

"If you create an act, you create a habit. If you create a habit, you create a character. If you create a character, you create a destiny."

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

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2019 – An overview

NEW Year brings hope even at the worst of times. The past is behind us and this is time to look forward to a new future. The year that ended was, worldwide, a usual one. No earth-shaking event took place. There was neither a war of some significance, nor a confrontation beyond the normal. India too carried on through placid times other than for the Pulwama terror attack and the Balakot air strikes that followed, both shaking the sub-continent and beyond. The parliament polls saw a change of government to the effect Prime Minister Narendra Modi returned to power. Political stability at the Centre, this past year did not lead to a similar smooth sailing for political parties in the states. The set of assembly polls after the Lok Sabha hustings came up with fractured verdicts. Post-poll alliances helped in the formation of governments in Maharashtra and Haryana, while a coalition of parties formed the government in Jharkhand too. In all the three polls, the BJP took a hit, though it emerged as the single largest party in Maharashtra and Haryana, and conceded a similar ground to the JMM in Jharkhand. India’s economy took a major hit this past year too; its impact being felt in all fields of human activity. Markets are taking the major hit. Cash was hard to come by and jobs were in short-supply. Overall, the year that ended was time for most denizens to tighten their belts. They could only grin and bear with the situation.

Major central government moves saw an end to the Triple Talaq system, followed by the abrogation of Article 370, ending the special status for Kashmir. The tough stand by the Centre helped. The Supreme Court won laurels among a section of citizens for the way it came up with a final verdict on the highly contentious Ayodhya dispute but left others dismayed. The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act by Parliament raised the nation’s temperature. The year saw no major international developments, though changes were one too many. President Trump got impeached and still stood his ground. In UK, a new election gave the Conservatives a thumbs up and cleared the way for Brexit. Sri Lanka saw the return of the Rajapaksas to power, while it was Asraf Ghani’s turn to retain power in Afghanistan. India’s relations with China were on an even keel this year, with no flashpoints emerging. All these aside, a grim moment for India was when its ambitious Chandrayaan 2 mission failed in September. Contact with Vikram lunar lander was lost – a low point in the nation’s prestigious Space odyssey. This coming year is set to see the country faces major challenges even as the nation-wide protests against the CAA gain momentum. The NCR and NPR are both creating heartburns as it is believed that they are set to turn many into non-citizens or stateless citizens without any antecedents about the country of their origins. How the centre handles these hot issues will not only decide the future of the BJP but also the trajectory towards which the country is heading.

TO THE EDITOR

Bengal- where infiltrators rule the roost

Editor,
Apropos the letter – “Dangerous agenda and propaganda” by Salil Gewali, (ST Dec 28, 2019), I would like to add a few things which are my unbiased observations. Gewali’s letters published in The Shillong Times always make us more aware about the ground realities which are very unfortunate in West Bengal. Due to Mamata’s greed for power she has turned West Bengal into a kind of hell for the native Bengali from the particular religion though her party and her supporters may not agree on this. The ground realities are extremely pathetic. For vote bank the Chief Minister often does not give any power to the police forces to deal with terror activities unleashed by certain communities which facts are on record. There are areas where other indigenous communities cannot perform their religious festival and rituals and live in peace. Temples and Puja pandals in certain districts are destroyed and the residents live in fear but there is no action from the government. During the last

MP election in a village named "Raiganj" the Hindu community was barred from exercising its democratic right. The news was published by NDTV and India Today. Usually the Government administration is totally mute and news about breakdown of law and order are seldom brought to the notice of the general public. Many biased elements are at work. I have personally made observations during my Puja vacation three years ago that the situation is getting from bad to worse particularly now when the infiltrators keep coming in and they are being encouraged by the ruling party cadres. In some districts even the heinous criminals are not convicted if the crimes are committed against people of certain communities. What do you call this kind of situation and just imagine the plight of the native Bengali. I am surprised why certain writers purposely ignore such violence and terror activities for so many years but they make the opposite community look like criminals which is totally unfair. It has often come out in the news that some MLAs encourage terror activities but they all get suppressed too soon. Salil Gewali has given us a timely

warning of this culture of biased reporting and has been creating awareness through his write-ups.

Yours etc.,
Rupesh Nath,
Viaemail

Year of tumult

Editor,
2019 will be remembered by many Indians as the year when things happened in rapid succession. First it was the return of the BJP to power and the actions taken by the new NDA Government under the new Home Minister, Amit Shah. Article 370 was abrogated and two Union territories were created. Jammu and Kashmir was left without a window to the world through a complete internet shutdown since August this year. The nation was left stunned but many of course celebrated this action of the Modi Government and felt vindicated that no part of the nation should enjoy special privileges. In fact, looking at the scenario today it would seem that we are a divided polity more than ever before. We look at each other from the prism of religion rather than as fellow Indians. How we have arrived at this point is something we have not had time to reflect.

As someone rightly said, we have been ruled by a Congress party that fawned over people of one religious group to the point that they made the majority Hindu community feel abandoned. When the NDA came to power this time this majority community suddenly felt rejuvenated. They felt they needed to assert themselves and reclaim all that they had lost in so many decades. Whether this reaction is good for a country that launched itself as a secular, republic and decided consciously to allow all religions to thrive without making any single religion a state religion, now seems challenged. The Christians as a small minority making barely two per cent of the country’s population now feel so vulnerable; more so the people of the North East who are ethnically and racially dissimilar to their compatriots in the rest of the country. These ethnic minorities feel they have no protective cover other than the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. And now all these seven small states want to keep out the “outsider” by asking for the Inner Line Permit. In Assam the Chief Minister has even said that Assamese will be the official/state language to counter the anti-CAA

protestors, thereby putting on notice other tribes like the Bodos, Karbi, Dimasas and the Bengali speaking people of the Barak Valley. We are moving into little ghettos because out leaders take the easiest way out to quell small revolutions. The NPP which is the Party leading the MDA Government in Meghalaya, yesterday sent out a public notice to its Party members that they should not write against the CAA or take part in public protests or join those who go to court on the CAA issue. Isn’t this like a mini dictatorship? Don’t the members of the NPP have their democratic rights to think what’s good or bad for themselves? All these events portend a future that is not very secure for the people of the region. The NPP as a member of the NDA seems hell bent on pleasing their bosses in Delhi. Where is Meghalaya headed for as a state and what is the future of the North East? Can anyone give an answer? Yours etc.,
Nangaibor Diengdoh,
Viaemail

BJP sliding

Editor,
In a major blow to the BJP after it lost Maharashtra, yet

campaign worries some top leaders within the TMC. They realise that fighting off BJP’s challenge in Bengal 2021 will be difficult enough. The saffron party will be the TMC’s strongest challenger among the majority Hindus (70 per cent of the population). Muslim votes could be divided, with the AIMIM coming into the picture. But as of now, it is hard to see the AIMIM emerge as a major challenger to the TMC’s support among the minorities. Party insiders are seriously concerned about her renewed efforts to emerge as a major national player once more. She had tried her best to catalyse a national political anti-BJP consolidation in early 2019, before the LS polls. She had invited major political parties for a common programme and a mass meeting in Kolkata. She had visited Shiv Sena leaders as well as BJP Chief Minister of Odisha Mr, Naveen Patnaik. What followed was a disaster. There was neither much unity among the problem-ridden, mangled anti BJP forces, nor could she defend her own turf Bengal, where she had given a call to win all 42 LS seats! The TMC’s LS seats fell to 22 from 34 in 2019. This is what other TMC leaders are worried about. They fear their leader, once again, is opening too many fronts. Their energies are bound to be spread out too thin in the days ahead. Defending Bengal should have been the top priority for her as well as her party, instead of engaging in grandiose attempts to strike out and conquer other states. The TMC had tried such experiments in the past, with occasional success in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur, but they proved to be no more than a flash in the pan. Kolkata-based analysts wonder whether the highly prized advice of poll strategist Mr. Prashant Kishor (now also chief political Adviser to the TMC!) have anything to do with her currently revived aspirations to make her mark on the national centrestage of politics . A single tweet from the gentleman could certainly throw much light on the Bengal political scene. (IPA Service)

Modi’s gujarat experience is hurting him
PM clueless on dealing with protesters

By Amulya Ganguli

Till the agitations began on the citizenship law, Narendra Modi’s career would have been a matter of envy for all politicians, for he had never known failure since becoming the Gujarat chief minister in 2001. After weathering the storm of the riots in the state in the following year when he was called a “modern-day Nero” by the Supreme court for his failure to control the communal outbreak, Modi went on to win three successive assembly elections notwithstanding the criticism he faced inside the country and outside for his suspected complicity in the violence which claimed 1,200 lives. When Modi made his pitch to be the prime minister, he was opposed by stalwarts in his party like L.K. Advani. But to no avail, for not only did Modi win and lead the BJP to a comfortable victory in the Lok Sabha with 282 seats, but he also acquired nationwide popularity because of his promise of ushering in development-oriented “achhey din” or good days in the wake of the

were said to mark the beginning of the Hindutva “experiment” in the laboratory. What the Modi-Shah duo is probably finding strange and unacceptable, therefore, is the resistance which their policies are facing, especially after the government’s success in pushing through other items on its pro-Hindu agenda such as revoking Article 370. The current obstacles on its path are not something which they experienced in Gujarat or after assuming power at the centre. They are a novelty for them and, understandably, the party and the government do not quite know how to deal with the presence on the streets almost on a daily basis of thousands of angry students as well as social and political activists. The BJP’s first reaction has been to brand the protesters as anti-nationals and pro-Pakistani. These have been the standard terms which the party has used against dissenting voices. But it is possible that the charges are losing their sting because of overuse. What is worse for the

The reason for the government’s recent policies is the conviction born of these factors that the path is clear for implementing on a national scale the lessons of the “Hindutva laboratory” for which Gujarat was known from the days even before Modi took charge. In fact, the 1969 Ahmedabad riots were said to mark the beginning of the Hindutva “experiment” in the laboratory.

previous government’s policy paralysis. It is possible that Modi’s series of successes over nearly two decades has fostered a sense of invincibility in him and an attitude of contempt for his opponents. Having faced virtually no opposition for over 10 years in Gujarat, he apparently began to see his tenure at the centre in the same light. This feeling of ruling over the country as he had done in Gujarat may have been strengthened by the presence by his side of his former political companion from the state, Amit Shah. Two other factors appear to have boosted the confidence of the party and its leader of being unassailable. One is obviously the absence of comparable figures in the opposition with Modi’s popularity and Amit Shah’s organizational skills. The other is the fawning support from a section of the media to the Modi dispensation. There are also bloggers who have seen the new government as one which represents a seminal change from all those which came before it by being rooted in an indigenous, primarily Hindu, worldview unlike its deracinated, anglicized predecessors. The reason for the government’s recent policies is the conviction born of these factors that the path is clear for implementing on a national scale the lessons of the “Hindutva laboratory” for which Gujarat was known from the days even before Modi took charge. In fact, the 1969 Ahmedabad riots

party and the government is that the protests against the citizenship law are being made not only in India, but also abroad and notably in prestigious academic institutions in Oxford and Harvard. The charges of being anti-national or pro-Pakistani will not wash in these cases. Since the citizenship law and the registers for citizens and populations have become additional sticks in the hands of the Western media with which to beat the Indian government, the entire protest movement is acquiring an embarrassing diplomatic overtone as well. As it is, the government has been finding it difficult to live down the infamy it has earned in the West over the crackdown in Kashmir with only China applauding the shutting down of Internet in the valley and welcoming India’s growing distance from Western democratic values, as the Chinese publication, the Global Times, has said. Now the government is having to counter the allegation of being anti-Muslim. Even if the BJP’s core group of supporters will find nothing wrong in such a label which the Hindutva brotherhood has worn ever since the formation of the RSS in 1925 with the U.P. chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, classifying Indians into two groups - Alis or Muslims and Bajrang Balis or Hindus – the BJP still shies away from formally flaunting such an Islamophobic attitude. What the BJP is realizing, therefore, is that the policies which passed muster in Gujarat can run into roadblocks at the national level. (IPA Service)

“ Like leap-year day — nothing in itself, but a nudge jostling every other day.”
--- Michael Cisco

The Shillong Times

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The year ahead

WHILE it is important to look back at the year gone by and learn lessons from past events, it is equally important to look at the future and see what awaits the State of Meghalaya and the North East in 2020. The Vision 2020 document prepared for the region by the Ministry of DoNER is today only a memory, although that involved a humungous consultative exercise. There were many suggestions in that document amongst which the key pointer was inter-state connectivity by road, rail and air. These remain in the realm of aspirations only. Roads in many parts of the region, more so in the rural areas of every state are in no condition for those with ailing bodies to travel on. Sadly this has never been a priority with any state government. Some states more than others have been lagging on this front. The road-making project between Dimapur and Kohima in Nagaland continues to be a monumental challenge for reasons best known to the planners and the movers and shakers of that state. Roads in the interiors of Assam, mainly Karbi Anglong and Dhemaji districts are badly maintained or not maintained at all. Yet there is a continued rhetoric in Delhi and occasionally in the North East about the Act East Policy which is meant to kick-start the sluggish economy of the region by linking its economy to that of South East Asia.

Of the many potential of the North Eastern states to trigger an economic upsurge, tourism is perhaps the most environmentally sustainable. Besides carbon footprints, there is not much left behind by visitors except their hard earned money. But tourism in the region has suffered from lack of vision and a comprehensive policy. Tourism products are poorly priced despite their exotic quality. Meghalaya’s living root bridges - a rarity in the world have been short-sold, so much so there is a glut of footfalls but very little accrual by way of income for local communities. The problem is that this costing of tourism products has been left entirely to communities who are yet to be exposed to high end tourism in the more advanced countries of South East Asia where only tourists of a certain category can afford the pleasure of visiting.

The much touted cleanest village of Asia - Mawlynnong in Meghalaya now looks faded and jaded and in need of repair. Perhaps it is time for such destinations to take a break and be given time to rejuvenate and repackage themselves. Other destination promoters should learn lessons from the Mawlynnong experience. While all tourist destinations are community owned it is imperative for the State of Meghalaya to come up with a more robust guideline for tourism promotion based on ecological factors. As of today most destinations are overdone and not environmentally sustainable. A pragmatic tourism policy is a critical need in the region and states if they are to continue to market themselves without losing out in the long run.

TO THE EDITOR

Counter to a false argument

Editor,
Apropos Rupesh Nath's letter titled "Bengal - where infiltrators rule the roost"(ST Jan 1, 2020), my question is whether there is any Indian state where sectarian strife hasn't taken place or is not taking place. Now is it a matter of sanity or civility to make a sweeping generalisation of a particular state as "rogue"! Certain self-appointed Bengal and Bengali "lovers" are extremely perturbed on the state of affairs of the state and "plight" of the "natives" as if all Muslims including the Bengali-speaking Muslims are necessarily "infiltrators"! So they may try to portray any stray communal disturbance as the "general picture" of Bengal, but such systematic character assassination and Goebbel's policy of manufacturing "truth" by

relentlessly parroting utter falsehood will not alter the reality in the ground ie impeccable brotherhood among Bengalis irrespective of their Hindu or Muslim credentials which is nothing but sheer accident of destiny. And this is precisely the reason why Bengalis unitedly participate in festivals ranging from Durga Puja to Muharram. Often we hear how any prosperous Muslim trader is donating huge amounts to help the poor Hindu neighbours organise Durga Puja or offering his land for setting up a Durga temple! In a Murshidabad village, it is a tradition of more than 300 years old where Muslims show the light to the departing Durga on Bijoya Dashami when the idols are taken out for immersion procession after dusk! Hindus preparing Taazia for Muharram procession also happens to be a typical Bengali tradition in various Bengal villages! And the significance of this illumina-

ting secular legacy of Bangaliana is too divine to be appreciated by the communal brigade working all-out to malign Bengal and Bengalis.

Let's assume that Bengal is a land of "infiltrators" and Mamata Banerjee-TMC are zealously protesting against NRC-CAA to "protect their vote bank"! Then may I ask why the entire country has burst out in protest including BJP-ruled states with almost all non-BJP Chief ministers vehemently declaring that they would not implement NRC-CAA! So is the rest of India also the "land of infiltrators" and all non-BJP parties are acting as sponsors of those "infiltrators"! Is only BJP the epitome of "nationalism"! Despite clinging on few states of North-East along with only Haryana-Uttarakhand-Uttar Pradesh-Gujarat-Karnataka and losing power in majority of the states and rejected by others with a BJP-mukth India looming large on the hori-

zon, the audacity of the party and its blind supporters sees no end!

And I want to ask one question to these "guardians of Hindus" shedding crocodile tears for "native" Bengali Hindus! Why are they keeping mum when Assamese are protesting against NRC-CAA so as to prevent granting of citizenship to Bengali Hindus originally from East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh! Where have all norms of "Hindu brotherhood" gone! Vanished in thin air! It proves that all "concern" for "native" Bengali Hindus of Bengal originate from the clever tactics of generating Islamophobia in Bengal to smoothen the political road for BJP to conquer the state! However the Bengal baiters may remain assured that as long as Bengalis continue to idolise the secular spirit of Rabindranath Tagore-Kazi Nazrul Islam, the promoters of rabid parochial communal concept of "Hindi Hindu

Hindustan" will continue to get consistently defeated by the legacy of Bangaliana.

Lastly it is very tragic to witness how religious orthodoxy has simply robbed minimum self-respect of a section of Bengalis to such a fatal extent that they are not hesitating to bat for racist individuals who dare to character assassinate the whole Bengali community as "corrosive in nature"! Yours etc., Kajal Chatterjee, Via email

ILP demand: pros and cons

Editor,
The demand for the Inner Line Permit is becoming shriller after the "historic" resolution passed by the state assembly recently to press upon the Centre to implement this law. However I suggest that a public debate between those for

after six years, at the last moment. As New Delhi cited China angle, some of us supported India not joining RCEP. But what defies our comprehension is New Delhi's inability to sign any trade deal with any country.

It has not signed a trade pact even with a closest friend like Israel. New Delhi has been negotiating endlessly a Free Trade Agreement with European Union since 2007; it has failed to initiate any trade deal with the US. Now that Brexit is a done deal, has New Delhi broached a Trade Pact with Britain? Japan looks favourably at India; their leadership has sounded that Japan will not sign RCEP if India is not in it. With such strong support, New Delhi failed to tap Japanese goodwill.

What was more important? A summit meeting with Japanese premier which would have resulted in greater investment and trade opportunity or creating chaos by shoddily formulating and presenting the CAA, NRC and NPR etc.? Obviously, Modi government misplaced its priorities. A robust foreign policy based on trade and investment would bring jobs and incomes to our country, which was neglected, and a needless controversy was created by CAA, NRC etc.

To be fair, there have been three inflexion points in our recent foreign policy. One was the nuclear test of 1998, the second, India-US nuclear pact of 2008 and the Abrogation of Article 370 on August 5 last year. The first two went well in India's favour adding extra-profile to the nation, but the last one, on Kashmir is yet to see its logical end. The Kashmir issue vis-a-vis Pakistan has been backed by Modi government with infusion of huge dose of nationalism into India's body politics. It has worked well so far. But nationalism alone by itself with its emotional contents will not help any country forever.

To conclude, on the record of last year, New Delhi did well on putting its stamp as a decisive power to reckon with, especially on India-Pacific area. It presided over the upgraded Quad last year and openly engaged with other Indian Ocean powers – France and Indonesia. The lapses consisted of dealing decisively with China and not drawing closer to US on trade, and making trade its key tool in foreign policy. Hopefully, it does so this year. ---INFA (The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

and against the ILP calling for viewpoints from the local population is the need of the hour. For quite a long time the ILP has been the bone of contention with a certain section with the justification that the "outsiders" have already overwhelmed the state or shall overwhelm it. This is true to a certain extent but this can be controlled when we ourselves take up various types of employment that do not give the "outsider" an opportunity. Tourism and hospitality is one such sector that has benefitted many directly and indirectly, but with the coming of the ILP it would lead to degeneration of self employment, low investment opportunities and aggravate the overall employment scenario. Therefore the protagonists of ILP should be rational in their approach and look ahead lest we regret.

Yours etc
Dominic S. Wankhar, Via email

Ethics in higher education
Much needed reforms

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

New guidelines for imparting values and ethics in higher education, prepared by the University Grants Commission, have been released by the Human Resource Development Ministry a few days ago along with another initiative to promote professional ethics in publishing labeled as publication ethics. The guidelines have come at a time when university campuses are increasingly being used for political battles and students are dragged into extremist propaganda necessitating a scrutiny of their involvement. However, value-based education, intended to promote modesty and harmony, has a longer history and is not an overnight idea to be linked with the present campus unrest getting rooted in some sensitive places. It is part of much needed educational reform.

Student community is a youth group comprising hundreds of groups in various places. It is rather easy to collect and organise its members under a common purpose or programme. It has all the characteristics of a youth group – active and energetic possessing ability and inclination to participate in social activities and quick to respond to calls for united action. Like the general youth population, student group is also undergoing changes under the influence of democratic institutions, political parties and social media.

Students today are not passive recipients of classroom lessons, but active participants in teacher-student interaction. They want a say in all that concerns education. More than that, with voting age at 18 years, every student entering college needs political learning which in practice is not divorced from action. Therefore, value-based ethical education now framed should prepare students to lead a value-based democratic life. It is intimately concerned with the mode of relating to other people and the disposition to follow certain principles in this relation.

UGC guidelines include five documents dealing with evaluation reforms, eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses, human values and professional ethics, faculty induction, and academic research integrity. The main object is to evolve such a system of higher education that will equip the country's next generation with vital skills, knowledge, and ethics for leading a rewarding life. There can be no controversy over such admirable qualities which are necessary for human resource development, but still we require special efforts to mobilise the enthusiasm of the entire academic community and general public in support of the scheme so as to make it a success.

Value-based education is not a novel concept. It has been discussed as part of education policy several times. More than 30 years back, Guidelines for Human Rights and Values in Education were provided by the UGC in 1985. A blueprint for promotion of human rights teaching and research at all levels of education was also prepared by the Commission. It had two components – one on Human Rights and Duties Education aimed at developing interaction between social and educational institutions, sensitising students so that norms and values would be realised and encouraging student research; and the other on creating awareness, convictions, and commitment to undertake academic and other activities preparatory to teaching, research and extension programmes in values and culture.

Ethics deals with what is good and bad. It is concerned with moral duty and obligation and is part of national culture. It requires moral judgement of what is right and wrong. Judgement is not always part of nature and instincts, but has to be imbibed and cultivated. Hence, the need for teaching.

The present guidelines that have been evolved to discuss and streamline the process to infuse the culture of human values and ethics in higher education underlines a call to students to observe modesty in their over-all appearance and behaviour, maintain good health and refrain from any kind of intoxicants, maintain harmony among students belonging to different socio-economic status, community, caste, religion, or region.

Usage of the word “modesty” is likely to raise a question over its definition. With State governments keen on lowering the minimum age for buying alcohol and people ready to fight for their right to drink, shunning intoxicants may pose problem. The other four guidelines are also intended to qualitatively improve the educational system and procedures so as to enhance their values. Evaluation reforms will be directed to more meaningful and effective assessment linked to “learning outcomes”. Eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses will encourage policies and practices to enhance the environmental quality of the campuses and adopt sustainable and green methods. Faculty induction will be done with the object of motivating the faculty to adopt learner-centred approaches, and Information and Technology Technique, and new pedagogic approaches to learning teaching, assessment tools, etc.

There is also a proposal to set up a Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (UGC-CARE) to continuously monitor and identify quality journals to help promote academic integrity and ethical publishing. The UGC has also approved a 2-credit course in ethics in research under the title “Research and Publication Ethics.” A 30-hour course is made mandatory for all Ph.D. students in pre-registration period.

Students and teachers are governed by the same ethical principles and standards. Academic dishonesty cannot be allowed in either. Respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern for others are considered prime constituents of model ethics, which if inculcated in higher education, can effectively curb violence and indiscipline in educational campuses.

India has around 37.4 million students in higher education. Increasing enrolment is no longer our one-point goal, for we need a workforce with necessary knowledge and skills, ability to further their knowledge, and more than that, with conviction in and habit to adhere to certain human and social values. Needless to mention social values include legal and constitutional values adopted in our society. We have to specifically include values in our education since the system that has evolved has concentrated in imparting information and skills and enlarging enrolment and retention of students.

It is said that the Scandinavian countries -- Norway and Sweden -- paid special attention to student values and this resulted in decreasing crime and corruption in the society. They are now considered safest and hospitable places in the world. In Japan, school students are taught to listen to others with different opinion, and to be fair, and to respect their country and learn about foreign cultures. ---INFA

“A man with a so-called character is often a simple piece of mechanism; he has often only one point of view for the extremely complicated relationships of life.”

--- Sir James Matthew Barrie

The Shillong Times

Vol.No: LXII No.143 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JANUARY 4, 2020

A Combined Military Chief

THE Indian military will, for the first time, have a new head in the form of the Chief of Defence Staff. The honour to occupy this post for the first time fell on General Bipin Rawat, who simultaneously handed over the baton as the chief of army staff to General Manoj Mukund Naravane. The new post created for the military bears special significance as the General would report directly to the Prime Minister even as the overall command rests with the President. India hesitated for many long years and opted against having a central command for the three wings of the military, in view of the ugly situations in neighbouring Pakistan and also Bangladesh. Pakistan’s process of democracy was frequently interrupted in the past by military take-over of the nation’s governance and even of grim scenarios of the army putting elected leaders on the gallows. Bangladesh had similar grim experiences too. A unified command for the military will, on the positive side, better coordinate matters relating to military affairs. At the same time, any major improvement in the military set-up is possible only with the input of political will. For quite a few years, the political leadership was found wanting in demonstrating an adequate interest in military affairs. The result was that the performance of the military suffered on various counts. For instance, Indian soldiers with outdated guns faced Pakistani soldiers along the Line of Control carrying with them sophisticated fire power. Military acquisitions dragged during the UPA period itself due to perceived indecisiveness of the political leadership.

India’s military strength at the turn of the century matched that of China’s. Today, China boasts of five times the military muscle of India. China made this possible also because of its fast-paced economic progress which brought in money to the exchequer in huge doses. For India, the political and legal hassles involving purchase of defence equipments as was witnessed during the Bofors guns acquisition and recently in respect of the Rafale jets, added to the problems of such acquisitions. Having a central command for the military, as promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address to the nation in August last, should help. At the same time, matters like speeding up of the acquisition process vis-à-vis hi-tech military equipments is also a major requirement of the times. The Indian way, at political and bureaucratic levels, is to put a spoke in where none is necessary. National interests are supreme and urgency is of the essence when it comes to the defence of the country’s sovereignty.

TO THE EDITOR

Lesson from infiltrators of West Bengal

Editor,

Apropos the various letters I read in The Shillong Times on the rising concerns regarding infiltrators in West Bengal, I would also like to share the experiences shared by my hostel-mates at college. They hail from Baduria and Asansol in West Bengal and belong to the Bengali community. According to them, infiltration and communal violence has become a part of West Bengal’s political culture and is increasing exponentially. If it continues this way then it would be beyond the control of the Bengal government to maintain peace and harmony in the state. I personally do sympathize with these hostel friends whose relatives’ shops in Bashirhat were set ablaze by a particular community and no action was ever initiated against the perpetrators by the administration. As a student, I clearly noticed their constant worries over their parents back home. At any point of time the people from the majority community are likely to be attacked by

the minority. This is the continuous fear they live with.

Regarding Kajal Chatterjee’s response to Salil Gewali’s letter titled, ‘Dangerous agenda and propaganda’ (ST Dec 28, 2019) wherein Gewali had showcased the real problem of foreign infiltration and how it has affected the social and cultural structure of our nation which is completely true, the fact is that incidents of communal violence are on the rise. The violent incidents of Murshidabad, Uluberia, Malda, Dhulagarh, Baduria, Howrah and Asansol and many more cannot be ignored at all. When we make a deeper analysis of each riot, we find its roots in massive inflow of infiltrators which was facilitated by the TMC government. Are the original people of West Bengal intolerant? No, instead, taking advantage of the non-aggressive nature of the natives, the infiltrators are trying to impose their dominance in the state. The State Government’s silence over these extremely sensitive issues is a serious concern for the entire nation. As rightly pointed by Gewali, all states in the Northeast should take a lesson from West Bengal. It

is very important for each state to be extra alert about the issue of infiltrators since we share extensive borders with Bangladesh.

Yours etc.,
Hemanta Upadhaya,
Shillong-2

CAA and protests in Northeast India

Editor,

The continued massive democratic protests that turned violent in some pockets over the most entangled and controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) now Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 across India speak against the arrogant stand of National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led government at the centre on the citizenship issue. The passage of this bill in both houses of the Parliament thereby making it an act is against the sanctity of the Constitution of India as it threatens the secular content enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution. Political scientists say that government has turned into a majoritarian tyranny. The act that grants citizenship on the basis of religion is discriminatory and biased

which is against the secular fabric of the country.

The people of Northeast India have been in deep anguish and shock over this Act since it was introduced as a Bill in 2016. The implementation of this Act is now in progress despite opposition. So the possibility of rolling it back is certainly not going to happen in the near future. There have been serious apprehensions that language, culture, identity, demographic profile and economic occupations would be adversely affected which would endanger the very existence of the entire indigenous people and hence the democratic protests against it is due to these perceived fears of existential crisis. The states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland which come under the inner line permit (ILP) regime would be excluded from the purview of the CAA. Also, it has been stated that areas administered under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura would be excluded while applying CAA. There have been massive protests against this new Act with the demand to either to roll

it back or exclude entire Northeast India while implementing it. Manipur has been granted ILP while protesting against the CAA. The divide and rule policy has weakened the united stand against the Act.

The massive democratic protests have been going on in Assam, which a section of politicians say is emotionally motivated or inclined. Jatiya nayaks (local or community leaders) sought people’s mandate during assembly election of 2016 where BJP-AGP-BPF combined defeated the Congress and formed the government in Assam. These jatiya nayaks promised the jati, mati, bheti (community, land and foundation) of the khillongia (indigenous) people of Assam. We even got to hear a melodious song ‘sobore ananda Sarbananda’ (Sarbananda - pleasure and welfare for all) as present chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal led the electioneering process that time. Today we see complete opposite of what had been promised.

Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) - an ally of the present BJP government in Assam couldn’t do anything but has done a meaningless drama. This party got multiple scope to serve the people of Assam even in the

past too. Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) - another ally of the same government has been adamant or thinks this Act is largely immaterial and hence remained opportunist as the party’s supremo often says so himself. Again, none of the BJP’s MLAs and MPs are today standing with the public - their electorate. Since government is turning a deaf ear, the political scenario might be changing in days to come including the possibility of floating a new regional political party targeting 2021 and 2024 elections. However, to appease the public the state government has already announced a few welfare measures including creation of the autonomous councils targeting different groups which would definitely weaken the united protests against CAA. Hence the moot question is: how many of us would remember the current ‘anti-incumbency syndrome’ up to the next elections?

Yours etc.
Gendra Galla Narzinary,
Barpeta, Assam

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Supreme Court failed in its constitutional duty in 2019

Battle for saving Indian soul has come to the streets

By Amritananda Chakravorty

publication of final NRC on 31st August, 2019, leaving 19 lakh persons out, but provided no guidance as to how the excluded persons would be tried by the Foreigner Tribunals in Assam. More significantly, the Assam BJP has rejected the NRC in Assam, ostensibly citing many irregularities, but actually being extremely unhappy that out of 19 lakh persons, around 12-13 lakh persons belong to the Hindu community.

On 5th August, 2019, when the Central Government unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Constitution, which granted special status to the State of Jammu & Kashmir, and imposed an unprecedented lockdown of the entire State, with complete shutdown on internet communications, curfew throughout, and detaining thousands of citizens, including students, political leaders, lawyers and activists under the Public Safety Act. When several petitions were filed in the Supreme Court just challenging the restrictions on communications, including the media, the Apex Court took almost 60 days for the arguments to begin properly. No urgency that is required in cases of threats to life and liberty was shown by the Court, and the Government was given months to file their affidavit. In individual cases of political prisoners, the Supreme Court allowed one or two politicians to meet the former, but with a caveat that they would not talk about their visit to Kashmir to the media, either in Kashmir or outside. The sealed cover jurisprudence continued, with the Courts asking the Petitioners to give a report of their visit to Kashmir in ‘sealed covers’! And on 27th November, 2019, the Court reserved its judgment on the petitions challenging communication restrictions, but no judgment given till date. Kashmir continues to remain under almost total lockdown for the last five months, with only some landline phones working, SMS, and mobile internet and broadband still shut, and Section 144 imposed in many parts of Jammu & Kashmir. Thus,

the Supreme Court is no longer the sentinel on the que vive of fundamental rights in India, especially if it pertains to issues not palatable to the Executive.

