each other. I kept reading the Deewan (in the original) whenever I could, having acquired many editions and prints over time."

In early 2000, he was at Oxford as a Visiting Fellow and had access to some outstanding libraries.

"I thought I had read enough and should try my hand at translating the Master for English speaking people or those who understood Urdu but did not have an adequate vocabulary. It did not take any time to realise I was not equipped for the task - neither was my vocabulary so good, nor did I fully comprehend the nuances and depth of his thought. I needed to read much more, and research the various "sharas" (commentaries) by other well know thinkers and writers and therefore to find the right Ustad. The big question was how to get THAT person," Jung explained.

As luck would have it, he came to the Jamia Millia Islamia in August 2009 and here began his search for the Ustad. His secretary, Zafar Hashmi, introduced him to Prof Khalid Mahmood who, at that time, was the Head of the Urdu department.

"Something clicked" at their first interaction and Jung knew he had found his teacher.

"Khalid sahib is not just an extremely good human being, but a profound thinker. He knew Ghalib, but above all, was happy to read and re-read Ghalib, and spend time with me. Let me add, this was a labour of love by him too - and all the hours and years we worked together, there was never any fee paid or even expected. It was a sacred relationship between a master and pupil on a subject they loved and therefore enjoyed working on together," Jung said.

From mid-2010 to the end of 2016, every day they read Ghalib; re-read Ghalib, discussed the "ashaar" (nuances of the couplets), looked at commentaries and different interpretations, agreed and at times disagreed.

"By this time I felt ready to attempt a translation. The big question before me whether I should translate the whole Deewan or pick out the popular ghazals, already well known through films and popular ghazals sung by the greats like (K.L.) Saigal, Begum Akhtar, Jagjit Singh etc. and stick to translating them. I do not know why I decided to translate the entire Deewan.

"It has taken me four years to do this. It has been a back-breaking labour of love, a dream I have lived with. Sometimes, a couplet would not be difficult but some would be back-breaking. For instance, I spent months agonising over the first couplet in the



Deewan: *Naqsh faryadi hai kiskii shokhi-e-tahreer ka/Kaaghazi hai pairahan har paikar-e-tasweer ka,* Jung elaborated.

He found it impossible to give true impression to this. So he would wake up at night and think over it, think on it during long walks, during long flights - and never be satisfied.

What eventually emerged was: Against those playful writings can an image petition/For made of paper is the attire of each image.

There were more like this and hours were spent looking for words that would convey the most appropriate meaning to what Ghalib meant.

"I would seek out my daughters, discuss the couplet and more often than not, they came up with the right expression. It is difficult for a family to be with a husband or parent obsessed with a passion but play along with him with patience and fortitude. In fact for the latter half of 2020, we were all together in New York with everyone contributing to complete the work. I guess every one of us wished to complete this work as soon as possible. Ten years was enough," Jung said.

He also pointed out that Ghalib is multi-layered and that different meanings can be derived from the same couplet.

"Take the popular couplet: *Aah ko chahiye ik umr asar hone tak/Kaun jiita hai teri zulf ke sar hone tak.* The simplest interpretation is of a lover moaning how long it would take for his sighs to take effect and whether he would even live till the beloved was ready. But could it not be a question to God that how long would a person wait for his prayer to be answered, whether he would not be dead till the prayer was answered?"

"Ghalib has a strange informal relationship with God. He is a Muslim believing in Allah and his Prophet, but rejects dogma and ritualism: *Bandagi mein bhi vo aazada o khudbiin hain ke hum/Ulte phir aaye dar-e-Kaaba agar vaa na hua* (While being a believer, I am so independent and proud/ That I would turn back from the Kaaba were its door not open)

"Or even challenging established Islamic belief: *Hum ko maloom hai jannat ki haqeeqat lekin/Dil ke khush rakhne ko Ghalib ye khayal achha hai* (We know the reality of Paradise but/To keep the heart happy, Ghalib, this thought is good)," Jung said.

Has Ghalib received his due in India?

"Well, despite Urdu not being widely read in India, and most people having inadequate vocabularies, Ghalib's ghazals have been sung manifold by the best in India. While it is near impossible to sing a ghazal in Qawali form, even that has happened. Masterpiece films have been made commencing from the 1940s when Saigal sahib played Ghalib, to Sohrab Modi's successful film in the early 1950s to the recent TV serial by Gulzar sahib - which will always remain a pure masterpiece bringing Ghalib into our homes," Jung said.

In 1969, the government celebrated Ghalib's death centenary with seminars, discussions and even a Mushaira at the Red Fort in Delhi. In addition, the Rekhta Foundation has brought him to the public and vast numbers of non-Urdu speaking people attend these recitations, and talks on him each year.

"So while the poetry may not be understood with its subtleties and nuances, Ghalib is most certainly heard, and admired by millions in India - and with time, his popularity grows," Jung concluded.

(IANS)

# A Climate Change Gallery at London Science Museum

The Science Museum in London has announced a landmark new gallery, with Adani Green Energy Limited as the title funder, examining how the world can undergo the fastest energy transition in history to curb climate change. The announcement was made as delegates arrived for a Global Investment Summit hosted at the museum by the Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The gallery will explore the latest climate science and the energy revolution needed to cut global dependence on fossil fuels and achieve the Paris targets to limit global warming to around 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Visitors to the new gallery will see how data visualisations and future projections are key to generating knowledge, informing decisions about how we live and stimulating creative and innovative solutions.

"Imagining our collective future, as this gallery will encourage, provides us all with a powerful action programme," says Mary Archer, Chair of the Science Museum Group.

"This gallery will take a truly global perspective on the world's most urgent challenge. We face a grave threat, but the future is not predestined - it is still in our hands if we can build the coalition required for urgent and far-reaching action."

The gallery will highlight moments from the past when energy futures were imagined. For example, it was by imagining a world powered through electricity that American inventor Thomas Edison created the world's first public electricity network in 1882.

Mains cables known as Edison tubes connected the first coal-fired electricity power station to nearby homes and businesses in London. This revolutionary network established how electricity is supplied today. A rare surviving Edison tube, on display for the first time after recently joining the Science Museum Group Collection, will enable visitors to marvel at this engineering feat when the new gallery opens in 2023.

The gallery will draw on the Science Museum Group Collection and loans, deploying a



range of interactive and digital storytelling techniques to reveal the latest science as well as exploring energy revolutions of the past and future.

Energy Revolution is supported by Adani Green Energy, the leading solar power developer which aims to be the world's largest renewable power generating company by 2030, as Title Funder.

"We're hugely grateful to Adani Green Energy for the significant financial support they are providing for this gallery," Archer said.

"We are delighted to support the Energy Revolution gallery, which will explore how society can power the future through low carbon technologies," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Green Energy.

"The Renewable Energy revolution to get to this point has been remarkable. The limitless power of the wind and sun is awe inspiring and our ability to harness that power is finally within reach. There is so much to learn from the history of this journey as the world writes a cleaner future and who better than the Science Museum team to depict this inspiration." As inventors and engineers sought to establish future modes of transport over the past 200 years, electric cars were imagined many times.

One early example, the Bersey electric cab, was envisioned as an improvement to horse-drawn taxis. Designed by Walter Bersey and built by the Great Horseless Carriage Company in 1897, it could reach 9 mph and cover up to 30 miles. However, this electric taxi was an idea ahead of its time, with breakdowns and expensive batteries making its operation unprofitable. It is only in the last few years that the dream of mass-produced electric vehicles has become a reality.

Our understanding of climate change is founded on projections of how Earth's systems

will change in the future. These projections are made possible because of long-term global observations that show how our planet is already changing. One fundamental series of observations was initiated in 1958 by Charles David Keeling, who began measuring carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere. One of the air-sampling flasks he used will be on display in the new gallery. These measurements continue around the world and provide crucial information about the relentless rise of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, so this flask provides a stark visual reminder of human influence on our planet.

Energy Revolution: The Adani Green Energy Gallery is being developed around four thematic sections, each providing a different lens on this century's defining challenge:

Alternative Futures uses examples from history to scrutinize the moments when people have imagined different kinds of energy futures - often at times of crisis - and the story of the energy shifts that have shaped our world. Past visions of the future remind us that our current energy system was not inevitable - and that many futures were possible.

Future Planet considers present day projections of the future, looking at how climate scientists use complex climate models to understand Earth's systems, and what these tell us about the scale and nature of future climate impacts.

Future Energy and Power focuses on the technologies with potential to support a global shift to a low carbon future and explores how trajectories of change are influenced by local geographical, social and political factors.

In Future Living we look at how everyone's lives are entangled with energy systems that determine how we live, work and get around. This section explores people's ability to influence our energy future and the prospect of a "just energy transition" that allows better living standards in developing nations.

The new gallery will replace Atmosphere, which has welcomed more than six million visitors since it opened a decade ago. (IANS)

# A slice of Paris in Shillong

A mother of three, Wabangnaro Aier Sooting is a serial entrepreneur who hails from Nagaland. Her husband passed away several years back and since then she has been running multiple businesses while raising her children independently and securing a prosperous financial future for them.

To date, she has 16+ years of experience in running her direct selling business with Oriflame - where she is highly successful and has been elevated to the prestigious position of Diamond Director. Besides, she has also been running a homestay (guest house for tourists) venture and a commercial property rental business for many years now.

Being associated with the global beauty brand for many years, Wabangnaro has had the chance to travel across the globe, while exploring a variety of cuisines and ready-to-eat food, snacks and desserts. Having a great passion for baking from a young age, she wanted to bring globally acclaimed bakery products and innovative ways of baking to the Indian market. So, in 2017, she decided to start up a new business venture - a home-based bakery named Petite Paris - which sells a variety of products such as cakes, tarts, pies, cookies, bread etc., while striving to maintain the highest quality of standards and baking with healthy ingredients.

From initially having only a few friends, acquaintances and relatives as its customers, Petite Paris grew substantially over the years and went on to establish a solid customer base in Dimapur (Nagaland) - from where it operated previously.

However, in September last year, Wabangnaro decided to shift to Shillong due to personal reasons, and since then, she is working dedicatedly to re-establish her enterprise in the new place and market. Petite Paris currently consists of a team of 3 people and markets and sells its products mainly through Instagram and word-of-mouth publicity.

Sooting was a part of Project Her&Now's Entrepreneurship Support Programme in the Northeast Region (NER), which helped her to bounce back stronger in running and growing her home-bakery amid the uncertain scenario ushered by the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Her&Now - Empowering Women Entrepreneurs' is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and in partnership with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India.

In Meghalaya and in other states of the North East Region, the Project is running in partnership



with 'Dhritii - The Courage Within'. Notably, Her&Now, GIZ has also recently come out with a detailed report titled "Women Entrepreneurs' Resilience in Times of Covid-19", in a bid to help women entrepreneurs like Wabangnaro learn from the best practices and business strategies for figuring out the optimal way forward in the new normal.

"It was a new chapter and a new challenge altogether in my entrepreneurship journey that I took up last year after moving to Shillong. Because of the pandemic and the lockdowns, I was feeling quite low and isolated, and in my mind, I was unsure about what the future holds. However, things shifted drastically in my favour after joining the Her&Now programme.

"Being a part of the programme, I could see and hear stories of many other women entrepreneurs from the North East who were rising above innumerable challenges and moving ahead in their entrepreneurship journeys notwithstanding the devastating effects of the pandemic. This gave me the confidence and the much-needed mental boost to continue running and nurturing my own venture, and in believing in myself - that no matter what the external circumstances are, I can still be successful. Further, the mentorship sessions provided by the Her&Now mentors were quite insightful, and they pushed me to explore and implement various innovative ideas around marketing, packaging, increasing revenues, etc.," informs Wabangnaro Aier Sooting, Founder, Petite Paris. (IANS/ife)

# Social Media: Make it better and happier

Picture this: it's April 2020, you're between Zoom meetings, and scrolling through your social media newsfeed. Headlines like "Death toll continues to rise", "COVID-19 may cause long-term health implications" and "Health-care systems overwhelmed" flash across your screen. Your mood takes a dive, but you can't stop scrolling.

If this scenario rings true for you, you're not alone. Research shows people have a tendency to seek out information during uncertain times - it's a natural coping mechanism. But is persistent information-seeking on social media, sometimes called doomscrolling, helpful during a pandemic, or any time?

Research on the effects of bad news on mood more generally suggest exposure to negative COVID news is likely to be detrimental to our emotional wellbeing. And indeed, early evidence on the effects of COVID news consumption on mental distress reflected this. For instance, one study conducted in March 2020 involving more than 6,000 Americans found that the more time participants spent consuming COVID news in a day, the unhappier they felt.

These findings are striking but leave a few key questions unanswered. Does doomscrolling make people unhappy, or are unhappy people just more likely to doomscroll? How much time spent doomscrolling is a problem? And what would happen if, instead of doomscrolling, we were "kindness scrolling" - reading about humanity's positive responses to a global crisis?

To find out, we conducted a study where we showed hundreds of people real-world content on either Twitter or YouTube for two to four minutes. The Twitter feeds and YouTube videos featured either general news about COVID, or news about kindness



during COVID. We then measured these participants' moods using a questionnaire, and compared their moods with participants who did not engage with any content at all.

People who were shown general COVID-related news experienced lower moods than people who were shown nothing at all. Meanwhile, people who were shown COVID news stories involving acts of kindness didn't experience the same decline in mood, but also didn't gain the boost in mood we'd predicted.

These findings suggest that spending as little as two to four minutes consuming negative news about COVID-19 can have a detrimental impact on our mood.

Although we didn't see an improvement in mood among participants who were shown positive news stories involving acts of kindness, this may be because the stories were still related to COVID. In other research, positive news stories have been

associated with improvements in mood.

## MAKING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA MORE POSITIVE

Our research was published earlier this month. Ironically, news coverage of our findings, with headlines such as "Just five minutes spent on social media is enough to make you miserable, study finds", could be part of a person's doomscrolling content.

But we didn't find that all social media use makes people miserable. Rather, we found that consuming negative content about COVID via Twitter or YouTube in the midst of a pandemic does.

So what can we do to look after ourselves, and make our time on social media more pleasurable?

One option is to delete our social media accounts altogether. Figures show almost half of Facebook users in the UK and the US considered leaving the platform in 2020.

But how realistic is it to dis-

tance ourselves from platforms that connect nearly half of the world's population, particularly when these platforms offer social interactions at a time when face-to-face interactions can be risky, or impossible?

Given that avoidance might not be practical, here are some other ways to make your experience on social media more positive.

Be mindful of what you consume on social media. If you log on to connect with other people, focus on the personal news and photos shared instead of the latest headlines.

Seek out content that makes you happy to balance out your newsfeed. This may be images of cute kittens, beautiful landscapes, drool-worthy food videos or something else. You could even follow a social media account dedicated to sharing only happy and positive news.

Use social media to promote positivity and kindness. Sharing good things that are happening in your life can improve your mood, and your positive mood can spread to others. You may also like to compliment others on social media. While this might sound awkward, people will appreciate it more than you think.

Importantly, we're not suggesting that you avoid all news and negative content. We need to know what's happening in the world. However, we should also be mindful of our mental health.

As the pandemic continues to alter our lives and newsfeeds, our findings highlight the importance of being aware of the emotional toll negative news takes on us. But there are steps we can take to mitigate this toll and make our social media a happier place.

(The Conversation)

# Light, Sound & Action: Let the festivities begin



With the festive season on in full swing, iconic brand Johnnie Walker, is all set to re-energize the country's after-hour culture. Through its one-of-a-kind campaign #ReVibeTheNight, the brand brings together beloved music artists like Divine, Ritviz, Lisa Mishra, Taba Chake along with popular indie bands like When Chai Met Toast and Mad Boy Mink, among others to perform live across iconic community spaces in India.

The collaborative effort by Johnnie Walker aims to bring back the after-hour culture through live performances across popular hotspots in India. The brand's goal is drive social regeneration in India and bring back the vibe of socializing through local music artists and reignite the trade, driving social culture by executing the live events with Covid measures in place and a limited capacity audience capacity.

Prior to the world going into lockdown, the after-hour culture in India bloomed at celebrated community hubs, that eventually became a safe-haven for individuals, a place where they found their sense of self-expression and belonging, that fuelled progress. This community was driven through the culture of live music and enthralling performances that created their very own vibe, a vibe that built extraordinary, forever-lasting relationships. Through #ReVibeTheNight, one can reconnect with this community bringing music curated by artists who have a history of captivating crowds with their one-of-a-kind live experiences.

Catch the gigs and live performances for artists in these venues/cities for the live performances.

## 'Star Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCT 24, 2021

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart and it will be a wonderful combination giving good results. You will develop a liking for someone working in your office leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. Colleagues will get your help. You will also be promoted in your job. Your influence and fame will increase manifold. You will refresh old memories. You will come out of troubles. Financial gains are indicated. Do not interfere in other people's affairs; otherwise you might have to pay for it. There will be some differences with your brothers on property matters. Your boss will be happy with your performance. People will pay attention to what you say. The graph of your fame and prestige will rise up day by day. Matters in court will come in your favor. Some plans regarding the future will be made. Your health will be okay.

### 'This week for you'

**Aries:** (March 21 - April 20) At times we need to understand a few things. It is not wise to be straight forward and tell the truth bluntly. There are other ways to do a few things. You will be caught in a similar situation. It will be wise for you to remain quiet or mold your words. Otherwise, people will get upset by what you say. This will only harm your interests. Otherwise, you will repent for it but by then it will be too late. But your time will change for better. You will get better job opportunities. Even your business will do well and your profits will rise. You will be victorious in everything. The happiness of the winning will reflect in your face. You will enjoy quality time with your family. Your partner will discover some new traits in you. Lovebirds will have a good time. You will go with your family to a hotel or picnic for entertainment, fun and relaxation.

**Taurus:** (April 21 - May 21) It is going to be a wonderful week for you. The placement of Jupiter and Saturn is indicating a change in your fortune. You will get back to winning ways. Now is the time to set long term goals too. You will get a promotion or can be transferred in your job. You will have monetary benefits. It is time for all round gains. You will also carry your secret relationship, but soon you will have to take a decision to get married. Some family member's health may cause some concern. You need to go for routine check-ups done. There is nothing much to worry. Your business will run on expected lines. You will not be bothered by excess of work. You will work a lot and also get good results in the long run. You need to just maintain cool. You will also meet new people.

**Gemini:** (May 22 - June 21) Some new problems will come to bother you this week. You will feel a bit let down. You need to take care of your health. An old disease may resurface again. You need to go for regular check ups. Your enemies will become active again but not trouble you much. You will also be troubled by the authority of work. Your hard work will not give the desired results. This may upset you a bit. Hence it is even more important to remain cool and not get upset. You need to keep your temperance humble. You will be meeting lot of new people. This will lift your mood up. You will also feel happy with the arrival of money. You will have wonderful time with your family. You will also buy some important things. You will feel mentally relaxed.

**Cancer:** (June 22 - July 22) Some positive developments will take place. It can be a new job offer or some other material gain. The marriage of a family member can also get finalized. You will feel overjoyed with success. There will be atmosphere of joy and happiness at your home. You will become the strength of your family. And your family members particularly children will look at you for support and guidance. You will also see the mindset of your grown up children and try to see life from their viewpoint. You will try your best to maintain good relations with your bosses. You also need to make changes in your business and improve quality rather than quantity. It is time to earn lot of money. You will recover the money given as loan. You will expect a lot from friends but will be disappointed. It is time to be realistic and practical.

**Leo:** (July 23 - August 23) Time will be highly beneficial for you this week. Due to your busy schedule you will be unable to give time to your family. But your family members will be very understandable and will support you under all circumstances. You will have gains in your business. And money and wealth will be coming. You will achieve your targets. All your work will get completed as planned. You will also win some award in a special event. Your efforts will enhance your reputation. Love mates will enjoy perfect bonding. Those who are in relationship for a long time will plan to get married. In the later part of the week you may plan for an outing with your family. Happiness is on the cards. Yet will get opportunities to meet lot of new people.