Lastly, on the issue of the horrific police violence on Jamia and AMU students by Delhi Police and UP police respectively on 15th December, 2019 night, the Supreme Court first refused to see the difference between students protesting peacefully, and the police perpetrating gross violence, including lathi-charge, using tear gas, and even firing bullets at students inside the University campus, i.e., in the library, canteen, and mosque. Chief Justice S.A. Bobde’s almost insensitive remarks that “rioting first had to stop” or “public property cannot be destroyed”, made it seem that the Court was blaming the students for the violence, whereas enough documentary evidence showed the police to be engaging in violence and destroying public property, whether in Jamia, AMU or in other districts of Uttar Pradesh.

On 17th December, 2019, when the Court was actually considering the petitions seeking an independent judicial enquiry into the police brutality allegations in Jamia and AMU, the Court washed its hands off and asked the Petitioners to approach the individual High Courts. In the face of grave allegations that unarmed students were shot at in the university library, the Supreme Court of India, one of the most powerful Constitutional Courts in the world, shockingly chose to remain silent. Actually, not so shocking anymore. The events of the last two years of judiciary’s actions have shown that judiciary has fully abdicated its role as guarantor of the fundamental rights of Indian people, especially the Supreme Court.

What the Court’s refusal to initiate an enquiry into Jamia and AMU violence did was beyond imagination. It finally broke the backs of the Indian people, especially Indian

Muslim community, who anyway was protesting against the CAA-NRC (and now even National Population Register has been added), and that of the hitherto silent mainstream Indians, including students (not just from JNU), professionals, and of course the larger civil society, who realised that this was a fight to the finish. The Modi-Shah regime has gone for the broke, i.e., to bring in an overtly discriminatory law against Muslims, and overturning the secular nature of our citizenship structure, and the Courts are no longer our allies in this struggle.

The seeds of ‘committed judiciary’ sown in the last 6 years are now fructifying fully, with the Judiciary either being a passive spectator or even being an enabler in some cases of the present fascist regime. Accordingly, the common people of India have taken on the task of protecting and preserving the Constitution, with most marches starting with collective readings of the preamble, and/or the fundamental rights of equality, non-discrimination and freedom. Finally, the Constitution is being owned, accepted, and truly felt by the Indian people, since it is they who have to protect it now. For the women of Shaheen Bagh, a non-descript working class locality in South Delhi, where hundreds of women have been protesting for more than 18 days on the road 24/7 in one of the coldest winters of Delhi in last 100 years, the ‘samvidhan’ is as much about them and their aspirations for themselves, and their children’s future, as about saving the country. Their mantra ‘agar samvidhan bachega, tabhi desh bachega’ is simple, and yet so powerful, which unfortunately the present Supreme Court has refused to understand.

So while the ‘break up between the judiciary, and Indian people is almost complete, it is the start of one of the most beautiful relationships between the Indian Constitution, and We the People of India. (IPA Service)

(The writer is a Delhi-based lawyer)

Movement against CAA & NRC evokes huge response

By Kushal Jeena

The campaign against citizen amendment act and proposed national register of citizens that started unrest among students in few big cities has now taken a shape of nationwide movement in which people belonging to all caste, religion and creed.

It has now spread over to small towns where large numbers of people particularly women could be spotted participating on continuous sit in The government on the other hand looks confused over the issue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and some of his colleague clarify that the government has no such plan in the near future whereas some top leaders of his party and ministers in the government still insist on an early implementation of CAA and NRC.

“It is no longer a movement confined to the students of JNU, Jamia Millia University and others. Now common people are participating in it irrespective of their political and religion affiliations. You can find groups of Muslim women sitting on dharna outside a small colony in Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, Lucknow etc.” said Rajeev Sharma, a political analyst.

There is still the pending issue of what to do with those whose presence in India is described as illegal. The government of the day instead of working towards finding an amicable solution to this problem is indulging in trying to give it a communal turn. There is no justification in government’s move to deny justice to those who sought the protection of India.

The move that recently took a violent turn has now returned to satyagraha model. The violence broke out in the national capital following protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act; hundreds of students took to the streets demanding a probe into the usage of teargas and police entering the campuses without permission from the varsity authorities.

An uneasy calm prevailed in Assam, the epicentre of the violence following improvement in the situation but peaceful protests were held. Violent protests erupted near Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and at the Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh, while West Bengal plunged deeper into chaos during the stir over the new citizenship law with incidents of arson and loot reported from the state and the northeast, acts which Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged were being instigated by the “Congress and its friends”.

The people protesting in North-eastern states claim to be against all ‘foreigners’ who have settled in the region and, seek the deportation of all those non-citizens who entered India after 1971. They certainly don’t want all Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Parsis who settled in India prior to 2015 to be automatically given Indian citizenship and become permanent residents in their states. There are people who are of the that view that the CAA is discriminatory and inherently anti-Muslim. They argue that this is aimed at giving religious dimension to citizenship that goes against both the Constitution and their ‘idea of India.’ They accused NDA government of creating a Hindu variant of Pakistan. The people Assam and Tripura have witnessed a massive demographic change since Independence caused by the influx of Bengali-speaking people from Bangladesh. Some of the immigrants were undeniably had fled religious persecution but a large part also comprised Muslim settlers who were drawn by other considerations. The cumulative effect of this immigration has resulted in Assamese-speakers being reduced to a minority in Assam and the social

character of Tripura being altered significantly.

It seems that CAA has at least given recognition to the predicament of the Hindus and Buddhists who fled persecution. These people should have been classified as refugees and not viewed as illegal migrants. They were deprived of their social identity and viewed as an invisible community.

If you look at the sequence behind the sudden spurt in the agitation against CAA and NRC across the country you would find few major factors behind the spread of the movement. One is the high level of polarization in the society as people are hardly found debating core issues. People including their friends and relatives are found to be debating merits and demerits of emotive issues that have nothing to do with the livelihood of common man.

The issues relating to development, socio-economy, price rise and unemployment have taken a back seat as the prime job of the government of day has become to keep people engaged in emotive and religious issues. A dangerous tendency that has come up in the recent past is those who find merit in government’s move to engage people on non-serious issues are called “nationalist” and those who are averse to the government’s move and try to insist that government start working to bring a failing economy back on track are dubbed as ‘anti national’.

The opposition to the contentious CAA and NRC has rocked the entire nation. This opposition is not confined to a particular class or religion, even though the violence in Jamia and Aligarh may have led to intensification of protests. The common people, particularly the poor and the Muslims, stand to be affected the worst by this act. After demonetisation, the people are afraid that they will again be forced to stand in queues.

The CAA and NRC have evoked much stronger reactions than the decision on revoking Article 370 or the Supreme Court verdict on the Ram temple-Babri Masjid dispute. The two legislations have hit much wider segments of society. The country is debating on whether the basis of citizenship should be religion. In the north east it has been looked at from the insider-outsider angle. There BJP faces challenges from both its allies and among segments from within the party.

The seriousness of the government could be judged over a contentious issue that has brought the country to a boil, from the fact that when Parliament was debating the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the Prime Minister was not present. It was left to the Home Minister to defend the stand of the government in both Houses. The equating of Partition with religion cannot be called a tactical error. The debate heightened tensions and caused the unrest. The involvement of the youth in the agitation got heightened after the developments in Jamia Millia University and a subsequent police action led to a reaction.

It is not necessary that the protest that was witnessed on the streets is instigated or sponsored by the opposition parties because those who are opposed to the Congress and the Left parties have been part of the agitation, especially in the north east and in key state-funded research institutions. It would be underestimating the outreach and intensity of the movement by calling it as one backed and instigated by opposition parties. It would amount to misjudging the strength of the segments of the society that are currently agitated over the government’s move.

A mad man’s empire in Karnataka

Hasta Shilpa village is Vijaynath Shenoy’s years of hard work

By Anirban Paul & Indranil Sarkar

In today’s times of modernisation, when traditional institutions are being jeopardised due to factors, including urbanisation, strong western influence and technology, pastoral livelihoods and joint family systems have been on the receiving end of victimisation. In such times, the passion of one man led to the development of a hand-built empire structured solely around accumulating and instating the traditional symbols of historical societies.

Located in Karnataka’s student town of Manipal, the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village was conceptualised almost 45 years ago. Vijaynath Shenoy, a regular Syndicate Bank employee of the town then, began collecting remains of magnificent old structures which were ancestral and left uninhabited.

Most of these ancient homes were located in the countryside and had started collapsing due to their archaic conditions. Therefore, they were either demolished for firewood or sold to various small-time industries. A common man in nature with not much financial capability, Shenoy could not do much initially to prevent these damages, which he believed were blows to an important heritage of the past.

“Architecture is one of the most visible symbols of our culture. Dance and music may be powerful, but are not tangible the way buildings and constructions are. These homes are way more than what they appear; they represent the conceptualization of our spirits, the skills of our very own native craftsmen and also a proof of our ancient, ingenious and indigenous technology. They work as a connecting link for our cultural growth and heritage. But both the connection and the heritage were breaking and disappearing in front of my own eyes, and sooner, there would have been hardly anything left for us to embrace as our roots. I had no other option, but to step in to save this from dying.” Shenoy elucidated.



In 1974, Shenoy started by acquiring some pillars and doors from certain sites with the limited money he had. In other cases, he even pleaded the owners to donate certain items to him instead

of selling them off to the scrap dealers. Eventually, he managed to recover some extraordinary artefacts from unused attics, junkyards and debris of shattered homes. He brought all of these structures together and re-used them to build a home for himself, which took five years to complete. He named it Hasta Shilpa (Creation by Hand).

According to Shenoy, “This is not a museum of traditional craft. It is the recreation of composite architectural tradition, in its true glory.” He added that the house was built in a way to adhere to Vaastu Shastra, a traditional Hindu system of architecture that combines principles of physics with metaphysics in order to bring in peace and harmony within the house. “Because of the nature of the home in terms of art and architecture, it soon ended up achieving acclaims. Intellectuals, art appreciators, commoners and students started visiting his home to simply have a look at his creation and, in his words “experienced the aura of traditional India of yesteryears,” he said.

In 1991, Shenoy declared Hasta Shilpa as a Public Charitable Trust following which he moved into a new simple house along with his family due to privacy issues arising out of excessive visitors. Hasta Shilpa was the home to some priceless objects, but Shenoy said he never considered selling it. “I was never the owner of that house. I was just a mere curator.”

During our conversation, Shenoy went back to a time to recollect a painful memory of how in 1983 he witnessed a beautiful ancestral home in Malnad (in Karnataka) being taken down into pieces by its owner. Being extremely perturbed by this situation, he begged and pleaded the owner to not trash the remnants. But this request received a heated reply. “You have no right to tear this house down,” Shenoy retorted then. “It doesn’t belong to you alone; it belongs to all of us.”

The owner got so furious at Shenoy’s response that he had

ratives by rebuilding the dying-homes and restoring the architecture in a site, which would be open for the world to visit.

But for a regular banker, to rebuild fragments of ancient societies was a herculean task. Dismantling dying homes, transporting them and reconstructing them back was quite a financial challenge too. Despite that, Shenoy did not give up. He approached Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and was successful in receiving a Rs 40lakh. Along with it, he also received a six-acre plot from the Government of Karnataka, which was enough to set the ball rolling.

Following that period, with years of hard work and a lot of restoration efforts, he was successful in setting up what he desired and thus, the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village was born.

For an average visitor, the extent of history and tradition that

nal furniture and kitchen utilities. To capture the overall image of the magnificence of antiquity that the site holds, the Heritage Village is a land that beholds history and culture at a glance.

For years the place was not open to public until recently. Till then Shenoy let enthusiasts, architecture students, journalists, artists and students visit the place. “It is a place of education and enthusiasts who are eager to learn will understand the true purpose of this place. They are more than welcome,” Shenoy said, adding that he never wants the place to be a mere tourist attraction but a place where people have a deeper sense of involvement, witnessing splendid creations of the past.

Vijaynath Shenoy passed away on March 9, 2017. Heritage Village is indeed a tribute to the desire of a man who was mad enough to dream, but equally determined to succeed. Generations



‘Cong hasn’t introspected... no one is concerned’

Not many bankers choose politics as a post-retirement engagement. But for **Beryl Sangma**, it was a natural course. Sangma, whose father Karnesh R Marak was the first Member of Parliament from Garo Hills, says he grew up “in that environment”. But before being a politician, he is a successful banker.

Sangma is the first Garo to become the chief general manager of the Reserve Bank of India. Born and brought up in Tura, Sangma left Garo Hills in 1974 to join St Anthony’s College in Shillong. Later, he went to Delhi University. During his two-year stint with the Christian Students’ Ministry for North East, “I learned about the numerous tribes and got interested in tribal culture”. So the Botany student readily switched to Social Anthropology.

The 61-year-old retired banker says his getting into RBI has a long story. “A friend came and asked me and another friend to sit for the RBI exam. I was reluctant as I knew I would not get through,” he recalls. But Sangma did get through the examination and interview. In fact, he was the highest scorer.

Reminiscing about his father, Sangma, a Don Bosco Tura alumnus, says since Marak was a former military person, there were strict rules in the house “and the discipline helped me in my life, studies and career”.

“My father was honest and straightforward. He was an avid reader, a good writer and poet and translated Macbeth in Garo. He was also instrumental in laying down the Garo customary laws,” he says.

The seasoned banker and greenhorn politician is easy with conversation. He is hospitable and always wears a pleasant smile on his face. Politics makes him sit up but when it comes to talking about banking and his various roles in RBI, CBI and even Interpol, his countenance changes and his eyes shine.

Sangma joined the Congress before the Assembly elections and he says his decision was greatly based on Mukul Sangma’s development-oriented approach. Though a new entrant in the party, Beryl is quite vocal about how it needs to be reorganised. His involvement with various central government offices, including the Central Bureau of Investigation, gives him an edge over any contemporary politician. But he is down-to-earth and patient.

In an interview with **Nabamita Mitra** at his residence in Tura, Sangma talks about his banking profession, politics and future. Excerpts:

You were the first Garo to become the RBI chief general manager in the northeastern circle? What were the challenges here?

I was the banking ombudsman for the NE circle and Uttar Pradesh. Financial awareness in the North East is very poor. One would never give complaints in writing. Tripura was active though. So I would conduct financial awareness programmes, coin melas. For coin melas, we would transport bags of coins to the district. I did a study on loan waiver programmes in Meghalaya, especially in Ri Bhoi’s Bhoirymbong. I found that wealthy people got loans and the poor were left out. Implementation was defective. There were no



TALKING POINT

BERYL SANGMA

follow-ups (after loan payment) and political influence was high. Also, the subsidy culture in NE has to go.

How is financial inclusivity in the North East?

It was poor. For instance, in Ukhrul, there was only one bank between 1972 and 2005 catering to 7,000 customers. We would send money by helicopter. But financial inclusivity has improved in this region.

You were also in CBI and Interpol. Please share your experience.

I was with the CBI’s economic offences and money laundering section and traveled across the country. I handled some of the high profile cases and one such was the Ketan Parekh case (Parekh was a Mumbai-based stock broker and was convicted for stock market manipulation between 1998 and 2001). During that time, I would not stay in one place for two days and had to constantly shift. The stint with CBI and Interpol was adventurous but I enjoyed every responsibility that I took up.

You were with IIBM too. What were the changes under you?

My focus was cyber crime at IIBM, Guwahati. The institute came to be known across the country because we did some unique programmes.

So from finance to politics, how did it happen?

Since my father was in politics, I grew up in that environment. I always wanted to help people. During my college days in Shillong, I was involved with student politics. We (Robert Kharshing and I) formed a political party called MDP (Meghalaya Democratic Party) and we were getting big... But I was forced to leave Shillong.

What do you think about the safe-fraction surge and the policies of the current government?

You see, if you put bamboos on fire, the flames will go up very fast but will also come down fast. BJP’s surge is like that. GST (Goods and Services Tax), CAB (Citizenship Amendment Bill), demonisation are all wrong pol-

icies. Now people are disappointed. There is a hidden agenda and there is intolerance everywhere. However, there is no doubt about the dynamism in Modi’s leadership.

You joined the Congress that is struggling in almost every state. How do you think it can turn around?

When I joined the Congress, the condition was not that bad. I joined the party because of Mukul Sangma who is development-oriented and (his approach is) irrespective of party affiliation. Under his tenure so many districts were formed and the administration came close to the people. Secondly, it became possible for people to place their grievances immediately.

I was surprised (after the Assembly elections) that the Congress lost its seats in Garo Hills. I was also surprised that Lapang (veteran Congress leader DD Lapang) quit the party (Lapang joined NPP a few months before the state elections in 2018).

As far as turnaround is concerned, the Congress has not introspected. We have not discussed (the weaknesses in the party). And no one is concerned. We need organisational changes. My son and I went to rural areas for campaigning (before the Assembly elections). There is need for reorganisation (in those areas). I intend to discuss this issue (with the high command). At the national level too, we need changes, if not drastic but in strategic places.

What about electoral politics?

I have been getting requests (from supporters) to join the fray. Let us see, it is God’s will and will of the people.

‘Writers have a big role’

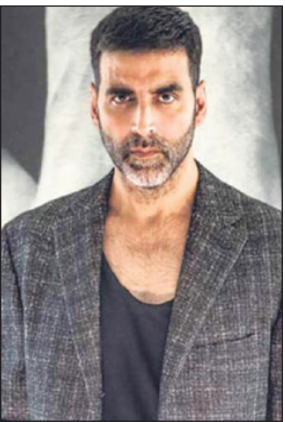
After Housefull 4, Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar is back in the genre of comedy with Good Newwz pairing with actress Kareena Kapoor Khan. The film has earned some good reviews. IBNS-TWF tracks the actor on the film and more.

What made you to do this film?
I just heard the script for exactly three minutes... I immediately said yes. I really liked the script. I liked the idea behind the film and it could be so funny. The film is based on real incidents.

What is good news to you?
I search for good news in bad news as well. I am a very positive kind of a person. So whatever I get in life, I will make something good out of it.

What has been the role of writers in shaping up your career?
They have a very big role. I think writers are the most important people. Even I feel they are even more important than directors. Actors will have no use if they don't get good writers and scripts. They are the most important part of a film.

You have done a music



video recently and that too for the first time in your career. Why did it take so long and will the audience see you in music videos again?
Actually I liked the song. I felt like doing and I just went to do it. I have done around 700 songs in about 140 films so far in my career. I didn't do the music video just to add one more to the list but because I felt like doing it.

As the discussions are going on about pay-parity, do you make sure that your female co-stars get equal remuneration?
I am doing films with Dharma (Dharma Productions) a lot as well as other corporates. The production houses finalise everything and I am very glad that the female co-actors are equally paid.



“I am a very positive kind of a person,” says the actor (above); and a poster of the film. Google Images

Lunar clock controls life under sea

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



The silver yellow full moon lights up the sky and makes me instantly happy. We have forgotten how the moon can change the landscape because we have so many artificial lights. But, as the moon spins round the planet, it alters the Earth's ecosystems, transforming the lives, food, shelters and reproduction cycles of hundreds of species.

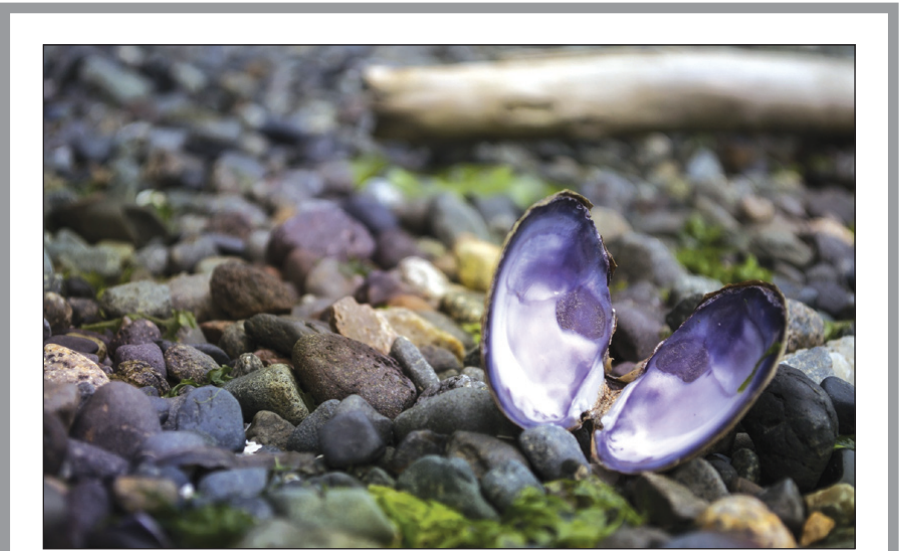
Tides are the result of the gravitational pull of the moon. When the moon is full, or new, it is directly in line with Earth and the sun, exerting a strong pull on the ocean and causing stronger tides. When the moon is half-full, it is out of alignment with Earth and the sun, producing weak neap tides. The life cycle of coastal creatures depends on these tides.

From March to August, the sand is carpeted in California with small silvery grunion fish who dig into the sand, mate on top of the holes and release eggs. Ten days later, the eggs hatch and are swept out by the high tide to sea, the entire event choreographed by the moon. Some species of sea turtles wait for the full moon's high tide to ride waves onto shore, and lay their eggs far up on the beach.

The marine annelid worms, *Platynereis dumerilii*, regulate their reproduction cycle according to the phases of the moon with amazing precision. They live in the sea bed. Under the full moon, the sex cells in adult worms mature. Then, exactly 14 days later under the new moon and four hours after sunset, they float to the surface and synchronously release eggs and sperm. After spawning, the worms die and a new generation begins to grow in the seabed.

Many ocean animals have biological clocks finely tuned to the cycles of the moon. Zooplanktons are tiny animals which swim up from below the ocean depths toward the surface every night to feed on algae. They are preyed on by larger animals that hunt by sight so, as soon as it is dawn, zooplankton head back down. This rhythm is dictated by the sun.

But in the Arctic, where the winter sun cannot be seen for months, zooplanktons also have an internal clock that is set to the moon. When the winter moon is full over the Arctic, it stays above the horizon for a handful of days and during this time, zooplanktons dive to take cover from predators. But the moon also rises and sets — and the zooplanktons respond, rising and diving over the course of this cycle.



►Oysters, which open their shells to eat and spawn, also fall under the moon's influence. French researchers monitored how widely oysters opened their shells during new moons, and more closed when the moon was full. They could tell the difference between the first and the third quarters of the moon. (Pic by Pixabay)

►Galapagos marine iguanas, with the most accurate lunar clock, are best at reaching feeding spots first

►Researchers reveal that not only do corals have light-sensitive neurons tuned to the dim blue wavelengths of moonlight, they also have genes which change their activity level in sync with the waxing and waning moon, regulating reproduction

Oysters, which open their shells to eat and spawn, also fall under the moon's influence. French researchers monitored how widely oysters opened their shells during new moons, and more closed when the moon was full. In addition, the oysters could tell the difference between the first quarter moon and the third quarter moon, and were significantly more open (by nearly 20 percent) at the latter.

Speckled sea lice burrow in the sand in the intertidal zone, which is covered by water at high tide, and dry when it is low. They have an internal lunar clock and are more active during the full and new moons, with their stronger currents, and more sedate during the weak neap tide.

Sandhoppers and tiny crustaceans, which live buried in sandy beaches, can

tell the difference between sunlight and moonlight, and so are able to move in the right direction between the sea and the shore regardless of the time of day.

Studies of fiddler crabs have shown that even when kept in the laboratory under constant light and temperature, the animals are still most active at the times that the tide should be out. This internal lunar clock, running in synchrony with the moon helps animals anticipate tide movements — a skill that might give some creatures an edge.

Galapagos marine iguanas, with the most accurate lunar clock, are more likely to survive tough times, presumably because they are best at reaching feeding spots on the beach first.

On a full moon night, each December,

corals around the world, but most spectacularly off the coast of Australia, synchronise a massive release of egg and sperm packed together in round, small, pink buoyant bundles. While environmental factors, like temperature, salinity and food availability, help in triggering the event, researchers have found that levels of moonlight seem to play a major role. If the sky is too cloudy and the moon obscured, the corals will often not spawn. Sometimes they delay until the next full moon.

Researchers reveal that not only do corals have light-sensitive neurons tuned to the dim blue wavelengths of moonlight, they also have genes which change their activity level in sync with the waxing and waning moon, regulating reproduction.

Palolo worms, which live in warm ocean waters worldwide, also release sperm and eggs together in a precisely timed explosion. They live on the seafloor, or in coral, and feed for most of their lives. But for two days in October when the moon is full, their rear bodies turn into sacks of egg or sperm, break off from the rest of the worm and swim toward the surface — and the light of the moon. Exactly one month later, they repeat this feat in even great numbers.

For many animals the moon is essential to migration and navigation.

During certain phases of the moon, Japanese Sesarma crabs collectively scuttle across mountain slopes toward sea-flowing rivers, where they release their eggs and sperm. The annual migrations of Christmas Island crabs, which move in waves of crimson from forest to sea to mate and lay their eggs, also seems to be linked to moonlight's shifting intensity.

For other species, the moon's light is more important as a navigational cue. Migrating chum salmon swim more quickly, and at shallower, depths during a full moon, likely because they are using its light as a lodestar. Albatrosses and streaked shearwaters often fly more frequently, and for longer periods of time under a full moon, perhaps because they can see farther.

Barau's petrel is a seabird that breeds on the island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean. The petrels time their pre- and post-breeding migrations by the length of the day, waiting until it reaches 12.5 hours before setting off. They always arrive at the breeding grounds on the full moon, suggesting that they use the moon to synchronise their migrations.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 5, 2020

Moon trine Jupiter on your solar return chart thus it is going to be a very fruitful year that promises a lot for you. You will find yourself wonderfully uplifted to achieve things that you always dreamed off. Your plans this year will get materialized. And you will be lot more ambitious and energetic. You will be very active professionally and socially too. And will be meeting a lot of learned and influential persons whom you will be able to impress and get your work done. New contacts will be fruitful. New job offers too will come. Those in business will plan a major expansion. Business/work related trips will keep you busy. Your financial condition will keep on improving. Your spouse/partner will support you in a big way. There will be love and bonding in family circle. Your moral will be high and you will look to spending some time of comfort with your family.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This period brings glamour in your life as you make changes in your grooming as well as in your lifestyle. You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and at work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. You maintain a fitness routine and a healthy diet program. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and fitness routine.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The planetary configuration brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. This phase also highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. It's a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones, as intimate moments are most appealing both of you. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when personal and family related decisions are to be taken. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and in your ability to socialize and make connections. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature, speaking, etc., would figure more prominently.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

There will be heightened communication, creativity and authority in your life. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating and learning is your best bet at this time. You spend time with your beloved and enjoy the quality time spent as well as the activities that you do together. You may redecorate your home, the specialty your living room, and add decorations to give a new look to your room. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with family members. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel the part of whole, as this brings new opportunities and bring monetary gains. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which in turn brings harmony at your workplace.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You show strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the doors to new romantic relationships. Your head rules because you have been highly motivated to make more money and improve your financial status. Monetary transactions bring gains in property related issues. This is a favorable time for learning something new, feeling at ease in social situations, taking care of the details of daily life. You are brilliant at dealing effectively with difficult projects at work. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings power, influence and authority. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Personal relationships may be dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. You would maintain balance in the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. Its right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professionals skills as a promotion or up-gradation in work area is likely to present itself. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There is a boost in your confidence as you handle conversations, seminars adroitly and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering; you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. Be careful when expressing feelings and emotions others can misunderstand you. It might be hard for you to work with others

in a harmonious manner, and disputes with co-workers are possible. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work. Obey traffic rules and exercise care while on the road.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

There is a burst of good-luck in the sphere of love and romance. You spend great time and listen to the inner feelings of your loved one. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor is especially strong. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures, or romance during this expressive period. You might enjoy researching speculative ventures now. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You might just find that this is a period when you are at your most gracious-as long as you are truly listening instead of reacting. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You exhibit sensitivity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than many other things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental and emotional with your loved ones. You may be especially focused on pleasing your beloved and may discover new facets to your love life. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You may visit religious places and there are strong chances of pilgrimage. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You build new associations and there are beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

As the week brings more stability in relations and professional life; you have tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new approach to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and are especially fond of family life. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities to upward the business and work opportunities. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. You or your parents may finalize a marriage proposal. Sharing your interests and communication with loved one may be especially appealing to you. You might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and loved ones. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Eat healthy food, yoga and meditation recommended would help to overcome from such problems.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You exhibit wisdom and knowledge in your behavior and cooperation and harmony in personal relationships. People are attracted to you for your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Centering within and witnessing inner truth and outer reflection is the best meditation this week. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Earn by spreading joy

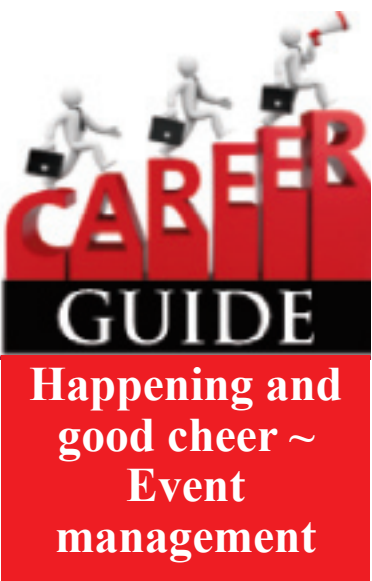


By Ranjan K Baruah

This is the first week of the year and there are parties and happenings all around last weekend and also in this weekend. Year-end means time to relax and say adieu to the year and welcome another year. From the time of Christmas to celebrating the New Year, it's all about fun, relaxing, joy and happiness. Occasions and festivity can also be linked with career and the easy word for us in this regard is event management.

Organising events have become a common area of employability in recent years as many events and celebration takes place during the last week. Events in the last and first weeks of the year include many activities. It is the application of project management to the creation and development of large scale events such as festivals, conferences, ceremonies, formal parties, concerts, or get together. Events management involves studying the brand, identifying the target audience, devising the event concept and coordinating the technical aspects before actually launching the event.

The process of planning and coordinating the event is usually referred to as event planning, which



includes budgeting, scheduling, site selection, acquiring necessary permits, coordinating transportation and parking, arranging for speakers or entertainers, arranging decor, event security, catering, coordinating with third party vendors and emergency plans.

One does not need much formal qualification to be part of these professions. Some of the qualities which are important are good communication skills, self-confidence and must be able to manage people and also work in team,

etc. Having good knowledge over language is another advantage. Students of Mass Communications or public relations can also take up this profession. This is a profession which demands high perfection, hard work and a lot of patience.

Some of the courses related to event management are Certificate Course in Event Management, Diploma in Event Management (DEM), Post Graduate Diploma in Event Management (PGEM), Post Graduate Diploma in Event Management and Public Relations, etc. There are some institutes which offer these kinds of courses.

With experience any one may earn a good amount of money through events and celebrations. As we are in 2020, a year with lots of opportunities, I wish all our readers a great year ahead. When you read this then next time you may think of organizing some events or guide others to do that so that the career option of event management gets popularity in our region. Let the coming year be another happening year and year with good cheer for all of us.

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

“A consistent man believes in destiny, a capricious man in chance.”

--- Benjamin Disraeli

The Shillong Times

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Iran takes a big hit

THE Middle East is put on notice. With President Trump annihilating a key anti-West crusader from Iran in the form of Qassem Suleimani on Friday, the region is set for a major upheaval, its contours as yet only in the realm of imagination. What is clear now is, Iran will not take this lying down. It will hit back at a time, mode(s) and place(s) of its own choosing, and US ally Israel is principally on high alert. American interests in the region as a whole would be in for a major security risk. Suleimani, closest to the supreme leader in Iran and who acted as top commander for a Revolutionary Guard outfit, was killed in a missile attack via drone route from air close to Baghdad airport in Iraq, where he was executing covert plans of the Iranian government. He was allegedly targeting American interests. Suleimani had earned notoriety and awe for his lethal plots in several nations in the region and beyond, including India where, in 2012, an Israeli diplomat was done to death in Delhi.