**Virgo:** (August 24 - September 22) You will definitely rise in your work. Fate is on your side. You will get new job/business opportunities. Your status and respect in society will grow. Your friends will give you good company. You will also plan to buy a new item for your house. All efforts and tasks related with children's education will be

completed. Students will study well. Time will improve and you will get new opportunities in your business. All your held up work will get completed. Senior officials will be supportive. Days will bring joy and wealth. You will benefit from your inheritance. Your self confidence will also rise. You will also undertake business related trips. You will like to meet like minded people. Keep a cool mind

**Libra:** (September 23 - October 23) You will plan a major expansion in your business. Those looking for job opportunities will get success. The results of exam/interview too will be favorable. You will continue to increase your knowledge. Your everyday activities will keep you busy, but you need to give time to your family from your busy schedule. You will also get back blocked money from somewhere. Your economic side will remain strong. You will also meet an influential personality. You will look at problems in life from a new angle. Your approach will be practical. You will understand the feelings of people who come in your contact. Your income will increase. There will be an atmosphere of happiness at home and at the workplace also. Peace will be there in the family. Your desires will get fulfilled.

**Scorpio:** (October 24 - November 22) It will be a favorable week for you. You will get positive results in money related matters. Your plans will be successful. Your focus towards work will increase and support will be gained. Peace will be there in the family and there will also be complete fulfillment of new work. New contracts will be made. You can also fall in love with a person working in your office. You will also undertake business related trips. You will get happiness and bliss in married life. You will be elated at the opportunities to meet your friends. Land related disputes will get resolved. You will also get the affection of your elders. You will also have good food and drink. It is time for students to study hard for coming exams/interviews.

**Sagittarius:** (November 23 - December 21) You will successfully earn money. You will also receive good news. These are cheerful days. People will praise you a lot. You will also remain busy in everyday work. Working women will get full support. Students will keep doing their work with full loyalty and concentration. You will also have the desire to learn something new. You will also get the benefit of your hard work. Your profits will double in business and you will also be praised. You will enjoy yourself at the workplace. You will be happy and something new will happen. You will be master of your own destiny. You will make plans to make renovation in your house. You will spare time to enjoy activities related to your hobbies and interests. You will take stock of your financial condition. And will plan your budget for work, home and business accordingly.

**Capricorn:** (December 22 - January 20) It is going to be a time spent very nicely. Luck is again favoring you. You will go about your task with full vigour and lot of enthusiasm. You are bound to make progress even in adverse circumstances. The orbit of Jupiter and Saturn will bring stability in your career. You stand to gain lot of money with your hard work. You will enjoy a peaceful married life without any disturbances. An unknown person will also help you when you expect the least. Your priority will be the importance of relationships. The thought of yours will bring you closer to people. You will listen to people's problems sympathetically and solve them. You will also make some joint investments. The time is for reaping materialistic pleasures and joys. You will make more profits. Your talent will come to the fore. You will also plan to go on an outing. You will establish contact with people.

**Aquarius:** (January 21 - February 18) It will prove to be a crucial week for you. You will fulfill your dreams but will have to work hard to realize those. You will behave nicely with people. You will witness a growth in your business. Your objectives will also get fulfilled. You will adopt new means to fulfill your objectives. There will be an improvement in your financial condition. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. You will come closer to your spouse. Peace and harmony will prevail in family ties. You will give full attention to the needs of your family. You will also enjoy the beauty of changing season. And will like to travel with your family to a far of location for peace and happiness. You might get connected to some influential persons. You might begin a new work or take a new project. You will also do some research and creative works.

**Pisces:** (February 19 - March 20) There is a yog and signs of success in business and profession. Your money and wealth will grow. You will have gains from investments made. You will also be inclined towards religious activities. Romance will bloom and you will get success in your love interests. The husband and wife will have good understanding. Company of close friends will be helpful in your progress. Cooperation, support and blessings of the elderly will protect you in bad times. You will remain busy in your work. You will also extend a helping hand towards your subordinates. You will also meet lot of new people. Your performance at work will be better and splendid. Official and government work that had been pending for a long time will get completed.

# Careers related to the United Nations

By Ranjan K Baruah

The devastating Second World War destroyed lives and properties. One of the institutes which started after the war is the United Nations. Every year 24th October is observed as the UN Day as it marks the anniversary of the day in 1945 when the UN Charter entered into force. UN Day, celebrated every year, offers the opportunity to amplify our common agenda and reaffirm the purposes and principles of the UN Charter that have guided us for the past 76 years.

There is no doubt that the world looks to the United Nations for solutions to complex problems everywhere; from ending conflict and alleviating poverty, to combating climate change and defending human rights. There are various career options related to the UN. Among the ranks one will find staff members who monitor elections, disarm child soldiers, coordinate relief in humanitarian crises and provide administrative as well as logistical support to carry out complex mandates. One may imagine the joy and respect one would get if s/he engages with the UN. We are aware that the UN is committed to maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations; promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.

The work of the UN touches every corner of the globe and focuses on a broad range of fundamental issues, like sustainable development, protection of the environment and refugees, disaster relief and mitigation, counter terrorism, as well as disarmament and non-proliferation. The UN Secretariat which commenced operations in early 1946 was staffed with a mere 300 people working primarily for the Preparatory Commission and engaged in providing conference services for a fledgling world body that was beginning to chart a course to positively change the world. From that nucleus, it expanded within six months to about 3,000

employees. Three years later, in October 1949, the cornerstone was laid for what would evolve into the Organization's sprawling Headquarters in midtown Manhattan in New York.

Today, the United Nations has evolved beyond the conference management services it provided in its early days and is now actively on the ground around the globe seeking solutions to the three thematic areas outlined in its Charter: peace and security; the protection and promotion of human rights; and human development. Since 1946 the Organization has gradually transformed itself into a global Secretariat with a workforce that now numbers some 44,000 specialized men and women.

The United Nations offers you an attractive remuneration package with competitive pay and benefits and mostly the salary is exempted from income tax as per rule of different countries. Aspirants may work in headquarters of various offices of the UN based in different countries. There are options and opportunities and designation or terms includes Young professionals programme, competitive examinations for language professional, Junior Professional Officer Programme, Volunteer programme, Internship programme, Temporary jobs, Consultants, etc.

The UN Young Professionals Programme (YPP) is a recruitment initiative for talented, highly qualified professionals to start a career as an international civil servant with the UN Secretariat. It consists of an entrance examination process and professional development once those successful start their career with the UN.

Volunteer programme of the UN is also very exciting and lucrative. Aspirants who want to get engaged in concrete action for global peace and development may look at the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. Every year, up to 8,000 qualified and experienced women and men of some 160 different nationalities

volunteer at least six months of their lives to help others. These UN Volunteers work in some 130 countries promoting peace, responding to disasters, empowering communities and helping to build sustainable livelihoods and lasting development.

Skilled graduates with energy, enthusiasm and an eagerness to join the UN may look for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme (formerly known as Associate Experts Programme). The main goal of the JPO Programme is to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to offer young professionals an opportunity to get hands-on experience in multilateral international cooperation at the United Nations.

The UN JPO Programme, managed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), recruits and administers JPOs for different agencies like Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), International Court of Justice and United Nations Tribunals, United Nations Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), etc.

All those who are thinking of entering the world of diplomacy and public policy, an internship at the United Nations could be the ideal start for you. The objective of the internship is to give you a first-hand impression of the day-to-day working environment of the United Nations. Apart from qualification, employability skills are must to shine with the United Nations. Interested people may read from the official website of the UN to know more about careers with the UN as I have directly published information from their website.

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

"Everyone thinks of changing the world,  
but no one thinks of changing himself."

— Leo Tolstoy

## The Shillong Times

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### Of drugs and jail

THE recommendation made by the Union Ministry of Social Justice to decriminalize possession of small quantities of narcotic substances for personal use is a step in the right direction. The arrest of Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Khan's son Aryan from a luxury cruise boat off Mumbai coast recently is a case in point. Such situations weighed in favour of this recommendation. Admittedly, consumption of narcotic substances is harmful to health and must be discouraged; so is the consumption of alcohol and yet there is practically no control on liquor consumption other than in a dry state like Gujarat. But even there liquor flows from people's stomachs and through the drains via illicit means. This hypocrisy is what marks India out as a nation, which fails on most fronts and yet gives enough room to law-enforcing agencies to make life miserable for its citizens. Evil-eyed indulgences of the police are a larger curse, in reality, than drug abuse. The Constitution of India is not the Gospel. It should, and does, change with the times through parliamentary interventions. Hatching on to a law even when it causes avoidable misery to larger numbers of the populace is unacceptable. Drug-related laws not only within India but across the world too need realistic changes. Notably, the present recommendation is in tune with a similar stand taken by the UN-linked International Narcotics Control Board, which has been in existence since 1968 and yet remained silent on such aspects all along.

What the social justice ministry stated, in sum, is to avoid jail for those caught with small amounts of drugs, say a few grams. As a rule, arrest could be avoided in all petty crimes and a fine should suffice. This will help reduce filing of cases in courts, which are already burdened with pending cases in crores. Fines fetch huge revenue; and several governments are doing things to eminently fill their coffers. India mostly has ageing men at the helm of affairs whose outlook is half a century behind that of the present-day world. Of first priority is a change of mindsets, which however is hard to happen. Concentration of the law-enforcing agencies should be on checking the trade and peddling of banned narcotic substances. Notably, several narcotic substances banned in India are allowed around the world. These substances have medicinal value as well. The social justice ministry has taken the courage to state the obvious. It is for the political establishment to wake up from its slumber in such matters and act judiciously.

# Beyond 2023: New Meghalaya in the next 50 years!

By H.H. Mohrmen

The next election in the state will be crucial because by that time, Meghalaya will complete fifty years of its existence. The 2023 elections will therefore be the first one after the state has attained fifty years of its existence. The election will therefore be a time for the citizens of this small hill state to ask themselves some difficult questions. It will be a time to look back in history and find the kind of people who represented the state in the last few decades and compare them with the MLAs and MDCs that we have now.

The major difference between the politicians in the past (MLAs in the first few decades after the state was established) and the MLAs now is that they were not as rich as the current stock of

early decades of statehood were real politicians and not businessmen. Neither did they allow themselves to be used by business houses or any businessmen or women. The major problem that we have now is that we have businessmen in the garb of politicians representing the many constituencies in the state. The more dangerous trend is not only that there are many MLAs in the House who are more businessmen than politicians, but that the people who lead most of the prominent political parties in the state now are crore-patis. It looks like it has become a prerequisite that only a crore-pati can be the president of a political party in the state

the treasury benches manipulate the system for their benefit. Take for example the way the tender for transport check gates was organised to favour those who are close to power.

Some politicians claim that they are compelled to do so because a huge amount of money is needed to contest the elections. They have to spend money left, right and centre to campaign and to organise rallies and even to buy votes. In a sense being in the government is the opportunity to garner funds which will ensure their victory again.

Why is the state in such a mess? This scribe has done a little study to find out how the

have already practiced this in the last few elections. This will help reduce the expenditure of the candidates during elections.

The expenditure on food can be restricted if the candidate is honest and states the fact that it will only compel him to be corrupt if he has to spend money and feed them during the election. But the crux of the problem is the money paid to buy votes. How can this practice be eradicated?

It is sad to say that in the last election the churches were not able to minimise the expenditures during elections. No doubt in the last election, the Bishops and the Executive Secretary of the churches, gave a clarion call from their respective headquarters to their followers



politicians are. At least the politicians of the bygone era that I knew, like Larsing Khyriem, Dr B Pakem, H E Pohshna, BS Challam, HB Dan, H Hadem, Albin Lamare, Mihsalan Suchiang from Jaftia hills, BB Lyngdoh, HS Lyngdoh, GG Swell were not rich. They did not retire rich with hundreds of crores in their bank accounts. The truth is politicians in the past did not do business or they do not have business interests of their own. The change in the kind of people the voters elected to the state legislative assembly happened in just a few decades.

This is the biggest difference between the MLAs of the present generation and the MLAs of yester years. Larsing Khyriem lived a simple life and enjoyed his retirement and did not even own a car when he died. Albin Lamare who represented Nangbah constituency was always humble and down to earth. This scribe still remembers him travelling using public transport and visiting the different government departments in Jowai even when he was an MLA. Mihsalan Suchiang, perhaps who died recently, was the last of the old breed of politicians, who even travelled on public transport and lived a simple life.

The politicians in the

now. The NPP is being led by Conrad who is no stranger to business, the UDP is led by Metbah Lyngdoh another business tycoon and Congress is now being led by VH Pala who has several hundred crores in his kitty.

People are complaining about bad roads and that the state is not performing well in many parameters of development. But the question that we should ask is why do we have bad roads in the state? The condition of the highway from Mukhla to Mawryngkneng is pathetic. Many trucks break down midway which leads to traffic jams almost every day, but the government is ignoring this fact. Why does the same road need to be repaired every year? Is it because the repairs work is of a sub-standard quality and if that is so why was it allowed to happen?

We often conclude that the reason for the bad roads is because of the contractor-political nexus, but in the current dispensation, most of the government contract works are being executed by the MLAs themselves or their coterie. This means that the politicians are themselves to be blamed for the bad roads. Politicians unashamedly abuse their powers for their own or their followers' interests. Our MLAs and especially those who are in

money is being used in the elections in Jowai. The findings are that between 20 to 30 percent of the money is spent in hiring buses and paying for fuel for people to attend the candidate's campaign every day. This includes expenditure on hiring chairs and decorating the campaign sites. While 10 to 15 percent is spent on providing food and drinks to the campaigners and a considerable amount of about 50 to 60 percent is spent on actual buying of votes and paying people to compensate them for losing their wages to attend the campaigns and rallies. Miscellaneous expenditure will be between 5 to 10 percent.

The pertinent question is whether change is possible in Meghalaya post the 2023 election? Can we expect to have new sets of MLAs after the elections? If any change is to happen, the Dorbar Shnongs have a vital role to play in ensuring that the expenditure during election is minimised. The candidate's expenditure will be reduced if he/she does not have to bring supporters from the other villages to the venue where the campaign is held. The Dorbar Shnong can make rules that the candidate and only a few of his canvassers should accompany him/her during the campaign trail. In fact, some localities in Jowai

not to use or be tempted by money during the election. But the opposite happened. At the local level the churches were found hobnobbing with the candidates to contribute for building a new church, or to build the approach road to their church building; a fence or a wall around their churches or their cemeteries. Local churches also lobbied with the candidates during election to help develop their schools or other Church's outreach projects. No wonder only rich candidates won in the last election.

If the election 2023 is going to be any different, the people of the state, particularly the educated section of the society will have to work hard to bring the changes especially during elections. The Dorbar Shnong, the Churches and the other aspects of the society will have to work together to stop this madness called election tamasha. We can only hope to see change in the state in the next fifty years if the influence of money during elections is stopped. The influence of money during elections is the root of all the ills that we see in the state today. We can have a new Meghalaya only if we are able to have clean elections which will produce clean legislators.

Hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

## The Veer, Mercy Petitions and Contemporary Justifications

By Dr Saji Varghese

The recent claim of the Defence Minister of India, Rajnath Singh that Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's mercy petition for amnesty was carried out on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, has waded into a controversy. Many, including prominent historians, journalists and opposition party leaders questioned the statement made by the Defence Minister on October 12, while releasing a book on Veer Savarkar. Several questions that pop up in peoples' minds are: Did the contrasting ideology of Mahatma Gandhi support his plea for amnesty? What compelled such a petition? The followers of the ideologies of Savarkar never contested their belief, that he who professed the radicalist's Hindu voice was a staunch nationalist and an unwavering patriot.

Savarkar, one of the founders of the Hindu Right Wing was known for his radical ethno-religious views which challenged in many ways the existence and practice of secularism in India. He argued that the true Indian was one, for whom the Motherland and the Holy land were one and the same. This dual bond to the land created a precious type of 'perfect solidarity and cohesion'. For this reason he claimed that Muslims and the Christians could never be true Indians, as their Holy land lay elsewhere.

However, today there is a more inclusive concept of what is India. By contrast Savarkar argues that Dalits and tribal people did worship gods that were fundamentally attached to the land, though their religion was not of the mainstream. At one point he

varkar's release. One opposition leader blamed Singh for "trying to twist history." However, is there a need for the ruling party's further cleansing (justification) of the acts of the leaders which seem to be in control of almost everything, on its road to the next 2024 showdown? Though the means seem acceptable and popular as Gandhi is a pacifist and advocate of peace and passive resistance would be appealing to the masses. Savarkar did write at least seven petitions between 1911 and 1920 for his release from the notorious Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands, where he and his brother spent 10 years after they were sentenced for life for waging a war against the British in India. In a 1920 petition, he expressed his "willingness to join the constitutional line of political activity and abstain from political activity for a long period of time", notes Vikram Sampath, historian and author of a two-volume biography of Savarkar.

While a term of governance witnessed the vital assiduity being heaped on the freedom fighters and social revolutionaries who were undercover in the earlier regime, this claim seemed to have further 'cleansed an unchivalrous move of a patriot in the much secular water of the ocean of Ahimsa'. An illogical claim may be called a petitio principii, the very assertion is nothing other than a presupposition which stands in need to be proved. Despite the assertion, there is no material on record to prove the same. Although the right-wing leader was

**Savarkar had lived for a long period in Europe and his Hindutva is a European product. The word Hindutva, now so familiar is Sarvarkar's choice in preference to the religious term, "Hinduism", means "Hinduness" or "the essence of being Hindu."**

suggested that Christians, Parsis, Jews and Muslims could count as genuine Hindus too, if they were willing to renounce their allegiance to their Holy land. In the modern world, his argument is that the world will have to bow to the power of the unified India as he believed that India would rise to its glory in unity. He wrote this in 'Hindutva: who is a Hindu?'. His views were more like an advocate of atheism and rationalism, and his strong opposition to orthodox Hindu beliefs were reflected in his book too and to whom Hindutva was a genetic and political force inbuilt into Hindus. He was also a man of contradictions. On the one hand, he was an outspoken political voice for the Hindus, on the other, he was a rationalist, who opposed Hindu superstition, the caste system, and worship of the Cow - a sacred animal for the Hindus.

Savarkar had lived for a long period in Europe and his Hindutva is a European product. The word Hindutva, now so familiar is Sarvarkar's choice in preference to the religious term, "Hinduism", means "Hinduness" or "the essence of being Hindu." The inquiry into the essence of Hindu had been historical and all the modern debate could still be the consequence of such an inquiry. Do these ideas lead to the conception of 'unity in diversity'? Savarkar was not in denial of this tradition, however, he was in favour of rebuilding the tradition along European lines. For him, the religious and cultural traditions are the key markers of Hindutva, though he was not a religious practitioner.

Rajnath Singh's remarks sparked protests from Savarkar's critics. Many opined that Gandhi, an ardent pacifist and opponent of the revolutionary, could not have advised and supported Sa-

exonerated of all charges, his critics allege that Savarkar was connected to the 1948 assassination of Gandhi. They dispute his role in the Indian freedom struggle and condemn his advocacy of a "Hindu nation". The two were fiercely opposed to each other.

Historian Ramachandra Guha says Savarkar's rivalry with Gandhi dated back to 1909 when "he openly abused Gandhi". "His hatred of Gandhi was intensely personal." In 1920, Savarkar's younger brother Narayan Rao sought the help and advice of Gandhi, for securing the release of his elder brother in the wake of the royal proclamation. Gandhi sent a small reply a week later which reads, "It is difficult to advise you. I suggest, however, framing a brief petition setting forth facts of the case bringing out in clear relief the fact that the offence committed by your brother was purely political." However, a few months later, Gandhi "built a case for their release." In an article in Young India, a weekly paper. He wrote that the Savarkar brothers had said "they did not entertain any revolutionary ideas". "They both state unequivocally that they do not desire independence from the British connection. On the contrary, they feel that India's destiny can be worked out in association with the British. Nobody has questioned their honour or their honesty," Gandhi wrote.

Many narratives of the freedom struggle and the related events have become easy locus for the political convenience of the leaders in contemporary times. Does history and facts get distorted through these assertions which recur with covert motives? Whatever be the intent, there is a need to keep history and historical movements apolitical.

(The writer teaches at Lady Keane College, Shillong)

### Letters to the Editor

#### A flawed decision

Editor,  
It is extremely sad and most worrisome to see the political football being played between the District Council and the State Government regarding implementation of the Meghalaya Building Bye-Laws at the cost of safety and security of the citizens of the state. From day one, it was a known fact that transferring the right to implement the bye-laws to the District Councils will be a disaster in itself and would not only be illegal but fraught with huge risks; the state being situated in Zone 5 of the Seismic Zoning Atlas of the country. Also, not forgetting the fact that the District Councils have neither the means or the capacity to take upon themselves this important technical responsibility, forget about framing its own bye-laws. This was only a political gimmick at the cost of safety of the citizens. But the powers that

be and the strange equations that work in our State, the Government of the day felt it prudent to absolve itself of this responsibility and pass on this important function to the District Council.

One thing the State Government failed to understand is that the law under which the Building-Bye Laws are framed, is a state law and it is the State Government which is responsible for its implementation and Government cannot absolve itself of the responsibility. God forbid if there is a disaster or some building were to collapse tomorrow, I wonder what would be the stand of the State Government. They cannot say that we have transferred this function to the District Councils and are therefore freed of all responsibility. They will be held accountable and have to face the consequences.

Building Bye-Laws are not only tools to control the height of the buildings but also regulates the growth, expansion and density of a

city. They play a major role in ensuring safety, well being and health and hygiene of the residents and leads to orderly development. Building Bye-Laws are not to be looked at in isolation but have to be read in conjunction with the Master Plan, Zoning Regulations and other development controls in the city. Without really understanding why building bye-laws are important for a city our leaders are playing politics with it thinking that it would bring them monetary reward.

I often wonder that if there is clamour tomorrow that PWD, Health and Power Supply be transferred to the District Council on the same grounds that building bye-laws was transferred, will the state Government take the risk to leave the design and implementation of roads, bridges, power plants etc., to the District Councils. It seems we did not learn our lessons from the fiasco of Primary Education of yester years and it will require the intervention of the judiciary

to set the matter right. After all it was the intervention of the judiciary in the year 2014 that to some extent controlled the violation that was taking place with high-rise buildings in Shillong.

We are a state situated in the most vulnerable seismic zone and an earthquake could hit us at any moment. The need of the hour is to be extra cautious and stringent in our building activities and development process. Instead, it seems that the present government is more into a policy of appeasement without any care of what may happen tomorrow and the safety of its citizens.

Yours etc.,  
B. Dutta,  
Shillong-1

#### Rising fuel prices

Editor,  
Petrol prices breached the Rs 100 mark per litre in Shillong and now the state capital has joined the list of

many Indian cities where petrol has now jumped to three figures. Fuel price hike has a cascading effect on the daily life of the common man. From the government's viewpoint, the increase in price may be inescapable but its impact goes from bad to worse and hits the poor and the middle class. This section will surely be paralyzed and burdened with such price hikes that are unstable. It is a no brainer that this, directly and indirectly, filters down to every sector of the economy. The impact is severe and a major part of their income is absorbed due to inflation. Starting from the transportation cost to price of goods to groceries these price hikes are digging a hole into the pockets of people and the chain keeps propagating further. However, since there is no negative impact on the enthusiastic devotees so they will never complain. They believe what they are told - that they are sacrificing for their greater good and long term gain. That is how they

accepted demonetization.

Government is taxing the middle class that aspires for a good life, but ends up paying taxes to the rich and a good chunk of that money is being used for reducing corporate tax, and bailouts. The rich and the corrupt transfer the burden to the common man and the chain reactions widen. The croanies of the country do not work for the welfare of society; they are instead more bothered about their own wealth creation. Who cares for the middle class when the super-rich, the politicians and top government officials are spared from such agony because they don't pay their own fuel bills. They are paid by their businesses or the Government and rest be damned.

Yours etc.,  
Advocate M Haque,  
Shillong-6

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"Great work is done by people who are not afraid to be great."

— Fernando Flores

## The Shillong Times

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### Price of MDA's friendly contests

WHAT is unique to Meghalaya is that coalition partners in a government nearly always contest bye-elections against each other in what is termed a "friendly fight." There is no loyalty of purpose. Each party tries to score over the other even as they try and project a united front to the world. This "friendly contest" among coalition partners of the MDA is actually opening up a window of opportunity for the opposition Congress which appears to have made headway in Garo Hills by getting back into its fold those who had earlier deserted the party for greener pastures.

In a state where the idea of a political party is merely that of a uniform worn during elections and where people actually voted in the past for individuals and their personal charisma and later for the money that's on offer, the ideology of political parties hardly matters. In Meghalaya, the number of political parties that have been birthed and died a natural death along with their founders are many. Yet, before every election, new political parties are born with the intent of capitalizing on the frustrations of people by pointing to the existing political parties and how they have failed the public.

Political parties hardly speak of the ideology on which they stand and which they will defend to the hilt. All regional parties in Meghalaya have one common ideology – to defend the "jaidbynriew" (the people or the ethnic communities) from a list of hyped-up fears such as the fear of being overwhelmed by the majority community from the rest of India; the fear that others will take away jobs and businesses; the fear that others (non-indigenous people) might capture political power. In all of the above issues or fear mongering, no facts and figures are cited. There are no academic citations to prove whether those fears are genuine or just pitches to emotionally blackmail the electorate. Since the electorate is largely ignorant of such issues and there is none to clarify and call the bluff of political parties for fear of being labelled "traitors," political actors get by with all these uncontested yet frivolous claims – an election tactic they have used for decades and forgotten thereafter. Political parties hardly speak of a development road map and nor do they give the public a blueprint of how they wish to achieve their goals. Manifestos are generic in nature and no one really pays attention to what's in the manifestos. Hence, we have the ugly politics of today where politicking is an end in itself.

# Why isn't there a second crop in Meghalaya?

By K.N. Kumar

Most paddy cultivation in our state takes place during the summer season (Kharif). During Kharif, the acreage under Paddy is 34,445 hectares, while it is just 3,194 hectares during the winter season. The winter Paddy (also known as Rabi or Boro Paddy) sown in September/October is taken up only in 9.27% of the State's Kharif Paddy area. Why does the Paddy area come down so drastically – by more than 90% between the seasons? Why are we unable to reach water to the farmers when they need it the most? Through this article, I want to highlight some of the festering gaps that need to be addressed by the Government through better policy and action.

Monsoons being what they are in our state, no irrigation is required during Kharif, for the most part, but not so, in the Rabi season. The residual moisture in the soil cannot meet the water requirement of paddy during winter, so the farmers do not risk undertaking paddy cultivation until they are assured of water availability. With an average rainfall of 988 mm, Tamil Nadu grows three crops of paddy from the same land every year thanks to their superior water distribution system, while we grow only one crop, despite receiving three times more rainfall (2818 mm). So, the Government must create the irrigation infrastructure to store water during summer and reach it to the fields during winter to cultivate a second crop. Why do we need a second crop of Paddy at all? Because we are a food-deficit state, because we currently produce only 30% of our food requirement, and because we are dependent upon other states for meeting the rest of the demand. So, for us, it is a matter of our food security just as it is, a case of self-esteem and self-respect. Such an opportunity loss cannot go on forever.

First, let us examine the official data. The Directorate of Water Resources indicates that by 2020-21, it completed 1139 projects with a culturable command area of 54,288 hectares. In other words, about 18% of our three lakh hectares of cultivable land is officially deemed as irrigable. However, the cropping pattern data obtained until 2021 indicate that only 49,383 hectares are irrigated, meaning a gap between what is on paper and what actually is. This gap of 4,905 hectares can be explained to an extent by (1) the farmers not taking up any cultivation during Rabi for various reasons, or (2) some of the 'implemented projects are either semi-functional or non-functional, so effectively

no water flows into the fields. In other words, what is culturable is not always cultured. Fair enough!

The data quality is questionable because several defunct projects are still on the record of the Department of Water Resources as 'implemented projects.' Without a comprehensive field assessment, the Directorate cannot state how many of the implemented projects



are functioning, how many need to be written off the records, and how many should be revived through repairs and restoration. Unfortunately, the Department of Water Resources has never attempted a comprehensive survey to determine the field realities. On his part, the then Chief Engineer (Irrigation) did submit a proposal for permission to write off 29 projects with a command area of 5220 hectares back in 2009. The Government constituted a committee under the Agriculture Department

can be brought back to life.

Reasons for the implemented projects turning non-operational are several: (1) Water diverts its course over the years due to silting, and therefore, channels turn dry (2) Recurrent flash floods damage civil structures (3) Large scale deforestation in the upper reaches dries up the primary water source (4) Dumping of coal near the water sources renders the water

unfit for irrigation (5) Non-involvement of the farmers at the project-design stage leads to poor designs and poorer construction quality (6) Inadequate financial allocations for repairs and restoration and (7) Projects constructed in the seventies can no longer be revived, etc.

Meanwhile, the anguish of the farmers continues. It is hardly edifying that it took us nearly fifty years of statehood to provide winter irrigation to only 13,148 hectares which work out to 4.38% of our total cultivable area of three lakh hectares. That is as good

*"Without a comprehensive field assessment, the Directorate cannot state how many of the implemented projects are functioning, how many need to be written off the records, and how many should be revived through repairs and restoration."*

as negligible acreage. At the present rate of about 258 hectares per year, the department will take one thousand years to complete the remaining acreage. The sense of urgency is missing; a regular system to coordinate with the agriculture department is not in place, the demand-side management through water user associations is generally ignored, and the departmental accountability for the failure of a project is as good as non-existent.

The number of registered Water User Associations (WUAs) in the state is only

394, while the implemented projects are as many as 1139. Ideally, every implemented project must have at least one WUA. Unfortunately, a significant number of the registered WUAs are not active, and the departmental effort to organize them or build their capacities is limited. Surprisingly, the department has not even drafted a regular scheme to train the members of the WUAs, most of whom will not even be aware that they have a role to play in the efficient management of the resources already created. Occasionally some of them are sent to the NERIWALM, Tejpur for training, but this kind of bits and pieces approach is not good enough. We will need a training institution within the Directorate, somewhat like what the Agriculture Department does, through its MAMETI. Building the human capacities of the members of the Water User Associations should be a regular and consistent activity, not an ad hoc measure.

The conventional excuse of funds being a constraint for repairs and restoration is also not valid because the Government of India is very liberal in its approach toward the north-eastern states. For example, under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, there is an incentivization scheme for bridging the irrigation gaps (ISBIG) to reduce the irrigation gaps in the states. The scheme provides for the strengthening of Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) for sustainable operation and maintenance of irrigation network, correction of deficiencies in canal networks, capacity building of the WUAs and even induction of technologies like solar pumps etc. However, we have yet to submit a comprehensive proposal to the Ministry to access these funds for Repair and Restoration is a regrettable fact.

At the risk of sounding rhetorical, I will say that the key to our state's progress lies in expanding the area under the second crop to optimize the productivity of the land and the farmers. To make that happen, we will need a mission mode intervention – (1) to identify the projects that require immediate restoration (2) to launch an immediate programme to repair and restore all of them in two working seasons (3) to form and build the capacities of the WUAs on priority, by creating a training institution within the state itself, and (4) to institutionalize the coordination with agriculture, rural development and water-based departments. All of this is implementable. Funding is not a constraint. Conviction is!

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

## Christians in India worried as attacks by Hindutva groups rise

By Shreyasi Singh

There has been a steep rise in violence committed against Christians by Hindutva groups, which have largely been unnoticed by the media. On October 21, the Association for the Protection of Civil Rights, United Against Hate, and United Christian Forum jointly released a fact-finding report highlighting the series of attacks on churches and hate speech against Christians across India.

The report records at least 305 incidents of violence against Christians in the first nine months of 2021, but only 30 FIRs have been registered so far in these cases. The report mentions that September alone recorded 69 such incidents, followed by 50 in August, 37 in January, 33 in July, 27 each in March, April, and June, 20 in February, and 15 in May.

On analysis, at least 1,331 women, 588 tribals, and 513 Dalits were injured in these incidents, and in about 23 incidents, places of worship were damaged. On 85 occasions, restrictions were imposed on people to carry out religious ceremonies. Each of these incidents was horrifying, and the report delves deeply into the nature of the offenses committed in light of the alleged facts.

First on the list is the attack of October 3, where a Hindutva mob of 250-300 persons barged into a Roorkee Church and attacked people, destroyed CCTV cameras, and vandalized the church premises. The report states that there were only 12 present in the church for prayers when the attack occurred and also contains the testimony of victims of the attack.

One victim stated in her testimony: "I had never seen those men. They held me tightly while the women abused and attacked me and the man stole my phone and molested me". Another victim testified that the mob was armed with sticks and iron rods, and was angrily chanting religious slogans like "Jai Shri Ram" and "Har Har Mahadev".

The mob alleged that the church was illegal and built on private property. However, the report mentions that the pastor's family shared their land sale deed agreement with the fact-finding team to clear any doubts about their ownership of the property. Further, the family has reported suspicious activity to the police at least four times before the mob attack but it was ignored by the authorities. Roorkee Police refused to entertain them and provide security to the church.

Further, during the time of the incident, police authorities were called to inform of the attack, and notably while the Civil Lines police station was less than a kilometre away from the church, the police team arrived a full hour after the violent mob dispersed on its own after the attack. The team noted that "prima facie the attack looked like it was meticulously planned to build a fake narrative of conversion."

As per the report, not only was the formal complaint filed by the victims not addressed by the authorities, but a counter FIR was lodged against the pastor's family and they were booked under several serious sections of the Indian Penal Code, including Sections 153A (promoting religious disharmony), 395 (dacoity), and 120B (criminal conspiracy).

The fact-finding report contains briefs on 89 attacks against the Christian community. Many of these are shockingly capricious and tyrannical.

In a case from Ghazipur, UP which occurred on August 10, a pastor and his family were denied their fundamental right to access clean drinking water by forbidding them access to hand pumps, along with restricting entry to the church building. The report mentions that all of this was on the basis of false accusations and social opposition by a

group of villagers.

In a case at Azamgarh, UP, on August 31, a pastor was arrested after local extremists, along with the police, came in civil dress to a religious meeting saying they want to know more about Jesus. After 15 minutes, the pastor was taken into custody. In another incident at Azamgarh, police arrested a pastor while he was conducting a private prayer meeting on September 9 on the basis of an anonymous complaint.

Two notable incidents occurred in Mau, UP. The first was an attack by a Hindutva mob who claimed to be Bajrang Dal activists and from the Hindu Yuva Vahini, on October 10. They lodged an FIR alleging that a pastor and six others were involved in "converting people to Christianity and insulted Hindu deities using abusive language," and forced the Christian worshippers to the police station.

The couple in whose house the worship took place pleaded that no forcible conversions were taking place and that the worship in his house had been a regular one. The pastor, too, can be heard in a video stating that the prayer meeting was for the health and wellbeing of everyone, and was open to anyone to attend. Following this, the seven were booked under the Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020.

In Mau, UP, two nuns were attacked by a mob at a bus stand on Oct 12. They were accused of conversion, were thrashed, and dragged to the police station. One of them said that it was more shocking for her that no policeman intervened when the mob attacked them. The other victim mentioned that even the police asked them 'are you converting?'

In Chhattisgarh, too, there is a steep rise in violence against Christians. The Guardian reported that "in some villages, Christian churches have been vandalised, in others, pastors are beaten or abused." Chhattisgarh, according to the report, has the second-highest number of incidents against Christians.

Hindu extremists allege that Christian pastors and activists are luring and allegedly converting people through coercion, specifically targeting the tribal communities and poor, lower-caste Hindu families by offering cash payments, free medical assistance, and foreign trips, funded by foreign donors. While there is no evidence to support such claims, "anti-conversion" rallies have been held across Chhattisgarh in the past month.

The report refers to the August 29 attack by around 100 people on three churches in the district of Kawardha. Further, Chhattisgarh is one of nine Indian states that already have draconian laws regulating religious conversions. Those wishing to change their religion are required to gain permission from the local district magistrate, and anyone carrying out forced conversions can be punished with a three-year jail sentence. The report mentions two recent cases of physical violence, vandalism, and false accusation in Chhattisgarh.

A closer look at the cases documented by the fact-finding report presents a common thread running through them. Nearly all the attacks are committed by Hindutva groups on the pretext of patriotism and containing unruly elements of anti-nationalism in the State. Another notable feature is the unwillingness of police authorities to act against the perpetrators who are Hindu religious extremists. In fact, the report lists multiple instances where the police authorities have themselves pushed for such violent acts and supported the violent Hindutva mobs. Mere submission of an FIR against the pastor or church, in general, has led to restraint on accessing the church premises and performing prayer rituals. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

### Letters to the Editor

#### Decrepit, accident-prone highway

Editor,  
I once went on holiday with my friends to Darjeeling. We visited a park where there were horses and we could ride them around the park for Rs 10 per round. It was such a joyous time and those days have long since gone. However, I was very recently reminded of this holiday while travelling on the stretch of National Highway 6 between Jowai and Mawryngkneng, particularly the stretch between Mookyndur and Mawryngkneng. The potholes and ditches (yes ditches!) were very helpful in reminding me of riding on horseback. It was a pitiful sight to see vehicles struggling to negotiate what bit of road was left. Added to our woes was the traffic jam, undoubtedly another aftermath of the sad state of the road. Thus, the journey from Jowai to Shillong, which would normally take around an hour and a half was stretched to four hours plus.

Anyone who regularly

commutes between these two important towns will attest to the fact that these traffic snarls are a regular occurrence. I would go further to state that as a regular commuter I can attest that this happens year after year. The road was in a similar condition last year but was then repaired later during the winter months only for the same repaired patches to fall apart yet again this year. If such apathy can exist for this vital lifeline of the state, what hope can we have? Shall we continue to be orphaned by this indifference and wait for some ill event to befall? I urge upon the authorities concerned to take up the matter. In our state, our roads are our lifeline and we need to wise up and take good care of them.

Yours etc.,  
Omarka Laloo,  
Mynthong  
Jowai

#### Are the Dorbar Shnong ready?

Editor,  
A noted personality and Chairman of the Mawlai Town Dorbar Bah SD Khongwir has waded into

an area where not much has been spoken because of the alibi of tradition that has allowed certain undemocratic principles to continue in our state. The views of Bah Khongwir have tickled the minds of many to think whether it is time to allow women and make them more participative and involved in matters of the Dorbar Shnong which are regarded as local governing grassroots institutions similar to the Panchayati Raj system or whether we should continue to remain silent in the garb of "customs and tradition". The fact is the Dorbar Shnong have not been able to accept that women should be part of the election or decision making process and this is prevalent even in urban educated localities as well. As we go the rural areas of the state this system gets worse. Women's voices are even more stifled

For readers and patrons of The Shillong Times, women's empowerment also means elevating them to higher levels. The first woman to have been part of this change is one Kong Irim Diengdoh of Khlieh Iewrim who was the first Village Employment Council, Sec-

retary to hold such position in a fiercely contested area during the primary stages of implementing the NREGS in the state and district of Jaintia Hills. I am saying this with all authority that it was during my tenure with the MRDS-IFAD project in Jaintia Hills that the Gender team led by Angela Rangad and later by Wansi Passah of the District Management Unit that played a crucial role in moulding the minds, behaviour and social characteristics of the local community into accepting this significant change. Another notable change was the holistic participation of women in the VEC committee and men were also seen encouraging this. In Jaintia Hills when Dorbar Shnongs have their annual meetings, one witnesses both women and men in the discussions and deliberations which our Khasi counterparts should take a leaf out of. This is how old tradition not in-tune with the changing times needs to move forward and women need to be part of this process. How the KHADC receives this "challenge" would be keenly watched development in the days to come.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Shillong-3

#### Pathetic state of judicial infrastructure

Editor,  
Chief Justice of India, N.V Ramana's revelations about inadequate judicial infrastructure brings into sharp focus how one of the pillars of democracy – the judicial system, is forced to function with limited facilities. According to him almost 20% of the judicial officers in the country don't even have proper courtrooms to sit in.