In Iraq, the US took on the Sunnis by overthrowing and liquidating Saddam Hussein in 2003 with overt and covert help from the Shia leaders there. After Saddam, the US installed a Shia-led dispensation there, which took on the Sunnis. Retaliation came from the Sunnis in forms like the Islamic State terror force (ISIS). Now, the US is targeting the Shias who rule Iran, by acting boldly and decisively against Suleimani. A war cannot be ruled out on the lines of the US-Iraq war of 2003 in which the European allies of the Americans too actively got involved. Indications are that the US is well-prepared this time to take on the Iranians on its own. The air power of the US is unassailable, even as Iran has its lethal arsenal. The US won the Iraq war with liberal use of Patriot missiles from the air and from the sea. There was too little use of the ground force to win the war – and it won the war in a jiffy. There are issues like the liquidation of Suleimani being an act of state terror or extra-judicial killing. Trump had already proven through his first term so far that he’s willing to take risks and go an extra mile. Additionally, the Iran hit has raised his stature back home, exactly when he was being on the defensive over the impeachment move.

TO THE EDITOR

Tolerance as virtue

Editor,

In his letter, "Counter to a false argument" (ST, Jan 2, 2020), Kajal Chatterjee aptly highlighted the secular legacy of Bangaliana. It is indeed a legacy of the idea of harmony of Lalan Fakir, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Nazrul Islam and many great souls of Bengal. Hemanta Upadhaya in his letter, "Lesson from infiltrators of West Bengal" (ST, Jan 3, 2020) agreed that the people of West Bengal are tolerant. But he added that others have been taking advantage of their non-aggressive nature. This raises an important question whether the tolerance or the idea of harmony is at all practical and wise for a country's development and progress.

To find an answer to this question let us focus our attention on two real stories ~ the first about Leo Varadkar and then about "Willkommenskultur" (welcome culture). Ashok Varadkar had moved from India (Maharashtra) to England in the 1960s. He started working in an English hospital as a junior doctor. There he fell in love with Miriam who was also working at that hospital as a student nurse. They married and came to India. After a short stay in India, they went to Ireland with their first child Sofia.

The birth of their second

and third child namely Sonia and Leo happened in Ireland. Like his father, Leo became a doctor. Leo showed his inclination towards politics from an early age, which pleased his father who took pride in calling himself a socialist. Two uncles of Leo were involved in the freedom struggle in India against the British. One of them served a year in jail as a political prisoner during the British Raj. But how far can an immigrant's son go in Ireland? The people of Ireland have indeed accepted him as their Prime Minister a couple of years ago! And he still remains in that coveted position. But is it prudent for a country to have such a liberal attitude? The 2019 Human Development Index shows the answer. Ireland has got the third place in HDI with a high score of 0.942. The life expectancy at birth in Ireland is 82.1 years and the mean years of schooling is 12.5 years.

Hitler taught European countries a bitter lesson of the dangers of pursuing an idea of hatred after labeling the people of a particular religion and communists as bad elements. Hitler left Germany in tatters. Now, Germany has embraced the idea of harmony with zero hatred against Jews, minorities and communists to such an extent that German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the borders in 2015 for Syrian refugees. This event has been

described in political debates as "Willkommenskultur" or welcome culture. It portrayed a perfect picture of humanity. Germans took refugees to meetings with authorities in their own cars, taught them German, acted as nannies to their children, opened up soccer clubs, schools and kindergartens for refugee kids. However, incidents of corrosive racial attacks on refugees took place in Germany but the general public demonstrated against the racial attacks across the country. It was as it were an act of atonement for the past wrongs of the Germans at the time of the Holocaust.

According to UNHCR data, many Syrians moved to Germany and applied for asylum between 2011 and 2017. As a result, Germany's Muslim population rose from 3.3 million in 2010 to 5 million in 2016. But is such an extreme tolerant approach good for a country's progress? Again we can get the answer from the 2019 Human Development Index. By adopting such a liberal attitude, Germany has actually moved from the nadir it had tasted after the Second World War to the fourth place in the HDI with a score of 0.939. Life expectancy at birth now in Germany is 81.2 years and the mean years of schooling is 14.1 years.

Secular ideals have been ridiculed as "sickular" and humanitarian approaches

are branded as utopian whereas machismo and majoritarianism have been regarded as panacea for ages. But history teaches us that exactly the very opposite of this is true. From Holocaust to KKK to Taliban to ISIS to Neo Nazism everywhere the idea of hatred only spelled disaster. On the other hand, the road to tolerance, harmony and fraternity took countries to prosperity.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Death due to negligence

Editor,

It is extremely shocking to learn that 100 infants are reported to have died in Kota, Rajasthan though the reasons for the death are still eluding the authorities concerned. The Centre on Thursday dispatched a high-level team to probe the deaths. Meanwhile, Congress President Sonia Gandhi summoned the party's state in-charge to Delhi over the issue and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot sent a detailed report to her.

With the death toll of infants mounting, the state government constituted an inquiry committee to probe these deaths. The Committee submitted its report to the Government after investigation on December 30. In this report, hospital administration and doctors have been given a

virtual clean chit.

The Investigating Committee found that the death of infants was not due to lack of treatment, but cold. However, the committee noted that oxygen is usually provided in the ICU through cylinders, while oxygen must be delivered through pipelines. Carrying the cylinder back and forth increases the risk of infection. The committee also found that over 70 children were being treated in 53 beds of the ICU in JK Lon Hospital, which could cause infection.

JK Lon Maternal and Child Hospital and New Medical College Hospital in Kota, Rajasthan is a government-run hospital, which claims to have specialty in treating children. Between December 23 and 24, 2019, as many as 10 children died in this hospital. Five of these were newborns, while the rest were less than two years old.

It may be recalled that the series of deaths of children have been going on in this hospital for a month. But when 10 children died at the same time, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan swung into action and gave a statement, which was termed as ‘insensitive’ by social media and the Opposition. It is worth noting that the health service infrastructures at the primary level in Rajasthan is not satisfactory. Besides, people do not go to

hospitals in far-flung areas. Many deaths occur at home. However, these days people have started reaching the hospitals gradually. If such deaths are to be prevented in the state, people have to be provided better services at the ground level, as patients often reach hospitals too late.

The state government admitted that some of the incubators at the hospital used for newborns were not in working condition. Coupled with this, the extreme cold has made it tougher for babies to survive their illness.

A deeper analysis of the problem reveals that people, especially villagers in Rajasthan are illiterate in health matters and they often are hesitant to go to hospital for treatment. They rely on traditional medicine for their primary health and fatalities happen when they even keep trying traditional medicine on the dying. This situation must change and people have to be given awareness about health and sanitation. The basic problem here is also economic. Most villagers don't have the wherewithal for a decent living. The Government must focus its attention on providing basic infrastructure to people like motorable roads, electricity, potable water, good houses. Once the infrastructural facilities start coming to the villages, people will start living more decent lives.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Via email

Amit Shah refuses to recognise Anti-CAA resurgence

Obstinacy of BJP leadership is dividing the nation

By Arun Srivastava

People around the world have been worried at the rising tide of rightwing populism, nationalism and polarisation, but the situation is more alarming in India. The rightist forces are out to eliminate the liberal and democratic forces from the political scenario of the country. India has been witnessing a popular peoples’ resistance to the Narendra Modi’s CAA, NRC and NPR. At least 26 persons 24 in UP alone, have lost their lives. This is for the first time in India a month long peoples’ movement has been going without the participation of political parties.

Uttar Pradesh is the only state where 26 persons have been killed. Even the top cop has been resorting to illogical and stupid arguments to justify killings. The other day he said most of the people were killed in cross firing between the protesters. Strange he tries to argue that while one group was protesting the other was opposing them. Obviously it raises the question if at all what he says is true, then the other group was the creation of the police. Did they resort to violence at his instruction?

For Yogi all protestors are “Islamists” or “urban Naxals” and they deserve to be taught a proper lesson. With the aim to silence the voice of dissent Yogi has directed the administration unleash a reign of terror. His idea of collective punishment is a mechanism to provide it a legal cover. In his rule there is no place for public discourse. Any one daring to speak sane is maligned as anti-national.

An insight into the entire episode would unravel that they have been working on well defined mission and plan. They have been aware of the challenges they would be facing in their pursuit. For them the idea of looking back is pariah.

It is utopian to believe that the Pradhan Sewak of the country, Narendra Modi would take a step backward to assuage the hurt feelings of his countrymen, listen to their wails and help salvage the trust from being a victim to the raging hatred and mistrust. But Modi and his worthy lieutenant Amit Shah nurse the view that any nature of relent at this stage would prove to be detrimental to his class and communal interest. It would jeopardise the interest of the RSS.

With the overwhelming majority he is sure to continue to rule India till 2024. He does not face any threat to his chair. Obviously he could have behaved like a statesman and reversed his decision. But it does not appear to be happening. The month long protest also manifest that he has been losing his charm and charisma. But he is not at all bothered about this. There is no ambiguity that a person like Modi would stake his credibility and image for some small gain. Tactically he can adopt a flexible stand as he does not face the threat of losing power and being unseated. But he won't.

The primary reason for his obstinacy and stubborn attitude is his compulsion to fulfil the instructions of the RSS. Any retreat would not go well with Sangh Parivar. He would not be able to fulfil the wishes of his RSS masters, to convert India into a Hindu Rashtira within the time frame it set up. He is under RSS instruction to accomplish the task of tabling a resolution for conversion of India into Hindu Rashtira before his term expires. In electoral politics no one is invincible.

In this backdrop his launching civil war on its own people is certainly not a big issue. It would be naïve to construe that the Pradhan Sewak is not aware of consequences of their moves. The fact cannot be denied that Shah is primarily responsible for creation of the present crisis and violence the country is engulfed in. Shah is not tired of reiterating that the citizenship would be implemented at any cost.

It is ironic that Modi and Shah have been finding it difficult to defend their actions but they speak lies to justify their actions. Modi-Shah combination has created such a situation where the local and state satraps are vying with each other to identify themselves as the yes-men of the two leaders. The outstanding performer has been the chief minister of UP, the state which has witnessed worst type communalised police action. In his pursuit to appease his masters he is shredding away the established norms and rules.

What we are witnessing today is even worse than Indira's Emergency. During Emergency people were hopeful of sane voices being heard. But it is beyond comprehension under the present ruling dispensation.

It is really pathetic to watch that people are swayed by simple anti-Congress rhetoric of Modi. These people have found a panacea to all the malaise in the accusations of Modi. He has been successful in maligning the Congress to such an extent that Congress is responsible for the present mess.

One feels ashamed when these people do not ask questions such as what happened to demonetisation? Why is the country in such economic slowdown? Why is there loss of jobs notwithstanding Modi's promise to create crores of jobs? Why is there increase in unemployment? Why are the daily wage earners turning unemployed? What is the reason for aggravation for agriculture crisis? Why are the poor and labourers joining the ranks of the homeless? Why is the number of self-employed decreasing? What happened to the New India?

These are the questions which should torment them. But no, they are simply satisfied with his insinuations against Congress and feeding them with the capitalist sense of nationalism. Behind the façade of this nationalism they have been carrying out repression on the people opposing their machinations.

Even after twenty days of the protest, their language and words continue to be the same: Arrogant, intolerant and self-eulogising. Modi has identified the current protest movement as anti-national. People do not have the right to dissent. Any one daring to do so will have to be ready to face state repression.

The obsession of Modi-Shah with citizenship issue has been so acute that India's insult and derision amongst the global fraternity does not matter for Modi. Most of the global countries have turned sceptical of the intentions of the Modi government and even questioned the approach of Modi towards Muslims. Recently the external affairs ministry directed the Indian diplomats abroad to improve the image of the country. The ministry launched an initiative to reach out to foreign countries.

It is indeed a matter of shame for the Government that the people are not ready to take it at its word; they have even told the highest functionaries that their clarification did not carry conviction. What is most unfortunate is the government on its part has not bothered to erase the wrong impressions from the minds of the people. (IPA Service)

“By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, journalism keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community. ”

--- Oscar Wilde

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.146 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020

Home Minister defiant

HOME Minister, Amit Shah has made it clear that the Modi Government will brook no opposition as far as the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 is concerned. As a political party the BJP has shown incredible tenacity in fulfilling its poll promises one by one. The Party believes that if it has been voted to power on the basis of those promises which were widely circulated vide its manifesto then it goes without saying that those must be vigorously pursued. The problem is that the BJP won only 37.36% of the votes totalling 303 seats. The BJP and allies together won 353 seats which is 45% of the 60.37 crore votes that were polled. This means that over 55 % of voters were either split between different political parties that have not formed a united opposition front or they have voted for none of the candidates. This is the travesty of democracy. The Party or alliance partners with the single largest majority get to form the government irrespective of the percentage of votes polled. That Government then implements its political agenda without calling for a national debate. Perhaps a time has come for India’s polity to go for a referendum on a political issue of such far reaching consequences such as the CAA which actually discredits the secular nature of the Indian Constitution by using religion as a criterion for granting Indian citizenship.

The general outcry across the country against the implementation of the CAA followed by the NRC should actually halt the BJP in its tracks, rather than labelling the protestors as anti-nationals, urban naxals and such other pejorative phrases. Although right wing politics seems to have gained ground across the world, such blatant disregard for public opinion and public protests that have now sustained for a month should make any political party step back and reconsider its stance. Instead the BJP led by two of its most voluble top guns seems determined to quash public opinion and voices of dissent. This is exacerbated by the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath whose unabashed commitment towards the Hindutva project is a threat to the diversity of India. He has unleashed a reign of terror to silence the protestors in UP and is using the police force for this malevolent objective.

The present protests are a battle to reclaim India’s soul. The BJP instead has taken it as a challenge to its objective of furthering the cause of Hindutva. It is unfortunate that pro-BJP intellectuals are accusing those against the CAA as being ignorant, brainwashed socialists. Not all the people on the streets today are ideological bigots. Many more are out there because they believe in the sanctity of the Indian Constitution, above all. Political egotism will ultimately be defeated by the very process of democracy. No political party can take the voters for granted for too long.

“What’s the use of coming now? He is already dead. All are dead. The Administration is hopeless, useless,” angrily shouted an anguished parent. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Day after day, month by month anguished wails pierce India’s comatose dark skies. As our netagan continue to glibly take pot shots at each other, parrot trivia and get their knickers in knots. Standing testimony that the aam aadmi translates into a sterile statistic!

Certainly, the death of 107 children and counting at Rajasthan Kota’s JK Lon hospital is heart-wrenching. But it was a calamity waiting to happen. Shockingly, 70% of the radiant warmers are dysfunctional as are 320 of 533 equipments for want of maintenance. Topped by a 13.1 bed nurse ratio against the 4.1 standard and absence of oxygen pipeline in the Special Newborn Care Unit. More horrifying is the ensuing political slugfest between the BJP and Congress with the former demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Gehlot. The Congress rebuttal: BJP destroyed medical facilities from 2014-19, there is no negligence and the death toll in 2019 is the lowest in five years. Sic.

Importantly, given our leaders penchant for short-cuts and quick-fix solutions, what else can one expect, but this ghisa-pitta reaction? They are no wiser nor have learnt any lessons from the painful 2017 Gorakhpur Baba Raghav Das Medical College calamity where 300 infants died due to a shortage of oxygen supply and poor management.

Spotlighting once again our polity’s cavalier churlish attitude and approach to a tragedy. Shrugging it off as an issue which will die its natural death within days. Not for them the need to execute damage control measures, put health dispensers in a wringer and apply balm on heart-broken parents.

Who will bear responsibility? Be accountable? Does anyone really care? Alas, gone are the days when Shastri resigned in 1956 following a train accident. Today, we are captive of double standards and skullduggeries wherein demands for resignations are dismissed by netas as political redundancies.

Paradoxically, Kota underscores India’s appalling state of healthcare system which makes us particularly vulnerable to disease. How can we? India spends just 1.4% of GDP on healthcare

My heartless India

It’s only life, stupid!

By Poonam I Kaushish

which underscores why our healthcare needs have remained underserved specially for the poor leaving them at the mercy of private hospitals, who shun them.

Scandalously, not only Kota but nation-wide hospitals infrastructure continues to be in shambles as medical facilities are ill equipped to handle the number of patients. There are two-three patients on one ICU bed, lack of hy-

Coupled with medical apathy, severe resources crunch, medical staff, inadequate number of doctors functioning in unhygienic conditions, shortage of medical equipments with 70% machines out of order including oxygen resulting in infections are some of the reasons behind this shoddy state of affairs.

Alongside, primary healthcare is in a mess. There is only one primary

“Worse, none is willing to learn the ABC of health and crisis management or finding lasting solutions. India has a shortage of an estimated 600,000 doctors and two million nurses, claims a study conducted by the Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy. Only 58% of those who refer themselves as doctors in cities have a medical degree; in rural areas the proportion is just 19% and a third of ‘doctors’ have only secondary school education.”

giene and creaking, leaking roofs. Rats nibbling on a new born’s ears and stray dogs moving about in gynecological wards no longer make news, as they are common occurrences in Government hospitals in urban and rural areas.

Worse, none is willing to learn the ABC of health and crisis management or finding lasting solutions. India has a shortage of an estimated 600,000 doctors and two million nurses, claims a study conducted by the Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy. Only 58% of those who refer themselves as doctors in cities have a medical degree; in rural areas the proportion is just 19% and a third of ‘doctors’ have only secondary school education.

Further, there is only one allopathic doctor per 10,189 people, only one hospital bed per 2046 persons and one State-run hospital per 90,343 people and one million allopathic doctors for 1.3 billion people of which only 10% work in the public health sector. Three thousand children die of malnutrition every day, 14.9% of our population is undernourished and nearly one million die annually due to scarce healthcare facilities.

healthcare centre with just one doctor for over 51,000 people. When he is away on call all is left to God. There is only 1.1 beds per 1,000 persons compared to the world average of 2.7. Besides, the doctor-patient ratio is less than the World Health Organisation prescribed limit of 1:1000. There is opaqueness in diagnosis, poor quality of services which ensures that people get treated below the WHO standards.

Moreover, a study done by the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership-India Working Group and the Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy found the infections rate of Indian hospitals wards and intensive care units is five times more than in the rest of the world. Of which some diseases are not only difficult but also impossible to treat leading to death. Clearly, highlighting the real filth is more administrative and political.

Additionally, poor care leads to more deaths than insufficient access to healthcare --- 16 lakh Indians died due to poor quality of care in 2016, nearly twice as many as due to non-utilisation of healthcare services (838,000 persons). Is providing care without ensuring the quality of health

services effective? Some 24 lakh Indians die of treatable conditions every year, the worst situation among 136 nations according to a study in The Lancet.

Appallingly, 34 out of 1,000 children die in the mother’s womb, nine lakh children below 5 years before they can read the word hunger and 3,000 kids die of malnutrition every day while 19 crore people are compelled to sleep on empty stomachs.

According to a CAG report last year there was a 24 to 38% shortfall in the availability of medical personnel at primary health and community health centres in 28 States while in 24 there were reports of non-availability of essential drugs. More. Over 700 million rural folks have no access to specialist care as 80% of specialists live in urban areas.

Undeniably, with India’s healthcare in a state of ‘emergency’ the Government needing urgent ‘oxygen’, public and private service providers, medical professionals and patients collectively need to make constructive efforts to end the trust deficit. Our polity needs to have respect for human life and reshape the paradigm of healthcare to achieve the goal of Healthy India.

It needs to put in place efficient administrative and political machinery and provide hygienic sanitary conditions (only half of the country’s garbage is cleared). It is now imperative for India to rethink its strategies and approaches to safeguard public health infrastructure, constitute a public health policy, establish fresh priorities, improve service delivery in public hospitals with people at the centre of social development.

The Government can no longer bury its head in the sand. Ministerial conferences and directives from the Centre to States will not do. People are sick of hearing the same old refrain: “Don’t panic...The Government is doing everything that is necessary...things are improving”. Really, you could have fooled me!

Remember, all crises are surmountable. What is insurmountable is damned casualness. That is the tragedy of our nation. The time is for gone for the Government to play the pied piper with a ki pharak painda hai attitude. Will the future generation be weighed down by our moribund, casual and politicizing leaders albatross round its neck who aver with a shocking casualness – “Let them bleed, its only life, stupid!” ---- INFA

National economy should take precedence over politics

India needs to focus on manufacturing

By Nantoo Banerjee

On December 7, 2015, eighteen months the Narendra Modi government first came to power, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu’s global consumer and industrial products industry group posted a report highlighting its expectation about India capturing the fifth position as the world’s most competitive manufacturing nation in 2020. The United States was expected to hold the top spot this year pushing the current leader China into the second position. How wrong was Deloitte! In five years time, India’s economic growth rate has nearly reached its bottom in two decades. Manufacturing fell into the negative growth zone. The Modi government’s much touted ‘Make in India’ programme was almost a non-starter. There was little systemised investment in infrastructure and job oriented projects to fuel the demand for manufactured products. Instead, a series of wrong and half-hearted decisions such as sudden demonetisation of large currencies and underprepared experiment with the consumption levy called the goods and services tax (GST), massive expenditure on politically-oriented social programmes and growing imports of manufactured junkies adversely affected India’s economic growth prospects.

While the country is yet to recover from the shock of banknote demonetisation on November 8, 2016, the GST, launched at midnight of July 1, 2017, has failed to stop tax leakage or evasion. GST is imposed at every step in the production process, but is meant to be refunded to all parties in various stages of production other than the final consumer and as a destination based tax, it is collected from point of consumption and not point of origin like previous taxes. Shockingly, the national government lately admitted that it doesn’t have sufficient resources to compensate states for revenue shortfall on account of GST rollout. The centre has written to states citing paucity of revenue for GST compensation in time. In December, GST compensation for August and September were overdue. Punjab and Kerala expressed concern over delay in GST compensation payment.

Incidentally, demonetisation led to the withdrawal of 86 percent of all money in circulation at once, disrupting the supply chain, negatively impacting the Indian economy. It may also have something to do with the the continued economic slowdown since 2017. Last year, the government admitted for the first time that demonetisation drastically affected farmers. The Reserve Bank too said almost all money in circulation made its way back to banks signalling that the tedious demonetisation exercise did not have much impact on black money. Demonetisation adversely affected small and medium scale business entities, and brought real estate business to almost a grinding halt. In consequence, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) suffered a lot. The money flow was badly disrupted.

Obviously, Deloitte can’t be faulted for not being able to guess such surprises as banknote demonetisation followed by introduction of a half-baked GST system in India. The international consultancy firm did an excellent home work to construct the global report on manufacturing, including India’s. The prediction was based

on an in-depth analysis of survey responses from more than 500 chief executive officers and senior leaders at manufacturing companies around the world. The country index rankings were included in a preview of findings released at the Council’s annual National Competitiveness Forum in December, 2015. Deloitte said: “the 2016 Global Manufacturing Competitiveness Index provides important insights on global innovation trends, and highlights the challenges faced by businesses in maintaining or improving their manufacturing competitiveness. India is, however, well positioned to take advantage of its younger population segment to make it to one of the world’s most manufacturing competitive nation by 2020.”

The Deloitte report said in addition to the US and China retaining the top two spots, Germany and Japan will remain the third and fourth positions respectively. India, holding 11th position on the list when the Narendra Modi government came to power, was expected to jump up to as high as the fifth place. South Korea, Canada and Singapore are expected to drop one spot each due to India’s rise, while Taiwan and the UK are each expected to drop two spots. The surprise downturn of India’s economy, especially in the last two years, may be responsible for the growth contraction in the manufacturing sector. The poor performance of the country’s automobile manufacturing industry, universally regarded as an engine of growth, is certainly a reason. Unfortunately, this may have more to do with the failure of the government’s financial policy and tax system than anything else. In fact, on the positive side, India’s manufacturing industry today meets most of the growth conditions such as cost competitiveness, workers’ productivity, supplier network, legal system, innovative policy and local market.

Yet, the country’s manufacturing sector witnessed negative growth in the second quarter of the current financial year. An important economic backbone, the manufacturing sector grew at minus one percent in the July-September quarter. The growth rate in the manufacturing sector had slumped to 0.6 percent in the first quarter of 2019-20 from 3.1 in the fourth quarter of the last financial year. Its decline comes at a time when the Centre’s flagship ‘Make in India’ programme aims to increase the manufacturing sector’s share from 17 percent to 25 percent by 2022. India’s GDP growth rate for the second quarter of this financial year fell to 4.5 percent, the lowest since the January-March quarter of 2013.

Sadly, ever since the Modi government returned to power with a massive mandate for the second term, it seems to be more concerned about speedily implementing its political manifesto instead of paying enough attention to the economic agenda. In the process, the ruling party is getting increasingly involved in political dogfights with the opposition at the cost of economic progress. The coming annual budget presentation for 2020-21 provides the best opportunity for the government to spell out its economic policy initiatives to take full advantage of the opportunities to grow the manufacturing sector and economy. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Violence on campus

Editor,
It is very unfortunate that as many as 30 students and teachers were injured during a clash which broke out between members of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Students’ Union and the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on the university campus on Sunday evening. Terror was unleashed in JNU on Sunday evening when masked goons entered the campus beat up students and teachers and vandalized the campus. Female students, in a bid to save themselves from the sledgehammer and rod wielding mob, locked themselves inside hostel rooms. The rampage continued for three hours.

A public meeting was organized by the JNU Teachers’ Association on the issue of violence on campus wherein students and professors were attacked. But as the meeting was underway, some alleged attackers of about 50-odd goons wearing masks and armed with rods and hammers barged into the hos-

tels around 6.30 pm and unleashed a reign of terror. Police had to enter the campus late in the night at the request of the JNU administration to track down the miscreants and also conducted a flag march.

It is worth noting that the first round of skirmishes and clashes happened by noon on Sunday between students- from the Left and the Right wing. However, the violence escalated and went out of control after 5 pm when ‘outsiders’ entered the campus and attacked students and faculty members inside the campus. JNU Students Union president Aishe Ghosh, who was injured in the violence, said she was attacked by ‘goons wearing masks.’ Later, Ms. Ghosh bleeding profusely was taken to the AIIMS Trauma Centre.

It may be recalled that JNU students who had been agitating over the hike in hostel fees ransacked the server room and intimidated the technical staff. The University has been seeing a stand off between students and administration over the hike in hostel fees for over 70 days. Late on Sunday night, groups of JNU students protested outside the Delhi police headquarters as Union Home Minister Amit

Shah spoke to police commissioner Amulya Patnaik to take stock of the situation.

When it is read between lines of the unpleasant incident, it can be understood that the masked goons with hammer and rods in their hands barged into the campus to deliberately attack all those who had been protesting. University students are those who are in their prime of youth and they have the natural tendency to protest against all kinds of injustice coming their way through peaceful means, which must be encouraged. To suppress peaceful protests by resorting to violence is indeed condemnable. Goons wearing masks wanted to hide themselves from being caught and on a simple analysis it can be inferred that this drama of violence in the campus is pre-planned. Enough is enough. The people of this country want to have a violence-free JNU campus where good ambience for learning must be ensured by all.

Your etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

On capital punishment

Editor,
Capital punishment is meant to act as a deterrent to stop crimes like murder, kidnapping, rape, sedition from happening. It is supposed to act as a tool to scare people from committing such horrible crimes. But how far is capital punishment successful? In a survey it was held that about 371 people were awarded the death penalty in the last 13 years but only 4 people have been executed till date. Yes it is the right of these people to be given to right to file for appeal and maybe seek for forgiveness or pardon from the President of the country but the question is what should be the time limit for it?

The offenders in the Nirbhaya case were apprehended in 2012, their sentence was upheld 5 years later by the Supreme Court in 2017 but till now the execution of their sentence has not been carried out. What’s shocking is that an appeal has been filed by one of the offenders of this case execute the death sentence against him and his petition will be heard on January 24, 2020 thereby giving him more

time to live. The court proceedings for the appeal will go on for a longer period of time, thus giving the offenders in this case extended period of life that they definitely don’t deserve.

Delay in carrying out death penalty or any other form of punishment defeats the purpose of justice and makes the quote, “Justice delayed is justice denied,” to be very true. Will it bring peace to the society when a person who committed a crime is given death sentence and executed after maybe 10 or 20 years? The society may feel a little happy but it still doesn’t scare people; it doesn’t put a fear inside those who nurture similar thoughts like the criminals who committed the horrible crimes. Hence a death penalty should be executed as fast as possible. This not only ensures that justice is served but also saves the tax payers’ money that is wasted every year on undeserving criminals. Let’s not make Justice an abstract but a practice.

Yours etc.,
Reakor Shisha Kharkrang
Upper Shillong,

Who’s behind the JNU violence?

Editor,
This refers to the front page report, “Masked miscreants attack students, teachers” (ST, Jan 6, 2020). There is no wonder that those who can kill Gandhi can also kill our students for peacefully protesting against fee hike. It is a shame that students are not safe even within their campuses! Is this law and order? Who was the mastermind to unleash a reign of terror within Indian campuses? Why did the police who were deployed on the campus do nothing to stop allegedly some 200 stick wielding goons to brutally injure two dozen students and teachers? The nation wants to know who remote controlled this barbaric act of terrorism and violence against the students and teachers of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Like 30th January 1948, 5th January 2020 will be remembered as another dark day in Indian history.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

“Confidence in another person's virtue is no light evidence of your own.”
--- Jack Nicklaus

The Shillong Times

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Arrogance of power

HOME Minister James Sangma’s (mis)behaviour with media persons on Monday was shameful to say the least. After making them wait out, outside his room, the Home Minister then leaves his room and was unwilling to speak to media persons, A lot is happening in Meghalaya today on the law and order front that are a cause for concern. Targeted attacks on non-tribal residents beginning on New Year’s eve and the inability of the police to book the criminals and charge-sheet them has given them a sense of invincibility. The victims and their relatives are left to lick their wounds and are resigned to the fact that they will never get justice. But for how long can such indifference on the part of the law enforcers be tolerated?

Since the anti-CAA protests started in mid December, the Home Minister has not spoken a word. There is a perception in the public mind that he does not have a handle on things, more so after the Tura MP, Agatha Sangma voted for the CAA and surprised all with her action. To cover up the mess and do a damage control, the ILP Resolution was hurriedly passed in the Assembly without as much as a public consultation about the far reaching consequences of such action. Apart from the anti-CAA protests there has been a regular violation of the Supreme Court order banning the mining and transportation of coal from Meghalaya. The mined coal was supposed to be auctioned by Coal India Limited (CIL). This has not happened. Coal is being mined and transported in complete violation of Supreme Court orders. In this a section of the bureaucracy and police are complicit and it would be the height of irony if the Home Minister is not in the know of this. The media had recently reported how the transportation of coal from North Garo Hills is carrying on after drivers pay up Rs 26,000 to the collectors at the check gates. Where is this money going? Who is supervising this collection? Several organisations of Garo Hills have also alleged that the process of coal auctioning is highly irregular and is intended to facilitate illegal transportation of coal. The media has a primary duty to ferret out information which concerns loss to the public exchequer. The Home Minister must have an answer as to why these irregularities have been allowed under his watch. Is this why he is evading the media? The MDA Govt has a lot to answer for to the public and it is becoming evident that this Government is a shade, nay several shades worse than its predecessor.