Of the 24,280 judicial officers in India, there are only 20, 143 court halls, including 620 rented premises. Discrimination against women is seen in providing basic facilities for them. 26% of the court premises have no separate toilets for women and 16% do not even have toilets. Only 54% courts have purified drinking water facility. In spite of the fact that computerization is of paramount importance for

speeding up office work, only 27% of the courtrooms have computers on the judges' desks. Notwithstanding the fact that reference books are of utmost importance in law, only 51% courts have a library.

It is a fact that inadequate infrastructure in courts makes it difficult for them to function effectively. In order to improve access to justice, good judicial infrastructure is a must. Given that people are aware of their rights and there has been overall progress in their lives, inadequate infrastructure is equal to depriving them of their rights. It must be understood that failure to deliver timely justice affects annual GDP growth. Considering that effective functioning of judicial system is essential for the progress of the country, there is an urgent need to rectify its deficiencies.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Kollam

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"Globalization means that business strategy and business ethics cannot be separated from each other."

— Ofra Strauss

## The Shillong Times

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### Less defence, less exports

A claim by Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh this week was that India's defence exports have grown by 334 per cent in the last five years and we are now doing such exports to as many as 75 countries. The fact of the matter is that both these figures do not mean much for the simple reason that India's record in this sector is too low in comparison with those of other nations. India exports defence wares worth Rs 9,000 crore a year now; no big sum anyway. Also, India is the second largest importer of arms costing billions, the first being Saudi Arabia. While the US is the top arms exporter, carrying a market size of 37 per cent, China occupies the fifth place. Good governance is a mirage for India. While several other nations in this geo-political region have grown by leaps and bounds, the economic growth here is below par with only a population bulge.

The greatness of Jawaharlal Nehru was his vision for the nation's future. As first prime minister leading Independent India, he initiated high-stakes programmes for each and every sector. He not only introduced the Five Year Plans, but also strengthened the industrial sector with steel plants, helped agriculture with a set of huge dams, started ISRO for space research, and set up ordnance factories to produce defence ware as in Jabalpur and a military tank factory in Avadi, Tamil Nadu. They were just a start. Successive governments failed to keep up the momentum. They engaged in petty politics and meaningless rhetoric and failed to take the nation forward. The IT sector grew by virtue of the initiatives by software engineers, not by help from the political establishment. This, thus, stands out while every other sectors in the country are failing to make a mark. With a billion-plus strong population, human resources are India's best advantage, but the nation's leadership failed to make good use of its people.

Successive governments took special interest in purchase of military ware from other countries, rather than encouraging domestic research and production of modern armaments and fighter jets. The commission behind such shady deals as in Bofors turned out to be their main obsession and attraction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has raised expectations by claiming to promote 'Make In India' as a principal endeavour for the defence sector. It has not progressed. Launching a programme is one thing, making a success out of it is a different ball game. India can only curse itself for the plight that it has landed in.

# 2021 by-polls: Dynastic elections

By Albert Thyrniang

Whenever a public representative passes away, the immediate thought is, "Who from the family will succeed him or her?" Mawryngkneng, Mawphlang and Rajabala are clear examples. Not long after David Nongrum suddenly died in February this year, the Congress workers in Mawryngkneng constituency approached the Pyngrope-Nongrum family to identify a person of their choice to 'carry on' the 'legacy' of the deceased. His father, Charles Pyngrope had to come out in public firmly insisting that no one from the family would contest the ensuing by-election. When Azad Zaman from Rajabala expired due to cardiac arrest in March this year the Congress promptly nominated Hasina Yasmin Mondol, wife of the former MLA for the by-poll. The same was played out in Mawphlang after SK Sunn succumbed to COVID-19 in September. The UDP, with support from the HSPDP, quickly called upon Sunn's son, Eugenenson Lyngdoh to abandon the football arena and jump into the electoral field.

Family members of expired legislators have every right to contest elections but what is worrying is that all other criteria are completely ignored. Experience, educational qualification, capability, party loyalty, merit are no consideration. Eugenenson was an active footballer plying his trade with East Bengal FC. He had to be persuaded to give up his passion in favour of politics. The 35 year old who has played for various clubs and for India is a famed footballer but he is less than a political novice. The privilege is being an offspring of the legislator. More celebrated sport-persons do not catch the eyes of politicians. Hasina too is the Congress nominee since she is the widow of the late Rajabala MLA. The ticket was handed to her not because she is a woman, nor because she is the most capable and not because she is the best to carry the mantle in the next one year. This is sheer dynastic politics. Here too all political parties are silent because all are culprits. Congress has the Mukul dynasty, NPP the PA Sangma dynasty and the UDP is a promoter of family politics of late. This is no blessing to Meghalaya. The tendency extends to reservations and government jobs in the form of nepotism. It is a discouraging scenario for hard working, educated and meritorious youths. Lahkhen Rymbui's call for youngsters to emulate Eugenenson is hollow. It is ap-

plicable only to youths with political lineage.

The effect is clearly seen during the campaign trails. The political discourse has no substance because sympathy wave, being a major factor, 'blood line' candidates exploit it while adversaries try to negate it by bypassing important issues in the meantime. So, we have the speakers in Mawphlang sounding like stand-up comedians. To combat the Congress which is projecting its candidate, Kennedy Khyriem as the most experienced and hence most deserving among the three contestants having been an MLA for 5 years, the UDP's Brol Nongsiej and aide of its beginner candidate assured voters that any concern is unfounded because he will tutor the rookie once elected. Not left behind the Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong admitted that the NPP candidate, Lamphrang Blah may not be the most capable but he would beat up Blah if he makes mistakes as a legislator. Tynsong's claim of telling that Mukul Sangma's rightful place is the verandah of the Secretariat is also childish. In Mawryngkneng, though David Nongrum's 'choice' is absent, even rival candidates call on his name. The winners of October 30 polls could be decided by sympathy votes. Unending broken promises do not matter. This paper's editorial yesterday points to how political parties have no ideology and road map for development. The regional parties love to keep the fear psychosis alive with their favourite unsubstantiated oratory of the imminent dangers facing the indigenous community.

Another glaring reality is that candidates depend not on their own forte, but on the strength of party bigwigs. If Highlander Kharalki emerges victorious the credit goes mainly to Charles Pyngrope, Amparen Lyngdoh and others. If Hasina creates history by being the first woman legislator from Rajabala, she owes it to Mukul Sangma in particular. If Eugenenson scores a stunning winning "goal", the sumptuous assist comes from the UDP bosses. If the NPP upset other rivals, the star campaigners, Conrad Sangma and Tynsong are the real winners.

Hasina is the lone woman in the fray in the present elections. Though a B. Sc and B. Ed holder we know why the 37-year-old became the first woman contestant from the minority community in

Rajabala. Whether we are matriarchal or matrilineal our society is still male dominated. Men and women are both blamed. We don't realise that tradition can be a curse. We are enslaved by age-old traditions and customs. The English writer G.K. Chesterton, in his much acclaimed Orthodoxy has these strong words, "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure... our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead." The South Indian mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti, often seen in YouTube and Facebook frighteningly warns, "Tradition becomes our security, and when the mind is secure it is in decay." Equally scary is Warren Ellis' blunt remark, "Tradition is one of those words conservative people use as a shortcut to thinking." No tradition is sacrosanct. If a tradition holds us back it has to be modified and even discarded. A tradition that is anti-21st century is superfluous. A tradition that does not promote gender equality should be done away with. Preserving a tradition for its own sake is pointless. So what if it has been followed from time immemorial? It would be a disaster if our minds decay because we simply rely on traditions.

It is a tragedy if we cling on to traditions though they are detrimental to growth. It is a shame that the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Syiem, Deputy Syiem, Electors and Rangbah Shnong of Myllem Syiemship) Act, 2007, still has a provision forbidding women to vote in the election of the Rangbah Shnong in this day and age. If in localities in Shillong, Shella confederacy and other villages women are already electors then the Act is no longer relevant. Amendment is the natural outcome. Ka Sur Ki Nong Mawlai (The Voice of Mawlai People) must pursue the matter to its logical conclusion. If women are not empowered in traditional institutions, in vain is the expectation that they will make the cut in democratic institutions. Remember Letty Cottin Pogrebin's quote, "When men are oppressed, it's a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it's tradition." In this connection the Congress' decision to reserve 40% seats for women in UP elections is commendable. At least a start is initiated.

The absence of anti-defection law in ADCs is an eyesore. Lamphrang Blah has donned the NPP colours but he remains a Congress

elector MDC. If he does not win he might return and reassume the office of the Leader of Opposition in KHADC. It is a mockery really! But no party talks of it because it benefits all across the board. That being an MDC is not an office of profit is ridiculous. Salary and perks of MDCs come from the tax payers' money. How can a person hold the dual office of an MLA and MDC at the same time? The citizens of the state must rise up to bring in the anti-defection law in ADCs and ban holding dual posts. Concentration of power in one person is only in a dictatorial system.

The Harijan Colony issue is unnecessarily dragged into the bye-elections. The timing of the announcement of the government to evict the residents of Punjabi Lane based on the recommendation of The High Level Committee (HLC) is political. Knowing fully well, due to the court ruling and other logistics, that it would be impossible to take possession of the land within one week, the government intentionally announced the deadline for political mileage. Having politicised the social subject, the government can't fault the Opposition for calling it 'Election propaganda'. The rhetoric of eviction of the 'Sweepers' at Them Iew Mawlong found echo even in Rajabala, more than 300 KMs away, where the issue is of little significance.

The HNLC's threat to the NPP is also game. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma suspects the placing of the bomb outside the NPP office is linked to the bye-elections. If ministers take advantage of a situation, the outlawed won't do better. The HNLC blames the NPP for the death of its 'retired' general secretary Cheristerheld Thangkiew. Many others too hold the NPP-led Government for the killing. Citizens protest. Gunmen threaten. The government has to deal with it. More than the political angle the proscribed organisation might have used it as a tactic to have a share of the pie of the alleged ATMs of the NPP at highways. It could be possible beneficiaries of illegal coal trade with HNLC being paid off after the threat. We know that governments pay to protesting pressure groups to keep them quiet. Money might have passed on to militants' hands as well.

November 2 will be a booster or a dampener for the Congress, NPP and UDP. Dynastic aided by persona of big names could be the definition for the 2021 by-elections.

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## Towards Transformation Rural strategy critical

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Discrimination in India has greatly affected our society and widened social and economic inequality. Besides, we witness another form of discrimination, wherein those in power have the ability to stall or delay justice when they are on the wrong side of law. A recent reiteration of this malady is manifest in Lakhimpur Kheri, where the Uttar Pradesh government demonstrated its seemingly scant regard for democratic norms and justice, leaving the protesting farmers further disheartened, but determined.

One effect of the conception of the rule of law is the legitimisation of the idea that state infrastructure, including the law, can be used without accountability against its political or social opponents, thus sharpening the inequality. The big question that the Lakhimpur Kheri incident raises amongst others is whether the farmers, rather the society will hit back and give a befitting reply in the ensuing UP Assembly elections to the ruling BJP?

It is said that public memory is short and that in the polls next year the incident may be forgotten. But the party in power and that at the Centre will obviously be on its guard and will need to ensure it retains power and is not impacted and that it reaches out to the electorate; in this case the farmers with a rural strategy.

Without delving deeper into the question of what effect it may have on BJP's poll prospects, it is vital to note that such form of violence witnessed has only aggravated the discrimination against the poor farmers protesting against the agriculture bills and for their rights. One may also note that such violence aggravated by the State found its critique in Mahatma Gandhi's utopian idealism long back.

Not surprisingly, therefore non-violence became for Gandhi a non-negotiable element of his idea of freedom, which is manifest in the year long struggle of the farmers. The logical fallacy and anachronism involved in such attempts notwithstanding, it must be admitted that Gandhi like Marx, was pointing to truly fundamental issues of human life and the right to live with dignity. This then brings us to the question of right to life as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution.

Recall that the Supreme Court gave a new dimension to Article 21, in the Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India (1978) case. The highest court of the land held that the right to life is not merely a physical right but also includes within its ambit the right to live with dignity. Another broad formulation of the right to life with dignity is found in Bandhua Mukti Marcha vs Union of India (1997) case. Characterising Article 21 as the heart of fundamental rights, the court expanded its interpretation. Justice Bhagwati very aptly observed: "It is the fundamental right of everyone in the country... to live with human dignity, free from exploitation".

This obviously points to the fact that the poor and economically weaker section do not enjoy right to life with dignity, though governments speak volumes on the subject. The main reason for this is the wanton neglect of the rural and backward areas in spite of various programmes launched by the government. Also it is interesting to note that a section of analysts are against subsidies or welfare programmes although they are silent when facilities are extended to corporate or business houses for industrial projects. Also there is little effort made on recovering the massive amount that big business houses have erred on and not repaid to banks for years together.

The crux of the problem is that rural development has not received priority in India's development strategy. To make things a little clear, it means that since over 60 percent of the population lives in villages, at least 30 to 40 percent of the total budget expenditure should be earmarked for rural and semi-urban areas. But this has not been the case and successive governments have not bothered to examine the state of education, health, sanitation etc. and especially the incomes of the majority who live there.

The obvious question before us is what needs to be done and what is critical. Recently, an analyst observed that agricultural labour needed to be curtailed and used elsewhere, signifying that it be used in industry or services sector. But he either did not know the extent of current unemployment and underemployment in these sectors nor had adequate knowledge about how agriculture could be modernised and diversified for higher profits.

The obvious strategy that needs to be adopted is to revive the rural economy and incomes of the people through a human-centred approach "to survive in a carbon neutral, digital age and affords them dignity, security and equal opportunity. It must also meet the changing needs and challenges facing businesses and secure sustainable economic growth", as outlined by the Global Commission on the Future of Work.

First, there is need to invest more in people's capabilities -- this means establishing an effective life-long learning system that enables people to skill, reskill and upskill, a system that spans early childhood and basic education through to adult learning. Other than the farmers, the informal workers and small business too need to contribute and benefit in the soundformal economy and this can only be possible in the country, if the government comes out with a well-designed action plan to promote labour-intensive sectors. But a significant financial allocation has to be made to really make this sector viable.

Secondly, more investments by the Centre are required in the institutions of work, including the establishment and implementation of a universal labour guarantee. Workers in the informal economy have to be given support in a big way, not just by providing finance but also technological inputs for their products so that they become acceptable in the domestic and also international market.

Thirdly, agriculture and agro-based industries have to be modernised and diversification of value added crops should be experimented with. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) would have to make contact at the panchayat level to ensure technology, particularly seeds and fertilizers to help small farmers diversify crops for higher incomes. Of course, productivity increases have to be taken care of, especially in districts where it is lower than the national average.

Finally, the thrust of the new policy has to be on rural transformation and not aim to become the strongest military power globally, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated on this Vijaya Dashmi day. We must not forget that India occupies the 101st position on a list of 116 nations in the 2021 Global Hunger Index with even Pakistan and Bangladesh being better off. A paper judicious rural development strategy can change the power matrix in the country. Protests and violence need to be countered with empathy and the will to work for a robust society. --INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### G S Road: A toll highway indeed!

Editor,  
One of the reasons private players were allowed to charge road users a fee for using certain roads was because they were also charged with the responsibility of building roads and maintaining these. I had the misfortune of travelling in the GS road over the weekend and was shocked to see that huge stretches of the highway were covered with potholes and even broken surfaces. Quite a few stretches were operating as a single-lane making it prone to accidents. Road signage was minimal if not absent. At the Jorabat junction, one could easily miss the turn to Shillong as the signage was hardly visible. The worst was the toll gate itself which had only one lane functioning and the other lanes were blocked with tin drums. In spite of the pronouncement of the Union Road Transport and Highways Minister, Mr Nitin Gadkari that if at any toll gate, vehicles have to wait in queue for more than 10 sec-

onds no fee will be charged, we had to wait for 10 minutes while going down and 15 minutes while returning, paying the toll both times. Perhaps the Government of India's diktat does not apply to Meghalaya!

The toll gate operators should either repair the roads and make passage through gates of the fast tag era seamless or stop charging for a service they are not providing. Can the government absolve itself of its responsibility on this?

Yours etc.,  
Sanjeeb Kakoty  
Via email

#### Inconsiderate decision

Editor,  
We've all been struck by the pandemic harshly. People's lives have changed drastically, and loved ones have been lost. Out of these, students' academic careers have experienced the hardest blow. We have been deprived of two years of proper classes and regular school. Grasping at straws, we opted for online classes to complete the syllabus. These were ineffective as compared

to regular offline classes, and a wide range of students have experienced their share of problems. Of course, many parts of the state complained of having barely any network connectivity and hence a number of students had no access to online classes. As stated above we were deprived of two years of proper schooling, thus making us unable to lay down the foundation for class 10 courses. Conceptual learning and interaction between students and teachers have been largely compromised. We have been informed that MBOSE will not take back its decision of including 100% of the syllabus, and that the SSLC will be held in March of 2022, giving us approximately 1-2 months to cover at least 50-60% of our syllabus and revise the ones already covered. Even a child can do the math and figure out that this is nearly impossible. Not only is this decision inconsiderate, it is also completely oblivious to the hardships the students face during these trying times. "Self-study" of chapters that are yet to be covered is almost impossible for neuro-diverse children and children with learning disabilities, but

nobody cares about them, right? When will we ever acknowledge children with cognitive disabilities? This decision might as well be a mockery of the students' mental health. "As long as you're not bleeding to death, you're fine," has been said indirectly. We have lost some of our dear friends to this sort of academic pressure, and they've been blamed for "being too weak." But just this instance, can we take our time and just think that there might be something wrong with this system that leads to young hearts taking such drastic measures? We need a reduction of the syllabus for the SSLC examination. We need a considerable amount of reduction. We didn't subject ourselves to misery. The pandemic wasn't a joke, so stop treating its hindrances as one. We didn't stay home because we wanted to. And we believe every human being with a mind and a heart understands that. We unanimously write to the newspaper in hopes that the people in power read and acknowledge it.

Yours etc.,  
Group of Class X students,  
Names withheld on request  
Via email

#### Climate finance for action

Editor,  
COP26 - the 2021 edition of the United Nations Annual Climate Change Conference is scheduled to be held in Glasgow from October 31 to November 12, 2021. World leaders who gather there will renew and strengthen commitments to the 2015 Paris agreement goal of keeping warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. COP consists of parties that are the signatories of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This treaty consists of 196 countries and the EU. The 26th meeting of the parties poses a big question: will it bring about important effects?

The central focus of the summit will be on climate finance for action and to reduce emissions to keep 1.5 degrees Celsius and abandoning fossil fuels. The most important agenda of the meeting is the \$100 billion climate finance commitment. Another agenda is to produce long-term strategies to achieve net zero. Despite the fact that there

is an urgent need to put the world on a path to net zero emissions, many developed countries are falling short of their responsibilities. It must be acknowledged that UK, the host country is already showing leadership with clear plans to reduce emissions and reach net zero by 2050. India's actions are more progressive compared to the largest emitters.

It is a fact that climate change is affecting every region of the globe necessitating an urgent action to reduce emissions. If the countries succeed in cutting global emissions to net zero in 50 years, there would be a great chance to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees to help lessen the effects of climate change. Hence, the Glasgow summit is an important occasion for countries to reinforce commitments to the Paris Agreement and find solutions to achieve net zero.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Kollam

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"There is a thin line that separates  
laughter and pain, comedy  
and tragedy, humor and hurt."