TO THE EDITOR

Virtues of humanity must be upheld

Editor,
A bold thinker of modern times -- François Voltaire once said - “As long as people believe in absurdities, they will continue to commit atrocities”. Most celebrated for his deep and frank thoughts, Voltaire had always stood up against the forces that wanted to rule the common people by brute forces of dogmatism, flawed ideology and so on. This quote has truly inspired me from an early age. It has often alerted me to “watch” each step I take and weigh each word I write. In order to guard myself against possible wrong influences, from here I have also learned to selectively pick up the literature so that I would not be misinformed and form wrong opinions! So, I strongly feel that one should never hesitate to chuck away books/articles and ignore many famous leaders/writers if they are likely to “mislead” us!
Yes, this all is, in fact, with reference to my letter “Dangerous agenda and propaganda” (ST Dec 27, 2019) which I had written to caution the trusting people from possible “atrocities” and misinformation. But that letter triggered a series

of criticisms from certain people from Kolkata while appreciation from others. I welcome them all. Dissension is the beauty of democracy, so no hard feeling at all! Of course, somewhere in my letter, I did not miss to sum up the ground reality as --- “I always pray to the Almighty that one may not lose his/her power of “judgment” to differentiate between who is “less or more” dangerous and who is dangerously vicious!” This I really meant it; more so when the din of hypocrisy is at fever pitch. Alas, these days people are misled by certain type of forces that veritably carry biased opinions. What is worse is that they often go to any extent to “whitewash” the crimes/ misdeeds committed by people/leaders who are dear to them. Even the vile and sinful acts committed by their beloved are swept under the carpet. Therefore, one of the best achievements in life would be when we sincerely start to figure out correctly whom to “trust” and follow, and whom to ignore and “unfollow”. One should not run after the elements whose job is to misinform the people with their lopsided arguments and gloss over the evil. However, one should not keep back and remain inactive when such “misinformation” is hurting the very heart of humanity. Humanity should

not be sacrificed at the altar of bigotry and violence. Kudos to Sujit De for his recent letter – “Tolerance as virtue” (ST, Jan 6, 2020). So, let the virtuous truths and “virtues of humanity” be upheld at any cost.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

Iran must exercise restraint

Editor,
Esmail Ghaani, the new Iranian General appointed in place of the slain Soleimani has created ripples of fear across the world especially the US as he vowed on Sunday to take revenge as Tehran abandoned the remaining limits of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers in response to the slaying. Soleimani and Ghaani are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee and they have almost the same set of goals-to attack and eliminate America. With his taking over the reins of the Iranian army, Ghaani is going to convert the Middle East into a far more dangerous and unstable place.

What agonizes peace-lovers is the fact that North Korea, another rogue nation, is in cahoots with Iran and clandestinely sharing technical know-

how on the production of nuclear weapons. It is worth noting that only recently North Korea has called Trump’s bluff as the US warned N Korea of a possible retaliation if it was going ahead with conducting further nuclear tests. Further, North Korea has also declared that it would go ahead with developing more dangerous weapons. In this context, it may be apt to note that North Korea has given a hint of a mysterious weapon that it has been working on. So, North Korea and Iran are supposed to be working together to wreak havoc on the US in the immediate future.

A highly perplexing statement by Ghaani has just set many tongues wagging. He said, “God the Almighty has promised to get his revenge, and God is the main avenger. Certainly actions will be taken. We promise to walk down martyr Soleimani’s path as firmly as before with help of God, and in return for his martyrdom we aim to get rid of America from the region.”

Ghaani’s perception of God is highly misleading and baffling. What is God? Who is He? God is the creator of everything and there is nothing created that he has not created. God is God for all and if God is for all, He cannot be a partisan God. The US military killed Soleimani because he

hatched a plan to destroy the US by bombing it. Besides, it was Soleimani who masterminded the killing of 250 American soldiers in Iraq. So, the US revenged Iran for killing of its 250 soldiers. Then how can God revenge Soleimani’s killing on the US? Hence, Iran’s case is like sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. If God is for all, how can God help Iran take revenge on the US? So, these people see the Almighty God through their narrow minds and interpret their own ideas with the backing of God. The people of Iran must therefore exercise restraint and never allow things to go out of their hands, for, we cannot suffer another holocaust of a third world war.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Shillong Traffic - A Massive Problem

Editor,
It’s evident that there is a problem when you take one hour to commute from Laitumkhrach to Police Bazar in a vehicle while you can cover the same distance in 15-20 minutes walking. My father tells me that in the late 80s and early 90s, vehicles were in fact a rare sight in Shillong and that the transformation has been ridiculous. It’s safe to say

Governments have no powers to refuse implementation of a Central law after several non-BJP governments in power in West Bengal, Kerala, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh announced their opposition to the CAA.

Such declarations of defiance are contrary to Article 256 of the Constitution under which “the executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament...” The Union Government’s executive power extends also to giving such directions to a State as may appear to it to be necessary for the purpose.

West Bengal Chief Minister has already declared that, “as long as we are here, nobody can impose anything on you,” which sounds like a strong regional political party’s challenge to a rival at the Centre and rejection of central authority in the federal system, but may only be a posture adopted for winning votes in the coming Assembly election. Work on the NPR is stopped in this State and also in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. Telangana Chief Minister wants to unite parties opposed to the NRC. Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have also announced that they will not implement CAA. The Chief Minister of MP is reported to have said that “so long as Congress is running the government in Madhya Pradesh, no anti-Constitution, anti-people, and anti-religion law will be implemented here”.

But, the Constitution has not authorised State Governments to decide on the legality and constitutionality of any Central law, but has provided for the right to approach courts. Thus, the politics of Union-State relations, hitherto centred mostly around defining State powers, is now extended to defy Central authority ignoring in the process that under the Indian Constitution, States are created by the Union and not the other way.--- INFA

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

that there are more vehicles than people in the city. This has contributed to an unbelievably high level of traffic in Shillong which is unbearable. In the afternoon, as soon as schools get over, the roads get clogged. Laitumkhrach, Beat House, Fire Brigade and Dhankehi are the ones worst affected by this and this problem has been happening for a little too long now. I took a bus from Police Bazar to Laitumkhrach a couple of days back and I was stranded in Malki for a frustrating 45 minutes.

I would also like to congratulate the 'Shillong Traffic Police' for going about their business in a dedicated manner, without losing patience. When the schools reopen, some schemes to aid car pooling can be devised. It is also well known that taxi drivers easily get a professional license and this adds to the ever growing problem. Such things should be taken care of to ensure that this issue is addressed at the earliest. I request the government to take up initiatives to solve or at least reduce this menace.

Yours etc.,
Pratham K Sharma
Shillong- 3

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

Urgent need to save our knowledge institutions from majoritarianism
JNU incident signals throttling of free mind in academic arena

By Ashish Goel

What happened in JNU on the 5th is now a matter to public record with several eyewitness accounts surfacing in the public domain. The questions that must now be asked are (a) who will take responsibility for the calculated dereliction of duty of the police (b) has there been a failure of administration and governance by the Vice-Chancellor (c) who pays the price for this violence.

Over the last 30 days, students at three Indian Universities – Jamia Milia Islamia (JMI), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and now Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) – were brutally attacked and assaulted inside campuses. In JMI, the police attacked and lathi-charged students who were peacefully protesting against a patently unconstitutional Citizenship Amendment Act. Even those studying inside the library were not spared. In AMU, security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades to silence student voices. Thousands of unarmed students were arbitrarily and even-handedly booked by the police under several sections of the Indian Penal Code.

And, only on January 5, over 50 masked goons belonging to the Akhil

the control of Amit Shah?

The violence on University campuses in the national capital tells a disturbing tale: that the ruling dispensation is leaving no stone unturned to silence the knowledge institutions of our constitutional democracy (including universities and centres of higher learning).

Detaining unarmed students for criticizing government laws and policies, filing charges of sedition for mere sloganeering, and the recent expulsion and deportation of Jakob Lindenthal, an exchange student at IIT Madras, for participating in a student-led protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act, are nothing but few glaring examples.

Knowledge institutions have an important role to play and are a vital component of our constitutional, representative democracy. India is not run by monarchs or autocrats who can claim a monopoly over knowledge and facts and use them to their own advantages. Knowledge and dissemination of it must be free.

Recent episodes of severe violence on students suggest that the government at the centre does not want students and professors to have opinions

The violence on University campuses in the national capital tells a disturbing tale: that the ruling dispensation is leaving no stone unturned to silence the knowledge institutions of our constitutional democracy (including universities and centres of higher learning).

Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), students’ wing affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party, unleashed terror and murderous attacks on JNU students and professors.

According to media reports, the goons barged inside the JNU campus, uninterruptedly, armed with sticks, iron rods, acid, sledgehammers and stones. According to RTI activist Anjali Bharadwaj, who was present outside JNU last night, the goons even attacked a team of doctors and nurses who reached JNU to give first aid to injured students and professors, but the police did not intervene despite being present in large numbers.

“Several people pleaded with the police to come and help, but no police persons came to the spot,” Bharadwaj recounts. “The police opened the pedestrian side of the JNU main gate and some men, with helmets or faces covered, exited the campus.”

That the Delhi police just stood as mute spectator while hundreds of goons had a free run, while all street lights leading up to the gate were purposefully switched off, and that not a single arrest has been made so far indicate a clear connivance of the ABVP, JNU administration, Delhi Police and the Home Ministry in the violence.

Home Minister Amit Shah’s December 26 call to “teach a lesson” to the tukde-tukde gang is already in the public domain. What do we then make of the silence of the Delhi Police, which comes directly under

on law and policy or to democratically express them in the public space. The kind of pressure and violence that has been unleashed on our knowledge institutions under the Modi government strike at the very root of our democratic foundations and have a chilling effect on academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression at other Indian universities as well.

In a participatory democracy, one of the primary roles of universities and academics is to show the mirror to the powers that be, disseminate information, spread knowledge and awareness and educate and empower other members of the public.

Any effort by a majoritarian government to intimidate and silence our knowledge institutions should have ideally been responded to with an iron fist by the guardians of our Constitution. However, as we saw in the case of Jamia violence when students turned to the Supreme Court (and the Delhi High Court) with prayers, both courts acted with callousness and failed to protect the students’ constitutional and fundamental rights.

At a time when public trust in the judiciary is gasping for air, the violence on JNU students is a fresh opportunity for the Supreme Court to rise to the occasion and make reparations to some of the damages that have been inflicted on Indian students in the past few weeks. The court must immediately take to task the Delhi Police Commissioner, the Home Ministry and the Vice-Chancellor of JNU and send an important and strong signal that it still has the spine to stand up to the government and police excesses. (IPA Service)

“ *Fascism is nothing but capitalist reaction.* ”
--- Leon Trotsky

The Shillong Times

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Delhi to decide

DELHI is set for assembly polls. With the election commission announcing the schedule, the battle lines are clearly drawn. Two principal contenders for power in Delhi are the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, and the BJP that has traditionally been well-entrenched in the national capital. The Congress party, faced with a serious leadership crisis at the national level and its support ebbing, comes as the third electoral force; but with a footnote -- that a Maharashtra-like situation of a post-poll tie up cannot be ruled out between the Congress and the AAP.

An alliance of the AAP and the Congress is unlikely before the polls, if one minds the fact that the AAP was a creation against the corruption under the Congress-led UPA period. Kejriwal has, on his part, done a job in the past five years. He has reduced corruption in governance. He retains his image of being sincere to the underlings’ cause in the capital – who are electorally a decisive force. At the same time, perceptions are also that if a BJP government ruled Delhi, its civic problems would have been attended to in a better way with liberal central funding. Clearly, all these factors will work to the advantage or disadvantage of rival contenders as the state goes to polls a month hence.

Also, Delhi elections will be seen as a referendum on some of the controversial and hard-edged steps of the Modi-Shah dispensation at the Centre. If the BJP wins this polls, it could be interpreted as a vote in favour of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as also the NRC-NPR exercises set in motion by the government, apart from the Kashmir initiative. While Kejriwal was opposed to the CAA, he did not join the fight against it in a forceful manner. Clearly, he needs both the sides, to win the polls. The Congress too has been openly cautious about challenging the new law.

State assembly polls are fought generally on local issues. Civic issues in Delhi will occupy a central place in this election too, but Delhi being the national capital, it is likely that issues like CAA too will occupy the minds of voters. This gives a new sensation to the Delhi polls. Also, the BJP will have a serious loss of face if it does not win this election, as it has lost as many as five state polls in recent times – Maharashtra and Jharkhand being the latest and Haryana too returning a fractured verdict.

TO THE EDITOR

BTAD, Oboro organisations & inefficient MP

Editor, Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD), which once used to regularly feature in the news for conflict and violence, is an autonomous district under the jurisdiction of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) comprising four districts viz., Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar and Udalguri in Assam. It was created within Assam under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as an outcome of the agreement between the Govt. of India, the Govt. of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLT) on February 10, 2003. This creation despite vehement separate statehood demand brought peace in the troubled periphery which was once called the boiling belt. Following the period of relative peace this region is once again caught in the Boro and Oboro controversy which is politically motivated by narrow and corrosive minded people. Several Oboro organisations such as Oboro Eikyo Mancha, Oboro Suraksha Samiti, BTAD Sena, etc. had mushroomed in Assam post the BTC formation. They raise voices against BTC administration be-

cause they feel that they have been denied their rights and privileges under the 15 year rule of Bodoland People’s Front (BPF)-led autonomous government. There have been serious apprehensions over the official language being used in day to day business and the benefits and privileges that ought to be enjoyed by the Oboro people in BTAD. They feel that Assamese language is at stake in these four districts of Assam because of not using it in Kokrajhar-the administrative headquarters of BTC. We need to ask ourselves that what official language is being used in Dispur and Kokrajhar. Is Assamese language used officially in all written communications in Dispur or Bodo language in Kokrajhar? All of us know that English language is used both in Dispur and Kokrajhar. The fact is that we, the Bodos too fear that Bodo language is not used as an official language even in BTC. In fact, the fear is more evident in entire Assam post the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 scenario under which hitherto religiously persecuted illegal migrants would be granted citizenship that may adversely affect the language, culture, demographic profile, composition of electorate and the economic occupations in Bodoland. These kinds of perceived fear exist almost everywhere.

To raise voices against any government, they need

Indian state showing signs of first stage of fascism

On June 25 last year, the first time Lok Sabha member of Trinamool Congress, Mahua Moitra mesmerised the house in her debut speech indicating how the Indian state under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is showing early signs of fascism. Based on the poster put up in the main lobby of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in the United States, Moitra chose seven signs relevant to the Indian context and explained its significance amidst the continuous disturbances made by the BJP members.

Exactly six months and 14 days after her speech, a look at the state of the nation under the second BJP led regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP President and Home Minister Amit Shah, confirms the signs and this visionary aspect of this young Trinamool MP must have weighed with the Forbes magazine when it decided to include Moitra among the 20 people globally who should be watched in 2020.

2020, the first year of the third decade of the 21st century has started in India with the unprecedented development at the Jawaharlal Nehru University on January 5 night when masked thugs numbering around one hundred beat the students and the faculty members in the hostels and the teacher’s flats while the Delhi Police stood outside without taking any action. The time when the mayhem was continuing, the JNU administration was busy in writing complaints against the students union president and her student colleagues for some developments taking place on January 1 and January 4. On January 7, the FIR was filed by the Delhi police against the students who was attacked by the masked men on Sunday night.

Then on January 7, another significant development took place at Lajpatnagar. The BJP supporters evicted two women lawyers from their respective flats after they showed a banner against the CAA and NRC to the BJP

not be Oboros. Even Assamese people can raise voices and pressurise the autonomous government. The argument that Oboro is a threat to the Assamese identity itself is illogical. Defining, ‘Who is an Assamese’ is already a difficult task due to the desperate attempt by different groups to be recognised as separate from composite Assamese society and asserts their own identity. Ahom, Chutiya, Koch Rajbanshis, Kalita, Nath Jogi, Moran, Muttock, etc. prefer today to be distinct groups who were once the core of Assamese society.

The existence of these Oboro organisations in Assam lack constitutional validity which directly or indirectly intends to breach the communal harmony. Naba Kumar Sarania-militant turned Member of Parliament (MP) from Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat would only benefit from these Oboro organisations because he is successful in polarising Boro and Oboro votes which in fact helped him to win twice as an MP. He is instrumental in pushing in the divisive Boro-Oboro politics in BTC. He believes he is protecting the Assamese identity by Oboro politics. Practically he himself is posing a threat to the Assamese identity. Being an MP, his mandate is to focus on developmental works in his constituency. A public representative cannot divide the electorate on linguistic or reli-

outreach procession in support of CAA led by Amit Shah. This means that nobody has any right to put protest banner in a peaceful manner. The signal is crystal clear to the single women professionals in Delhi that they are not safe if they protest against the ruling BJP’

Coming to the seven signs of early fascism as mentioned by Moitra, the first is the nurturing of narrow, superficial and xenophobic nationalism, the second is complete disregard of human rights and hate crimes. The developments

ing developments. As regards fourth, no speech of Modi-Shah ends without mentioning Pakistan and always mentioning those who are opposed to CAA, NRC and NPR as playing Pakistan’s game.

The fifth sign is the intertwining of religion and Government. It is known that the New India of which the Prime Minister is talking about is about the Hindurashtra as per the BJP’s election agenda. The party and the Government are working in tandem. There is another aspect which the sociologist Dr.

plete contempt for intellectuals. This has been the experience of the independent thinkers and the faculty members of the prime academic institutes in the last few years. This situation is likely to aggravate and the ruling regime is sure to take more measures to see that the intellectuals fall in line with the BJP and the Government thinking.

The seventh, according to Mahua Moitra is the erosion of the independence of the electoral system. This has been in evidence for the last five years. The ruling regime is determined to put faithfuls in key positions of the bureaucracy, judiciary and the constitutional body like Election Commission.

So that way India in the beginning of 2020 shows all, the seven signs mentioned by Mahua Moitra. But there is hope as the anti-CAA movement has spread throughout the country and this has engulfed people of all ages, religion, gender and political parties excepting BJP. There is enormous anger against the economic policies of the Modi regime, The living conditions are becoming increasingly unbearable. On January 8, all India general strike has been held against the anti-people economic policies of the Modi government

This latest upsurge by the civil society, especially students and women has to be channelised in a proper way. The opposition parties, especially the Congress, Left, NCP, Trinamool and DMK have to mobilise themselves on the basis of a programme taking civil society all along. The BJP juggernaut has to be halted in Delhi and Bihar assembly elections. By undermining BLP’s power through peoples mandate in the coming elections, the fight against the fascist tendencies can get stronger. The non-BJP parties still rule over 65 per cent of the country’s population. A visionary opposition can still combat the jingoism of the BJP and retard the process of growing fascist tendencies. 2020 is the crucial year for the opposition to take that plunge. (IPA Service)

ing hundreds. Soleimani’s death in a drone strike on Friday has sparked calls across Iran for revenge against America, drastically raising tensions across West Asia. Earlier, Hossein Salami, the new leader of Iran’s Revolutionary guard vowed to avenge Soleimani’s death as he addressed a crowd of supporters gathered round the coffin in a central square in Kerman. Salami said, “We tell our enemies that we will retaliate but if they take another action we will set ablaze the places that they like and are passionate about.” The crowd in response chanted “Death to Israel.” Israel is a long time regional foe of Iran.

According to a report on Tuesday by the semi-official Tasnim news agency, Iran has worked up 13 sets of plans to revenge Soleimani’s killing. The report quoted Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, as saying that even the weakest among them would be a historic nightmare for the US. However, he declined to elaborate.

Meanwhile, the US Air Force launched a drill with 52 fighter jets in Utah; just days after President Donald Trump threatened to hit 52 sites in Iran. Britain has come out condemning the attack on military bases in Iraq that hosted US-led coalition forces including British personnel. It has urged Iran not to repeat the reckless and dangerous at-

tacks. Surely and slowly, the world will divide on this issue and it will not be good for Iran.

The most appalling thing about Iran right now is that there is a miasma of revenge lingering all across Iran following the killing of Soleimani by the US military. Every Iranian’s mind is injected with the poison of revenge. Religious leaders, high ranking officials, and even the daughter of the slain Soleimani vow revenge on America. The terms they use against America can have a devastating effect on the Iranian populace. This could upset their composure and lead people from being sane to insane. People will become prejudiced like the proverbial saying ‘everything looks yellow to a jaundiced eye.’ Revenge repels rational thought in man and in the revengeful mind there is nothing but revenge, which eventually kills the man who harbours it. So, Iran’s leaders must not be carried away by spite. Instead they should exhort their people to maintain calm and composure. Revenge is not a solution but destruction, and in the destruction nothing constructive is gained. Let us all hope for a change in Iran’s attitude as its role is pivotal in maintaining peace in the Gulf region and by extension in Asia.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanana,
Via email

**Lawyering in a period of judicial collapse
People on the streets are fighting for constitution**

By Amritananda Chakravorty

It is often said that lawyers’ language and doctors’ handwriting are hard to understand. The legalese of lawyers accompanied with legal jargon often sounds alien and too technical for common people, and for long, the Constitution of India remained the instrument mostly for lawyers, and judges to argue about, interpret and to uphold. Besides the time of emergency (1975-1977), when the country in unison had risen in revolt against the suspension of fundamental rights, and in effect, the Constitution, people in India after independence largely had taken the constitutional values for granted, and not deeply engaged with the same.

In this regard, what India is witnessing in the last one month through mass scale protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (‘CAA’) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (‘NRC’) in most parts of the country, is nothing less than a ‘constitutional revolution’ or a ‘second satyagraha’, led by the Muslim community, women from all strata of society, and of course the students. The mass reading of the Preamble of the Constitution in the protests, and

or commission. But these are not ‘normal’ times, and students and activists have less expectation from the Courts than even from the police. Otherwise how can the highest Constitutional Court in India set up a bench of nine judges to deliberate on all temple entry cases, when the country has been ripped apart by these protests, and the horrific backlash by the State agencies? How can one even call itself a Constitutional Court?

In this context, how does a lawyer invested in the democratic and secular nature of the Indian polity work, when the courts have become complicit, and the constitution is under attack? What is the role of a lawyer when the fight to preserve the Constitution has shifted from the Courts to the streets? In a way, it is not a difficult transition, since lawyers have played prominent roles in the social movements for long, whether in labour unions, women’s groups, minority rights, or LGBTQ issues. At the same time, lawyers are often heavily criticised for overly ‘lawyering’ movements, by agitating complex socioeconomic issues in the Courts and stripping them of their radical content and

Nevertheless, the lawyers have long known that law is to aid social movements, and not to substitute them, and if the affected community wants to pursue a non-legal strategy, then the legal ‘itch’ has to be curbed.

the distribution of the Preamble as leaflets is a lawyer’s dream, and a dictator’s nightmare. The image of 40 lawyers reading out the Preamble at the lawns of the Supreme Court was, though deeply reassuring, a devastating reflection as to the state of the country we are in that the Judiciary has to be reminded of the words of our Constitution-makers.

At the same time, if one pauses and starts to think that why are the protests happening on the streets at such a large scale, then one understands that since all institutional checks and balances that were set up, vide the Constitutional mechanism, especially the Judiciary, which is supposed to be the counter-majoritarian institution in a constitutional democracy, have miserably failed, people are left with no option, but to take to the streets. The biggest disappointment in the last 6 years has been the collapse of the judiciary, especially the Supreme Court of India, like a quick sand in the wake of BJP government’s brute majority in Parliament. Presently, public’s trust in the administration of justice is at its lowest point, and it is the Supreme Court that is to be blamed for this current trust deficit.

On 5th January, 2020, a mob of 30-40 alleged Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (‘ABVP’), student wing of BJP, went on a rampage in the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (‘JNU’) and severely beat up students and teachers, including the JNU Student Union President, Aishee Ghosh, a 23 year old woman who was hit with an iron rod on her head, while Delhi Police looked away, even enabled the goons to destroy students hostels, and property, and then let them out by switching off the street lights. In any other situation, the lawyers would have approached either the Delhi High Court, or the Supreme Court, or the courts would have taken suo moto cognisance of the complete mob brutality and police inaction, and made the State accountable for its omission

edge. It is not a friction-less collaboration.

Nevertheless, the lawyers have long known that law is to aid social movements, and not to substitute them, and if the affected community wants to pursue a non-legal strategy, then the legal ‘itch’ has to be curbed. Lawyers then ought to focus on the micro strategies of keeping people out of jail or detention, applying for bail of arrested persons, or to facilitate medical attention for injured protestors. In fact, the anti-CAA/NRC protests have shown the importance of having lawyers on the streets with the protestors, when the police becomes violent or illegal detention or arbitrary arrests happens. The days of rushing to court are over, since the Courts are in no rush to protect the citizens.

The near collapse of the constitutional courts in India has been so quick that the lawyers and jurists are completely taken by surprise, and it seems that one does not know how to function in a different way. But we have to now learn new ways to engage with the court system, similar to how one engages with the police in a fascist regime, knowing fully well that police is one of the main institutions of oppression. The idea is to merely record the dissent, despite no justice in sight. Similarly, each incident of violence and brutality ought to be recorded, complaint filed, and courts approached, from the trial court onwards, to shame them into working, and upholding the constitutional rights.

In fact, the month long protests in India have shown that the Constitution is no longer an abstract legal book for most citizens, but has become of their very own ‘holy’ books like Quran or Bible or ‘Bhagwad Gita’, which ought to be read, understood, preserved and celebrated. After 70 years of India becoming a Republic, and drafting the Constitution, the Constitution of India has finally become a ‘People’s Constitution’. (IPA Service)

“*Actions are the seed of fate deeds grow into destiny.*”
--- R. D. Laing

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JNU’s steady drift

JAWAHARLAL Nehru University, which was shaping up as a prestigious institution in recent decades, has today become the hub of political violence. A confrontation is on between the students and the establishment on issue after issue especially after the BJP-led government held power at the Centre. The confrontation has more to do with ideology and less with academics. A meeting called by the HRD ministry on Monday for discussions with student representatives failed and ended in a fresh confrontation between the students and the Delhi Police, resulting in arrests. The present round of troubles started with a steep hike in fees at JNU which led to student protests. The protests also led to a fight between the pro-BJP ABVP and the well-entrenched Leftist student unions there, and ended up in a major offensive against a section of the students by a masked gang which broke open hostel doors and targeted many after dusk on January 5. The brutal attack left scores of students injured and hospitalized. Allegations are that the police on the campus did little to stop the mayhem and that Home Minister Amit Shah worked from behind the scenes.

The Modi government seems bent on facing the situation squarely, as it did in the past too when students protested against the Rohit Vemula suicide in Hyderabad Central University in 2016 and a similar offensive against the hanging of the 2001 Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru the same year. These had also led to confrontations between the leftist students and pro-BJP lawyers outside a Delhi court. This time, the nocturnal attack at the campus took place after students, as part of their protests against the fee hike, prevented varsity office staff from operating the Central Information System (CIS). As a result a sense of fear has gripped the university campus where a large section of the apolitical academic-oriented students are feeling suffocated. A university campus is a marketplace of ideas and political views. No single ideology should exert control over students’ minds. They should be free to toy around with ideas and ideologies without being trapped in any single one. When a single ideology gets entrenched in any academic institution then confrontations are inevitable since their will be those with a counter ideology that will want to capture space too. In JNU the Left ideology has remained unchallenged for decades. This is now sought to be replaced with Right Wing ideas. The clash of ideologies is inevitable. The CAA was just a trigger. What is unfortunate is that the keepers of law too have become tools of partisan politics. And the students are ultimate sufferers.

TO THE EDITOR

Unfortunate show of command

Editor,
Apropos the letter by TK Nandan, “Iran must exercise restraint” (ST Jan 8, 2020), I am aghast at the use of the word ‘must’ in the caption. Only God uses the word “must” in his commandments in any religion. Christopher Columbus discovered by default the Red Indians leaving them in four centuries to exit from the world map, luckily leaving the Black Indians untouched save for a short spell of British rule, which in few cases helped us a lot. In 1729 Lord William Bentinck abolished Sati, a ritual of the widow throwing herself in her husband’s funeral pyre. Sadly the modern Supreme Court does not seem to have the power to abolish a tradition like Sabaramila. On August 6, 1944, Robert Jopponheimer wept and could never sleep in peace. His hard work of the Little Boy and the Fat Man, mathematics of Right Wing Albert Einstein sold to Robert in 1940s at the height of Hitler’s victories, had killed 2 lakh Japanese while the survivors continued to have genetic disorders until the end of the 20th century. The Jews are experts in trade and warfare. To escape the Mosaic Law, the

rich money-lending Jews left Israel to live on the European Mediterranean Coast. There, they extracted exorbitant interest from the non-Jews. Shakespeare’s, ‘Merchant of Venice’ where Shylock the Jewish money-lender wanted the pound of flesh of Antonio, the borrower when he could not repay his debt, explains this. They are cruel and ruthless and when Germany had to obey the humiliating treaty of Versailles at a time when Hitler was a mere corporal, blinded in one eye in World War I, the Jews rejoiced. Hitler filled with vengeance retaliated to the extent of final liquidation of the Jews. Thus Hitler’s excesses do need a debate, for had there been no right wing in Palestine, peace would have prevailed with the sons of Ishmael never being disturbed. The carpet bombings and chemical warfare in North Vietnam are stark reminders of American brutality. Saddam Hussain was hunted down like a dog on the false pretext of him having nuclear arsenal builds ups, which was a total lie. The International body did nothing. They also left the Kurds and Syrians to the mercy of ISIS and President Erdogan. Poor people became homeless with starvation hitting the children hard and them dying in large numbers. The Americans claimed to have got their man, Osama Bin Laden. But with no medical proof, the alleged body was simply dumped

When column writing turns wearisome

By Patricia Mukhim

This being my first column in 2020, let me begin by wishing all readers a very happy, and, hopefully a prosperous and peaceful year, although peace seems like a distant dream in these tumultuous times. I had skipped writing two Friday columns not because there was nothing to write about. There’s plenty to cogitate on, so much so words tumble over each other. I was on ‘pause’ mode because writing in itself has ceased to become an intellectual catharsis. Who does one write for anyway? Let me be honest. Every writer hopes that his/her writing makes an impact on the readers and wishfully imagines that it will also make those in the business of governance pause to think before they embark on the same old clichéd trajectory that leaves the governed hugely dismayed and frustrated. But that’s purely wishful thinking that writers including this one, indulges in. When a new Government took over in March 2018 we expected the brand new chief minister with a foreign degree to boot, to be different from his predecessor who was booted out because his colleagues said he did not consult them and that he was a one man army. Nowhere else would it have been kosher for two members of the family to hold the two most powerful posts in the government, namely that of the Chief Minister and Home Minister. But those elected did not even have the stamina to object to this concentration of power in one family, thereby undermining the very spirit of parliamentary democracy! What’s worse is that even the public did not object. We haven’t had a single person yet denouncing this tyranny of ambition. And so we now have a Government where the Chief Minister cannot possibly censure his elder brother even if he wished to because it’s all in the family and families consolidate power; they don’t do a course correction. What’s worse is that the elder brother also holds the Power Department and we are now

left nursing our grouse against the two-hour load shedding from 9am-11 am daily at a time when we need to cook food and keep ourselves warm especially when mornings are bitterly cold. I have met several people who feel that the power cut timings are bad. My question to them is whether they have expressed it publicly. If not, why not? As is the practice here, people only murmur but will not take 30 minutes to write a letter to a newspaper to express their anxieties. Yes we are a long suffering people when it comes to bearing up with bad governance. But talk about the Inner Line Permit and everyone is an educated activist who will write ILP in blood. That’s how convoluted the politics of the day is. Hence those in Government prefer that the public squabble over ILP, CAA and what have you, so that their minds are diverted from more contentious issues which are a result of a failure of governance. Why the hell is Meghalaya having to suffer power cuts in the thick of winter? Will the Government answer? Will the Chief Minister and his brother the Power Minister answer? What steps have they taken to sort out the mess with NEEPCo? What is happening to the money collected from the consumers month after month? If there is a problem in the manner in which the Electricity Corporation is run then fix it; don’t give excuses about not being able to service NEEPCo’s debts. Throughout the campaign period in Jan- Feb 2018, there was overwrought bellowing about the monster in the closet – namely the Congress Party - which we had all connived to throw out because of some legitimate reasons but largely because we wanted a change. The NDA Government at the Centre looked attractive; we thought the BJP was kite-flying when it spoke of the Citizenship Amendment Bill; we thought the NDA Government was pro-

development and we felt that at the state level we needed a Party with a link to the BJP. Right? Wrong...Now everything has gone haywire. Before we knew it the MP from Tura voted for the CAA when a few months ago the NPP President was the poster boy for the anti-CAA campaign. Now everything is so muddled up that we don’t actually know whether we are coming or going. No, we may not know where we are headed but those in the Government know exactly what they want for themselves and they have charted out a perfect course on how to reach that goal. It’s we the people who are confused and we have ourselves to blame. Now we have a government but no governance. Pressure groups are scolding the government on a daily basis and telling them to come back to work and to end their vacationing. They are pushing the government to meet the Union Home Minister on the ILP. In fact the pressure groups are actually governing Meghalaya. They have done it since 2018 March and they have got this government where they want it. What the pressure groups don’t talk about and which is what surprises political observers is the complete lawlessness in the mining sector. Coal mining and transportation is banned by no less than the Supreme Court of India but this happily carries on. Anyone who wishes to witness this lawlessness should go to the Umroi bypass up to Jowai and see the thousands of coal bearing trucks being supervised by handpicked men who ensure that money is collected and transit is smooth. We are yet to see such blatant defiance of the law. Why are pressure groups not keen to address this issue? What’s the deal? Isn’t this corruption at the highest levels of government? And is the Home Minister innocent of these goings-on? What about the police? Whose tune are they dancing to and where is their allegiance? To

the ruling party politicians or the Constitution of India and the Indian Police Manual? And who will stem this rot? Some in this government suffer from the malignancy of insatiable greed, perhaps because they know they have only this one chance at running a government! Who’s going to break the speed of greed? And what is weird about this government is that the Home Minister never speaks even in the midst of a crisis when people get beaten up and there is anarchy in the streets. He shuns the media because he really has no answers to the questions put up to him. All politicians think the media is laying an elaborate trap for them when we are only doing our duty of questioning because the Opposition today does not do enough of that. Yes, this is where we have arrived at. There is both political and moral anarchy. Such is the situation today that even the ordinary person on the street knows the character of this government. Sadly the public is not organised to take on corruption. The public is not a pressure group. There is need for a different kind of mobilisation. The rot today has spread to the three district councils too. An MDC from Garo Hills is kidnapped so that he does not become a stumbling block to certain ambitious projects. The KHADC is today hanging in the balance. The JHADC is in a mess too and everything is related to money and power. Nothing else! And we dare believe these institutions will correct the wrongs in our customary governance practices which include our traditional land holding systems among others? It’s time to put the mirror to ourselves and to stop blaming the “other” for the wretched mess we are in. There’s a limit to asserting the moral superiority of victimhood. We are not victims. In fact we victimise others because we don’t want to address our congenital faultlines. If the government of the day has failed us it is because we don’t speak up enough. Silence always means consent! Period!