— Erma Bombeck

## The Shillong Times

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**Elections, public meetings and rallies**  
ELECTION campaigns are essentially a show of strength by different candidates. The ploy adopted is to bring in bus-loads of supporters from other areas of the constituency and have them converge at the place where a public meeting is scheduled on a particular day. All political parties but mainly the Congress Party in Rajabala have violated the Covid protocols with impunity. Normally the Election Commission sends flying squads comprising magistrates etc., to ensure that protocols are followed and no violations happen. But what is seen in places like Rajabala and Mawphlang raise questions as to what the election vigilance teams were doing there when hordes of people congregated without masks and social distancing. It has been seen time and again that rules and regulation are flouted by the very people who are in the seats of governance and because of which the Election Department is unable to take strict action where needed.

The campaign timings too have not been adhered to by many candidates. In fact, the use of very high decibel loudspeakers that are a nuisance to people around the venue of the election rallies especially in the evenings when students are at their peak study hours, should be disallowed because of the potential for noise pollution. Why, for instance do candidates and their star campaigners, usually the MLAs have to shout and scream at the loud speaker in an attempt to expose the sins of the ruling government before the electorate? Isn't the Assembly a better space to expose the Government? Did we hear any of the MLAs who are spouting fire and brimstone raising the issue of huge irregularities in the Power Department and the MeECL in the Assembly? If the media had not followed up on these irregularities assiduously they would have been buried under mounds of paper. Opposition MLAs are heard making generic references to corruption in use of Covid funds but none of them take the trouble to do their own research into any of the government schemes and their implementation. Part of the MLA scheme should have been dedicated for ground research but that is asking for too much from MLAs in Meghalaya. They are mere masters of rhetoric.

Electioneering in the 21st century cannot continue to follow the mode of the 20th century. Surely there are other ways of better reaching the target audience without getting them to sacrifice a day's wages to attend an election rally. The Election Commission of India should itself be more creative about suggesting better electioneering methods. Remember it was the election rallies early this year that led to the rise in Covid cases.

# Rule of law takes a plunge

By Rajdeep Sardesai

When should a minister resign or be sacked? It's a vexed question that's been blowing in the political wind once again ever since union minister of state for home, Ajay Mishra found himself in the line of fire over the horrifying Lakhimpur violence. The viral video of a VVIP cavalcade mowing down protesting farmers in the minister's constituency and the lynching that followed should haunt the mantri for a long time: it exposes a shameful disregard for human life in what can only be described as cold blooded murder. Rather than show any remorse, the minister has chosen to brazen it out while standing by his son who has been arrested for his alleged role in the grisly chain of events. While the opposition has taken its demand for the minister's resignation to the president and farm groups have organized rail roko protests, the Modi government has oscillated between conspicuous silence and spurious whataboutery. Which only exposes the further moral degradation of a polity where notions of political accountability and propriety are now a matter of convenience and not conviction.

Mishra is a two-time MP who has built a reputation of being a local toughie in his area of Lakhimpur Kheri. His rapid ascent from being a district zilla parishad member a decade ago to being sworn in as a union minister this July reveals a typical political graph where caste-community equations triumph over any concept of merit or administrative experience. Mishra's appointment in the home ministry was seen as part of the BJP's Brahmin quota in the council of ministers, designed to send a message to the party's traditional vote bank ahead of the crucial Uttar Pradesh elections next year. Even a cursory glance at his CV would reveal a controversial history of being charged with assault, intimidation, even murder. A judgment has been reserved by the Lucknow High Court since 2018 in a 2003 murder case in which Mishra is one of the prime accused (a sessions court had granted him relief earlier). That the ministry of home which is supposed to be the nodal ministry to supervise the country's law and order should have as one of its ministerial occupants a politi-

cian fighting a murder charge only exposes the underlying grimness of a political system that has been systematically undermined by routine ethical compromises. Imagine the plight of honest IPS officers who have to obediently serve this system.

The argument that Mishra shouldn't have to pay for the alleged sins of his son, Ashish is also reflective of a political milieu where the notion of 'conflict of interest' is almost non-existent. Is it not more than likely that a union minister who is an MP

made to resign in 2018 over 'Me Too' sexual harassment allegations made by a number of women: there was no FIR made out against Akbar but the charges were seen to have caused reputational damage. Perhaps, Akbar as a long-time English language journalist and late entrant into the BJP's universe with no political base of his own was seen as dispensable in a manner that Mishra with his locally rooted 'bahubali' (strongman) network is not.

The only two other instances where ministers have

prime minister has made his distinctive calling card that any ministerial resignation under media or opposition pressure is seen as a sign of weakness, a chink in the formidable army that is designed to create an aura of invincibility around the Supreme Leader. A resignation being taken under duress is not what the Modi larger than life persona is comfortable with.

Contrast this with the UPA years when ministers charged not just with corruption but even those who were accused of the slightest impropriety had to step down. In May 2013, for example, Ashwani Kumar and Pawan Bansal, both ministers in the Manmohan Singh government had to resign because of a 'public perception' that they might have misused their office. While Kumar as law minister was accused of interfering in a coal probe, Bansal as railway minister resigned after his nephew was arrested for accepting an alleged bribe for a Rail Board post. In neither case was individual culpability established, but both had to quit. Unlike the Modi government's impregnable status, the Manmohan Singh-led coalition government was simply too weak to resist internal or external pressures.

Paradoxically, the unbridled power of a domineering government is also its shield against any form of public scrutiny. But where the Modi regime falters is in confusing support for the prime minister's leadership with that for Team Modi. By refusing to sack Mishra or even express concern over the Lakhimpur fallout, the government's credibility and commitment to the rule of law has taken a hit. One day, the unchecked hubris could catch up with the leader too.

Post-script: In the focus on Mishra, the Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar has got away with shocking remarks virtually asking his supporters to retaliate with sticks against farm protesters. Khattar may now claim his comments were misconstrued but they reveal a dangerously retributive mindset that endorses violent vigilantism. But who will rein in our lawmakers who see themselves above the law?

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



from the very region where a heinous crime allegedly involving his son has occurred can influence a police investigation, especially as only days before the Lakhimpur tragedy he was caught on camera threatening farm protesters? Does propriety not demand, based on a potential conflict of interest that the minister step aside till at least such time that the case is inquired into? Sadly, political reform in the country has never attempted to create the much needed institutional correctives to manage conflict of interests situations, thereby allowing elected representatives to unashamedly blur the lines between personal benefit and public obligations.

Unfortunately, the much-hyped Modi model of governance has also chosen not to read the riot act to ministers who flout their constitutional oath with sheer impunity. In the two decades of uninterrupted power in Gandhinagar and Delhi, Mr Modi has only forced a ministerial resignation once. MJ Akbar was

had to resign in the Modi years are the high-profile exits of Amit Shah and Maya Kodnani in Gujarat in 2009-10, both of whom stepped down only when their anticipatory bail applications were rejected by the court and the CBI swooped in to arrest them. In these cases, their impending arrest left Mr Modi with no option but to reluctantly accept their resignation. In all other examples, Mr Modi has preferred to use the route of an occasional cabinet reshuffle or denial of a ticket at election time to effect a change in his ministerial team rather than insist on a sudden resignation. In fact, on another occasion, when a Gujarat minister Prabhatsinh Chauhan was charge-sheeted in a co-operative bank scam case, the minister was retained.

Which is why it is highly unlikely that Mishra too will be asked to tender his resignation until such time as his position becomes wholly untenable. It is perhaps a demonstration of the muscular strongman image that the

## SC order on Pegasus may lead to Modi's 'Watergate Moment'

By Nitya Chakraborty

The Supreme Court order on Wednesday morning appointing an expert committee to look into the allegations of unauthorized surveillance using the Pegasus software is nothing but a Watergate like moment for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP led NDA government. The observations made by the learned bench led by the Chief Justice of India N V Ramana prima facie confirms what the petitioners have said in their allegations that the ruling administration at the centre is stonewalling any probe into the allegations which are hitting at the fundamental rights of the citizens including politicians, journalists, human rights activists and even the senior officials of the centre.

The probe panel is scheduled to submit its report to the Supreme Court after eight weeks meaning by the end of December this year. Then the hearing will take place. It is apparent that since the last week in December is holidays in the apex court, the hearing will take place in early January 2022. This January and February will

image as a fighter against corruption is sullied, that will have impact among the general voters on the eve of the state polls.

In 1989, the BJP was the main party which carried a ceaseless campaign against the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi before the Lok Sabha elections at the end of the year on the issue of Bofors pay off which was nothing compared to the present Pegasus scandal. That was an amount of Rs. 64 crore which could not be proved in court while after 32 years, this Pegasus snoopage is something which deals with the government bid to trample the provisions of the Constitution regarding personal freedom and fundamental rights. The opposition parties including the Congress will certainly make full use of this discomfiture of the Modi Government in the coming campaign for the state assembly polls which should prove decisive in determining the course of the future political battle in the country.

In the name of national security, the Modi govern-



ment has arrested a number of rights activists and they are suffering in jail for months and years. The UAPA provisions are being imposed on anyone who challenges the present government. Criticism of the government is being taken as the criticism of the nation. In this milieu, the Supreme Court through this Pegasus order has come out strongly against the Modi Government's continuing stance on privacy issues by citing national security.

The CJI observes "The state cannot get free pass every time by raising national security concerns. No omnibus prohibition can be called against judicial review. Centre should have justified its stand here and not render the court a mute spectator."

"There has been no specific denial by the Centre. Thus, we have no option but to accept the submissions of petitioner prima facie and thus, we appoint an expert committee whose function will be overseen by the Supreme Court," he added.

In its judgment, the SC underlined the importance of privacy and technology, saying that while technology can be used to improve the lives of people, it can also be used to invade privacy. It said certain limitations exist when it comes to privacy, but the restrictions have to pass constitutional muster.

Thus the Modi Government got no escape route. Its devious ways to bypass the Constitutional provisions have been detected and the bench this time has been strict in enforcing its duty as per the provisions of the Indian constitution. The Court has done its duty and now it is up to the opposition parties how they unitedly can carry on this interim legal victory to the electoral battlefields in February/ March 2022 by taking on the BJP. The Opposition can lose this golden opportunity only to its peril. (IPA Service)

As of now, the political situation has again turned against the BJP in the country following the Supreme Court order despite fissures among the opposition camp on some vital issues. The main problem of the BJP this time is that the entire focus of the Pegasus issue is on the Prime Minister, the PMO and the National Security Adviser. It is not so much to do with the BJP as a party but it is to do with the Prime Minister and the agencies on which he has full control. The Supreme Court observations mean that the judges have no belief in what the Government lawyers have told them about denying a detailed affidavit to the Court on the plea of national security. PM is the mascot of BJP campaign and if his

### Letters to the Editor

#### Let down by technology

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to bring to the concerned organization that the recruitment of the Meghalaya Legislative Research Fellowship that was hosted by the Bharti Institute of Public Policy of the Indian School of Business, was held through Zoom Meetings by way of a group discussion on the October 25 and 26. Some of the shortlisted candidates for the same at the time of the said group discussion however, faced connectivity issues and therefore were not able to take part in the same, while others dealt with other technical issues with the application itself. Upon approaching the hosts of the said recruitment by email or calls for rescheduling of the group discussions, the candidates were met with no reply whatsoever to their queries, nor were they even informed if the recruiters have decided to move on with the other candidates who were able to connect. It is without doubt, frustrating to deal with technical issues at such an important event, but to be met with silence to any queries is even more demoralising.

I therefore request the relevant department to look into the matter so that all shortlisted candidates for the

Fellowship get a fair chance at qualifying for the same.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Unfair means in written test of Agriculture Dept

Editor,

It was beyond any stretch of imagination to see on social media that on October 7 last when there was a written test for the gazetted posts in the Department of Agriculture, Govt of Meghalaya, that in one of the centres in Garo Hills some aspiring candidates were shown to have breached the fair means in writing an exam by adopting questionable methods. Contrastingly, candidates appearing in Shillong centres were reported to have undergone scrupulous rigidities where they were not allowed to carry any of their personal effects, besides being physically checked to ensure that their pens, pencil, watches etc., were all metal screened before entering the exam halls.

I'm afraid that if the foregoing social media revelation is factually true, then without going to technicalities of contention it is for the powers that be to investigate this media exposure and to set things right so as to ensure that meritorious can-

didates are not denied their fundamental rights.

Your etc.,  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Via email

#### Tribute to our leaders

Editor,

There are many leaders who have contributed to the freedom and development of our great nation. We observe their death anniversary by enjoying a holiday and a small function at the district or state level attended by a few officials. The majority of people do not know the role that these leaders have played to gain freedom and development of our country.

Some years ago after the holiday for 'Labour Corps Day,' I asked the students to say something about the significance of the day. I was not surprised that most of them did not know about the importance of the day and the reason for observing that day as a holiday. October 25, was the death anniversary of late Capt. Williamson A Sangma but if we ask the students about his leadership and contribution for the nation and Meghalaya many of them will be blank. This is true for most of the holidays given in India, as we do not give an opportunity for the students to have

an insight into the event or personalities.

A question that arises in my mind is whether it is fitting to declare holidays to celebrate and commemorate the death anniversary of important leaders and events of our nation. The leaders worked tirelessly for the development of the society but we revere them by enjoying a holiday and not contributing our mite for the growth of the society. Is there not a better way to remember and pay homage to them in schools, departments and offices by rededicating our commitment and pledge to contribute more for the growth of humanity? We adults should be responsible in rooting out corruption and follow the ethics of hard work, tolerance and dedication, which were the hallmarks of our great icons.

'Catch them young', goes the saying. The greatness and contribution of our leaders and importance of some events and festivals will be forgotten by the future generation, unless we impart knowledge and convey the meaning of events to school children. The best way to pay tribute to their memories is by following their ideals. On the day we observe their memory, special events have to be conducted and made known to them so that children learn of the contribution of our national and state icons and have an

inclination to follow the high ethics, moral values and the sacrifices they have made. Time to think of our priorities and work ethics. In my opinion declaring a holiday to honour great men/women is not the best option!

Yours etc.,  
Bro.K.J.Jose  
Director, Montfort  
Centre for Education,  
Tura

#### Clean gas technology

Editor,

India's over-dependence on fossil fuels makes it imperative to develop and sell zero or negative-carbon footprint products. Such an energy transition includes solar, wind, batteries, power electronics and the latest one green hydrogen. Green hydrogen (GH) is a non-fossil fuel based clean gas that can substitute fossil fuels. India has ample opportunity to GH use and production.

In such a scenario, India needs to establish itself as a GH hub. Policy must be formulated to create demand for GH. A lot of things need to be taken into account for the setting up of the GH industry. There must be integration of GH with the existing industries. GH purchase must be made compulsory for industries. Decarbonisation of other sectors must

happen in tandem.

There must be provision for domestic manufacturing of GH. Indigenous manufacturing of parts of the supply chain must be promoted. This will make the country self-reliant in GH manufacturing. It will also create job opportunities, thereby decreasing unemployment. Electricity needed for GH manufacturing could be used from renewable energy. As handling and transportation of GH are difficult, plans must be devised for this. As there is need for the collaboration of different ministries, public undertakings and other stakeholders for the adoption of GH, all of them need to cohesively function together. In such a scenario, there is every likelihood that India will emerge as a global hub of GH. It will enable India to deal with climate change effectively. As climate change is a global problem, any attempts to mitigate it are considered welfare measures for humanity. If India succeeds in properly channelizing its efforts in the GH transition, it will definitely become a global economic leader.

Yours etc.,  
Venu, GS,  
Kollam

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

*People do not like to think. If one thinks, one must reach conclusions. Conclusions are not always pleasant.*

— Helen Keller

**The Shillong Times**

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**Snooping -- How and why**

THE Pegasus row has reached a stage where a Supreme Court bench has constituted a probe panel headed by former Supreme Court Justice, Raju V Raveendran. Significantly, the court stated in a footnote that what it aims at is to uphold the Constitutional aspirations and rule of law without being consumed in "political rhetoric." The establishment indulging in snooping on its citizens is objectionable in a system of democracy where the citizen's right to privacy is paramount. The question is how to save the system of democracy from such motivated deviations from its basic tenets. The Pegasus row erupted in July last. Israeli NSO group's spyware was reported to have been used by the Indian establishment – read the Modi government – to eavesdrop on some 300 mobile phones including those of opposition leaders, some ministers, journalists and businessmen.

The SC-appointed panel will look at all sides of the matter – namely, the right to privacy of citizens, right of journalists to ensure privacy of their sources of information and the limits to the claim from the government side that it is required to ensure national security. It was on this ground that the Centre refused to divulge related information to the apex court. The SC has asked the panel to also give recommendations on the legal and policy framework to protect citizens from surveillance by the state and how to enhance cyber security. Specifically, the SC said protection of information sources is a basic condition for freedom of press. Without such protection, sources may not assist the media in revealing matters of public interest. This is well-said. Most rackets in governmental functioning including pilfering of public money would not come to light unless sources within the government provide such details to the media. They may have their own reasons for doing this, but an eminent public cause is served thereof. Identifying such sources of information would mean a drying up of such sources for scribes.

At the same time, snooping is part of governmental engagements everywhere. Question is, to what extent a government can go. Matters concerning national security, for instance, cannot be treated lightly. In a recent instance, a former chief minister was accused of having a close liaison with a Pakistani woman journalist. ISI is known to adopt many tricks to elicit classified information about Indian policies and military matters. Questions would arise as to how a government should handle such situations when hints come to it. While a blanket ban on snooping is uncalled for the point is that government should refrain from doing so to protect its limited electoral interests.

**Should ADCs get into realms beyond their mandate?**

By Patricia Mukhim

The District Councils have a particular mandate which should not intrude into the realm of the State Government, simply because the Councils don't have the financial or administrative resources to do so. There are many examples of how the Councils have floundered in the past such as in running primary schools in the Sixth Schedule areas of the state. The Councils defaulted in payment of salaries to primary school teachers resulting in them striking work at great cost to the students. There was a demand from primary school teachers that the state government should take over the administration

of production.

The Councils have failed miserably to even safeguard the forests under their jurisdiction. Instead, the Councils see forests only as a resource from where they can earn their revenue. And that revenue accrues when forests are perceived as 'trees' which are to be felled and turned to timber. Hence the Councils actually earn their revenues from cutting down forests, not in conserving them. I wonder why this aspect has not been given due attention to by the State Forest Department whose mandate

of which have now receded and stopped flowing with the same intensity.

This now brings me to an important issue which the District Councils now suddenly want to wield their power over, and that is the taking over of the mandate for issuance of building permission under the Building Bye-laws – a subject which they are not competent to administer on because they don't have the wherewithal for it. Does the Council have structural engineers that can assess the soil engineers as the mandate of the Megha-

Now even that waste has to be discarded as wet garbage collected by garbage trucks across the city and emptied at Marten. There are houses that discharge their latrines into rivers. How did this happen? Any answers? Has anyone been punished for allowing such a nuisance? No! And such violations might spiral under the ADCs. The single point here is that the ADCs do not have the capacity to do due diligence before issuing building permissions. Period.

Interestingly, the 125th Amendment Bill that is still pending seeks to increase the financial and executive powers of the ADCs in the Sixth



ST File Photo

of primary schools and that finally happened in 1994.

The Sixth Schedule says the Councils can make laws on certain specified matters like land, forests, canal water, shifting cultivation, village administration, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and so on. But all such laws require the assent of the governor.

On land, forests and rivers there are several contentious issues that the Councils should be delving into and be worried about as they directly impinge on the lives and livelihoods of the indigenous tribes of Meghalaya. The issue of land and landlessness of people in rural Meghalaya is actually very serious but surprisingly this issue has never been discussed either in the State Assembly or the District Councils. Ever since the Socio-Economic Caste Census came up with its findings in 2011 stating that nearly 76% of rural Meghalaya is landless, one expected the State Government and the District Councils to be perturbed by the findings and that they would therefore ensure that a cadastral survey was carried out to ascertain the veracity of the socio-economic census report and to know for sure the extent of land alienation and landlessness in Meghalaya. Land is intrinsically linked to culture, tradition and customary practices. Without land we are no longer a cohesive tribal entity because it means we are not able to protect the tribal population from exploitation by modern means

it is to conserve forests and wildlife. It is convenient for the Department to say they have jurisdiction over only 4-5% of reserved forests in the State. If it is the constitutional mandate of the State Environment and Forest Department to prevent deforestation should it turn a blind eye when that deforestation happens outside the reserved forests? Does the Indian Constitution not supersede the Sixth Schedule?