CAA Imbroglio
Playing vote bank politics?

By Proloy Bagchi

The opposition to the Citizens Amendment Act is understandable. With our secular claims, granting citizenship on the basis of religion appears to be obnoxious and is generally revolting against the spirit of secularism. Whatever might have been the considerations, the law seems to be flawed. To say that it’s what the previous governments didn’t do, following the Nehru-Liaquat Pact more than half a century back, and that it’s the “unfinished business” that this government has brought to an end, does not quite gel with our secular traditions. Surely, there must have been other options available to the government to achieve its objectives but these were not availed of. And the result has been furor and tumult and veritable chaos in the country, with students and civil society leading the protests. Already, a few petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court, quite a few of which are by members of a few Muslim organisations. Whether the law is in conformity with the Constitutional parameters will be decided by the Court. But, in the meantime it has aroused antipathetic feelings among the Indians as well as the Indian diaspora. Among the foreign political parties the Democrats in the US and the Labour Party in UK are clearly unhappy with the provisions of the Law. They did not expect the largest secular pluralistic democracy to frame a law that excludes practitioners of one particular faith from its ambit. A rumour is floating around that as soon as the government realised that the NRC in Assam produced an unexpected result – that of exclusions of around 19 lakh individuals many of whom are Hindus, the government hastened to bring in the CAA in order to exclude Muslims infiltrators or those Muslims who may not have the necessary documents to prove their length of residence in India. The idea appears to be to get at only the alleged Muslims infiltrators leaving out those of the other communities, especially Hindus. Thereby the Government advertently stepped on the toes of North-Eastern States, particularly Assam by acting in breach of the provisions of the Assam Accord according to which the cut-off date for determining infiltrators was 25th March 1971 as against the cut-off date of 31st December 2014 indicated in the CAA. The cut-off date thus was pushed away more than 40 years during which many more infiltrators – predominantly Muslims and Hindus – would have entered the State. While Muslims may eventually get deported or repatriated or become stateless, Assam would be saddled with many more lakhs of Bangladeshi Hindu infiltrators for whom there is nothing provided in the law. Whether they would be absorbed in Assam after grant of Indian citizenship or will be distributed among several States is not known. The law is curiously silent about it. The law overlooked the fact that an infiltrator is an infiltrator regardless of his religion.

The Assamese thus are landed with a problem that they do not like one bit. They have always opposed the way they were being swamped by outsiders, particularly from Bangladesh as their identity, language, traditions and way of life came under threat and was likely to be overwhelmed by the massive induction of foreigners. Their fear was that they would be subsumed under the sheer weight of the foreigners, whom they wanted to be ousted from their land. By remaining silent on this score the CAA does a bad turn to the Assamese. The question is whether the CAA was really needed. The problem was straightforward, that of throwing out the illegal residents from the country. Assam had the largest number and its problem was more acute. Under the Assam accord some work was done to identify the foreigners but it was the then Assam Government of Tarun Gogoi which played foul and dragged its feet. The Indian National Congress, the party then in power, thought it had got a vote bank thrown into its lap without ever trying to get one. It never showed in keenness to forcefully implement the existing laws to push out the illegal immigrants. An opportunity of clearing the State of all infiltrators was thus lost. It is the policy of acquiring vote banks by political parties that is putting the country and its people in difficulties. While the Congress government remained inert in Assam and remained mute and inactive witnesses to the influx from Bangladesh, sometimes even welcoming it as prospective vote bank a similar attitude was displayed by the CPM and later by the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. Today, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is in vehement opposition of CAA and National Register of Citizens (NRC) for fear of losing her vote bank of Bangladeshis in West Bengal. She is singing a different tune today as when she was in the Opposition she would harangue the CPM government to expel the Bangladeshis. Likewise, the new legislation of CAA has at its back the votes of those who are benefited and BJP thinks that its expectation of this windfall is legitimate. While in the East it hopes to garner the votes of Bangladeshi Hindus in Assam, in the West it is the Sindhis who are likely to go en bloc in its favour in any election. The latter are already pro-BJP and the thousands and lakhs who will be benefited will add to their strength. This apart, if NRC is implemented in West Bengal the State’s Hindu population may feel obligated to vote for the BJP feeling relieved, as it were, from the oppressive presence of the Bangladeshis. There are so many unanswered questions that it feels that the some lose knots were left to be tightened before the bill was tabled in Parliament. But there is the nagging feeling that in the whole imbroglio, political parties are clearly seen to be playing the game of vote banks without any regard to the interests of the country. Whether the change in the philosophy for grant of citizenship has undone the Partition which was based on religion is another question? If all Hindus of Pakistan and Bangladesh are to be given Indian citizenship, the partition would seem to be undone. While Pakistan and Bangladesh throw out their Hindus, the Indian Muslims remain rooted where they are. The new philosophy does not seem to have taken into consideration either the spatial constraint or the limited natural resources that the country possesses. If all Hindus of the world are to be given Indian citizenship on demand, as the RSS seems to suggest, would we be able to accommodate or feed them all now that we are already 137 crore?--INFA

The Australian wildfires

Editor
An absolutely astonishing set of wild fires has been destroying Australia since the fire season began in late July. 27 people have died nationwide, and in the state of New South Wales alone, more than 2000 homes have been destroyed. State and federal authorities are struggling to contain the massive blazes, even with fire-fighting assistance from other countries including the United States. The situation is exacerbated by persistent heat and drought, and many point to climate change as a factor making natural disaster go from bad to worse. It may be noted that there have been fires in every Australian state, but New South Wales has been hardest hit. Fire season in Australia is always dangerous. Fires have torn through bush land, wooded areas, and national parks like the Blue Mountains. Some of Australia’s largest cities have also been affected including Melbourne and Sydney. The fires have scorched an area twice the size of the US State of Maryland. Earlier in December, the smoke was so bad in Sydney that air quality measured 11 times the ‘hazardous’ level. So far, almost 15 million acres of land have burned. As per a conservative estimate,

about half a billion animals have been affected by the fires across NSW, with millions likely dead. Strong winds have also made the fires and smoke spread more rapidly. Experts say climate change has worsened the scope and impact of natural disasters like fires and floods. Weather conditions are growing more extreme, and for years, the fires have been starting earlier in the season and spreading with greater intensity. Last year climate was both the hottest and driest on record for Australia. Like the rest of the world, Australia’s temperatures are climbing to ever higher records as the climate warms, which boosts evaporation and strengthens droughts in situations like this. Rainfall trends are less clear, but declines have been partly attributed to climate change for at least some regions. Although Australia’s climate is closely linked to the El Nino Southern Oscillation in the Pacific Ocean, that particular seesaw has been in a neutral state. There is another similar oscillation in the Indian ocean, however, called the Indian Ocean Dipole, which has been in a strongly positive phase recently. That means that waters in the western Indian Ocean have been warmer than average, with cooler temperatures to the east. This has the effect of pushing rainy weather away from Australia. And in the last few months an unusual

pattern in the Antarctic stratosphere has weakened the pole-circling winds. That has also helped produce clear skies in Australia as well as strong westerly winds blowing dry air seaward over Victoria and New South Wales-stoking the fires. There are more than 2,000 fire-fighters working on the ground in NSW alone, and more support is on the way-the US, Canada and New Zealand have sent additional fire-fighters to help. The US is planning to send at least another 100 fire-fighters to join 159 already in the country battling the wildfires. The federal government has also sent in military assistance like army personnel, air force aircraft and navy cruisers for fire-fighting, evacuation, search and rescue and clean-up efforts. It is worth noting that Kylie Jenner, an American media personality and the founder and owner of a cosmetic company has joined the list of stars contributing to the Australia wild fire relief efforts. She has donated one million dollar to local fire-fighting efforts. Sadly, Australia is burning and as a result of this millions of animals are being perished in the wildfires. Australia alone cannot douse the massive fire. So let us also join the efforts directly or indirectly in containing the wildfires.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Viaemail

Yours etc.,
W.Passah
Ex Hod Electronics
St Edmunds College

“Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings.”

--- Woodrow Wilson

The Shillong Times

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Lokayukta to the rescue

THE Meghalaya Lokayukta has risen to the occasion and done what should have rightfully been done by the government of the day. The primary role of government is to govern and the oldest and simplest justification for a government is that it should protect its citizens from violence apart from providing citizens with basic services. But modern governance entails maintenance of law and order. Thomas Hobbes in Leviathan describes a world that is fraught with insecurities without a government to provide the safety of law and order. Government is also the provider of goods and services that individuals cannot provide individually for themselves. To do so government raises taxes and revenues. Meghalaya has substantial mineral resources mainly coal and limestone. These should be utilised in a manner that is ecologically sustainable and should generate revenue for the state so that it can meet its strategic developmental needs. Road connectivity, waterways and bridges, education, health and agriculture are areas where major investments are required. To rely on the central government for all such expenditures is unreasonable as the state needs to meet its own share of the 90:10 funding arrangement.

It is therefore inexplicable as to why the Government of Meghalaya has consistently failed to come up with a comprehensive mining policy as required by the Supreme Court of India before it ventures into coal mining yet again, after the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2014 banned the archaic and brutish rat hole mining where miners are buried inside flooded mines and die horrific deaths. That such a system of mining is allowed to carry on in a modern state in the 21st century has rattled human rights activists across the globe but not the apathetic government. Instead of coming out with a Mining Policy, the Government has turned coal mining into an underground activity run by the mafia. Hence legitimate revenue that should accrue to the state is going into private pockets of politicians, police and bureaucrats. This has been carrying on since 2014 in a clandestine fashion. The argument against a Mining Policy is that it will corporatize an otherwise private business. This argument goes against the grain of modern governance systems where mining is a regulated activity. Government cannot kowtow to private players who take no responsibility to regenerate the forests and rivers that have turned toxic in the mining areas. Is this not the prime responsibility of any government especially since rivers are a life force and had hitherto been supplying drinking water and supporting riverine life? Why is there complete apathy to this looming danger? The Lokayukta has made a timely intervention by ordering a CBI probe into this venality. In fact, the Lokayukta carries the onus of stopping this sleaze once and for all.

LOOKING BACK
June 27, 1989

Centre to create bank for civic bodies

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today said a bank will soon be set up to look after the financial needs of municipalities and other urban bodies.

Speaking at the valedictory function of the three day nagarpalika sammelan, Mr Gandhi said that this bank would operate on the lines of the National Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) and will be part of the proposed bill for the restructuring of urban bodies.

Mr Gandhi said that the government was also

thinking of setting up a bank to look after the development of rural and urban areas.

Mr Gandhi, who heard the views of the least 15 delegates from different states on the restructuring of urban bodies, said the government was also considering a programme like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) for the urban areas to take care of the unemployment programme to some extent.

Mr Gandhi said that this programme would be implemented soon in the urban areas.

University students on warpath against CAA

By Kushal Jeena

Students across the universities are on the warpath against the contentious new citizenship act and proposed national register of citizens. There is no going back on their part as they are getting popular support not only from within the country but also from top universities overseas.

The incidents of violent attacks on the peaceful student protests recently at Jamia Millia University and Jawaharlal Nehru University by the government -backed ABVP, the student wing of ruling right wing Bhartiya Janata Party, have given further fillip to the movement that has currently rocked the country. The attitude of confrontation that central government has been pursuing has further complicated the situation.

"All major student unions like the All India Student Federation, Student Federation of India, the National Student Union of India and the All India Student Association mobilised support to register their protest. "All 40 central universities will see protests this week on the issue and plans were afoot to take it us in institutes as well. No campus can be turned into a war zone like it was done at Jamia Millia Islamia. We are demanding a roll back of Citizenship Amendment Act and action against Delhi Police for excesses on students. Protests have already erupted across several institutes," the student unions said in a statement.

The events that have unfolded in the aftermath of passage of new citizenship amendment act by parliament and subsequent police action inside the campuses have given rise to a new phenomenon in India's youth politics that could have its far reaching implications in the national politics as the government seems all out to curb it by using power. However, the movement seems still searching for an icon that could capture the

The new citizenship amendment act in its present form is all set to harm the interests of the indigenous people of north east.

networking sites. The protests against the government and police atrocities are also a protest against suffocation that the authorities have unleashed on the students.

The voicing of their opposition to the CAA and NRC assumes political significance as the student community that includes a sizeable number of non-Muslim students are rejecting the CAA and NRC on two basic issues of being non-secular and discriminatory in nature. If you look at the problem beyond CAA and NRC, you would find that youth is impatient with the business of settling past scores that the present BJP-led central government is engaged in.

The agitation against the hostel fee hike at JNU is in fact the fall out of this fundamental issue. Higher education is unaffordable in view of the state of the economy. Successive

governments have done little except hold back fee hike, which is a small component of the expense of higher education, and that too under duress.

The new generation of students who have entered higher education bring new aspiration and they find out that university education is unlikely to land them decent jobs as unemployment rate continues to be high, and the highest among college graduates. This rate drops after the age of 24, not because they get the jobs they were looking for, but because they begin to settle down in whatever job they can get the sudden and spontaneous eruption of the student community expresses this deeper frustration of aspirations.

The movement is

spontaneous and it does not have an organisational instrument that can widen and deepen its impact. Though there are emerging youth icons, but no one who can bind the movement together as it is also looking for a new set of ideas. It would be a mistake to read the movement as the harbinger of a socialist revolution because it is still a movement in search of a name and ideology that could shape it in a full-fledge political movement based on certain ideas and a well thought out forward looking process.

"No sooner had Parliament given its approval to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill than students across the country erupted in protest against what they saw as a violation of the Constitution. A number of student groups and other bodies issued statements against what is now the citizenship

amendment act and the proposed national register of citizens, and against the crackdown on the students of JNU Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University.," the joint statement of student unions underlined.

Almost all top Indian and 19 prestigious global universities have come out in support of Indian students and have issued a statement against CAA and NRC describing the act as discriminatory and in violation of the basic structure of Indian Constitution. They have advocated a comprehensive asylum law while protecting the land, cultural and linguistic rights of the indigenous people. The new citizenship amendment act in its present form is all set to harm the interests of the indigenous people of north east. India as a signatory to the UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People has the responsibility to protect the interests of its citizens.

Meanwhile, North East Students Organization, an umbrella organization of student unions of restive north-eastern region of the country has issued a joint statement against the CAA that reads: "The eight major student unions of seven north-eastern states are opposing strongly the citizenship amendment act. It is a draconian act on the very basic principle that this CAA is a threat to the identity and survival of the microscopic indigenous communities of the different states of the region, which shares a long and porous border with Bangladesh and has been facing a problem of illegal infiltration since India attained independence. This law will facilitate illegal migration of foreigners and put at risk its own citizens from external aggression".

The powerful All Assam Student Union that had unleashed a popular movement against illegal migration in Assam, the largest among north-eastern states, is one of the major components of NESO. [IFS]

Meghalaya: Your best years are ahead of you

By Gary Marbaniang

The other day I was thinking about how people of different age groups made wild guesses about my age from the way I look and it struck me that it really isn't my looks that define my age but it is the age groups that certain people belong to that is the deciding factor when it comes to their perception about my age. Last year I asked a few people in their early 20's to take a wild guess about my age and all of them said that I'm in my mid twenties. On the other hand some people in their 40's would say it straight to my face that I'm in my mid 30's.They deviate from my real age just by observation. I went home that day baffled, so out of sheer curiosity I took out a pen and a notebook and calculated the mean age and standard deviation to see if it adds up mathematically. The interesting result is that the Standard deviation is 6.7 when I calculated the mean age for data from age 20 to 42.If we add 6.7 to 20 or 21 and if we subtract 6.7 from 42 or 41 then the resulting number adds up perfectly with the perception that certain people have about my age.

The other alternative explanation that I can give for this divergence in view is that young people have a more optimistic view about life whereas some middle aged people have a more pessimistic view about life. People in their early 20's have a more vibrant outlook and everything and everyone around them looks younger and fresher than they actually are whereas some people in their 40's have a dull outlook and everything and everyone

government. India is a federal country with unitary features. India is a Union of States and our founding fathers through the Constitution made sure that more power is vested in the Central government both politically and financially. So India is like a joint family where all the earning members give their salaries to their parents at the end of each month and it is the parents who decide how much money a member and his family needs.

Meghalaya was formed in 1972 and we are one of the youngest members in the family. We are still in the infancy stage of development and we still need a lot of financial assistance from elder members of the family like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. But we must understand that this cannot go on forever. We'll have to one day stand on our own two feet and carve a niche for ourselves in this world. Continually ranting about the issue that we are forcibly adopted by our parents will do us no good. We'll have to let bygones be bygones. We'll have to stop grumbling about the past and start living in the present.

I remember a former neighbour who held on to the past while living his life. He held a grudge against his mother for not giving him an education. He was a very talented man. When I was a child he was already an adult and he was very fond of me. He used to make me toys and he was also very good at carpentry. But he wasted the best years of his life by holding on to the past. Likewise our people and our State need to quit holding

The point I want to make is that people in their early 20's have a future ahead of them and everything around them seems bright and sunny. They have dreams and ambitions and they are willing to take on life and the obstacles ahead of them head on.

around them may seems older and duller than they actually are. Mind you,this is just an assumption.

The point I want to make is that people in their early 20's have a future ahead of them and everything around them seems bright and sunny. They have dreams and ambitions and they are willing to take on life and the obstacles ahead of them head on. But the reality is that the future is bleak for young people in our State. Jobs are few and far between and most young people have doubts about the fairness of the recruitment process to the few government jobs that are available. Considering the demographic dividend that our State is currently enjoying, the number one priority of our policy makers should be on youth and job creation. "It's the economy, stupid," that's what James Carville, the Strategist to Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign said to his campaign workers during that election. Job creation is the number one priority for policy makers in developed countries in the west. If the economy is doing well, then the chances of winning the next election increases exponentially for an incumbent President or Prime Minister. Sadly, other issues takes center stage during elections in our State.

At the moment our State is almost entirely financially dependent on the Central government. It is not the Central government per se that is helping us financially but it is the more well to do States that have to come to our rescue every time we are in need. Without the States there is no Central

on to the past .Maybe the best years for our State is in the foreseeable future. We need to show the parents who adopted us what we're truly made of and that we can make it on our own. I consider myself very fortunate to get a job three months after I graduated from college. I knew that my parents beamed with pride when I got a job at such a young age and it lightened up their burden but the best thing was that it made me an independent person. Likewise my paternal great grandparents and the people of Shella and other Khasi villages made it long before there was a Government of India or a Government of Meghalaya. I guess my great grandfather's entire village were extremely proud of them when they were able to export the oranges from their plantation as far as the shores of the Middle East. Some of our ancestors became financially independent without any government assistance. If they can do it, then this present generation can also do it.

The present generation is not swayed by mainland India's right wing or liberal agenda. All we care about is our future. We are fighting for our survival. The threat of being overrun by people from mainland India and from Bangladesh is real. Our population is a meager 16 to 17 lakh. The Khasi people are one of the most welcoming people in the country. But being welcoming does not mean that we want to be overrun by others. We want the rest of the country to understand and admire our culture and accept us as we are.

matter and put an end to the misunderstandings among the NGOs and the public by taking cognisance of the notification by the Govt. of India.

Yours etc.,
B Khongwar,
W. Kyndiah.
Viaemail

“Who is KSU?”

Editor,

Who is the KSU and who gave them the authority to represent the people of Meghalaya? How dare they intimidate the people in this manner? I think they owe an immediate apology to the people of Meghalaya for making such a statement. May I ask whether KSU owns Meghalaya or are they our elected representatives? Or does all the land in Meghalaya belong to them? For god's sake KSU, don't try to become our Godfather - we don't need you and dare you make such statements upon the citizens of Meghalaya. For all that you guys are pack of jackals in the garb of our well wishers and hunting for personal benefits only. Let me speak out my mind today. You guys have disturbed the state for decades. It's time for us to now unite against you.

We don't need your help to uplift our society and we would progress much better without you. All you guys have done for decades is to instigate trouble in our state and render us helpless because we have not ganged up as you do. Push us to the wall

and we too will stand up to your nonsense! Just because you think ILP will be good for us does not mean it is the gospel truth. And just because we may not agree with your point of view, you will ask us to leave our mother land? KSU, who are you? I am really angry!

Yours etc.,
Richard M. Lyngwa
Shillong -3

Silence of the lambs

Editor,

Apropos the article, "When column writing becomes wearisome," by Patricia Mukhim (ST Jan 10, 2020), I agree with the writer that we the people of Meghalaya who don't belong to so-called NGOs or pressure groups that use force and coercion are always silent and only discuss issues in our drawing rooms. We are not organised and allow the few who use violence as a means to dictate terms to us. It is unfortunate that the Government too is being dictated by these groups. But this always happens when the Govt of the day is weak and spineless and this is what is happening today. I am ashamed of our Khasi MLAs who don't say a word against the bullying by some groups to make the Assembly pass a retrograde resolution demanding Inner Line Permit. Meghalaya has no job openings. It relies on the outside world to create job opportunities but also

wants to keep out outsiders by spreading a fear psychosis.

Why would non-tribals want to come to a place where they cannot own land or get a job. The only job openings are in areas where the local tribal people do not want to work. The world is shrinking and people are becoming more interdependent but here for decades a section of pressure groups have been spreading only fear without looking at statistics. Look at the statistics on the demography of Meghalaya. The non-tribal population has come down over the years. So what is the fear about? Isn't this just a bullying tactic by pressure groups because the Govt is too weak to tackle them? Across the country young people are spontaneously coming out to protest against the CAA. Here in Meghalaya every protest is appropriated by some groups only. Why is this so? For how long can this society outsource its problems to these groups? The elders should be ashamed of themselves for cowering in fear in front of these bully groups. I hope we learn lessons and come out to protest against any and all forms of bullying. Otherwise we don't deserved democracy!

Yours etc.,
S Kharkongor,
Shillong-1

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Lights, camera & climate action

At a time when carbon-intensive industries are highlighted in the fight against climate change, the film industry is yet to get on board with climate action

By Kartik Chandramouli

Biswajeet Bora’s 2015 Hindi feature film *Aisa Yeh Jahaan* not only showcased the alienation of urban denizens from nature but also demonstrated that even the film industry can take action to tackle climate change.

The film was India’s first carbon-neutral film. Bora’s desire to make such a film, together with the work of the Centre for Environmental Research and Education (CERE), made the initial inspiration a reality.

The Mumbai-based CERE, a firm that specialises in environmental sustainability, analysed every activity of the film’s production and pre-production (the planning stages before a film shoot) through the environmental lens. The film’s carbon footprint — the amount of greenhouse gas emissions — was calculated by factoring transportation of people and equipment by air and road, catering, set construction, hotels and so on.

CERE used scientifically determined emission factors for each activity and calculated the film’s emission as 78.47 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO2e).

With these calculations, the idea was to remove the same amount of carbon produced in making the film, from the atmosphere. CERE recommended offsetting the emissions by planting 560 indigenous trees of a mixed variety. The plantation was done in parts of Mumbai and Assam, where the film was shot, for under a fraction of the film’s budget. The trees were geotagged and monitored for three years as part of CERE’s Urban Afforestation Project.

And so, in 2015, *Aisa Yeh Jahaan* became India’s first carbon-neutral full-length feature film.

Janjri Jasani, head of sustainability services at CERE, said, “Film and television is a resource-intensive industry. It should use resources efficiently to reduce footprint. Offset when you cannot.”

CERE pitched the idea of a ‘Carbon Neutral Film Certification’ to many other production houses. Unfortunately, one more project later, things did not move beyond the pilot.

Jasani said, “Production houses may have balked at the cost of offsetting or just not have known enough about the subject (climate change and carbon footprint) to take on this challenge. Given the lack of interest at the time, CERE scaled down its focus.”

Siddharth Nakai, a sustainability consultant with a television network



and founder of Greening Advertising Media and Entertainment (GAME), said, “There are straight guidelines and environmental laws for industries. The film and media industry is not seen as a carbon-intensive industry like a manufacturing plant, but it can have a substantial environmental impact because its energy and fuel consumption are at different stages.”

He too admits that it has been tough to make a breakthrough and bag projects that are looking to become sustainable. But he sees mindsets and convenience as the villain here, not money.

Nakai says that the entire process of film pre-production, production, and post-production (e.g., audio/video editing) can work with some guidelines.

“For example, in the pre-production stage, one could use eco-fonts to print scripts and documents. These fonts use less ink and save cartridges. On film sets, rechargeable batteries can be used for audio equipment. That saves a considerable amount of use-and-throw batteries that end up at the landfill and make the environ-

ment toxic. Waste segregation and zero-plastic bottles on sets are totally possible. These are small things, but gradually, they save a lot of costs.”

Zooming out to the bigger picture, sustainable practices could reduce the environmental impact of film production, which, among other things, uses energy, generates waste, and burn fossil fuels through transportation.

Unrecycled solid and electronic waste at landfills break down and contribute to methane emissions, which is a more potent greenhouse gas as compared to carbon dioxide. The waste sector contributed to three percent of India’s total GHG emissions in 2014.

A 2006 UCLA study found that the U.S. film and television industry created 15 million tons of carbon dioxide in 1999.

Another challenge to making a process such as a film production sustainable is that production can be scattered across long periods and locations. So, it needs the continuous monitoring and support of all stakeholders involved. Nakai recollected, “I’ve once huddled the entire crew...

actors, director, workers on set...and explained the rules and the reasons. But if someone decides not to follow something like waste segregation, the effort collapses.”

Efforts to make films production sustainable

There are other ways film productions are trying to make an impact, or rather, reduce it. Cut to Vectar Project, a film-studio in Manchester, United Kingdom that is dedicated to achieving “zero impact filming”. It boasts of an LED-only light setup powered by solar and will build virtual sets with augmented reality to avoid building a physical set. Another proposition is to use an 8K 3D camera setup, which will allow clients and even filmmakers to skip road or air travel to the studio.

A Mexican documentary film *Bosque de Niebla* (2018) became carbon neutral by compensating its emissions using United Nations-certified carbon reduction credits that allowed the production unit to support solutions against climate change across

developing countries.

Vivek Gilani, the founder of CBalance, a Mumbai-based company that helps organisations manage their carbon footprints, expressed concern that there’s a risk of greenwashing in the process. And if someone sincerely takes up the task, he said, “Instead of focusing on every frivolous aspect (of the film production), we can identify the carbon hotspots and work to reduce those.”

Gilani, who is developing the first India-specific GHG emission factor database and hasn’t consulted on film projects, said, “Like how a film production is seen through the lens of other government permissions, actor A or actor B, location A or B, environmental impact and climate change should be a lens too. But first, evaluating the footprint has to be seen as part of the solution.”

Jasani concurred that producers are free to offset emissions in the way they like, but the industry accounting its carbon footprint is essential. She said, “Offsetting with trees is a slow process and can take over 15 years to

achieve. It has to be done on degraded land and forests and not habitats like grasslands. Tree planting is not the solution for all environmental issues, but they provide a lot of other ecological services.”

As the entertainment industry is projected to grow in India, its resulting emissions and waste are bound to rise too. Gilani said, “The industry should recognise and declare the issue.” He hopes that climate change soon finds its place in film scripts, even if it is not the story. “Someone in the film can maybe miss a flight because of an extreme weather event,” he joked.

There are faces in the film industry who are vocal about environmental issues, and Jasani believes it would be encouraging if they speak up and have conversations about its impact.

“Many would complain that it is for publicity, but as long as the work is done efficiently, the environment benefits. That is what matters,” Jasani added. (*Mongabay-India/TWF*)

(Photo by Jakob Owens on Unsplash)

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

If you speak proper English, you are regarded as a freak; why can’t the English learn to speak English,” asked Prof. Higgins in *My Fair Lady* (adopted from George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*) referring to Cockney Eliza Doolittle, who pronounced “The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain” as “The rine in Spain falls minely in the pline”.

There was an old saying that the sun never sets on the British Empire. How very true this is when we peep into Britain’s colonial past. English was diffused over a large canvas of the globe and which was adopted as the official language of those countries. English thus became the *lingua franca*, a language of international communication.

Lingua franca is a language adopted as a common or bridge language whose native languages are different. It is a common means of communication for different first language speakers and which literally means “Frankish language”.

Franks were Germanic people who were dominant in present day France, Belgium and western Germany. According to *Britannica*, language is a system of spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of social groups and participating in its cultures, express themselves.

If we fly back into the past in a flying machine to what is known as England today, there will be some interesting revelations. During the time of Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43, the inhabitants of Great Britain were known as Britons, derived from the old French ‘Bretun’ — a term used for the people and language of Brittany, a cultural region in north western France.

During the Roman occupation of Britain from 43-410 AD, the land was known as Roman Britain, and the term Britain was derived from Latin *Britannia*, the area of the island of Great Britain ruled by the Roman Empire.

The rise of the Roman Empire has seen the spread of Latin language as far as Spain and England. It was not pure Latin though but a branch of the

Origin & diffusion of English



Indo-European language family, Romance, developed from Latin spoken in ancient Rome. Latin language not only influenced Romance languages as French, Spanish and Italian but also English spoken today — a number of common words in widely used in English, like *alibi*, *bona fide*, *bonus*, *de facto*, *eg*, *ie*, *intro*, *multi*, *semi*, *status quo*, *impromptu*, *ad hoc*.

Vikings from Scandinavia, also known as Norsemen, conquered France then known as Gaul and settled in present day Normandy in north western France. Normans were the descendants of the Vikings. Normans came from Denmark. The land they occupied in northern France came to be known as Normandy after the ‘north man’. Normans discarded the Scandinavian language and started speaking French.

The Normans invaded England under the Duke of Normandy, William

the Conqueror by an army of Normans, Flemish and French soldiers. English was much modified as a result of Norman invasion. French remained dominant language of England for about 150 years. As a result of Norman conquest, French was adopted by the families of aristocrats and the ruling elite class in England, though the mass spoke English.

French not only modified but enriched English to a great extent. Norman invasion displaced the English dialect with French.

English is a Germanic language which belongs to Indo-Germanic language family that originated around the Black Sea. The first speakers of English language were the wandering tribes who lived in mainland Europe. During the fifth century and at the end of the Roman rule Anglo Saxons, a group of various Germanic people crossed the

North Sea from what is now Germany and Denmark invaded England, which many historians believe as the origin of England and English people. Prior to the invasion of England by the three wandering Germanic tribes, Angles, Jutes and Saxons the predominant occupant of England were the Celts who had arrived from mainland Europe and who spoke Celtic.

Celts were a group of tribes that originated in Central Europe sharing similar languages, traditions and cultural traits. Prior to the arrival of the Celts the languages spoken in England are still unknown. Of the three tribes Angles lived in present day Denmark, Jutes were from northern part of Denmark while the Saxons occupied north-western part of present day Germany.

The languages spoken by those tribes were similar to those tribes who lived in northern Europe. Of the three tribes

Angles settled in Central, northern and eastern England and the related tribe the Saxons in the southern part of England. Of the three groups of Germanic language, West Germanic branch is of prime importance to English speakers. The languages spoken by the three tribes laid the foundation of Old English, which took words from Scandinavian and Latin.

Old English originated as a group of Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken in England and southern and eastern Scotland in the middle ages. Frisian languages are related to a group of Germanic languages who live in the southern fringes of the North Sea, in the Netherlands and Germany. Hence along with German words, Dutch words also have entered English vocabulary.

The evolution of Old English to Middle English began with the Norman conquest by William the Con-

querer, the Duke of Normandy and later by William I of England. Middle English was spoken until the last half of the 15th century. A number of Anglo-Norman words were borrowed and the period had seen the evolution the London dialect.

Of the various dialects used in Britain in those days, the London dialect became the standard language for speech and writing. This form became dominant because it was used by most residents of London and the university centres of Cambridge and Oxford. A classic example of London dialect can be found in *Canterbury Tales*, a masterpiece by Geoffrey Chaucer. Written mostly in verse between 1387 and 1400 it is a story of the English pilgrims who travelled together from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket.

The prologue to *Canterbury Tales* starts with a description of the spring with typical spellings and funny words used in Middle English —

When that Aprille with his shoures soote (its sweet showers) / That drotte (drought) of Marche hath perced to the roote, / And bathed every veyne in swich (such) licour, / Of which vertu engendred is the flour.

Except Mandarin Chinese there are an overwhelming number of English speakers all over the world. The diffusion of English throughout the world was possible through the establishment of colonies, the first being Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. It is the first language of more people than any other linguistic group. English is spoken by almost all residents of the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand and a sizeable number of people in Canada.

Diffusion of Christianity from the Roman province of Palestine was facilitated by the Roman Empire and Christianity received a special patronage which spread throughout the world. Christian missionaries from Great Britain helped diffuse the spread of English. In most of the countries the choice was the legacy of the colonial era.

(The author is former head of the Department of Geography at St Edmund’s College)

‘I want to be a performer and not a diva’

After earning appreciations for her acting in Love Sonia, actress Mrunal Thakur went on with two big Bollywood films, Super 30 and Batla House, last year and began 2020 with her maiden project on digital platform, Ghost Stories. In a candid interview with IBNS-TWF correspondent Souvik Ghosh, Mrunal speaks about her journey so far.

In your last interview with IBNS, you had said that 2018 was your achiever’s year and 2019 would decide whether you have passed or failed. So after Super 30, Batla House and Ghost Stories, how do you assess your career right now? Have you reached your goals?

I feel honestly acting is such an art which can never be enough for an actor. An actor learns something or the other through the process of each project. Also I feel like there is no full stop when it comes to learning. People being able to connect with the characters I have played onscreen and not as Mrunal is a big achievement for me. I think I am in a stable condition (smiles).

Your latest project on Netflix, Ghost Stories, was not a conventional horror story. How did you react to the script initially?

When it comes to Ghost Stories, I was really excited because this is something which I had not done before. When it comes to horror as a genre, I prefer not to watch it as I really do get scared. In order to break those inhibitions, I wanted to do a project, especially Ghost Stories. I don’t know whether people were scared after watching Ghost Stories or not but I was definitely scared while shooting it. I am happy that I had at least explored that genre. Also I got to work with Karan Johar and the entire team. What more important was to play that character in those particular days without any workshop. I am happy to play my character ‘Ira’, a common girl

who is frustrated because she doesn’t know what superstitions her husband or her family is following. So sometimes it is more mental. So that is the reason why I could connect to (the film) and wanted to do this.

Was Karan Johar one of the reasons behind working in this film?

Yes of course. I wanted to work with him. He was on my bucket list. Being with Karan Johar, I wanted to know so many things about film making as a process. He also used to share several stories about Shah Rukh (Shah Rukh Khan) or other actors. It was another experience.

I feel obviously the digital platform allows one to watch films and dramas whenever he wants to... So that is an advantage. It is a platform for directors and actors to showcase talents

At a time people are talking about nepotism, would like to know how being a part of commercially successful films matters to actors without filmy background like you to progress in career?

I think the entire logic of understanding a commercial film is wrong. We have to get it right of course. Batla House has done tremendous market in the box office. Commercial success does affect an actor or a director. There are many directors like Tabrez Noorani who did film like Love Sonia whose subject was so important. I feel heartbroken when I see such

films get recognised and appreciated by the entire world but not by this country. Such things break my heart because directors like Tabrez Noorani are the aspiring directors who want to make films. So an actor does not want to begin his career with an art film rather start with a comedy or romcom. People don’t want to risk their careers. Even I was asked by a couple of actors not to start my career with a de-glammed role (in Love Sonia). They had said my career would sink before even taking off. Trust me, I am just working. I don’t care whether films are commercially hit or not. I think one must believe his instinct. I really felt that it was important for me to get out of that television zone and to perform because that is what I was very keen on. I wanted to prove to myself that I can be a good actor. I want to be performer and not a diva. When people appreciate my performance, I feel happy to realise that people at least thought my art was genuine enough. So when people ask me about commercial cinema and all, I get really confused because I have still not understood the definition and concept behind it.

Do you think film like Love Sonia helped you to mature as an actor very early in your career?

Love Sonia did allow me to mature faster. It made me an aware person. I didn't know what sex trafficking was all about (before doing Love Sonia). Also, I was more skeptical about the kind of roles I was getting. I realised that after Love Sonia, it was very important for me to not play a village girl because then I would be stereotyped. That's what Bollywood does. It puts an actor in a bracket. So I just want to make sure that when I do a project, I just get out of my comfort zone and keep doing something that I have not done before. At least, this is my effort. I don't know whether I will be getting roles of a "silly girl".. (smiles).. but if the script demands and if it is something really exciting that

touches my heart, I would want to do it.

Do you think the digital platform is a scope to look for good contents? Is it like a breather to you?

I feel obviously the digital platform allows one to watch films and dramas whenever he wants to and not wait for the release. So that is an advantage. It is a platform for directors and actors to showcase their talents. Sometimes, good films do not get released at theatres. It is a fact. Also, Love Sonia went through two years of delay because we had no money to do the publicity and nobody wanted to invest in it considering it as a dark film. So thanks to the digital platform for providing content-driven film.

You had earlier said deadline is a challenge on television. What is the biggest challenge on digital platform?

Digital? Ah! I don’t think there is any challenge. It was very smooth. Ghost Stories was my first digital film with Netflix. Within seven days, I had shot my segment of Ghost Stories and went back home. It was very smooth and quick. I think the horror genre was challenging for me. Horror is definitely not my space.

Would you like to reveal a bit about your characters in upcoming films Jersey and Toofan which will release this year?

I am sure people must be aware of Jersey because it is a remake of a Telugu film (with the same title). I am playing Sarah's character which is again very close to my heart because the emotional journey she goes through is not easy. I am really looking forward for the audience to watch it and not compare me with Shraddha Srinath who had played Sarah's role in the Telugu film. I want to make it different yet the emotional journey should be felt by the audience. As far as Toofan, the poster is going to be launched soon. So I can't wait for the audience to see it.



‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 12, 2020

Moon trine Mars on your solar return chart results in an excellent time period ahead. You will be assertive and will be able to execute your cherished dreams. You will also get wonderful opportunities at place of work. New responsibilities too will be given to you. You could also plan to work on a major overseas project. Financial position will remain stable. You will also invest your money in multiple schemes. You will also undertake business trips which will turn out to be beneficial. You will also come in contact with new persons. Even friends and strangers will help you in your ambitious projects and you will not fail to deliver. Marriage will take place in family. There is like hood of a lively love affair that may lead to marriage. You will also be thinking of buying some new vehicle and a house of your own choice. Your confidence will be high and you will be able to face challenges with high spirit.

There would be good relations among family members and good financial gain. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance and expressing yourself creatively. You would be able to give an unconventional perspective to your work and creativity. You spend quality time with your loved ones, family and children. There would be emphasis on your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than materialistic things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level. You may discover new facets to your love life. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and fitness routine.

Success and good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. This period highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. It is a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones, as intimate moments are most appealing both of you. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when domestic and family related decisions are to be taken. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and your ability to socialize and make connections. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature, speaking, etc., would figure more prominently in your life.

You bring brilliancy and efficiency at work. You give a new approach to love, children and work on creative projects. A new set-up in existing relations or chances of formation of new relationship with people, are bright this week. You may redecorate your living space and put some more interiors and decorations to give a new look to your room. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with family members. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel the part of whole, as this brings new opportunities and bring monetary gains. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers this brings harmony and joyous atmosphere at work place.

This is a favorable time for learning something new, feeling comfortable in social situations and taking care of your hobbies. You are brilliant at dealing effectively with difficult projects at work. Increased connections and experiences come into picture. This is a period of growth as well as some form of blossoming or fruition. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities of love and the power of attraction, which may open the doors to new romantic relationships. You are bold and courageous in your approach when family related decisions are to be taken. You are highly motivated to indulge in your hobbies. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise

Power, influence and authority are the keywords at this time. Your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You are working hard and inclined towards more detailed work. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities to enhance the business and work opportunities. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity. You are able to influence people with your fresh approach and novel ideas. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

People and friends look upon you with more respect, tolerance and acceptance. You handle business meetings, people and express yourself more specifically about the issues. Business expansion

and new professional opportunities are worth considering; you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. New associations and beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature at this time. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work.

This phase brings good-love, luck and romance. Personal relationships are dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. You would maintain balance in the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. Its right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professionals skills as a promotion or up-gradation in work area is likely to present itself. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

You spend a lot of time in short frequent trips with your family and children, communicating with people and visiting relatives and friends. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor is especially strong. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures, or romance during this expressive period. You might enjoy researching speculative ventures now. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You might just find that this is a period when you are at your most gracious as long as you are truly listening instead of reacting. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal many issues bravely and successfully. You may bring in changes in your lifestyle even making small changes such as your hair-style, buy new attire etc. and spend time and money on entertainment and things that please you. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and connecting with people. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You may visit religious places. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

The planetary configuration is indicative of more stability in personal relations and professional life. You have the tendency to compromise and adjust and take a softer approach while dealing with people at work and home. You may explore new equipment and improve working space as this brings more efficiency in your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Cordial relations in professional and personal relations are highlighted. Cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Close friends and family members would notice you for your more tolerant and broadminded nature. You would attract people with your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You would show your love to your family and children. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work.

Building the machine man

By Kaustov Kashyap

Robotics is a rapidly growing field that has applications in diverse industries. Robotics is a field of engineering concerned with the development and application of robots and computer systems for their control, sensory feedback and information processing. In other words, Robotics is all about designing robots, maintaining them, developing new applications and conducting research.

Robotics is an exciting area of computer-controlled technology. It is one of the most inter-disciplinary of engineering endeavors. In an elaborate form, Robotics Engineering is a sub-field of Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering and Computer Science. This is a rapidly developing field with advances in computing constantly opening up new possibilities for robotics applications.

The term ‘robotics’ includes research and engineering activities involving design and development of robotic systems.

Experts working in the area of robotics are called robotic engineers. Robotics engineers are concerned with the science of robotics that is the science of flexible automation. Robotics engineers design robots, maintain them, develop new applications for them, and conduct research to expand the potential of robots. These engineers use computer-aided design and drafting and computer-aided manufacturing (CADD/CAM) systems to perform their tasks. Their duties include analysing designs, debugging programs, standardising and servicing the robots and combining the robots with new mechanical devices. They also supervise other technicians and engineers.

Education

A bachelor’s degree in engineering or a related field which is of four years duration is required for most entry-level positions in robotics engineering. Robotics being an inter-disciplinary course invites students who have completed their graduation in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, instrumentation engineering or computer engineering with an interest in robotics and

artificial intelligence. Most colleges or universities offer robotics engineering as specialisation of other engineering degrees rather than as a stand-alone program. However, now there are universities that offer robotics engineering degrees.

For advancement in positions you need a master’s degree or PhD. A PhD is required to teach in this field as well as for most high-level research positions. A master’s degree requires two years while a PhD takes three to five years to complete.

A course in robotics trains and educates a student in the field of artificial intelligence, computer-aided manufacturing, computer integrated manufacturing system, computa-



tional geometry, robot motion planning, digital electronics and micro processing.

Personal attributes

Like engineers in other disciplines, robotics engineers must be able to work well as team members. They must be able to communicate their ideas effectively. Those entering this field should have an aptitude for mathematics, physics, chemistry, and electronics. They should also be skilled in using computers. Robotics engineers must be familiar with logic, microprocessors and computer programming so that they can design the right robot for each application. Along with the technical know-how, interest in research is essential in this field. For this, robotics engineers must continually upgrade their technical knowledge to keep abreast

of new developments in this rapidly changing field.

Job Prospects & Career Options

With the advancement of computer science and related research technologies, robotics jobs are gaining more popularity. Use of robots is expected to increase in the near future, from production line robots to experimental robotics for the medical, military, and automotive industries, the future of robotics engineering will certainly offer a range of opportunities for professionals entering the field.

There are various specialisations even in robotics. Specialising in design and control in robotics is close to mechanical engineering. If you want to specialise in control and hardware design of robots, a BTech. degree in Electrical or Electronics or Electronics and Communication Engineering is the best-suited qualification. B.Tech. Computer Engineers can look at hardware design in robotics. The control part of the robot is all about certain aspects electrical engineering.

Remuneration

Salary for robotics engineers is concerned at par with most of the other demanding engineering professions as supply is less compared to demand. Earnings vary depending on the experience of the robotics engineer, the location, and the kind of job. In India, one can expect a starting salary of Rs 5-6 lakhs per annum for a fresher.

Institutes

Lord Jeggannath College of Engineering and Technology, Kanyakumari Chandigarh College of Engineering and Technology, Chandigarh Central Institute of Tool Design (CITD), Hyderabad (Diploma) University College of Engineering (UCE), Osmania University Indian Institute of Technology (IIT Madras), Chennai Indian Institute of Technology (IIT Kanpur), Kanpur SRM University, Kancheepuram University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES), Knowledge Acres, Dehradun

(The author is a career counsellor)

“Athletic competition clearly defines the unique power of our attitude.”
--- Alfred P. Sloan

The Shillong Times

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New Era for Indian Railways

INDIAN Railways, a painful saga of neglect, ineptitude and massive corruption, is entering a phase of partial privatization. Niti Aayog has come up with the proposal and a nod has come for privatization from the Modi government. The plan is to allow private entities to run their trains on some 100 routes across states. A pilot project of this kind had been given the green signal last year when the Lucknow-Delhi Tejas Express started its run under the label of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). A gift of the British Raj, Indian Railways was an efficient and profit-making entity till a few decades ago. With governments hesitating to raise passenger fares to meet populist demands – revenue from which formed the bulk – and the more lucrative freights segment steadily lost out to the private roadways. The Railways had little funds for development and modernization. Old rakes, wheels disengaging from trains and causing accidents, and several other problems persisted in the railways for many years. Failure to change or maintain old tracks led to mishaps as also curbed speed. India’s express trains run on an average speed of 60 km/hr while, ages past the Bullet era, Maglev trains in China today claim a speed of 600 plus per hour. China’s latest trains run on Magnetic Levitation technology and floats on tracks, not run on them. PM Modi came up with the Bullet Train project in 2014, but it is still facing serious odds at the implementation stage. India failed on most fronts in the railways sector and hence its time the private sector is given a chance to run parallel services and ensure competition.

Considering the lethargy with which the Indian establishments function today, a safe guess is that, over a period of time, the entire railway sector could lose out to private entities which will charge ahead with a new sense of dynamism. On the flip side, this could also mean hefty hike in ticket rates. The poor and ordinary folks will, thus, be out of their comfort zones when it comes to rail travel. This too is a matter of serious concern. Under the circumstances, it would be advisable that subsidized modes of travel by the Railways be continued, rather than dispensed with even in the long run. A nation of 1.3 billion population – of mostly poor people—cannot afford the luxury that the private sector could offer. In other words, privatization in the railway sector cannot be wholesale, but limited.

TO THE EDITOR

Systematic attacks on educational spaces worrying

Editor,

In the past few months, the country has witnessed a pattern in which divisive and discriminatory laws and policies have been passed, which contradict the very fabric of inclusiveness and secular nature of our constitution. We have also seen how any form of dissent or protest against these policies have been systematically suppressed by this intolerant government. Amongst the many voices questioning the legitimacy of this government’s actions, students have been in the frontline of the various movements, especially when it comes to their constitutional right to education and freedom of speech. It has been more than seventy days that the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University(JNU) have been fighting a battle against the discriminatory and illegal fee hike that had been introduced by the administration without proper dialogue with the teachers and student representatives. This stand-off has culminated in the student body calling for a boycott of classes, exams and, more recently, the registration process for the new semester until the fee hike is rolled back. In an attempt to deter the student movement, the administration, with the help

of its supporters, has resorted to questionable means such as exams being conducted through Whatsapp and email and forceful attempts to make students register with the hiked fees.

Things reached a climax on the evening of January 5, 2020 when a group of 70-80 armed masked men and women entered the campus of JNU. They proceeded to not only disrupt a peaceful meeting organised by the Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers’ Association (JNUTA) at Sabarmati T-point but also terrorised the residents of the campus with mob violence. In the three hours that followed, many people were injured and traumatised, teachers and students alike. Many hostel rooms were also vandalised, with the residents either having to hide themselves to escape the violence that was targeted towards them. Despite the atmosphere of chaos and fear, the police who were present in and around the campus did not intervene and it was seen that they themselves were aiding the perpetrators in carrying out the attack; even the campus security guards were nowhere to be seen. It is no coincidence that the attack took place on the last date of registration itself with the majority of the students still boycotting the registration process.

The fee hike in JNU is not an isolated incident; the same has been happening to various educational institutions all over the country owing to the current government’s push

Weather-wise it was raining on the first day of the year; hence it was cold and damp, but that did not dampen the spirits of the young souls in Jowai in particular to welcome the New Year in style. The community feast celebrated by all the localities followed by a carnival sort of procession in the entire town was as joyous as ever. And elsewhere in the state families and friends were out picnicking on their favourite picnic spots, but something else happened during the first few days of the year.

In the international arena the US drone attack which killed general Soleimani of the Iranian army almost sparked a war between the two countries of the world. Thankfully good sense prevailed on both sides and war was averted but not without casualties. Although Iran missiles did not hit American bases in the region, but unfortunately a jetliner was hit killing all the crew members and passengers in the aircraft. In India the protest against CAA has refused to die down in many parts of the country but in the famous University of the country something untoward happened.

The unfortunate incident of violence in the JNU campus which left many of the students of the University injured and the attack on students in the other prominent universities in the country should be a cause of concern for all right thinking people. If the Universities stop being a place to debate over issues where voices of dissent are respected, what kind of future do we have for our temples of learning? Universities should be like a garden where different kind of flowers with all hues and colours should grow at peace with each other and that is what we should teach our children. But if the goal of the administration is to patronize only one view or one voice and suppress debate then the alternative to that is violence as we have seen from the incidents at JNU, Jadavpur, Jamia and other universities, where unruly

for privatisation of education which will lead to the exclusion of people belonging to marginalised sections of society. This kind of attack on a peaceful university space occurred just weeks after the recent brutal attacks on two other university campuses, namely Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University.

Moreover, there has been an increasing clampdown on voices of dissent by the government through the use of state machinery such as the police and Section 144. As students and research scholars from the state of Meghalaya studying in JNU, we cannot help but voice our concerns over these disturbing trends that create an environment of fear to question and criticise the government, especially in university campuses which are meant to be safe spaces for learning and engaging. We also feel disappointed by the lack of response from the administration and government with regards to addressing the situation and ensuring better security measures for the students.

However, amidst all this, we cannot help but be overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from students and concerned individuals from different parts of the country. On this note, we would like to express our gratitude to the JNU alumni of Meghalaya, the various student unions and concerned citizens who have come out and stood in solidarity with

JNU. At this time, when our political leaders have failed to fulfil their responsibilities towards their own people, we earnestly appeal to the general public to be aware and vigilant of the dangerous path that this current government is taking us on. We also encourage the student community and civil society groups of Meghalaya to engage in this movement to protect our right to education and freedom of speech. As of now, JNU stands united in its demand for affordable and quality education for all citizens of the country.

Yours etc.,
Meghalaya Students of JNU,
New Delhi

JNU mayhem

Editor,

The brutal attack on students and teachers inside prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus in New Delhi perpetrated by masked miscreants armed with iron rods and sticks on 5 January night shocked the entire country and evoked massive protests across the country as well as abroad. Over 30 including professors and JNU Students’ Union (JNUSU) president were injured due to the violence, some of whom had been inflicted very serious wounds. This terror-type attack in JNU is not only an assault on students, teachers and causing damage of public property. It is an attack on the institution-the core foundation of a country

message of the State government.

The Shillong Times exposé on January 11, where it was confirmed by the NGT appointed Committee that Cement plants and power plants used illegally mined coal to power their units brought to light the fact that this Government and the previous one too were directly or indirectly involved in the illegal transportation of coal. The Government and the cement companies are hand in gloves with and the coal mine owners to rob the state of its valuable resources. The unholy nexus has denied the government royalty from the mineral that is due to the state and it has also deprived the state of taxes that would have added to the state exchequer had there not been these illegal activities.

After the Katakey Committee recommendation was carried by the Shillong Times, not only the Home Minister James K Sangma is in a mess, but even Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma will have a hard time answering questions from media persons when he meets the press the next time. The public have the right to know why the State Government is silent, or why it turns a blind eye when this looting is happening and who benefits from this entire episode. This is a very serious issue for CM Conrad Sangma and he should come up with a white paper on the illegal transportation of coal which has robbed the state of the revenue that it is due to receive. As per reports the state should earn royalty of Rs. 675 per MT, contribution to Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund at the rate of Rs. 485 per MT and GST/VAT @ of 5% and if we assume that the rate of coal per MT is Rs. 8000 then the government is losing a revenue of Rs 1,560 per MT. The new trucks now carry a minimum of 30 MT per trip and the number of trucks transporting coal per night would be minimum of two thousands trucks just on the Khliehriat Guwahati route. The State is thus losing 9 to 10 crore per night

but someone else in the Government is pocketing this money!

The illegal transport of coal did not bring any revenue to the State and nor do the local people benefit from it. It is only the few people who have benefitted from the illegal act and still people justify the act. People justify the transport of coal on the pretext that it is people’s livelihood. But selling drugs is also somebody’s livelihood and it is an illegal activity so should the police should not catch those who are engaged in selling drugs? The jaibhynriew is supposed to be one which considers ‘kamai ña ka hok and tip briew tip blei’ as the two of the three cardinal principles of life of the people. But where is the value system of ‘to earn righteousness and respect fellow humans and the will of God’, when people openly engage in illegal activities?

Can the people still call themselves Khasi Pnar when they have abandoned their cardinal principles of life? The people who validate illegal activities do not have the right to call themselves the children of the Jaibhynriew because they have abandoned the very cardinal principles of life which make it distinct from others. This question is also for the students’ movements of the state. In the student protest earlier, the popular slogan was ‘Khasi by birth, Indian by accident’ but now the students has come up with a more dreadful slogan which they shout at the top of their voices, ‘Ha la ka ri katba mon.’ This is not only un-Khasi-like because people are supposed to earn righteousness and respect fellow humans and the will of God (kamai ñaka hok & tipbriew tip Blei), but if the youth continue with this mindset, it is like opening a Pandora’s box. How then are we different from those we oppose?

2020 did not start on a happy note but hopefully as the days and months pass, things will work out and the year will bring cheer and joy in the face and the hearts of the people of Meghalaya.

New Vision 2040
How can the last man gain?

By Shivaji Sarkar

India has stepped into a new decade, like the rest of the world. It needs a new vision 2040 to propel the country – its politics and economics and junk the present system.

At the year-end, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unfolded the Rs 102 lakh crore NIP – national infrastructure pipeline – a good effort but with limited aim. The Narendra Modi government has given a call for \$5 trillion economy – a robust aim. Now the nation needs to rethink how this can be broad-based. The NDA thinks in terms of reaching the last man – antyodaya. A review is needed whether the policies are percolating down to the last person or not or if GDP – rising or plummeting - has a meaning for him.

A vision 2040 document could offer a model to the rest of the world that at present is in awe of the lone super power, the US and is forced into submission before its bullying tactics. America is having the world’s largest army for perpetuating jingoism and keeping the Asian countries in awe. On flimsy grounds it has waged wars since the attempt to subjugate Vietnam to the present destruction of the Middle East from Libya to Iran. The recent threats to Iran and killing of Gen Qasem Soleimani do not bode well for India.

The US is the largest economy but it has millions in utter penury. An average American is struggling to eke out a living. It led the global sub-prime collapse. It cannot be an ideal for India. It exemplifies that large does not mean an efficient pro-people economy.

India rooted in panchsheel and ideals of sarve bahavantu sukhinah cannot emulate the US. So despite the vision of a capable army in the Vision 2020, India did not envisage a predatory army despite a rogue and belligerent neighbour in its West. Prudently it countered that with removal of Article 370 and 35A.

Still a nation has to relocate at why most political parties are losing vibrancy, why ideologies have failed – and if these had any strength, why violence is becoming culture in some States like West Bengal or Kerala, why different States have different economic growth pattern, why two Chief Ministers should speak in similar vein on the deaths of children in hospitals or why Mamata Banerjee is insensitive to Park Street rape victim or she and Pinarayi Vijayan of Kerala keep mum on political killings. Is politics getting too ghettoized?

Or is it the result of a sagging economy? Should the budgetary process be altered? Else how could 25 per cent cut in department allocations, about Rs 40,000 crore, be justified in fog end of the financial year?

India is conquering space but faltering in managing mundane agriculture or rising prices or profiteering motives of governments or privatising public assets or treating private education as pariah or heaping innumerable tolls and fees or disallowing the poor through high fares, uses of rail, metro or bus. Has not its market ideology heaped with it problems in every sector --education and health to industry to deciding its priorities?

As India progresses it has to find out whether the neo-rich getting into the portals of power are becoming insensitive. Are not they misguiding

governance through trade bodies, bureaucratic functioning and making every bit of service beyond the reach of the people?

The Constitution guarantees barrier free travel. Why should atrociously high toll or fee hinder it? The roads are built on public land. It needs to be explained how a private body can be given its zamindari. A villager or a farmer travelling across the tolls are levied an unnecessary cost. The Vision needs to find out how it is making living expensive and increasing prices -- that too after multiple tolls, cess and road taxes. Education cess is not making education affordable.

The NIP has yet to look into why a new parliament building or central vista is needed instead of pride in continuity in a heritage building. Or why road allocations are made for the same set of roads – in the name of refurbishing, redesigning or and adding lanes.

The people want a white paper on IL&FS collapse after doling out Rs 91000 crore to the toll roads and not getting repayment despite toll collections. It is essential for preventing a new proposed Central funding body meeting the same fate.

More power 619 GW is to be produced. Why? The country is unable to utilize 356 GW present production and power tariffs are bleeding every sector.

For the sake of private, Air India was annihilated, MTNL-BSNL is sent to sick bed, hosts of other sold to competitors, bank coffers are opened up. It has led to enormous losses to public financial institutions – UTI (losing Rs 64,000 crore shut), LIC, GIC and almost all banks. These have lost about Rs 50 lakh crore since 1992 Harshad Mehta scam. Still the private sector is dependent on the government. Is it not slowing down the economy?

More so, wages are not keeping pace with the rising prices. The price indices have been modified in 2011 so as to reflect reduced impact of the rises. Even the modified index reflects 19.5 per cent inflation, may be actually 30 per cent as per the old matrix. India is becoming expensive for its residents whose income is low and being eroded by high 42 per cent income-tax (I-T) and plethora of indirect taxes estimated at 40 per cent, including profession tax in many States, despite GST.

Yes, an Indian pays over 70 per cent in taxes. Innovative bureaucrats despite that go on increasing the prices of fuel, rail fares, bus fares, freight and consequently jacking up prices of commodities. It is affecting nutrition, as people are unable to take proper meals, consumption and GDP growth.

The bankisation of the society has created new middle men in payment portals. It has made dealings expensive. The note-ban alone turned at least 15 per cent more black money. The people of West, Australia and Japan are protesting to come out of the clutches of banks. Why should not India go back to no-cost cash transaction?

The list is long. Wider review of the past’s follies and road map for the future has to be drawn. For the new vision, the country has to review its past mistakes so that the future generation does not have to go through the same trials and tribulations as this one has encountered.--INFA

“ Without electricity, the air would rot.”
--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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End of VIP status symbol

AMIDST the raging controversies around the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), some positive aspects of governance should not be missed. On January 12, the NDA Government effected a major VIP security cut by taking away the National Security Guard (NSG) 'black cat commandos' from this task. Earlier the Government had withdrawn SPG cover from the Nehru-Gandhi family. The NSG was conceptualised and raised in 1984 to counter terror attacks across the country. Over time the NSG was used to provide proximate mobile security cover to VIPs and are armed with sophisticated assault weapons.

A VIP given this category of security has about two dozen personnel guarding him/her. Foremost amongst those VIPs entitled to this category of security are Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Uttar Pradesh CM, Yogi Adityanath. This duty is now being assigned to para-military forces. This decision was taken after a careful audit was done of the NSG. A senior official in the security establishment has said that VIP security duties were weighing down the NSG whose primary task is to counter-terror and prevent hijacking and secure critical installations. After withdrawing the NSG commandos from security duty about 450 elite security personnel will be deployed to duties specifically mandated for them. In India, it has become fashionable for VIPs to use the NSG for security duties, thereby diluting the very purpose of their mandate which is to ensure that critical installations are not subject to terror attacks. For VIPs in India having the NSG to guard them is more of a status symbol. It is ridiculous that the NSG should be used to secure the lives of people who are not carrying out any national duties such as Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her family. Even Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are MPs and as such are entitled the security allowed to other MPs. But for a long time they have been given the services of the elite Black Cat Commandos. Thankfully the NSG will now be freed from this routine duty.

Those used to such VIP treatment will of course whine and make an issue of this loss of status. They include many from the present political dispensation and those presently in the Opposition. Out of a total of thirteen VIPs who require Z-plus security, many do not require the same level of security today. A case in point is that of former Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi. Time has come for Government to decide that those requiring Z-plus security cover should manage their own private security. All of them can afford this. Why should an elite force with a specific mandate of counter-terrorism be burdened with the security of politicians?

TO THE EDITOR

Load shedding: Govt's callous attitude

Editor,
At a time when the state is experiencing one of it's coldest winters, the proposed 8 hours load shedding starting from January 13 has come as a rude shock. Afternoons will now be spent shivering in the cold and for the elderly and the very young it will be a battle trying to keep warm. A number of families now depend solely on room heaters for heat and to cut off this one source of heating is inhuman.

For students preparing for their various exams, it is sheer cruelty to deny them the use of electricity during this critical part of their preparations. Not only will their internet access be greatly hampered by the load shedding during the afternoons but sitting and studying for even a couple of hours without any heat in this cold weather is unthinkable and unbearable. For those who like to study till late at night, the electricity will be turned off at 11pm and for those who like to get up early in the morning and study, heaven help them. They will have no electricity and no heat till 6.30 am. I'm surprised that the government is not showing any concern at all for the students' exam preparations by implementing this new timing for load shedding. Our children need to be comfortable in order to concentrate in their studies and the 8 hours load shedding seems de-

signed to hamper the exam preparation of the majority of students.

The board exams are crucial for our children's future and the government should be extending every help possible in order to help them excel instead of acting as a hindrance to their progress. I therefore request the government to revoke it's decision of increasing the load shedding hours.