Let's come to rivers and their sources. These two have not been taken care of by the District Councils although these fall within their purview. They tried a one-off venture to clean the Wah Umkhrah and abandoned it immediately afterwards because for the Council everything revolves around funds (read money). They won't take a step without money. Actually, if they really care about the rivers and the environment they would have activated the Dorbar Shnong and the residents under each Dorbar to ensure that rivers do not become dumping ground for garbage. But we have never heard the District Council doing any awareness campaign on the need to prevent large scale pollution of rivers in the entire state. They are responsible even for the toxicity caused to the rivers in Jaintia Hills on account of the sulphuric acid draining out from the coal mines and coal dumps. But so far none of the Councils have taken up with any seriousness this onslaught into our lifeline – the rivers of the state many

laya Urban Development Authority (MUDA). Apart from a whole host of requirements to fulfil the person who wants to construct a house has to get a structural sufficiency certificate signed by the registered engineer / agency and the owner jointly to the effect that the building is safe against various loads, forces and effects including due to natural disasters, such as, earthquake, landslides, cyclones, floods etc., as per National Building Code 2016 and other relevant Codes. The registered engineer / agency shall also have the details to substantiate his design for high rise buildings / projects, special buildings having covered area above 500 sqm. The building bye laws in a seismic zone like ours also means that the structural engineers prescribe the required strength of the rods and steel structures to be used which can take the weight of the buildings.

The question that arises is why do the Councils want control over this aspect of administration? The obvious answer is that the Councils see this as an opportunity for revenue generation. What is feared is that the rules will be bent according to the demands of the building owner based on what the person can pay. It's not that MUDA is not without its flaws but we can imagine the encroachments on the main roads and other violations that will follow. In fact in the past every house was built leaving enough space for biodegradable kitchen waste.

Schedule areas of the north eastern region. The amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.

The village councils are to be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry. The Finance Commission will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them. At the moment the Autonomous Councils depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.

What is progressive about the amendment is that at least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved. Meghalaya is exempted perhaps because we don't yet have elected village and municipal councils and we are still resisting this move even when we know that having elected bodies will ensure better grassroots governance and better access to central funds. This is what happens when people understand governance as an opportunity to appropriate power and not for devolving power to the lowest strata of governance. This will be Meghalaya's eternal plight.

**India's New Game Plan to Tackle China Challenge**

By Kanwal Sibal

India's rising China challenge is now being more openly acknowledged by our armed forces in public. They seem to have acquired more freedom to express themselves on politically sensitive security issues. Our retired military figures have been speaking and writing on such issues freely, but serving top brass have been traditionally publicly discreet on such matters.

The earlier practice of serving military chiefs confining themselves essentially to bread and butter defence and service issues related to equipment, procurement, organisation, manpower, deployments, capacity gaps, modernisation etc., and staying clear of issues with foreign policy sensitivities is being redefined. The armed forces have always complained about not being consulted adequately, much less institutionally, on the strategic national security challenges confronting India.

Their other longstanding grouse has been that India has ignored the importance of military diplomacy as an adjunct to the conduct of foreign policy, unlike in the case of other major powers, especially the US. It is true that the military represents hard power and used with discernment it can give teeth to diplomacy. Our Chief of Defence Staff and service chiefs are lately frequently speaking in various fora on a range of challenges facing India that straddle defence and foreign policy. This is particularly true of our challenges from China and Pakistan.

**CDS Rawat's plain talk on China threat**

General Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), has been particularly outspoken on the national security challenges facing India. In a recent public lecture he called China's ambitions and aspirations to global power an "omnipresent danger" to regional strategic instability and carrying the potential of "threatening India's territorial integrity and strategic importance". He noted that China was making huge inroads into South Asia and the Indian Ocean region to strengthen its position as an emerging global power.

Bangladesh and Myanmar, he said, have been the largest recipients of Chinese military aid in the recent past, which he characterised as not being in India's national interest as these were attempts to encircle us. China had made significant investments in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives to gain a strategic foothold in the region, he added. China's supply of military hardware to Pakistan and supporting it in international fora was described by him as an anti-India nexus. He believes Pakistan's continued sponsoring of cross-border terrorism, a vicious anti-India rhetoric on social media, and efforts to create social disharmony within India, makes the trust gap between India and that country "unbridgeable".

The CDS has been highlighting China's technological advances in the cyber and space domains as the most worrisome external security challenge, as beyond the military, it includes critical infrastructure as well. For him, procuring advanced surveillance systems that can help India keep an eye on its land borders and oceans is the topmost priority of the armed forces right now. He foresees a durable confrontation with China, as he views the recent incidents on the northern borders along with aggressive posturing remaining a cornerstone of China's expansionist foreign policy about which India has to be wary.

Without mincing words he has spoken of geo-strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific, including a race for strategic bases in the Indian Ocean region and increasing militarisation of the Belt and Road outposts in the region. This is plain talk which the Chinese would have noted

carefully, as we too would have noted equally carefully if the PLA chief had given his assessment publicly on the impact of India's policies on China's regional strategic interests.

**India's evolved strategy**  
General Rawat's assessment of China's regional threat to India has been commonplace in think tank circles for years. After the Doklam stand-off and the much more serious Chinese military moves in Ladakh which in a breakdown of border protocols resulted in actual loss of lives, the threat from China is being felt by the country much more palpably than in recent times.

Our policy toward China since 1988 has essentially failed. The peace and tranquility agreements, the confidence building measures, several additional border management protocols to prevent any actual clash, a Special Representatives mechanism to resolve the border issue politically, the agreement on parameters and guidelines for a border settlement, allowing bilateral trade ties to grow without making them hostage to border differences, exchange of state visits, numerous bilateral meetings, informal summits—all of this has not only not worked for betterment and stability of our ties, our relations today have deteriorated sharply and the distrust of China has become deeper.

The failed latest round (13th) of military talks points to a hardening of China's position. The statements issued on both sides, unlike after the previous rounds, not only show an impasse, but also a readiness on both sides to publicly blame each other. This was unusual in the light of a studied optimistic posture maintained after the previous rounds. The prospect of forces on both sides continuing to be deployed at icy heights in Ladakh during the coming winter is now a reality.

The hardening of China's posture is reflected in setting up additional infrastructure by China for the winter deployment of its forces in Ladakh, the dual purpose border villages set up close to the LAC in the eastern sector and the new border law passed by China to protect its territorial integrity. China has also begun mounting pressure on the eastern front with additional infrastructural activity and reported intrusions (in the central Barahoti sector as well), with India, in turn, increasing its troop and weapon deployments such as the M777 ultra-light howitzers and the 155 mm FH 77 BO2 (Bofors) guns.

The CDS's bluntness contrasts with a firm but much more diplomatic posture adopted by the External Affairs Minister and studied reticence at the Prime Minister's level on the China challenge. The strategy seems to be to maintain diplomatic pressure on China, avoid involving directly the highest political authority in the unfolding situation in order to maintain political manoeuvrability at that level, but let the military spell out the reality of the China threat.

It is a good strategy, in that the China challenge is not being glossed over at the military level while keeping the window open at the bilateral political level and preserving the diplomatic suppleness needed for our participation in forums such as BRICS, the SCO, even the RIC, where China is present and is an ostensible partner, even as we strengthen ties with the US, deepen our Quad engagement, pursue maritime security within the framework of the Indo-Pacific based on adherence to international law and respect for sovereignty.

*(The author is Former Foreign Secretary. He was India's Ambassador to Turkey, Egypt, France and Russia.)*

Letters to the Editor

**Election platforms a big farce**

Editor,  
My attention was drawn to the article "Elections are serious business, not battles of words" by Patricia Mukhim (ST Oct 21). I, not only endorse fully the content and views expressed by the writer but going by the speeches during this current bye elections and the lectures by candidates and different canvassers, including the big guns, in the election platforms as appeared in the media was a pathetic display of competing in oratorical skills. Instead of trying to lecture down the electorate and running down rivals more time should have been given to imparting election knowledge to the electorate on the democratic system of government, parties' ideology, policies and programmes etc., of the respective parties. Instead the discourse has degenerated to such an extent that election platforms have become a farce and a big hoax. Most of the election speeches, barring a few turned out to be nonsensi-

cal, childish, slanderous, defamatory and above all blatant lies. While candidates and their canvassers have the right to criticise their opponents and the political parties they are contesting from but those allegations turned out to be lies which were abhorrent even to the least informed electorate.

Election platforms today have become the place for mud-slinging for throwing rotten eggs, trash and a dehumanizing fora. Courtesy, respect and civilized fellow human considerations are all gone. The politics of one-upmanship through the most devilish means has already caught up with India and Meghalaya. Now the cut throat politics of money power, muscle power, caste and communal power and religious power has come to rule even in Meghalaya which is a so called Christian dominated state. Whither the much wanted clean politics? Who is responsible for this pass? Where is the conscience of the electorate? Is it dead?

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Sr. Journalist,  
Shillong.

**If humanity is hurt, God is hurt**

Editor,  
Religion without compassion might give way to hatred. Compassion with a motive of "self-interest" is completely irreligious. But of late, some of the religions have departed from those basic human values. Love and compassion are for only those who follow their "specific" faith. Almost each of the religions is vying for its exclusive "supremacy". The dogmatic belief in exclusive supremacy has become a real bone of contention among the existing religions.

In the name of religion, we have polluted our minds. We have corrupted our souls. We have also gone so much astray that God must have now shut his gateway to heaven! Are we not foolish to believe in the twenty-first century --- "my God is different from yours" If the sun and moon are the same for Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, by that simple logic, why is the CREATOR of the infinite cosmos not

ONE for all? Is the digestive system in the stomach of a Hindu and a Christian different? The alimentary canal secretes the "same" kind of digestive enzymes to digest the food eaten by people of any faith. One divine power is controlling each of us, every part of our organ and cell. It is outrageous that we bear malice and hostility towards others in order to uphold our faiths. Why don't we try to understand that there are many paths to each "one destination." One wonders in amazement, why we are so "unscientific" in our approach to the Almighty? Why is there so much bad blood among the different faiths? Truly, our fanaticism and belligerence have become the stumbling block in our understanding of the real teachings of the holy scriptures.

If God-believing people nurture animosity for others, then that religion itself has been wrongly understood or misinterpreted. Who is to blame here? Is there any organization of moral rectitude that will come up to address this glaring faultline?

All should agree that "tolerance to inhumanity" begets

more violence. No one has the right to hold humanity to ransom. As believers of GOD, all should shake off narrow dogmatism and malice. All need to follow the path that takes us from hatred to love, ignorance to knowledge. The practice of expressing LOVE and COMPASSION for "all" irrespective of caste, creed, and colour, always ensures communal harmony and peace. Not just that, it is the pathway to DIVINITY. If humanity is hurt, God is hurt.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

**Whither JRDO Mains results?**

Editor,  
The Community and Rural Development Department, Government of Meghalaya called for applications for 28 posts of Junior Rural Development Officers (JRDO) on August 26, 2019. Thereafter the prelims were held on November 2 and 4, 2019. The results were declared on January 17, 2020. A total of 332 candidates cleared the

prelims and were called to appear for the main examination which was held on September 4, 2020 at designated examination centres in each district. Now after more than a year has passed since the conduct of the main exams we the candidates are left in the dark as to why the results are not yet declared. For evaluating the answer scripts of a mere 332 candidates, the Department has crossed a milestone of 411 days up to October 20. Some sources claim that the transfer of competent officers has resulted in the delay of declaration of the results. There are other insider sources which say that the answer scripts have not been evaluated at all. What is taking the Department so long to declare the results? The C&RD Department needs to answer!

Yours etc.,  
M Lyngdoh - Shillong -2  
AN Sangma - Tura  
W Lyngdoh - Shillong -3

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.

*"Neither situations nor people can be altered by the interference of an outsider. If they are to be altered, that alteration must come from within."*

— Phyllis Bottome

**The Shillong Times**

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**Khasi women and Dorbar Shnong**

IT is a giant step taken by the former minister and Chairman of the Mawlai Town Dorbar, SD Khongwir to lead the women of his area to the Khasi Hills District Council to demand that women be allowed to take part in the election of the Rangbah Shnong in the Greater Mawlai area. What is peculiar is that women are already electing their Rangbah Shnong in several localities (shnong) of Khasi Hills which means that the Council laws based on tradition are not being uniformly followed with each Shnong doing what it thinks best.

When the KHADC, CEM was asked if the Council would amend its laws, he said that such laws have been practiced since time immemorial. The question that arises is whether in other aspects of life we are still stuck in a time warp or we have moved with the times. The true spirit of democracy enjoins upon all institutions created under the Indian Constitution to ensure gender equality. There cannot be institutions that in the 21st century still disallow women from participating as equal citizens, especially as that concerns governance at the grassroots. The progress of every society is measured by how empowered its women are and whether they occupy decision-making positions. A lot has been said about why women not only must be able to elect the Rangbah Shnong but to also contest for that post if they wish to. Today women are as educated if not more educated than men. They know their rights and have the freedom to contest elections to the legislative assembly and parliament. It defies all logic that they should not be allowed to take part in the affairs of their village councils. Women have different sets of problems which are not well understood in a world that is still dominated by patriarchal values even in a matrilineal society. And to believe that men can represent women and their concerns is highly problematic.

It is unfortunate that every time Meghalaya heads for an election to the district councils, women do not make common cause about passing laws that give women equal status in all institutions, traditional or modern. Tradition cannot be the alibi to continue to keep women out of grassroots institutions and this should be communicated by voters loudly and clearly. For too long women in Meghalaya have been prisoners of tradition. They have been humoured by the idea that they carry the lineage and therefore have been given enough concessions. There can be no trade-off here. Women must take their place in traditional institutions and prove their mettle.

**Flyover — Rap's Mansion to Sweepers lane**

Editor,  
A flyover is to ease the traffic congestion connecting one road to another bypassing the congested areas through a bridge and sub-bridges intersecting parallel roads. A flyover from Rap's Mansion to Sweepers lane in Lew Mawlong (Mawlonghat) is one of the proposed projects of the Urban Development Affairs Department, Govt. of Meghalaya during 2006. Implementing the project involved 8 acres land of the Cantonment area near Lady Keane College. The then Minister of Urban Development, Paul Lyngdoh met the Defence Minister, Govt. of India in August, 2006 at New Delhi in which I accompanied as Secretary, Govt. of Meghalaya. The Union Minister stressed on the stringent law and rule of the Defence Ministry that land for the Flyover Project can

be considered provided that it can be exchanged with another land of equal monetary value which sounds impossible. However, with the intervention of the then Union Defence Minister, Anthony, the Ministry agreed in principle that land of eight acres will be released to the State Government by an exchange of certain acres of land along the stretch of Umiam lake from Lad Umsaw to junction of Ferrando Home of Disabled, Umbir for Army Water Sports Complex. As Secretary, Urban Affairs and Chairman, Search Committee for required land in exchange along with the then Director, Urban as Secretary and the high officials of the 101 Area of the Army, Urban Affairs Directorate, an inspection was conducted and found agreeable by both sides. The team recommended to the State Government for necessary consultation and approval with the then Meghalaya State Electricity Board. It was agreed upon that in the said Water Sports Complex, strict maintenance of cleanliness in and around

**Imaginary distinction**

Outsider-Insider

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

Hundreds of workers who had gone to Kashmir in search of employment are reported to be fleeing the region to the nearest safest State gripped by a fear after reports spread far and wide of non-locals being attacked to be driven out of Kashmir. Targeted killing of workers from Bihar has become a big threat to all migrant workers, who as a category has hardly recovered from the pangs

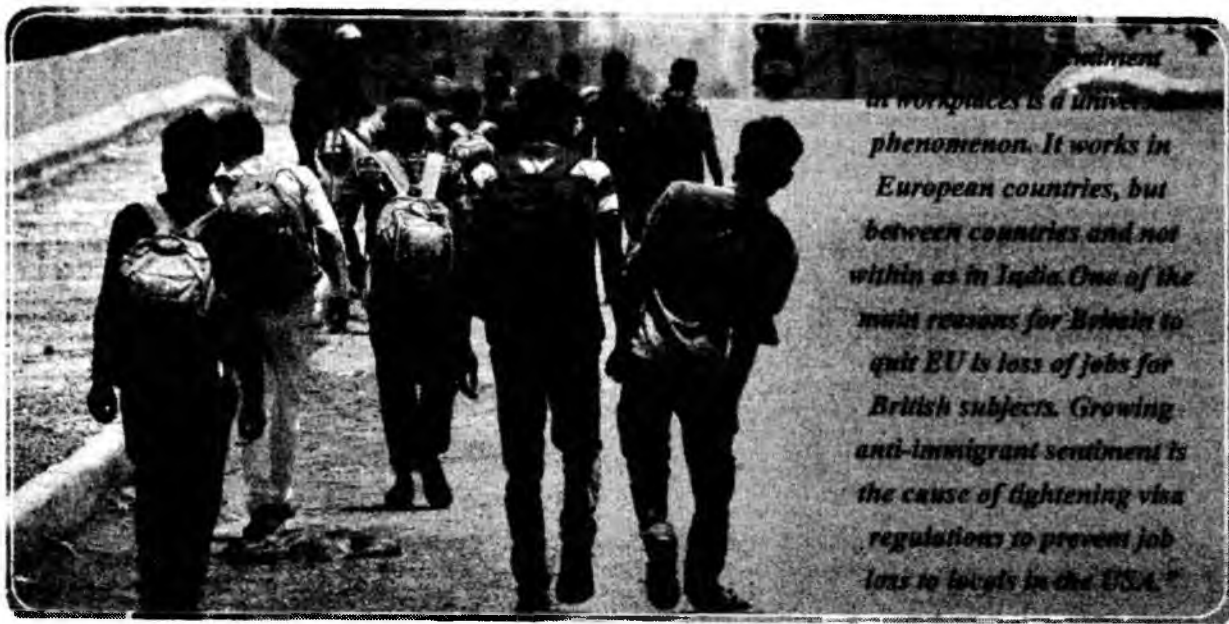
when local people begin to realise that they are deprived of chances of getting employment because of these "outside" workers. Whether or not they acquire merit and skills necessary, they begin to dislike "outsiders" as an unwanted lot.

It is universally true that as long as the services of

Recently, there has been a sudden interest in many States to pamper locals who matter most in State elections. One way to do this is through offer of concessions which in India translates into reservation or quota in employment. A common argument given in many States is proliferation of urban slums

reserve 75% of jobs carrying a salary less than Rs.30,000 per month in the private sector to locals.

The census of 2011 recorded a total of 5.6 crore inter-State migrants in the country. But, divergence between States is noticeable with Kerala earning a reputation several decades back that there is no place on earth where you will not find a Malayalee. There is a village



*...in workplaces is a universal phenomenon. It works in European countries, but between countries and not within as in India. One of the main reasons for Britain to quit EU is loss of jobs for British subjects. Growing anti-immigrant sentiment is the cause of tightening visa regulations to prevent job loss to locals in the USA.*

of Covid-19 exodus. This is as serious as an attack on Kashmiri Pandits to evict them permanently from their home State. Both seem to be ethnic-religious cleansing operation in pursuit of an imaginary goal of making and keeping Kashmir for Kashmiris — another imaginary demographic group.

Rough estimates put the number of seasonal migrant labourers in Kashmir as 3 to 4 lakh, comprising mostly Hindus from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand. There is certainly a historical background for what is happening in Kashmir which has to be dealt with as a State-specific issue. But, attack on migrant workers draws our attention to the plight of such workers elsewhere in India and the growing unhealthy trend of parochial outlook submerging our national spirit in many places.