Load shedding a crime

Editor,
On Monday, January 13 2020, the revised load shedding hours have started and straight away the arbitrary nature of the MeECL has surfaced. The second daily dose was supposed to end at 4 pm, but, in Nongrah Nongpdeng, Shillong, electricity came on only at 4:27 pm. Students who are preparing for various exams are already facing problems and if the MeECL is going to stretch the load shedding hours at their whims and fancies, it is only going to make things worse for the students and for everyone else who depend on electricity for lighting and cooking, primarily, and also for other activities. Domestic power users, despite paying their bills regularly, have always been the worst sufferers at the hands of the MeECL, which however, uses kid gloves when dealing with defaulters and the subsidised industrial units. We are simply the public who pay our power bills regularly and it is none of our

business if the water level in the Umiam lake recedes. It is incumbent upon the MeECL to find a solution to the situation, not to forget too, that this is an annual affair, with the MeECL citing the same reasons all the time. When will the people at the helm of affairs take their jobs seriously and do the job they are paid for? Or does this issue also require judicial directives to ease the paying public's suffering?

College students to the fore

Editor
When the going is tough and the pressure is on, when reserves of strength are waning and the victory over CAA still not in sight, the men and women we need are not lawyers, politicians, historians, economists, social reformers, scientists, however important they may appear to be but the students across India. Students carrying placards of the Constitution, claiming liberty to march with knowledge and discipline and most of all in the spirit of satyagraha of Gandhi - a weapon more powerful than the might of the pre 1947 British Empire are what's needed today. It may sound impossible but if we really value our hard earned freedom and also remember the freedom fighters in Kalapani who were brutally tortured and murdered, then we are ordained to join in. If any amendment is worth bringing in then it is Art 25A

Finance Minister's hide and seek with economy

Sitharaman desperately needs to establish her credentials

By K Raveendran

tations that Modi has ever held on the economy in the past five years.

It was the absence of Nirmala Sitharaman from these meetings that raised the curiosity of media and

the problem through posturing and symbolism rather than concrete action. Her stimulus programme, introduced initially through 'Equated Weekly Installments', and now with lesser

cism. In her budget speech, she deliberately withheld numbers relating to the government's overall revenue and expenditure, for both the previous year and the current year.

It turned out that figures of revenue and expenditure of 2018-19 as provided in the documents were not just misleading but actually false. The doubts led to an unprecedented situation in which the finance minister had to claim that the numbers were indeed authentic.

"The data which is given in the budget is 100 per cent above board...there need not be any speculation on the figures which have been given out. Every number is authentic," the minister said while replying to the concerns raised by members during the discussion on the budget in the Lok Sabha. No other finance minister has had to make such a claim.

All her optimism notwithstanding, the economy is in dire straits. And the latest estimates paint even a more dismal picture. The Central Statistics Office has projected the growth rate for 2019-20 at 5 per cent, the lowest in the current series with 2011-12 as the base year. This is quite a climb down from the 7 percent projected by the Economic Survey and marks an 11-year low.

Everyone is looking forward to her new gimmicks in the presentation of her second budget. In place of her red cloth to wrap the budget papers like last year, she can probably come dressed in a traditional red khadi saree, like the legendary Shivabhogam, who became India's first lady auditor in 1931 and in whose name the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has instituted an award. The connection might help her establish some credential as a finance minister. (IPA Service)

frequency, has failed to make any mark and the economy continues to suffer from lack of demand.

Nirmala Sitharaman goes on like a broken record, blaming all the ills of the economy on the 'misrule' of

sections of the political leadership. It is a different matter that her presence would have made any material difference to the deliberations. Modi's meetings achieved at least one thing. He acknowledged that the

It was the absence of Nirmala Sitharaman from these meetings that raised the curiosity of media and sections of the political leadership. It is a different matter that her presence would have made any material difference to the deliberations.

economy was facing a slowdown, although the reference was made to highlight the capacity of the Indian economy to bounce back. Nirmala Sitharaman has been refusing to accept there has been a slowdown, an approach that prevented any real solution to the current economic problem.

The finance minister has been trying to talk down the economic crisis and solve

the UPA regime, little realising that the Modi government has been in power for more than one tenure. Her first budget, the papers of which were brought to parliament in folder wrapped in red cloth, another meaningless symbolism, did very little to tackle the problems in the economy.

Most of the initiatives came outside the budget, which was incidentally reduced to a political speech, attracting widespread criti-

Yours etc.,
W Passah
Ex-HOD Electronics
St Edmunds College

What's wrong with college students protesting?

Editor,
Recently Sunil Gavaskar had asked college students to be Indians first and to go back to their classrooms. He said, "The country is in turmoil. Some of our youngsters are out on the streets when they should have been in their classrooms." During the time of the freedom struggle and also during the time of emergency, college students hit the streets instead of just confining themselves inside the classrooms because they were indeed conscious and ideal Indians. They played a great role to make India free from colonial yoke during the Gandhi satyagraha movement. They again did take a major part to save our democracy during the JP movement. Those who dared to join those movements put the interest of India above their career goals. Indeed we salute them for their sacrifice.

Commenting on Gavaskar's super slow first world cup one day cricket

match against England in 1975 in which he scored just 36 runs from 174 deliveries, the then team manager, GS Ramchand had said, "It was the most disgraceful and selfish performance I have ever seen." We do not want to remember this innings where self interest of the batsman ruthlessly jeopardized the country's interest. But we will certainly remember selfless freedom fighters for their coming out of their classrooms to the streets to peacefully protest against the British raj for the sake of India.

College students have often been advised not to join politics. But if they do not join politics then where will we get young educated leaders from? It is true that students should give maximum attention to their studies. However, the Universities need to teach students about our Constitution, how to logically present one's views and the art of listening and thinking about others' opinions. This will enable graduates to be conscious citizens to objectively exercise their voting rights and even to become political leaders to lead the country.

There must be a clear road from University campuses to local self governments, assemblies and parliament. We need more young educated youths in politics rather than local goons. The equation between machismo and politics needs to be banished with logic and reasoning. What we need from politicians is empathy. But machismo is against the idea of empathy.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Forestry Report
Need to value ground reality

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

At a time when global warming is critical to human survival, forests play a significant role. Thus the much-hyped State of Forest Report, 2019 which has been blown out of proportions, needs to be critically analysed, considering the heavily depleted forest cover of the country. As the report reveals, the total forest and tree cover stands at around 80.73 million hectares but it is only around 24.56 per of the total geographical area of the country, while according to an assessment, the minimum area needed under forest cover should be around 33 per cent.

However, according to the report, only 13 out of 28 States have 33 per cent forest cover. The north-eastern States feature in this list. Six of these eight States top the chart; Sikkim and Assam now lag behind with Goa, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha entering the list. Recorded as 'un-classed forests', these form a sizeable portion in most of the States except Sikkim that has no such category. In fact, the North East shows a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 765 sq. km. i.e. 0.45 per cent of its geographical area. It needs to be mentioned here that dense forests are a feature only in tribal majority States.

Only 3.02 per cent of the geographical area is under very dense forest, while the moderately dense forest is 9.38 and open forests is 9.26 per cent. Obviously, the quality of most of the forest area of the country is poor. Alternatively tree cover, the contribution outside reserved forests, is 2.89 per cent made possible through the initiatives of the community.

The report showed two worrying aspects of the country's greening programme in terms of quality of forest. It showed a decrease of 330 sq. km. of forest in 'Recorded Forest Area' (RFA) and continued loss of forests in north-eastern States, which are known for old forests having the capacity to sink more carbon as compared to newly developed green cover. The old forests are also important for conserving country's rich biodiversity. Decrease of forest in RFA showed that the forest department has not been able to improve or conserve the forest wealth of the country under its jurisdiction.

More surprising is the fact that areas outside the registered forests, registered an increase and this indicates that forest officials in connivance with mafias are looting these forests. It is indeed distressing to note that tribals have lost ownership of the jungles and thereby their livelihoods which were traditionally dependent on forest produce. While tribals are suffering, the forest bureaucracy with political backing is looting the forest wealth.

According to a forest expert, Ajay Kumar Saxena, and many others like him, the country, however, recorded 4306 sq. km. of forest cover outside the RFA, including social forestry, putting the total increase of forest cover at a mere 3976 sq.km. Karnataka recorded the highest increase (1025 sq. km in forest cover in the past two years followed by Andhra Pradesh (990 sq. km) and Kerala (823 sq. km).

As is well known, forests can create local microclimates to help generate rainfall, decreased evapo-transpiration can intensify droughts when soil moisture decreases due to warming or rainfall deficits. Plants exchange energy, carbon and water with the atmosphere as a part of photosynthesis and respiration. Warm temperatures can ex-

acerbate soil moisture loss via evaporation and intensify droughts. Plants also try to save water by modulating water that reaches the atmosphere through a process evapo-transpiration. Thus it goes without saying that afforestation and reforestation efforts should provide pathways to balance the portfolio when tradeoffs may be needed to manage food and fibre security and biodiversity with urbanization and other economic development goals.

It has been estimated that the existing canopy cover of 4.4 billion hectares could be expanded by an additional 0.9 billion hectares, leading to total sequestration of over 200 giga tonnes of carbon. Though this is imperative for India to stay true to its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) targets, the results are not quite encouraging.

While ecological balance is vital at such a juncture, what is happening at the ground level is the increasing trend of forests being denuded for various projects, relating to infrastructure development, expansion of roadways and highways. Added to this is the trend towards urbanisation, all of which has resulted in actual depletion of forest area.

The present data presents many areas of serious concern, keeping in view the imbalance in the environment, ecology and climate change that India is suffering from. More pronounced adverse effects like uneven rainfall, drought, water crisis and devastating floods reinforce the need for giving more emphasis to forestry.

Saving our forests is vital for the country at such a juncture when climate change has been affecting a large section of the population. It is doubtful whether the realisation of protecting our forests and turning them as reserves of our ecosystem is understood by the bureaucrats and politicians in the country, who are in charge of framing policies, which most often tend to be anti-people.

It is difficult to agree with observations that there has been an increase in forest and tree cover and reduction in the diversion of forest land... despite...increasing population, industrialisation and rapid economic growth. Deep forests have remained more or less the same while diversion has been on the increase. One may mention here that way back in 2013, an RTI application filed by environmental lawyers, Ritwick Dutta and Rahul Choudhary revealed that the country, on an average, loses 135 hectares of natural forest land per day to development schemes. As of 2017, the government passed about 10,000 approvals related to forest diversions.

Finally, while support for industrial forestry within the country cannot be doubted, it is best done by benefiting all stakeholders. A forest is after all not a mere stand of over-mature timber but a home to forest-dwelling communities as also wildlife. The ecosystem services from forests, both financially tangible and otherwise, provide sustainability to the national economy and resilience to climate change. Thus, what is required is actually an ecosystems approach with focus on climate justice and the rights and role of local communities. It should also address biodiversity and poverty effectively and challenge the underlying causes of deforestation directly, resolving governance, poverty and land tenure issues.---INFA

“Everything you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.”
--- Philip Adams

The Shillong Times
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Meghalaya Police compromised

THE Meghalaya Lokayukta recently released a list of police officials involved in the illegal mining and transportation of coal from different districts of Meghalaya, but, mainly from East Jaintia Hills. Names of other officials such as those from the District Administration, the Directorate of Mineral Resources (DMR) etc., have also featured but what should concern the people of Meghalaya is that the law keepers have themselves turned deviant. Illegal coal mining and transportation has carried on since 2014 under many pretexts; the principal one being that coal already mined before the April 2014 NGT ban has to be transported to prevent loss to the mine owners. Things climaxed when 15 miners were trapped in a flooded mine in East Jaintia Hills on December 13, 2018 after which rescue operations failed majorly to rescue the miners. Only two bodies could be retrieved by the Indian Navy after much effort and resources being pulled in from several quarters. This matter reached the Supreme Court when a Delhi-based lawyer took up the case on humanitarian grounds. The Supreme Court had given clear instructions about how the inhuman rat hole mining must be discontinued and the already mined coal (which incidentally kept appearing day after day) should be auctioned by Coal India Ltd. The State was also censured and told to come up with a comprehensive Mining Policy before coal mining could be resumed. This remains an unfulfilled task both of the Congress- led MUA Government and the present MDA Government. The reasons we are made to believe is that mechanized mining is not viable (in other words not profitable to the miners).

Many questions need to be answered by the Police Department, especially by the Police Chief. Could the police officials be so deeply involved in facilitating the illegal transportation of coal without the knowledge of the higher- ups in the Department, particularly the Police Chief and the Home Minister? What is even more tragic is that the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the Home Minister has also been named by the Lokayukta for being involved in this murky business. How can so many police officials be involved in corruption at the personal level without being punished for their crimes? Were they simply carrying out orders from their higher-ups? Is that not open collusion and therefore equally venal? What action does the Lokayukta propose to take if and when the CBI enquiry reveals who the perpetrators of this daylight robbery are? Clearly those found guilty should be dismissed and the Police Department cleansed of filth. As it is some high-ranking police officers have entrenched themselves in the Headquarters for over a decade and developed vested interests. Matters have come to such a pass that officers not given to corruption are now completely demoralized and are kicked around to inconsequential posts. This has to end sooner than later.

LOOKING BACK
June 27, 1989

Saikia likely to be inducted into central cabinet

Mr Hiteswar Saikia, who has just lost the Rajaya Sabha election in a controversial verdict, is being considered for inclusion in the Central Cabinet, according to informed sources here. A reshuffle of the Union Cabinet is on the cards early next month. For Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, this is going to be the "poll cabinet" aimed at securing maximum electoral advantage. A number of known vote catchers who have to go behind the wings for this or that reason, are expected to be taken in. They include former Bihar Chief Minister Dr. Jagannath Mishra and Mr

Bhagat former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mr Arjun Singh, former UP opposition leader Mr Ram Naresh Yadav and former Assam Chief Minister Mr Hiteswar Saikia. In fact, Mr Saikia asked to file his nomination soon after he declared that he was on 'leave' on health grounds to make way for his entry to the Union Cabinet. However, since anybody can remain a minister for six months without being a member of Parliament and parliamentary election is scheduled to be held within this stipulated time, there will be no problem if the Prime Minister desires so.

Modi’s shifting tactics on CAA unlikely to yield result
India’s youth has punctured the pretensions behind Act

By Arun Srivastava

CAA is not about taking away anybody's citizenship, but about granting citizenship." The second has been: "There are a lot of questions among the youth about the new citizenship law, and some are being misled by rumours around it... it is our duty to clear their doubts." Modi has been trying to present himself as a statesman. The protest has been going on for a month, but Modi never tried to reach out to the people. On the contrary, his lieutenant Amit Shah has been threatening the participants. The worst sufferers are ironically the students and youths. Whether it is Jamia or JNU, they have been targets of the brutality unleashed by the state machinery. It is simply to confuse the

question which haunts them most is why they are being singled out? Why they are being terrorized by the State? According to Modi, the CAA is only for persecuted minorities. If this were indeed the case, then the existing law and regulations would have facilitated the government to accomplish the task. There was no reason for undertaking so much of pain, which has in turn created acute resentment and a climate of fear in the country. The fact is previous governments have given citizenship to thousands of refugees. In Pilibhit, UP, more than 50,000 such persons were conferred with this rights long back. Few years back, the famous singer Adnan Sami, a Pakistani national, was granted citizenship.

The nation is in a crisis. The polarisation brought about by the BJP and Modi government is badly dividing the nation.

students and presenting himself as a democratic leader that Modi has been blaming "people with political interests", who he says are deliberately "spreading rumours" about the new citizenship law. Ever since the CAA was cleared by the Parliament, the saffron leaders and intellectuals have been singling out Muslims. Undeniably, Amit Shah has been at the forefront, whether it is in Parliament or on the streets. In Lok Sabha, he made clear that Muslims would be thrown out. In the changed situation, it is argued that like Hindus, the Muslims would not be harmed. But it is vague assurance. Modi and Shah are aware that the poor among Muslims, like the Hindu poor, Dalits and tribal people, do not always have documentary proof to substantiate their claims of being Indian. Besides the

These events make it absolutely clearly that was no need to amend the Constitution and this task could have been merely through an executive action. What is really intriguing is why the Modi government is hiding its real intentions behind the façade of having a citizenship act. If Modi had been really honest in his commitment, he would have opened talk with the protesters before implementing the law. Amidst wide-ranging countrywide student protests, Modi government has already notified the Citizenship Amendment Act effective from January 10. This move of Narendra Modi makes it explicit that he has no respect for the peoples' desire and is ready to confront the citizens of India. His determination to push ahead the saffron agenda is so precious that he is even prepared to

antagonise the people of the country.

During the month-long movement, at least 25 persons have been killed. Ironically, except a few deaths, the government and its people have failed to muster courage to confess that these people were killed by police. What has been most atrocious is that the police has not been ashamed of showing its fascist face to the people. The Act, which grants citizenship to immigrants belonging to Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Parsi, Christian and Buddhist communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, has also been opposed by many state governments. Modi should have at least cared for their moves and listened to their arguments. After all India is a federal structure and sentiments of the people should have been honoured.

Modi is not honest in his approach. While on one hand he says youths are misguided, on the other he is not willing to wait for their response to his observation. It simply implies that he has been paying lip service and nothing more. It is beyond comprehension why he is adamant to enforce the Act which has lost credibility and is being viewed with suspicion. Though Modi-Shah combination has launched mass reach out campaign it is irony that so far no sustained effort has been made by the BJP leadership to interact with the Muslims.

The nation is in a crisis. The polarisation brought about by the BJP and Modi government is badly dividing the nation. For the first time the Independent India is witnessing vertical divide and also confrontation between the people and the politics. The scenario emerging at the political horizon of the country is horrific. If this persists there is no doubt that the educational environment will be completely ruined. (IPA Service)

Big infra spending with little gain for economy
Time ripe for an impact audit

By Nantoo Banerjee

The government's latest resolve to invest as large as Rs 102 lakh crore in infrastructure is most welcome But, it may have little impact on the country's shrinking economic growth unless they are properly executed, monitored in stages and their impacts thoroughly audited. After all, the government's claim of spending over Rs 50 lakh crore on infrastructure over the last six years seems to have failed to generate much positive results on economy. The questions are naturally raised about the sources of such large funds, specific investment projects, their locations and implementation schedules and resultant impact on employment and national income. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lately claimed that "in last six years, there has been an investment of around Rs 50 lakh crore in infrastructure." She said infrastructure investment (in power, railways, irrigation, education, health, digital, urban, mobility, water) forms the bulk of the projects in the pipeline. The prime minister spoke about the setting up of a task force for India's infrastructure development. "The task force has identified Rs 102 lakh crore worth of projects, after conducting 70 stakeholder consultations in a short period of four months. These projects are spread across 21 ministries and 18 states and Union Territories," she said. The plan is certainly noteworthy. It would be nice if the government gives some specific details of these projects, including those responsible for their implementation, end results and contribution to employment and income generation. Large infrastructure spending is universally recognised as the surest way to push economic growth.

Unfortunately, India's implementation record of public-funded projects has been truly dismal. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) had recently expressed its concern over long delays in project implementation in India. The resultant cost overruns cause the biggest worry when it comes to funding India. The Beijing-headquartered multilateral bank has USD three billion exposure to India. AIIB is aware that India has a lot of appetite for credit and will continue to be a very large borrower in the near future. The bank was established in 2016 to fund developmental projects in which it takes both equity and debt interests. India is the second-largest shareholder in AIIB after China. According to chief investment officer D J Pandian".. the concern is how quickly a project is implemented. Time overrun will always take the project cost higher. If you are able to stick to the plan and do the project in time, that would be great." Interestingly, Pandian thinks India's current economic slowdown trend is temporary and more cyclical in nature. The bank is not too perturbed by the negative headlines on GDP expansion. The government must do more for infrastructure when there is a slowdown as it helps in a pickup. "Slowdown should not deter the government from building infrastructure as this is one of the surest ways to restart faster growth," he said. Notably, public infrastructure investment, such as

spending on roads, ports, rail network, bridges, housing, water supply and sanitation and other such projects, is one of the most well-known tools of anti-recessionary fiscal policy. AIIB is willing to fund USD one billion worth projects in India per annum for some more time, considering the fact that India's domestic needs are quite large. The bank's top investment officer thinks "India can afford to borrow, the space for borrowing is there. Many countries don't have the limits by being under IMF watch or some similar thing. India has good quality projects." The bank has over USD six billion of pending projects from India. In fact, China has doubled the value of infrastructure project approvals to stave off economic slowdown amid trade war with the US, last year. The sharp increase in infrastructure project approvals implies greater infrastructure spending in coming years to help stabilise China's economy. The actual infrastructure investment in China accelerated to 4.5 percent in the first nine months of 2019, up from 4.2 percent in the first eight months. Last year, China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has approved 21 projects, worth at least 764.3 billion yuan (US\$107.8 billion). The amount is more than double the size of the previous year's 374.3 billion yuan (US\$52.8 billion) in approvals recorded over the same period. They included 11 projects such as railways, roads and airports. On the other hand, even the US administration is in the process of enacting a comprehensive legislation that will provide \$200 billion over 10 years to meet the America's goal of generating at least \$1.5 trillion in total infrastructure investment. The government of India is obviously on the right track. However, it must pay proper attention to the approval and execution schedules of the projects. Sadly, this has not been happening. It should be remembered that infrastructure projects facing a big time and cost overrun will have little impact on the economy as the ultimate consumers may not find them quite useful or pocket friendly when the projects are finally ready. Previous track records of contractors to be engaged in new projects need to be seriously considered before awarding fresh orders. Years ago, the Vizag steel plant had to spend ten times more the original cost for a simple ash pond when it was finally ready after a long time overrun. Such government or public sector jobs helped some of the private contractors emerge, in due course, as among the country's major industrial houses while the original projects suffered permanently. Cost overruns in government funded construction projects have become an industry-wide phenomenon. According to a KPMG study, just 31 percent of all projects came within 10 percent of the budget in the past three years. Construction professionals can't afford to accept the new normal. Project selection and fund allocation without their strict compliance are most unlikely to meet the purpose of infrastructure spending to revive economy and its growth. This appears to be a major challenge before the Modi government. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Govt fails on all fronts

Editor,
Through your paper I would like to comment on our recent long hours of power cuts. It is amazing how crores of rupees meant for paying the power suppliers just vanishes and yet no one is booked or brought to task. No investigation is conducted I assume and yet the public suffer although most of us pay our bills. Somebody somewhere must have known and did nothing and still continues to do nothing. Your newspaper has so often written about governance, well that too like most of the money has vanished or maybe in this instance did not even exist. This Government and so have previous ones failed the people in every department.... Just before students are due to appear for their exams we have power cuts. Most of our streets have no street lighting. Our pavements are no longer fit for walking. In all of this what is most intriguing is when our MLA'S and Ministers say they go to WORK. What exactly is their WORK? And when they are in their offices if at all they are there, what exactly do they do when there is failure on all fronts? Yours etc., Christine Nonghuloo, Shillong-3

Load shedding not the solution
Editor, The Government

decision to effect load shedding for 8 hours in the State seems to be one taken in haste and without proper analysis. It's well known that the Board exams are banging at the doors of the students and therefore, the decision needs to be revisited. Load shedding will dim the light at the end of the educational tunnel as it will hamper students' schedules and eventually reduce their efficiency levels. This happening in an era where digital education is heavily promoted is surprising. Businesses will suffer the most because of this. The time 12:30-4:00 is peak time for businessmen and as such, load shedding will have a severe impact in this sector. It is also inconvenient for people to make changes to their schedule, especially when there are multiple working people in a family. I request the concerned authorities to reconsider the decision and come up with a more pragmatic intervention to meet the power crisis in the State.

Yours etc., Pratham K Sharma Shillong-3

Violence in universities

Editor,
This refers to the letters, "Systematic attacks on educational spaces worrying" by Meghalaya students of JNU and "JNU mayhem" by Gendra Galla Narzinary (ST, January 13, 2020). I feel helpless when I think about the current law and order situation in the

country. It has come to such a pass that now our children and teachers are not safe even within their university campuses. The incidents happening in university campuses during the last thirty days or so starting from Jamia Milia University to Jawaharlal Nehru University make me feel like living in a reign of terror. The Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University should immediately be dismissed and a fact finding committee should be set up to look into his role in the JNU mayhem. The role of some television channels and some political leaders also needs to be scrutinised by an independent body as they constantly vilified the students and teachers of Jawaharlal Nehru University and instigated violence against them. The Ministry of Home Affairs should answer why the Delhi police who are smart enough to find out lost materials of VVIPs within a short period of time, has been unable to identify and nab the masked culprits when video footage of the brutal violence in JNU, eye witness accounts and the tapes of a sting operation conducted by India Today have been available.

Yours etc., Sujit De, Via email

CAA violates the Constitution

Editor, The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 19, 2016 to amend the

Citizenship Act, 1955. It seeks to make illegal migrants belonging to the same six religions and three countries eligible for citizenship. It was given on the basis of citizenship by birth, descent or registration. The new Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 that has come into effect with the law giving due recognition to persecuted migrant belonging to Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, Buddhist faiths etc...except for Muslims belonging from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan suggest a departure from the secular aspect of the Constitution. To set this in motion the National Register of Citizens seems to have been set as the benchmark for granting citizenship to those in the NRC list and those outside would be deported or sent to detention camps to face trial. The question is how does the NRC become the only benchmark for granting citizenship or for that matter those left out of the CAA? Or how can the CAA seek to grant citizenship only on the basis of one's religion? The Preamble itself should be the benchmark rather than allowing flimsy laws to trample upon the Constitution and it's ideals.

Yours etc., Dominic S. Wankhar Via email

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

“ The world will not accept dictatorship or domination.”
--- Mikhail Gorbachev

The Shillong Times
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Final call on Nirbhaya case
THE Nirbhaya case of 2012 took what might be a final turn on Tuesday. The Supreme Court has dismissed the curative petitions filed by two of the convicts, which could be the last port of call in the legal realm for them before their execution is carried out, though the Mercy Plea before the President could still come in the way. As per standards of Indian judiciary, seven years in the progression of a case is by itself a fast-paced progress, as several cases remain undecided for decades. The final word from the five-member apex court bench was that there was no merit in the present plea to avoid capital punishment.

Capital punishment is rarest of the rare awards from courts and is delivered only in extreme cases. Admittedly, the Nirbhaya case was one, considering the cruelty with which a hapless paramedic was pounced upon in a running bus - to which she and her male friend were called in obviously with mischievous intent - and gang-raped in the most heinous manner, resulting in her death a few days later at a hospital. The incident shocked the nation and led to an unprecedented outrage.

The incident had led to massive public outcry and a new law against rape and cruelty to women had been brought forward. Feelings were that the law would help to curb such heinous acts against women, but the Supreme Court itself noted some days ago that the law did not prove to be of much help, considering the way such cases continued to take place. This meant, the job remains unfinished and more ways and means need to be found to ensure safety for women in public places.

It must be stressed in this context that if a case like this continues even after eight years then something is seriously wrong with the judicial system in this country itself. Justice delayed is justice denied. Also, cases dragging for long years meant additional exertion on the part of the judiciary, thereby wasting its precious time. A straight case often turns out to be not so, caught as it is in the labyrinth of arguments, submissions, and counter-arguments. This is the luxury that a developing nation where multitudes live with bare minimum income cannot afford. The more the cases carry on, the more the expenses for the complainants and the pressure on the judicial system.

Judges must be freed from cases in the normal course to attend to new cases. Instead, the tendency often is to give a long rope to one and all to try and divert the course of justice by picking loopholes. This has to end!

TO THE EDITOR

Unprecedented atrocities by predators

Editor,
This is to bring to public attention the situation prevailing at the Indo-Bangla border at Dawki, West Jaintia Hills District. Even before the Citizenship Amendment Bill (now CAA) was tabled, there have been many instances where Bangladeshi nationals have started encroaching into Indian territory. Since there is no proper demarcation or proper fencing and many vulnerable points, it is very easy for them to enter the country illegally. These Bangladeshi nationals are not refugees or immigrants but bandits and robbers. There have been a number of cases, some reported, many unreported of assault, mugging and so on. One case was reported on January 4, 2020 last when two young men travelling from Dawki to Lamin had to stop their car at Shmia Demmu, as the road was blocked with wood and stones. When one of the men got out of the car to clear the way, a group of bandits came through the woods and brutally assaulted him and his friend and also damaged the car. They left them with serious injuries. These bandits dragged them both through the thick jungle to the Indo-Bangla border.

They looted them and demanded money for ransom. Another victim travelling not far behind was witness to this event. He drove forcefully off the road, the bandits pelted stones at his car but he managed to escape. He immediately informed the people of Lamin and the news spread to the villages of Dawki and Sohkhā as well. The local residents organised a search party and went looking for the two men. As the search party came close, the bandits fled the scene and ran across the border back to Bangladesh. The victims on the other hand were rushed to the hospital where they received medical assistance. Many truck drivers have also fallen victims to this menace.
As a local resident living near the Bangladesh border I find it nerve-wracking to know that there are foreign bandits roaming around freely and terrorising our society and the villages as a whole. This happens because of the negligence and disregard of the Border Security Force and the local police who fail to perform their duties.
The people of Dawki, Sohkhā, Lamin and other neighbouring villages are enraged knowing that their safety and the safety of their families are at risk. I urge the concerned authorities to take action before this felonious act gets out of hand. Our Prime Minister ensured and asserted that the CAA will not cause any harm to

the citizens but he was wrong. It is high time for the government to realise the impending danger this holds for all of us, and for once, it is expected from the state and central government to keep the safety, security and the needs of its citizens first before that of any other foreign nationals.
Yours etc.,
Sofia Gashnga
Lamin Village

Age of lantern or I-phone?

Editor,
If we do not learn from past experiences then our future will be "dark." We shall be lagging behind in every aspect. It is nothing strange that as in the previous years, this year too Meghalaya is plunged into darkness at a time of the MeECL's choice. For this depressing situation we ourselves are to blame. We did not put earnest efforts to bring sunshine to the state. In spite of many years of load shedding we have virtually failed to act. We did not draw up plans to address this yearly phenomenon.
However, the present cabinet meeting called by Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma to resolve this power crisis in the state is quite encouraging, "Government blames non-functional units for power shortage" (ST, Jan 14, 2020). The CM has sincerely assured

Dual Citizenship
Fresh complications
By Dr S.Saraswathi

cause of Tamils in the island nation whereas proposals to extend their stay in India may work against them. In handling this case, great care is needed to keep political postures, local party politics and electoral calculations in check.
Citizenship is not thrust upon any foreigner in India under the Act, but granted only on application. Those who want to return to their homeland can always do so. Citizenship for a person is not a simple issue of granting certain rights to him in India, but affects also his status in his home country. Political parties and groups have to make a comprehensive study of the implications of citizenship before taking up a position on this issue or mobilize people for

who vehemently opposed the Citizenship Bill in Parliament as a document fit to be thrown in the Bay of Bengal, is not for dual citizenship for Sri Lankan Tamils, but wants to make arrangement for their return to their homes for those who want to return and to grant citizenship for those who want to stay back.
A senior Sri Lankan leader and former Chief Minister CV Wigneswaran has also urged India to grant dual citizenship to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in India since the late 1980s. According to reports, there are about 62,000 such refugees in 107 camps in Tamil Nadu and another 36,000 dispersed in other States. He calls for a fresh agreement between the two

secure than "second" citizenship. Dual and multiple citizenship undermine the spirit of citizenship which is loyalty to the nation.
It means obligation to pay taxes and fulfil residency requirements wherever needed for the concerned person in two countries. Inequality generally pertains to national service, voting right, and consular access to another country. Some countries do not allow dual citizenship holders to serve in their Armed forces, police forces, and certain public services. In Britain, it is said that deportation of citizens holding dual citizenship is common. USA is allowing, but not promoting dual citizenship. Security clearance is required for those holding dual citizenship in certain places.
Many countries do not allow dual citizenship. They require that applicants for citizenship by naturalization should give up all other citizenships they may be holding. They may also withdraw their citizenship from those who may voluntarily acquire citizenship of another country. Some permit dual citizenship only with some specified countries with which they have an agreement for the purpose. Some permit renunciation of citizenship while others do not.