Distinction as insider-outsider, or locals and migrants has caught hold of several political parties and pressure groups and is voiced loudly and sought to be justified as part of social justice. The insider/local is here portrayed as the victim or the deprived and the outsider/migrant the exploiter and villain.

A migrant is a person who either migrates within the home country or outside to pursue work. He or she usually has no intention to stay permanently in the country or region where he/she works. Migrants are welcomed in the beginning as they bring knowledge, skills, and efficiency, and also motivation and energy which are lacking or inadequate among locals. Problems start

foreign workers are needed in a country, whether it is low level plantation labourers or high-tech engineers, they are accepted. But once locals acquire necessary skills and expertise, foreign workers become targets of attack physically or otherwise to make their continued employment and stay abroad difficult.

With the rise of regional parties, many of them with their roots in a State and language, a strong need for expressing "love for 'locals'" has grown among political classes as a "vote-catching" strategy. In the "hate politics" spreading fast, accusation of opponents from outside the State as an outsider and the local leader and politician as "sons of the soil" has become common. It was witnessed in the recent West Bengal Assembly election to prevent even entry of leaders from outside the State for electioneering.

The DMK in its election manifesto promised to bring a law to reserve 75% of jobs in companies set up in Tamil Nadu for Tamils. Earlier, the party had sought 90% reservation for Tamils in central government jobs in the State. In 2019, the PMK was for 80% private sector jobs for Tamils in the State, and wanted all State government jobs to be reserved for Tamils.

The TN Government has also introduced 7.5% reservation for government school students, mostly locals, in engineering courses. Nearly, 8,000 seats have been allotted this year under this quota. Opposition to NEET is for promoting local rural candidates.

due to increase in migrant labour employed in the unorganised sector for wages lower than that of locals.

Migrant is a touchy issue in Maharashtra where it's at the core of Shiv Sena and MNS politics. The parties accused migrants of spoiling the Maratha culture. According to the Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2019-20, the number of migrants from other States stood at 38.13 lakh. Migrants who left, the State during Covid-19 stood at 12 lakh with many waiting for their turn. They were engaged in about 50 kinds of jobs.

Haryana Government has reserved 75% of new jobs with salaries below Rs.50,000 a month for locals in the private sector under Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill. The government also provides incentives per person per year to employers who hire locals under the Haryana Enterprises and Employment Policy 2020. In June 2019, Andhra Pradesh also followed this, but it is not yet implemented. In Madhya Pradesh, the Congress Government was considering a proposal to reserve 70% of jobs to locals when the government fell. The successor BJP government is exploring the possibility of reserving 100% of jobs meaning appointing only locals in government jobs. Jobs for the "children of the State" by applying the rule of domicile has become a popular slogan.

Jharkhand passed the Jharkhand State Employment of Local Candidates Bill in 2021. The cabinet has also approved a proposal to

in Kerala nicknamed Dubai village where at least one in every household is said to be in the Middle East. Intra-State migrations from village to town and between villages are more common in India than inter-State. "Outsiders" available for wages lower than that of "insiders", are preferred by employers thus creating a new labour problem.

Anti-outsider sentiment in workplaces is a universal phenomenon. It works in European countries, but between countries and not within as in India. One of the main reasons for Britain to quit EU is loss of jobs for British subjects. Growing anti-immigrant sentiment is the cause of tightening visa regulations to prevent job loss to locals in the USA. The question of growing size of workforce with work permits, that is, green card holders, became an election issue in the last Presidential election.

To denote workers moving within a country as "migrant workers" in India to distinguish them from locals has promoted a tendency to look upon workers from another State as "outsiders". The Indian Constitution grants to all citizens freedom to move, work, and settle in any part of the country with provision for essential protection to local people in the North-East. Therefore, to distinguish employees as "insider" and "outsider" is untenable.

The rule of "domicile" may be an accepted factor to encourage recruitment of locals. By stretching it too far, we will be creating ill-will between States which are already divided by linguistic patriotism. --- INFA

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

**Yogi Adityanath using sedition to woo Hindu voters**

**SC must come out clearly against this Draconian Law**

By Sushil Kutty

Sometimes the Supreme Court says something of great import and then leaves it behind like it was a no account fleeting thought. Take the archaic sedition law. Earlier this year, the apex court said it was time for India "to define the limits of the sedition law." The Supreme Court was speaking in the context of media freedom. Now, the Yogi Adityanath Government has taken it in the context of the outcome of an India-Pakistan T-20 match.

The Yogi Adityanath Government did not expect a Pakistan victory. But Babar

Their hostels are aghast. All because of a T-20 match and the "victory of Islam" as a Pakistani minister and a couple of Pakistani ex-cricketers put it.

Question is didn't the Modi Government know Pakistan is "enemy"? Demands were made that India shouldn't play the match, not when "people" were being killed for their faith in Kashmir and there was an ongoing battle to death with Pak-sponsored terrorists in Poonch. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah did not



Azam won and Virat Kohli lost. And three Kashmiri students studying in an Uttar Pradesh college couldn't stop themselves from cheering Pakistan's victory over India. The Yogi Government slapped the sedition charge on them and one Kashmiri political analyst couldn't believe that sedition and UAPA could be slapped on Kashmiris for cheering a Pakistan victory.

"What's got into you blokes? You cannot change a long set mindset in just two short years? So what if Article 370 has been abrogated, you have to give them time, point out to them the errors of their ways," he said on TV. He is right. The youth of Kashmir have grown up on a diet of seeing army and police fighting "Kashmiri freedom fighters", some of them imported from Pakistan.

They also saw stone pelting in the streets. There's also the "Islam thing" and it's not easy to "grow up Indian" given such surround

pay heed to the demands and the next thing you know the "enemy" had won!

Some Kashmiris cheered. Now "sedition" and "unlawful activities prevention act" have come into play. And Yogi Adityanath saw an opening. This close to the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, he would be considered a political dolt if he did not jump at the chance to communally polarize. Doesn't matter if at the end of the day sedition in this case doesn't stand a chance in the top court.

It is the "now" that matters to the Yogi. His action to teach the Kashmiri students a lesson is moored in his craving to win a second term, especially when it looks dicey that he will be able repeat 2017 in 2022. The Kashmiri students should have known better. But how could they, when not even the Congress saw Narendra Modi come to power in 2014?

What did they expect when they cheered and

*"The youth of Kashmir have grown up on a diet of seeing army and police fighting 'Kashmiri freedom fighters', some of them imported from Pakistan. They also saw stone pelting in the streets. There's also the 'Islam thing' and it's not easy to 'grow up Indian' given such surround sounds. Cricket did not help."*

sounds. Cricket did not help. It was quite "natural" for "Kashmiri Muslims" to clap and cheer a Pakistan victory over India. They have been clapping for years. Their parents clapped and the parents did not stop them or warn them. It's like the celeb father who did not tell his son that psychotropic drugs do harm to both body and mind.

The fact of the matter is the Supreme Court should have followed up its thoughts on "sedition" with proper action. But the top court is also human at its core. And one of man's weaknesses is procrastination. Leave things to a later generation, which doesn't do well to this or the next generation. Also it gives regimes like that of Yogi Adityanath the fig leaf of political advantage.

The three Kashmiri students — two aged 20 and one aged 21 — have been charged with "sedition" and placed behind bars. Their lives are ruined. Their college-ing is over. Their distraught families are "begging".

clapped, when they sang Pakistan's national anthem? Clamouring for the restoration of Article 370 is one thing, but to clamour for "Pakistan banega Kashmir" at the time of an "Indian debacle" is quite another. No government at the Centre — not even Congress or CPI/CPM — would agree to hand over Kashmir to Pakistan to keep Kashmiris in humour!

Also, even Congress governments at the Centre have used the sedition law. It is the UAPA slapped on the students of Government Medical College and the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) which should be opposed. UAPA is an anti-terror law. Aspiring doctors and surgeons of GMC and SKIMS did not know what they were clapping their ways into! Now, they can forget the scalpel and the stethoscope. It's a pity. Only the Supreme Court or a change in government in Uttar Pradesh and at the Centre can save them from the rigours of UAPA and sedition. (IPA Service)

the area of the Umiam lake was to be followed, with no staff habitation except two or three security guards and an office (non-residential) near the lake. With the Defence land to be made available to the State Government, required land for the project can be acquired by an acquisition under the provisions of Land Acquisition Act in the interest of the public. As per law, illegal structures in the Sweepers Lane including shops and establishment may be dismantled and attached for public purpose. All such activities in the area are operating without permissions and licenses which are supposed to be renewed from year to year.

Pa'iem (L) Jor Manik Syiem in his book "Ka Jingiathuh Khana Pateng shaphang ki Syiem jong ka Hima Mylliem (1830-1960)" wrote that on the market day of Mawlong, the original Lew Mawlong (Mawlonghat) of the Shillong Municipality Board (SMB) was located in the present premises of the Shillong Pine Mount School. In 1913, the British Govern-

ment requested the Syiem of Hima Mylliem, Syiem Ron Singh to allot a land in Lewduh for shifting the Lew Mawlong of the SMB. Syiem Ron Singh allotted a land below Lewduh for the Lew Mawlong. The Municipality Board as a gesture of gratitude sanctioned Rs. 8000 to Hima Mylliem for development of Lewduh. The agreement of handing over to SMB was signed between the British Government, Syiem Ron Singh of Hima Mylliem and the Municipality Board in the year 1913-14. The agreement was again signed in 1954 between the Assam Government, the Municipal Board and the Syiem of Hima Mylliem. In those days there was a lane from Lewduh to GS Road, hence Sweepers' Lane.

In 2007, employees of the Shillong Municipality Board were asked to shift to their quarters constructed in European Ward, Bishop Cotton Road. Almost all of them were ready to shift but requested for completion of water supply and proper electrification including

some minor repairs.

The proposed composite flyover with traffic distribution included a sub-roadway leading to Umshyri and Them Bejoy. The MDA Government may revive the Project or a new project by constructing a Shopping Mall-cum-Multi storied Parking lot in The Them Lew Mawlong Sweepers Lane and turn it into a strictly non-residential space in the interest of the people of Meghalaya and the Tourism Industry.

Yours etc.,  
W.L. Lyngdoh  
Shillong-6

**United in disunity**

Editor,  
The theory of having all regional parties united under one banner or brand has been floating every time before an election happens and this same ideological theory of politicking continues once in five years. What prevents the regional parties from putting

up a unified stand under one banner is because of egoism, and a self-centered approach and ideological differences. This is the stumbling block to their unity. Therefore, if we look at the current bye-election in one constituency we have a set of regional parties supporting the NPP and in another we have two regional parties cutting to size the NPP and supporting one another. This style of politics neglects the core issues like unemployment, inflation, education, health, environment etc. and a host of issues which none of the parties mention. So as long as regional parties do not speak on the same wavelength it will be a tight rope walk towards 2023 and people aren't fools.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Via email

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# Crusader for Women Empowerment

Moushumi Dey of Women's College, Shillong underlines the contribution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

S wami Vivekananda had once said: "The best thermometer of the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women." A personality from the pages of history who strove relentlessly towards empowering girls and women during the 19th century was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

Despite facing a defiant orthodox traditional society in Bengal, he continued to hold his ground, challenging and reforming age-old customs and traditions inimical to the social fabric of Bengal. Throughout his living years this great educationist and social reformer lived his life for the cause of uplifting and advancing the marginalised sections of society.

Among the many luminaries in India, Vidyasagar's name stands out like a bright shiny star that illuminated the path of reform in the Indian society of that period, freeing it from many of the social tribulations prevalent then. The Bengal Renaissance was in-fact ushered in by the tireless efforts of two sons of the soil - Raja Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar. Both played a pivotal role in the reform movement by eradicating the restrictive traditions that bogged down the lives of the people, especially of women. If Roy relentlessly campaigned against the evil practice of Sati, Vidyasagar ushered in the process of change for the cause of remarriage of child widows, ending polygamy, introducing female education and improving the condition of the down-trodden in society, particularly women.

Vidyasagar can best be described as one of the pillars of Bengal renaissance who managed to continue the social reforms movement that was started by Roy in the early 1800s. Vidyasagar's greatness also lies to the fact that he worked relentlessly towards eradicating several ills prevalent in the society despite facing severe displeasure towards his reform measures from an orthodox caste-based patriarchal society of Bengal of the period.

Born in Birsingha village of Midnapore district in Bengal on September 26, 1820, Vidyasagar received much of his values from his pious parents, father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay and mother Bhagavati Devi.

Despite his upbringing in poverty, he proved to be a disciplined student who excelled in studies. There are many interesting stories regarding his brilliance and dedication as a student. It is said that Vidyasagar as a child learnt English numerals by following the milestones on his way to Calcutta. It is also said that he used to help with the household chores after school hours, and at night would study under the street lamps to save oil for cooking the next day! Besides Sanskrit, he helped himself learn the Vedanta, Vyakarana, literature, rhetoric, Smriti and ethics at Sanskrit College from 1829 to 1841. His meritorious bent of mind earned him regular scholarships and later, he took up a teaching position in a school in Bengal's Jorasanko to support his family.

It was in 1839 that he earned the title of 'Vidyasagar' meaning 'Ocean of Knowledge' after he excelled in a Sanskrit testing competition. The same year, Vidyasagar cleared his law examination. In 1841 at 21 years, he joined the Fort William College as the head pandit in the Sanskrit department. Soon he became proficient in both English and Hindi. After five years, in 1946, Vidyasagar left Fort William College and joined the Sanskrit College as an assistant secretary. By 1851, he rose to become the Principal of Sanskrit College and by 1855, he



"Education does not only mean learning, reading, writing and arithmetic, it should provide a comprehensive knowledge. Education in geography, geometry, literature, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, physiology, political economy, etc is very much necessary. We want teachers who know both Bengali and the English Language, at the same time are free from religious prejudices."

- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

assumed the responsibilities as a special inspector of schools with additional charges and during this tenure he travelled to remote villages of Bengal to oversee the quality of education and realised the lack of quality education especially among girls and women, which he believed were the root causes of the perpetuation of several societal evils.

Vidyasagar thoroughly remodelled the medieval scholastic system prevailing in Sanskrit College and brought about modern insights into the education system. The first change he made when he returned to the Sanskrit College as a professor was to include English and Bengali as the medium of learning besides Sanskrit. He introduced courses of European history, philosophy and science alongside Vedic scriptures. He encouraged students to pursue these subjects and imbibe the best from both worlds. He also altered the rules of admission for students in Sanskrit College allowing non-privileged students to enrol in an institution where admission of non-Brahmin students was considered a taboo.

To ease the learning system of the time, Vidyasagar even wrote two books *Upakramonika* and *Byakaran Koumudi*, interpreting complex notions of Sanskrit grammar in easy legible Bengali. He set up training schools for teachers, enabling uniformity in teaching methodology.

Vidyasagar was far ahead of his times when it came to the question of empowering women and for them to have the rightful place in society. At a time when women's place and position were strictly demarcated to domestic roles within the four walls of the house, he realised that if society was to be freed from orthodoxy and rigidity, it has to be through the tool of education and learning. He rightly viewed education as the crucial way for women to achieve emancipation from all the societal oppression. He exercised his power and lobbied hard for opening of schools for girls and even outlined suitable curriculum that not only educated them, but stressed on skill development to make them self-reliant through the inclusion of vocations like needlecraft, etc.

Further, to convince parents about the vital need of educating the girl child, he is said to have visited

door-to-door, requesting them to allow their daughters to be enrolled in schools. He opened 35 schools exclusively for women throughout Bengal and was successful in enrolling almost 1,300 students.

At a time when the birth of a girl child was considered a burden, Vidyasagar singlehandedly spearheaded the daunting task of educating girls and women. He even initiated Nari Siksha Bhandar, an exclusive fund to lend support towards this cause. He impressed John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, the then President of the Council of Education in British India to establish the first permanent girls' school in India.

The Bethune School was established on May 7, 1849, with an initial enrolment of 21 girls, which rose to 80 girls the following year. In order to disseminate his ideals to a wider audience, Vidyasagar contributed regular articles to periodicals and newspapers. He continued to write a number of books to educate the masses on the Bengali culture. His lasting legacy remains with *Borno Porichoy*, an elementary level book for learning Bengali alphabets, where he reconstructed Bengali alphabets and reformed it into typography of 12 vowels and 40 consonants. He also established the Sanskrit Press with an aim to produce printed books at affordable prices.

Apart from his reforms in the field of education, Vidyasagar was always vocal about the oppression that society inflicted on women. He was very close to his mother, a woman of great character, and encouraged him to alleviate the pain and helplessness of Hindu widows, who were forced to live a life of misery and abnegation. The widows were not only denied basic pleasures of life but were marginalised in society and often exploited unfairly and treated as a burden by their family.

Vidyasagar's compassionate heart made him take up the miserable plight of the widows and soon he made it his mission to improve the quality of life for these vulnerable women. The going was not easy for he faced raging opposition from the orthodox elements of society. He challenged the Brahmanical traditional ideologies and to convince them to stop

this evil practice, he even laid bare before them the sanction of widow remarriage as enshrined in the Vedonic scriptures.

But he realised that age-old traditional practices can only be broken if there would be a law against it. He took this issue to the British authorities and after strong arguments for it, the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856 or Act XV, 1856, was passed on July 26, 1856. Such was his personality that he even set personal examples when in 1870 he got his own son Narayan Chandra married to an adolescent widow. Thereafter, the deplorable and pitiful status of widows was ameliorated to a significant extent. He was a man with exceptional strength of character and his unwavering courage made him stand his ground towards ridding the Bengali society of many evil practices resolutely despite facing backlash. It was Michael Madhusudan Dutt who in deep appreciation and gratitude gave the epithet 'Daya Sagar' (ocean of generosity) to Vidyasagar for his selfless altruism. After decades of relentless struggle towards reforming his own society, the great scholar, academician and reformer breathed his last on July 29, 1891, at the age of 70.

Today, Vidyasagar's ideals and philosophies are still upheld and revered by individuals, educational institutions and organisations. One such educational institution in Northeast India that has been following his footsteps is Women's College, Shillong.

Apart from other programmes, the annual Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Endowment Lecture is organised at this college since 2009 by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell to uphold and espouse the ideals of this scholar par excellence to students, academicians and the citizens at large. This lecture was held this year on September 25, coinciding with the bi-centenary of Vidyasagar's birth anniversary, in a hybrid mode in the college auditorium and the virtual platform.

Prominent academician Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs, Harvard University virtually delivered a lecture on "A few Pearls from an Ocean of Learning". Prof Bose highlighted the role Vidyasagar played and called him "a champion of women's education who broke the inertia that plagued the Bengali language and filled it with progressive momentum". He said Vidyasagar believed in the blending of eastern and western concepts of education and in that manner was rightfully a reformist who broke the rigid code of Bengali society by inculcating the essential elements of western learning.

As a befitting tribute to the great educationist, a bronze bust of Vidyasagar sculpted by Amiya Nimai Dharma was inaugurated on the college premises the same day. This is the great social reformer's first bust in the Northeast.

Very few born from humble background can rise to the stature of Vidyasagar, to reform, transform and leave their indelible contribution that even after 200 years is remembered with pride, admiration and gratitude. His pathbreaking efforts as a torch-bearer of women's education and their empowerment are indeed worth emulating and can guide our present-day women-centric policies and plans towards achieving a more gender sensitive and gender equal modern society.

Such was the aura of Vidyasagar that after his death, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote: "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!"

## Prepping educators to go back to school

By Surabhi Goel

Campuses reopen for students after 19 months of COVID-induced break

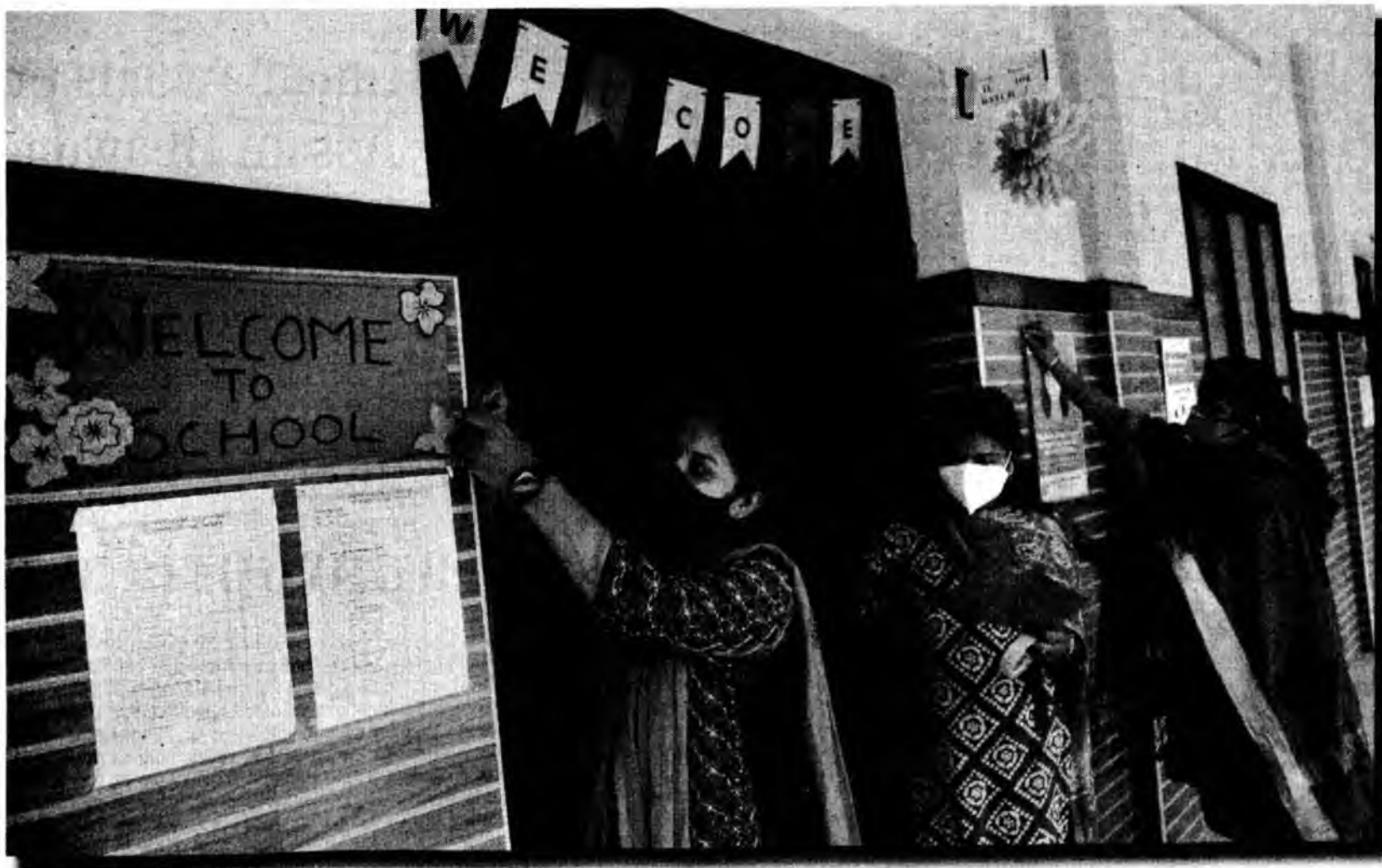
Along with students, educators too are looking forward to the start of physical schools and to being reunited with students and colleagues. Educational institutions across India are gearing up to welcome students back to campus after nearly 19 months of virtual classrooms. Educators too need to prep for the transition, including encouraging children while also managing their own anxieties and shifts. While the emphasis is on planning for the reopening, the following tips can assist teachers for a hybrid learning model.

### COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

Uncertainty feeds anxiety, and the COVID-19 pandemic is rife with it. While families will have to accept some uncertainty, school officials and educators may help ease the transition by managing collectively to communicate with families regularly and explicitly about the procedures for returning to school. It is important to have a blueprint to maintain academic education and to ensure that students have access to specialised services. To plan for the return to school, teachers should exercise regular communication to apprise students and families about academic standards such as adjustments made at schools, specific expectations for families, upcoming plans, long-term plans, and access to services and other basic school services which students and families depend on.

### PLANNING SCHEDULE

Maintaining a regular sched-



ule provides a sense of control, predictability, and tranquillity. It also teaches children to respect each other's needs for peaceful, uninterrupted time alone and to connect with school friends.

Considering minor details such as how teachers will stand in the classroom during the first lesson or sharing with the students' relatable experiences, as well as coping skills, can help them

feel less alone and offer them a roadmap for being comfortable. Planning and creating a schedule for the physical classes will help the teachers be prepared for the children.

### VALIDATE AND HEAR THE STUDENTS OUT

Remote learning has taken a toll on the emotional, social, behavioural and academic growth among some students.

With schools reopening, children may experience a new set of unexpected feelings. Educators must support children at this period by identifying symptoms such as irritability, mood changes, physical problems, appearing clingy, and becoming disturbed or angry easily. During the first week of school, educators must spend a lot of time getting to know the students to encourage them to feel comfortable about the transition. If they continue to express anxiety or panic, listen to them carefully and validate their feelings; post which, the educators can recommend professional guidance for the students.

### SELF-CARE

Educators' ability to help others is constrained by their own physical and mental health. Remember that being a teacher or other school-based professional is difficult - especially during COVID-19, and they may be battling to stay healthy in the midst of it all. Most crucial, make sure to exhibit compassion to oneself as well as others. Given all of these changes, teachers may need an extra break or two during the day to regroup. School staff should promote and ensure that educators take time to care for themselves while preparing to help students. If teachers find coping with these changes and responsibilities resulting in significant mental health issues, it may be time to seek professional help rather than attempting to manage everything on their own. (IANSlife)

(The author is CEO at Aditya Birla Education Academy)

# ARTIFICIAL MINI GLACIERS

Ice stupas bringing water to some of the driest, coldest places on Earth



Sonam Wangchuk: The man who invented the ice stupa

Glaciers are not just spectacular indicators of climate change as they shrink and disappear due to global warming. They are also, for many communities, an irreplaceable source of fresh water.

During the melting season in summer, a portion of mountain glacier surface releases water that is essential to the ecosystem in the valleys below, supplying vast cities – and industries – in places like South America and India.

But this meltwater is also essential to many remote rural communities for drinking water and crop irrigation. These include those living in the Ladakh Valley, a beautiful, 470km valley sandwiched between the Greater Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges, and home to 300,000 people up to 4000m above sea level.

These iconic ranges have an abundance of glaciers, but large areas also fall within the monsoon rain shadow zone, which means they are extremely arid, because

rain is blocked by the mountains. The Ladakh Valley is one of the most arid and coldest mountain regions in the world, with annual rain and snowfall rarely exceeding 100mm – little more than the Sahara Desert – and winter temperatures as low as -30°C.

Severe water shortages are a fundamental issue for the people who live in this cold desert. Their existence relies on the success of their crops, which can only be cultivated over a few short months of the year, often irrigated by diverted glacier meltwater. However, climate change over the past decades has meant that glaciers in the region have been shrinking, or disappearing altogether at a worrying rate, thus reducing the short growing season further.

An increasingly viable solution to this problem is the construction of ice stupas – artificial glaciers built to store winter water for use in the arid months of late spring and early summer, when meltwater is scarce. Invented in 2013

by engineer Sonam Wangchuk in Ladakh, the idea is to conserve this tower of ice as long into the year as possible so that, as it melts, it feeds the fields until the real glacial meltwaters start flowing again later in the summer.

## BUILDING LOCAL RESILIENCE

In a collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, our Cryosphere and Climate Change research group has been conducting a study looking at 2,200 glaciers in the wider Ladakh region. We've found that 86% have experienced a rise in the height of the snowline of around 300m over the past 42 years. This rate has increased to almost 10m a year over the last two decades.

Combined with drier winters, this situation has led to frequent and extended droughts, which are now threatening life-sustaining crops in rural communities. Unsurprisingly, entire villages have already been abandoned, or will be soon.

The wider issues can only be resolved through the action of governments and society as a whole, so many hopes are pinned on positive outcomes from COP26. But any solutions to augment the limited, and now declining, glacier-derived meltwater could help guarantee a sustainable fu-

ture for these communities.

Locally, ice stupas offer an answer, or at least a partial way to offset the effect of shrinking glaciers in the short term. Using basic and inexpensive techniques, a conical structure of wood and steel is built and then gravity, rather than electricity, is used to bring water diverted from a nearby streams during the rainy season, and sprayed this into the air like a fountain.

The sub-zero temperatures quickly freeze the water into the

conical structure, so that a mass of ice begins to grow. The end result has the same high, narrow dome-shape typical of Buddhist shrines, hence the "stupa" part of the name, which slows down subsequent melting because the surface area exposed to the sun and warm temperatures is minimised.

When the warmer, arid growing season arrives, the lower altitude streams quickly dry up and there is little water available again until June when the glaciers pro-

vide meltwater again. It is in this crucial window that the ice stupas start melting, offering an invaluable source of water for irrigation early in the growing season, extending the cropping season by a few weeks – which makes all the difference in this extreme agricultural environment.

Constructing artificial ice reserves is not new, but in the past these were built in less efficient shapes and much higher up the mountains, making them difficult to manage. Now, these ice stupas are built next to where the water is needed most, right on the outskirts of villages, near their fields. The size and shape make them particularly efficient, inexpensive and easy to maintain, and they are able to produce millions of litres of water each year.

We're now hoping to explore how stupas can best be used to tackle this problem. Our [project] is still in its infancy and more work is needed to improve some technical aspects. These include finding further sites both in the Ladakh region and other parts of the world, ways to avoid water freezing in the supply pipelines and how best to distribute water to the many villages and other users. By establishing a long-lasting collaboration with local ice stupa teams and research colleagues, we hope to provide some of the solutions. *(The Conversation)*

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambh

Sunday, OCT 31, 2021

Moon sextile Sun on your solar return chart and will give wonderful benefits. You will attain the objectives of a long term plan that you had made in the past. The outline of some auspicious work will be drawn out. Your fortunes will rise, so also your income. Your business too will flourish and prosper. But you will take a loan for everyday requirement in business. Your enemies will try to dominate you. The health of elders will be a cause of concern. But you will face all problems with confidence without any fear. Your talent and capability will come to the fore. You will get lot of mental peace. You will also spend quality time with your family and make best use of your mental capacity. You will also plan to get married to a person of your choice. You will get the desired results. Children will focus on their study. You will be interested in playing games and sports.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is time to obtain lot of wealth and happiness. You will have monetary gains. Additional sources of income will be tapped. You will also have amazing bonding with your family member. There will be joy, cheer and lot of warmth in family ties. Loved one will respect and understand each other. You will excel in your work. Your boss will be happy at seeing your capabilities in all works. You will also enjoy peaceful days. You will also get money from your tenant. Lovebirds will also have a wonderful time and enjoy each other's company. Your health will remain absolutely fine. You will also go on a business trip which will put you in an advantageous position. It is a brilliant time to meet your friends and other people. You will shoulder your responsibility well.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

These are days to have lot of name and fame. Works will be done without any obstruction. You will be very ambitious and will also achieve your goals. Destiny will provide you lot of opportunities to grow in your life. You will be helped and supported by your well wishers. You will also get unprecedented gains in your business. Despite all the tensions, the ending will be great. You will be victorious in professional matters. You will also get success in financial matters. Your pending work will also get completed. You will also have to take a vital decision in a matter of great importance. You will seek opinion of your friends and act accordingly. The time is good, you will get marital happiness. The placement of planets will bring lot of success.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will be enjoying mental peace. Your partner will be a source of strength and guide you. He/she will understand your feelings and will take care of your interests. You will also establish contact with a person living far away. You will have financial gains. Your investments will give you good return. Money that had been lent to someone will come back. Your government related work will also get done. Your contact with influential person will deepen. It is an auspicious time for you. You may also get attracted to opposite sex easily. You can fall in love relations again. You will also get ample opportunities for employment. There is strong possibility of a promotion in your job. You will be happy that everything goes according to your plans. You will also enjoy change in weather. It is time to go for a picnic or to a luxury resort for fun and relaxation and take a short break.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The time is good for completing your work. You will enhance your knowledge and skills. You will get a new job/business offer. The passage of time is favorable for you. People will take interest in your ideas. And you will do well in your work. Your peers and bosses will support you fully. You will have no major health and financial worries. Luck is on your side. You will also explore new business contacts. Business/work related trips will keep you busy. You will get success in love affairs. You will also plan to buy new clothes, jewelry and other things. You will also remain occupied with domestic matters. House-wives should give time to themselves too and relax and enjoy. You will also remain busy in religious work. You will also help those persons in need.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is time to come out of your make belief world and face the reality. Life is going to be challenging for you and you need to push yourself up. From now onwards your graph will only go up if you keep on trying and don't give up. You need to limit your expenses and not spend on wrong people. Right decisions taken at the appropriate time will be favorable for you. It is better to take advice of your faithful friends in the matters of property. But do not put too much faith in someone in financial matters. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. Peace and harmony will prevail at your home. You will feel a new energy and hope. Your children will listen to you. Your parents and siblings will be helpful to you. Your financial aspect will be strong. You will enjoy the changing climate. You will plan to go on a short trip with your family amidst natural surroundings. You will be happy and feel delighted.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)

The week will turn out to be fruitful for you. You will have gains in business and profession. These are money giving days. You will also interact a lot with people directly on a one to one basis. This is the best time for communication and contacts. You will also undertake business related trips which will prove to be beneficial too. You will also develop interest

in music, dance, songs, cinema and other such fields. You will spend quality time with your family. You will be fully entertained. Your children will also make progress in their life. You will not like anything nonsense and will talk tough with those who try to cross the limits with you. Matters related to property and finance will keep you engrossed. Instead of adopting an obstinate attitude towards them, patience will get you better results.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



These are excellent days. You will have financial gains. You will also explore additional sources of income. Your expenses too will rise. But you will have to do all those works that will require money and you will manage it also. You will also share good equations with your boss and colleagues. Your working atmosphere will be enjoyable and you will keep working hard. Your behavior at home should be good. You will be free of tension. You will spend quality time with your family members. You will also fulfill your responsibilities. You will witness positive changes in your life. There are chances of change in job also. People will like to work with you and support you too.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



The time is entirely favorable for you. You will get opportunities to rise in your life. New job/business offers will come to you. You will also remain in the pink of your health. Your friends and family members will keep supporting you. You will get encouragement and cooperation from your boss and colleagues. You will try to go for multi tasking work. It will be better for you to follow the middle path. There is no need to take the risks and just move onwards with the passage of time. You will be hopeful. You will be clear in your mind and decisive too. You will have absolutely no doubts. Before going to start anything new, you will think twice and take the advice of seniors. You will feel energetic. You will enjoy marital bliss. A pilgrimage might be planned.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



There will be an increase in your dignity and prestige. Your work will be completed according to your wishes. New job/business offers will come to you. In the field of education, students will maintain their performance and do well. You will also do well. You will also be inspired to do challenging tasks. You will also acquire new skills. But spiritual thoughts will also come to your mind. You will develop interest in yoga, meditation, prayers and reading motivational literature. You will also look after your elders and get their blessings. You will have financial gains. Money inflow will be continuous. You will get some new ideas, that will prove successful. Your behavior towards everyone will be good and you will achieve fame.

Capricorn: (December 23 - January 20)



These are days for doing hard work and getting the best results. You will be happy, healthy and cheerful. Your charming and immaculate personality will impress and attract one and all. You will be happy to complete the work and also feel happy to get the desired results. You will also get desired success in establishing relations with higher ups. Even after putting up your best show some people will be unhappy with you. But that will not worry you too much. You will also spend quality time with your family. Joy and bliss will fill your home. You will come close to your loved ones. Guests will visit and you will be very busy with them. You will also be able to do some important works. There will be some obstacles in government related works but you will be able to remove it. You will face all your difficulties with determination and will not be discouraged by difficult situations. You will enjoy the fascinating journey of your life.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



It is a wonderful phase for you. Positive incidents will take place. Something will leave a lasting impression on your mind. There will be an increase in income. You will feel very happy meeting people. You need to pay attention to your health. Also take care of your diet. Students will make greater efforts to get success in exams. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your family members and also get love and affection from them. Your time will be spent in useful activities. Your business will never be sort of funds. Government officials will get additional income by doing extra work. Your parents will pour a lot of love upon you. You will get success in money matters. With this success you will be encouraged to renovate, beautify and decorate your home.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



These are prestige enhancing days. You will be having love for loved ones, which will give happiness to them. You will also get your work done. Your children will shine in their field. You will feel very relaxed. The time is beneficial. Travels will be relaxing. You will meet lot of new people too. Young people will overcome all situations and emerge victorious. You also need to control your eating habits and take care of your health. You will also make plans for acquiring land property etc. The road to financial progress will open up. Sources of income will increase. You will also show love towards your in-laws and will establish good relations with them. You will be happy obtaining something and securing gains. You will pay full attention to your work. There will be an increase in your popularity.

# Career opportunities related to Cities

By Ranjan K Baruah

People move from rural areas to urban areas for better opportunities like livelihoods and other facilities. Until 2009, more people lived in rural areas than in urban areas. Today, around 55 per cent of the world's population lives in towns and cities, with the level of urbanisation projected to reach almost 70 per cent by 2050. Much of the growth in urban populations will take place in Asia and Africa, especially in China, India and Nigeria where the fertility rates remain high.

There is no doubt that cities should be encouraged to innovate and experiment, and also to learn from one another in order to achieve sustainable development. Cities worldwide are increasingly suffering the effects of climate-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, sea level rise, heatwaves, landslides and storms. At least 130 port cities with over one million inhabitants around the world are expected to be affected by coastal flooding and the one billion people in urban informal settlements are particularly at risk.

We are talking about the challenges but at the same time it brings career opportunities for young people who are interested to work for the positive development and change in cities. Creating more sustainable, climate-resilient societies involves addressing a range of issues including poverty reduction, ensuring basic services livelihoods, the provision of accessible, affordable and adequate housing, investing in infrastructure, upgrading informal settlements and managing ecosystems. Successful, well-governed cities greatly reduce climate-related risks for their populations.

We should be aware that the United Nations General Assembly designated 31st October as World Cities Day, by its resolution 68/239. The Day is expected to greatly promote the international community's interest in global urbanization, push forward



Representational image

cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities addressing challenges of urbanization and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world.

Sustainable Development Goal 11, which formulates the ambition to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable - underlying the relevance of UN-Habitat's mission. Inequalities in cities have grown since 1980. The world's largest cities are also often the most unequal, and this year's theme is embraced by the action and implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which is putting the topic of inclusive cities as one of the main pillars for the urban shift.

When it comes to careers and job opportunities for sustainability then the options are urban planners, architects, city designers, social workers, communicators, urban managers, sociologists, etc. There are different options which need experts like engineers or planners like architects. When we look at the perspectives from people then we need more social workers like experts on reducing urban poverty, ensuring accessibility for physically challenged, enhancing economic activities for city dwellers who are mostly financially marginalized.

Urban planning graduates play

a key role in managing and developing the places we live in to make them safer, more sustainable and healthier. Environmental scientists and experts help in design and planning cities that do not affect the urban ecosystems. Aspirants with a Master in Social Work or Development Studies or Sociology may work to eradicate urban poverty to make cities more inclusive by engaging themselves as social experts or social workers or development workers.

Let us make our cities as hubs of innovation and human ingenuity — and potential centres for transformative action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Cities must be climate friendly with less carbon emission which brings opportunities for climate experts. The theme of this year's World Cities Day, 'Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience', comes at a time when cities must be more resilient than ever before. Cities have been epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic and are on the frontlines of the climate crisis and this brings opportunities for aspirants with qualifications and skills.

*(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at bkranian@gmail.com or 8473943734 for further details)*