The number of countries permitting dual citizenship (most of them in Europe) has increased since a treaty made in Europe to limit dual citizenship lapsed in the 1990s. Huge emigration rates in Europe led to closer links with diaspora in all countries. Movement between countries becoming common and frequent, multiple citizenship too became common. The case of India is very different.
Nationality and citizenship for emigrants are not just matters of getting certain rights in host countries, but involves emotional integration beyond rights and nations have to move slowly and cautiously in the matter. Wholesale absorption is neither possible nor desirable. Dual citizenship can only be temporary and for limited purposes and cannot be promoted as a political show to exhibit concern over the plight of emigrants not covered under the CAA.

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

Notification of CAA before supreme court hearing unjustified
Modi-Shah duo showing scant respect for national protests
By Arun Srivastava

Amidst wide ranging country wide student protest, Modi government has notified the Citizenship Amendment Act effective from January 10. This move of Narendra Modi makes it explicit that he has no respect for the peoples' desire and is ready to confront the citizens of India. His determination to push ahead the saffron agenda is so precious and important that he is even prepared to antagonise the people of the country. This action simply makes clear that apprehensions have come true.
This notification makes it apparent that beginning January 10, at least legally, illegal immigrants from communities - barring Muslims - can apply for Indian citi-

force the Act which has lost credibility and is being viewed with suspicion. Though Modi-Shah combination has launched mass reach out campaign the fact remains that so far no sustained effort has been made by the BJP leadership to interact with the Muslims.
The nation is in a crisis. The polarisation brought about by the BJP and Modi government through a series of legislation, judgments and executive action is badly dividing the nation. For the first time the Independent India is witnessing vertical divide and also confrontation between the people and the politics.
The scenario emerging at the political horizon of the country is horrific. The edu-

“The nation is in a crisis. The polarisation brought about by the BJP and Modi government through a series of legislation, judgments and executive action is badly dividing the nation. For the first time the Independent India is witnessing vertical divide and also confrontation between the people and the politics.”

zenship under the new Act. During the month long movement at least 25 persons have been killed. Ironically except a few deaths, the government and its people have failed to muster courage that these people were killed by police. What has been most atrocious is the police has not been ashamed of showing its fascist face to the people.
The Act, which grants illegal immigrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Christian and Buddhist communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, has also been opposed by multiple state governments. A notification in the official gazette by Addi-

cation environment will be completely ruined. The way the communalised police has been acting at the behest of the politicians and sycophant bureaucrats is quite disheartening. At the instruction of the government the future of the students is deliberately being ruined by the police in implicating in false cases. Undeniably they are being punished for acting at the directive of their conscience and compulsion to protect Constitution and the country.
Modi government could have avoided from creation of this situation. But unfortunately for the rulers these students are their class enemies. This step of theirs

“At the instruction of the government the future of the students is deliberately being ruined by the police in implicating in false cases. Undeniably they are being punished for acting at the directive of their conscience and compulsion to protect Constitution and the country.”

tional Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Anil Malik said, "In exercise of the powers conferred by subsection (2) of the Section 1 of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (47 of 2019), the Central Government hereby appoints the 10th day of January, 2020, as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force."
If the sources are to be believed the Union Home Ministry has been keenly watching the mood of the Supreme Court, which is set to take the petition challenging the Act on January 22 and it after this day the government would prefer to notify the rules for CAA. Without the rules in place, identifying necessary authorities and streamlining processes may not be feasible. How far it would be practicable to notify is not yet clear as the Act will disenfranchise a large number of Muslims notwithstanding Modi's claim that was a wrong perception and a canard spread by its enemies.
While Modi has been consistently denying this, it is beyond comprehension why he is adamant to en-

has turned great thinker Chanakya irrelevant. The notification comes in the backdrop of large-scale protests across the country against the Act and fears are being expressed that the movement may further aggravate in future. It is expected that after the rules specify the kind of documents the people have to submit underline the nature of protest.
The notification came a day after the Supreme Court expressed surprise at a public interest plea that sought a declaration that the Act was "constitutionally valid", saying that such petitions do not help a country going through "difficult times".
BJP leaders and cadres claim Modi as a statesman. They may believe so. But fact remains that a statesman is one who admits when he has made a mistake and has the grace to correct it before it does any more harm. The prime minister, unfortunately, has shown no signs of having either of these virtues. On the contrary his style has been self-congratulatory. (IPA Service)

should be made known to the PMO, New Delhi. Is it not the present government that dreamt and "promised" to make India digitally advanced? How can we have that unless we have sufficient electricity? I think this makes a logical point that we can put across to the Central ministry now. If necessary, we have come to the streets with lanterns! Better and more relevant will be by holding the 'I-phone in one hand' and a lantern in another!
Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

Meghalaya Calendar 2020

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I would like to bring to the notice of the concerned authority who published and printed the Meghalaya State Calendar 2020. In the picture for August 2020 the caption mentions 'Nokpante' whereas the picture depicts Nok A-chik / Nokmong.
Nok A-chik / Nokmong and Nokpante are two different type of dwellings of the A-chiks (Garos) for which a brief descriptions are given below:-
1. Nokpante can be described as (in the Garo habitation) the house where unmarried male youth or bachelors live. The word Nokpante means the house of bachelors. Nokpantes

are generally constructed in the front courtyard of the Nokma, the chief. The art of cultivation, various arts and cultures, and different games are also taught in the Nokpante to the young boys by the senior boys and elders.
2. Nok A-chik / Nokmong is the house where every A-chik family can stay together. This house is built in such a way that inside the house, there are provisions for sleeping, hearth, sanitary arrangements, kitchen, water storage, place for fermenting wine, place for use as cattle-shed or for stall-feeding the cow and the space between earthen floor and raised platform for use as pigsty and in the back of the house, the raised platform serves as a chicken coop for keeping fowl and for storing firewood; thus every need is being fully provisioned for in one house.
Everyone is aware that the calendar of our beautiful State of Meghalaya showcases our rich culture, traditions etc. both within the country and abroad. It is sad that such pictures are published without proof-reading by those who know about the different cultures of Meghalaya. Instead now people are misinformed about our culture, traditions etc.
Yours etc.,
Louvre Venus Rangsa Marak
Shillong.

“More than anything else, I believe it's our decisions, not the conditions of our lives, that determine our destiny.”

--- Benjamin Disraeli

The Shillong Times

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UN rebuff on Kashmir

KASHMIR, undoubtedly, is a bilateral matter between India and Pakistan; and that too, going by the fact that a part of this scenic landscape is with this country and another with the Islamic nation. Several UN resolutions in the past, and abortive attempts too to pass resolutions, are part of history. A fresh attempt by China, at the behest of Pakistan, the third in a row, to rake up the Kashmir issue at the UN failed to click; and understandably so. It is not clear whether China was serious about what it was doing, or made a show to satisfy Pakistan about its friendly credentials. The Indian envoy to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin explained India's actions vis-à-vis Kashmir, including the bifurcation and reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir state. All members attending the Security Council meet, other than China, agreed that Kashmir is a bilateral matter and UN need not take up this matter.

In a way, it is doubtful whether Pakistan itself saw this as a serious exercise at the UN fora. The silence of the international community over the changes New Delhi effected in Kashmir was significant. While some might argue that this was due to the diplomatic pushes being made by the Modi government to endear nations near and far, the fact is that the international community would not put its weight behind any issue linked to terrorism. Since Kashmir is affected by Pakistan-sponsored terror for long years, India earns both support and sympathy, while Pakistan, sadly, is seen in a bad light. Even China is faced with the problem of Islamic terrorism in its western province of Xinjiang, and separatist tendencies in Hong Kong in the east. Prime Minister Imran Khan is mindful of the image problem that Pakistan suffers, but even with his best intentions, it is not easy to eliminate terrorism's breeding grounds there. Still, the time is ripe for Imran Khan to act positively on the home turf itself, to change the image of Pakistan into a new and development-oriented nation. The generals who used to call all the shots in Pakistan are now a tamed lot - after the Balakot hit, when they were found blinking in the first phase, unable to drive away Indian fighter jets. The generals, though, saved "some face" after a 'retaliation' the next day in a fight over the sky above the LoC. After the bold steps by India in Kashmir in August, nothing goes to show the scenario there is unmanageable as such. The positives apparently outweigh the negatives.

TO THE EDITOR

Irony of load-shedding

Editor
Firstly, I sincerely admire the people of Meghalaya for tolerating this inefficient governance of the Government of Meghalaya. In any other part of the country, there would have been bloodshed with the amount of load shedding that is being effected by this government. By the way, all protests and demonstrations by our people here just end up in lip service. Has any protests and demonstration borne fruit? Talk about ILP, CAA, Harijan Colony, NGT et al. The protests last for a few days and they die down never to be resurrected. Coming back to load-shedding, it's a crime that 8 hours of power cut is being imposed and that too during the peak hours of work whether in government offices or commercial institutions. I wonder what the government officers do during those hours without electricity? They (not sure how many of them) start work at 10:00 am and by 12:30 pm there is no power

until 4:30 pm after which they leave the offices. So with just 3 hours of works daily they still receive their salaries. Is this justified? This is a crime.
Instead all the offices should be closed and since there is no work, don't pay the employees. Let their salaries clear all the pending bills of the MeECL. Another irony with the government is that they cut power for so many hours due to shortage of power supply from other sources. But why is that thousands of street lights (counting those that work) are being lit even during the day? Those streetlights are with halogen bulbs and the amount of energy they consume is very high. Can the government say something on why those streetlights should not be switched-off during the day so that the energy can be stored to at least reduce the bills to be paid to the Corporation?
Newspaper reports say that CM and many ministers and officers have gone to different countries for vacation, perhaps spending a few crore rupees. Actually if YOU in government love the state and its people as you have said during your

election campaign, with that money you could have installed solar street lights and saves so much of electricity. The irony is that YOU ARE INEFFICIENT and that's why you blame others.

Yours etc.,
Michael Makri
Shillong - 3

Keep politics out of religion

Editor,
I have penned down this letter to express my disaffection at the unethical practices of today's political leaders of major political parties. They are using various religious platforms and events to make themselves known or to further their political agenda. They forget that the Bible has mentioned Jesus as saying, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." This implies the separation of politics and earthly matters. Leaving aside politicians who by default are seen as donors, there are also individuals who represent a section of the Church organisations and continue

to use this as an advantage for the political parties and political agenda they align with. We have seen the likes of Mr. K.J. Alfonso a BJP MP and his silence on crucial matters. We see many others from various political parties also dragging the church along and turning it into a sort of a political circus. The faithful also happily allow matters of faith and religion to be used as tools for promoting political agenda. This indeed is unfortunate.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong

IAF strengthened

Editor,
Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is going to inaugurate the induction ceremony of SU-30 fighter squadron at the Air Force Station in Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu on January 20 giving more teeth to Indian military prowess. The fighters are expected to have the most potent platform capable of long reach and multi-role capabilities.
The SU-30 is a twin-

engine, two-seat super maneuverable fighter aircraft developed by Russia's Sukhoi Aviation Corporation. It is a multi-role fighter for all-weather, air-to-air and air-to-surface deep interdiction missions. It may be recalled that the IAF had earlier announced the resurrection of the 222 Squadron -The Tigersharks on January 1 with the Sukhois. The maritime strike squadron inducted in the IAF is also armed with the indigenous Brahmos missile. The Tiger Sharks equipped with formidable state-of-the-art air superiority fighter air craft, which are armed with 2.5 ton air- launched Brahmos missile of 300 km range, have the capability to strike from large stand-off ranges on any target at sea or on land with pin-point accuracy by day or night and in all weather conditions.

The Indian Ocean Region is vast and spread over three continents. Hence India has an important role to play in regional peace, security and prosperity and strengthening Indian defence with state-of-the-art warfare technologies and equipments is the need

only interested in getting maximum allocations to his/her department. This leads to higher cost of production per unit of services/goods. This in turn leads to disillusionment with the bureaucracy. Much has been written about bringing more efficiency to the bureaucracy but this is a futile wish. It is practically impossible to improve the efficiency of the bureaucracy (think Meghalaya where people come to work after 11 am if not later and leave by 4 PM or earlier). Alternatively can some public services such as power supply be efficiently supplied by other actors?

Alas, Niskanen after a great deal of study concludes that to raise the performance of the bureaucracy the remedy must come from the private sector where there is a structure in place for an incentive system for supplying public goods and services. We have experienced this in the telecom sector and the airlines as well. The monopoly of the bureaucracy must be dismantled if the consumer is to benefit. The very structure of the MSERC and the Public Grievances Forum already tell us how each of them is headed by former bureaucrats as if there are no competent people around. The bureaucracy is so self serving and protective of one another that they will create jobs for every retired bureaucrat.

The Public Choice theory is committed to market values and is contemptuous of government monopolies as they hold the consumers captive without providing the services they demand. Niskanen feels that this alone will improve the efficiency of the bureaucracy. If the power consumer in Meghalaya had a choice to buy power from private suppliers, MeECL would have to close shop! Of that I am very sure.

The problem with us in Meghalaya is that we are a long suffering public and unwilling to exercise the option of Public Choice and to register our complaints with the Consumer Grievances Redressal Forum created to address our grievances. It's time to inform ourselves of the remedies available and to use the appropriate platforms to register our complaints. If people are appointed to certain offices and are paid for it they must also be made to work.

of the hour.
Yours etc.,
TK Nandanani,
Via email

Why no DDK Shillong on DTH?

Editor,
The company DISHTV recently removed channel No 4018 of DDK Shillong from its platform and renamed it as Zee Bioscope. I lodged a complaint with the DISHTV company through email and telephonic conversation. The reply that I got from the Customer Executive of DISHTV is that they are removing the channel without mentioning the reasons for the removal. I am pained to see that DD Aizawl on channel No 4020 is still being telecast by DISHTV. So why is only the DDK Shillong channel axed? If the people living in urban areas with cable TV network can enjoy watching local news and local talent programmes on DDK Shillong, why is the same not transmitted by DTH Companies to their customers in rural areas where there's no cable TV network?

Yours etc.,
M Passah,
Via email

Protests have now spread across India
Shaheen Bagh a symbol of womens' political empowerment

By Arun Srivastava

Mahatma Gandhi has come alive at Shaheen Bagh. Politicians usually chant his name. So far the politicians have been exploiting the name of Gandhi for their personal benefits, but probably this is for the first time that the protesters are living his ideals. The special feature of the movement has been the protesters for the first time in Independent India have been pursuing the non-violent Satyagraha the fundamental ideal of Gandhism.

This is precisely the reason that even the Delhi police which carried out brutal attacks on students, especially on the women students, in Jamia Millia Islamia is finding it tough to muster courage to touch the protesters. Protesters resorting to Gandhian ideology has been basically the reason for Narendra Modi and his colleagues failure to muster moral conviction and courage to personally reach out to the protesters and open dialogue with them.

It is really a matter of shame that some senior ministerial colleagues of Modi have been trying to malign it as the Muslim protest to protect their communal interests. This is nothing but a slur on the Indian nationalism which has been primarily pluralist in character and never endorsed partisan politics.

To justify their

issue of their inconvenience due to this month long protest and force the police to vacate the place of the protesters.

Involving women is a strategic move of the organisers to broaden the space and ambit of the protest. Besides forcing the state machinery to refrain from using violence against them they have been motivating the hesitant women to come to the streets. This has also made the protesters to behave in a more restrained and disciplined manner. Women (and men) across the nation have now occupied parks, maidans and roads to register their protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

Undoubtedly the protesting women are scared of nasty machinations. They fear that on any day in the night they may pounce upon and evict them. Shaheen Bagh has become the face of women protest and galvanized people. This situation is unacceptable to BJP and Modi government, especially to Amit Shah.

Shaheen Bagh has one very positive and interesting aspect. They are open to the idea of engaging in a political debate. They are ready to discuss the issue of CAA, NRC and NPR with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Their argument is simple and straight: if we

There is no doubt that the number of Muslim women participants is more than the Hindu women. But the fact cannot be denied that they are participating and are part of the movement. The movement has now acquired a pan-Indian character. This is not a mean achievement. Yet another positive development that has taken place is Punjabi women have started langars for the protesting women.

insinuations against them these ministers and leaders have been citing the satyagraha being held closer to Muslim dominated areas. But undeterred by such allegations the protesters say that since these Shaheen Bagh-inspired protests are limited to Muslim neighbourhoods, it shouldn't be assumed that it is just Muslim sisters or brothers who are protesting. They point towards the Hindu and Sikh women participants and assert that people from different religion and beliefs are participating and standing in solidarity with them.

There is no doubt that the number of Muslim women participants is more than the Hindu women. But the fact cannot be denied that they are participating and are part of the movement. The movement has now acquired a pan-Indian character. This is not a mean achievement. Yet another positive development that has taken place is Punjabi women have started langars for the protesting women.

Shaheen Bagh inspires many protests across the country. The anti-CAA sit-in protests led by women at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh are inspiring. The protest spearheaded by women at Shaheen Bagh has completed a month. Yet, it marks the beginning of a series of protracted demonstrations and sit-ins; from Allahabad to Kolkata to Pune to Bhopal to Bengaluru to Kochi; Shaheen Bagh is everywhere.

The BJP which has large supporters in the trading and small business are instigating them to raise the

keenly listen to his Man Ki Baat, why he is not listening to our Maan Ki Baat. He must be open to discuss our views.

After the Uttar Pradesh police's brutal crackdown of mass protests on December 19 across the state, voices of opposition fell into silence. But gradually people regained their footing and organised themselves through Shaheen Bagh.

These are women who live in slums, and affluent localities; many are home makers. They all have gathered here to protest, to break taboos and inspire others. And primarily to erase the impression that Indian homemakers are not politically conscious. These women openly confess that they are afraid of losing their identity and more than it the identity of their sons, daughters and grandsons and granddaughters. They argue Aadhaar card, PAN and Election identity card are more than enough to prepare a population register of citizens.

The manner in which government has been maintaining passive attitude on the citizenship issue has only strengthened the belief of these women that the ruling party has been out to finish the ideal of secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution. Led by communal demagogues, it has been waging war against the country's Muslim community. What aggravated the situation is the government's brutal and illegal response to the protests. The women say that they came to the streets to protect their sons and daughters future in this country. (IPA Service)

"Confidence is the most important single factor in this game, and no matter how great your natural talent, there is only one way to obtain and sustain it: work."

--- Tom Landry

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's tryst with Governors

PRIOR to 2014 Meghalaya had Governors that lived up to their constitutional roles. Some were politicians of the ruling dispensation; a few were retired police officials and bureaucrats. They all left their previous avatars and their politics behind after entering the Raj Bhavan and played their roles with élan. After 2014, the governors posted to Meghalaya have eroded the sanctity of the Raj Bhavan. One of them had to leave because of unsavoury incidents at the height of the #MeToo movement. Another one decided to address the Assembly in Hindi. This led to an uproar where Garo and Khasi MLAs started speaking in their vernacular languages. The Assembly became a virtual Tower of Babel. After him was posted Governor Tathagata Roy who loudly proclaims that he is an old resident of Shillong. But he evidently did not imbibe the culture of this place. He lived and worked in West Bengal and even taught at a University for a while before being indoctrinated in the RSS ideology. Mr Tathagata Roy as an individual is entitled to his Right Wing dogma which he proudly proclaims to be the harbinger of, on his Twitter handle. But as Governor Tathagata Roy, he should have kept his ideological fancies to himself. Governors are servants of the Constitution; not of any political party. They owe their allegiance to the Constitution and not to the party in power.

At the height of the CAA controversy, Governor Roy tweeted that democracy necessary promotes an eco-system of multiple voices; hence those that cannot live in such an eco-system should go to North Korea. This tweet incensed the people of Meghalaya who demanded his removal. The Centre responded and asked Roy to go on leave. But even while on sabbatical he continued to give interviews to the media stating that his heart beats for his birthplace in East Bengal turned East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. He even showed a little box where he kept the soil of his birthplace. No one would have any quarrel with that if Roy was an ordinary person. But as Governor there are a set of protocols that cannot be breached. One of them is to keep personal views private. The latest tweet is based on a fake picture of an incident that took place many years ago in Rajasthan but which Roy attributes to Pakistan. After being trolled on Twitter, Roy still refused to acknowledge the error and to apologise. The constant anti-Pakistan ratcheting by the BJP-RSS and its acolytes is not doing India any good. Coming from a Governor it is even more distasteful. The BJP needs to rethink its list of Governor Appointees. It can do without the controversies created by these worthies!

LOOKING BACK
June 27, 1989

Legacy of a tradition

The UNI, quoting the authority of the Meghalaya unit of the CPI, has reported that the villages of Rengka area in Sough Khasi Hills of Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh are being “exploited” and deprived of their ‘fundamental rights’ by landlords and headmen. The CPI secretary’s report on the case after local visit to the village has given a graphic account of this unfortunate state of affairs to which the government many not have hitherto been well posted with. Now that this has come out with all its nakedness, we trust that the authorities must have been roused to their responsibility to see such blatant injustice corrected. If suitable steps have not already been taken we hope these lines would serve as a reminder which otherwise would not have been

necessary. We have a shrewd suspicion that Rengka may not be a solitary case of exception. More cases of similar exploitation may see the height of day if a detailed investigation is undertaken by agencies under non-official auspices if the local executive care at all to prove such mater because it belongs to an area which is covered by what is accepted as traditional custom and usage and as such considered even as somewhat sacrosanct. Nothing, however, is above fundamental consideration of natural justice and from this point of view the traditional institutions of land ownership and management should not in any case be exempt from an overall scrutiny for individual lapses and delinquencies.

Tackling Meghalaya’s Power Woes

By Marbianglang Rymbai

heating, it transcended to room heaters, ovens and cooking heaters to be followed by heavy duty fridges, microwave ovens, and even fans when the summers in Meghalaya became unbearable. Hotels with AC’s, lifts and giant electric ovens emerged in good numbers. Hospitals with lifts, air conditioning and heavy laboratory machines are heavy electric users. Electric fabrication flourishes in our state and furniture making

somewhere else. Had it not been so, think where we will be right now! Unable to convince protesters of dire need of a dam for electricity, the government chose ROR (Run of River) project at Le-shka (confluence of three rivers). Unfortunately, monsoon tricked by climate change played havoc and it became a sick wasteful unit, totally dependent on good monsoons. With development in Meghalaya increasing by

In 1929, BC Roy tapped the Beadon falls to light up the hamlets of Shillong the then Scotland of the East. Shillong grew and so too Jowai, Nongstoin, Dawki, Tura, Nongpoh. Luckily the Colombo Project commissioned the Umtrew Dam, which recently enhanced its power generation, in 1957. In 1964, Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the Umiam plant which was commissioned in 1967.

was pucca electric. Byrnihat steels and the nine cement plants in present East Jaintia Hills District are the main guzzlers of electricity. Fearing deficiency the then government eyed the Umgot river with heavy flow and good height. Sadly it hit a wall thanks to so called self-styled environmentalists, no different from our Assam's Subansiri, though recently it resumed for final construction. In this respect we in Meghalaya were blessed by the farmers and paddy field owners all along Umiam river banks, who gladly took compensation to move

leaps and bounds and with power generation stagnant since 1992, we are entering the worst of times. From the first week of September 2018 to 23rd May 2019, Meghalaya was reeling under crisis of load shedding and unprecedented precise timings of power rationing. School children used candles, housewives trained with electric cookers cried aloud. Geysers were replaced by charcoal to flame CC, and entrepreneurs dealing with electrical goods and tools nearly lost their livelihoods with unforgiving GST. Solar panel shops had a good time with the rich. A week before May 30,

2019 when the ICC World Cup in England started, all of a sudden hundreds of crores of rupees of debts were paid to NEEPCO. The Escrow Account was signed. The outcome was that until July 14, 2019, the closing ceremony of the ICC World Cup, Meghalaya enjoyed overflow of electricity 24 x 7. Signal strength on screen was maximum and children enjoyed PUBG no more on hillocks but at home.

Five hours after the close, we felt a bit of load shedding in spite of the Umiam water level being at its maximum. A week ago I saw that the debt to NEEPCo had accumulated again to Rs 2800 crore. Using these data, it appears that consumer's bills did not help much. Frightening is the fact that the supply voltage optimum at 220 volt is read by my meter at 180V. And for consumers, let them know that the less the voltage the more the units. It is an engineering fact. Geysers would take longer time to reach set degrees and fridges longer time to thaw ice. It is very sad that in an energy crisis of this magnitude, we still light our buildings just like presidential palaces on Republic Day, blast our amplifiers to deafening levels, light the fish ponds, the gates etc. If we know that a reservoir discharging water to turbine is controlled by a computer to have zero waste (spin reserve); good sense will teach us to switch off the lights during the day time, to watch games with limited time, to have off control for electrical items etc. In times of adversity let us remember this phrase, "Sweet are the uses of adversity". In short let us not be spendthrifts.

TO THE EDITOR

CAA and unfounded fears & tension

Editor, There is a growing fear and tension with regard to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the subsequent consequences. In fact the people of the state particularly the youth are emotionally charged to the extent that they are going out to the streets damaging private and public properties. As we are aware there is a 97% exemption in Meghalaya which falls under 6th Schedule covering all 11 districts of the state, where the citizens if they are recognized also under CAA would have not be in a position to buy land and settle in 6th Schedule areas. The non tribal community which have been staying in Meghalaya particularly in Tura and Shillong for the last three or four generations are not even permitted to purchase a plot of land under the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act. In fact it is a pity that the present generation of non - tribals finding no other option are compelled to buy land and flats in other parts of the country. So why do people like Ms. Jenniefer Dkhar have to spend sleepless nights being afraid of the CAA?

In this connection it may be further pointed out that the cut off year as per the CAA is fixed on 31st December, 2014 which is to say that those illegal settlers who were supposed to be benefited under CAA cannot claim citizenship after the above date. As such people should not be worried about the foreigners being benefitted after the cut off year. Another apprehension of people here is that after CAA thousands of people will migrate and settle in

Meghalaya but one should not forget the fact that large scale immigration of people from one country to another always takes place when there is an abnormal situation like war, famine and starvation due to economic conditions in their parent country. We the people of North East have a common fear thinking that large number of refugees would cross over from our neighbouring country but the present economic GDP growth of Bangladesh being one of the fastest with 8% is higher than India which is 4 % and therefore the well to do Hindu people of Bangladesh would not even be tempted to come to India leaving behind their assets and properties in their country as peace and harmony is there under the present Government. I would therefore appeal to the people not to give any emotional and irresponsible statements which will incite the minds of the people and complicate law and order in the state.

Yours etc.,
Khrawbor Marbaniang
Shillong- 2

Narpuh sanctuary under threat

Editor, Narpuh reserve forest area is one of the known and well- conserved forests in East Jaintia Hills and was a home to numerous undiscovered species of animals, birds and even medicinal plants. It was the opening of the Single Window Agency under the skewed state industrial policy and few politicians who unfortunately are also part of the current dispensation that had allowed cement firms to avail NOC for a song. Along with financial enticements and so-called development

that these firms offered, began the gradual destruction of this pristine forest cover. The JHADC which is supposedly to be the custodian and care taker of tribal lands allowed itself to be misused and be a pawn in the hands of greedy industrialists and politicians. It has been reported that Star Cement factory is planning to excavate limestone from about 42.051 hectare of land nearby the Narpuh Forest at Brishynot village which will lead to further destruction and reduced forest cover in the area. This is a travesty of environmental norms and defies all logic as the environment cannot be destructed in the name of 'development.' The state authorities should take note lest the NGT puts them in the docks.

Yours etc..
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

NRC a ridiculous move

Editor, Apropos the article, "India's youth has punctured the pretensions behind Act" by Arun Srivastava (ST, January 16, 2020), there have been controversies about educational qualifications of some ministers in the past. Sometimes there were mismatches between the claims and certificates of educational qualification of ministers.

If this is the case, then how can it be expected that ordinary citizens have all valid documents in their possession? Therefore, if CAA and the following policies have to be introduced in chronological order then these should first be experimented by limiting them only for the Members of Parliament as a test case before their implementation across the country. But even then questions

will remain. How can the poor, nomads and marginalized people fetch old documents? Moreover, It is really ludicrous to ask Adivasis who have been living here for centuries and even before Aryans came to India to produce papers to prove that they are citizens of India. It will be like a child asking its mother to show documents to prove her motherhood.

Yours etc.,
Suji De,
Kolkata

Use of unauthorized NCERT text books

Editor, Many schools in Meghalaya are still using the same old NCERT text books that are not authorised by MBOSE. The quality of these books leave much to be desired. They should be replaced immediately. Many schools both Government run and private institutions prefer to use these books for reasons best known to them.

Why is the entire curriculum changed from class 1 to 8 when students have to use MBOSE books later for class IX and X? Who is earning money here? The state coordinators and cluster resource concerned under SSA should be strict and vigilant and make sure that all schools use books prescribed by the MBOSE.

Yours etc.,
Nissar Fazil
Ladrymbai
East Jaintia Hills

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CAA, NPR Scrap Call to Opposition States

By Insaif

Round the States

The war between Opposition States Versus Centre gets hotter. The call by 20 Opposition parties asking all Chief Ministers to oppose the National Register of Citizens is finding takers, but not all. Punjab has followed Kerala in passing a Resolution in its Assembly on Friday last demanding scrapping of the Citizenship Amendment Act. How many other follow needs to be watched, but as of now the Opposition parties are sending a strong message to the citizens across the country that they are with them on the protests against the CAA and NRC. Importantly, the parties have sought to hit the nail on the head by ensuring their campaign is also linked to the economic distress, which the Modi regime is trying to hide with his CAA card. The leaders thus urged the Chief Ministers, who have made known that they wouldn't implement NRC, must also consider to suspension of the NPR exercise given it's a prelude to NRC. While a beginning has been made, there is concern that the unity as sought is not forthcoming. Seven major parties - TMC, AAP, Shiv Sena, DMK, BSP, SP and TDP stayed away from this meeting, suggesting that fissures remain in the Opposition camp. Will these be resolved? Will the Opposition parties' next move -- to celebrate Subhash Chandra Bose birth anniversary on January 23 and mark Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary on January 30, ensure that the flock gets together in full strength? Time will tell.

NPR On Hold In WB West Bengal has joined Kerala with a big No to undertake the exercise of National Population Register. The communication was sent to the Registrar General of India through its regional Census offices saying it was asked to put the exercise "on hold". The reasoning given to the District Magistrates states: the NPR exercise "could be detrimental to public order and so it must be put on hold for the moment." This has put the Union Home Ministry in a quandary as apparently there is no clarity on what the Centre can do if States don't cooperate. More so, as the manpower for Census conduct and NPR, is to be drawn from State governments! So while the Centre has notified all States, the intent to conduct Census, the 'houselisting phase', may not begin here as it did in 2010 and 2015 and in fact the TMC used it to issue ration cards. Perhaps, Didi should rethink as the new survey has features -- whether a household gets bottled water, toilet in premises is shared or personal, is there is LPG connection etc, which could reveal if the publicized schemes have reached the aam admi. Importantly, while the State Government has taken its position, the citizen is in a dilemma. Can he refuse to provide information? The clause imposing penalty for it has been replaced by an undertaking that information provided is correct. Guess the Centre must be more precise and not get into the haze of political one-upmanship.

Chhattisgarh Challenges NIA Chhattisgarh has taken a cue from Kerala and used its idea to challenge the National Investigating Agency (NIA) Act in the Supreme Court, saying it's unconstitutional. It has done so by invoking Article 131 of the Constitution (like Kerala) which gives the apex court 'the exclusion of any other court, have original jurisdiction in any dispute between the Government of India and

one or more States..." subject to provisions of the Constitution. Thus the government has claimed that the NIA Act, in its present form, "not only takes away the State's power of conducting investigation through police but also confers unfettered discretionary and arbitrary powers on the Centre." It argues that the Act is beyond the legislative competence of Parliament since it empowers the Centre to create an agency for "investigation" which, notwithstanding the NIA, is carried out by the State Police, a subject matter of the State. Of course, the Bhupesh Baghel government does not take into account that the National Investigation Act 2008 was brought by the UPA government. Guess, at this point of turbulent times, Opposition States would not miss out the opportunity to hit out at the Centre.

Political Funding of Parties Political funding of State parties has had a strange response. Some got donations from electoral bonds whereas others didn't, putting a question mark on the controversial funding instrument, as brought out by a survey of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. It found that during 2018-19, other than national parties Congress and BJP, the ruling TMC (West Bengal), BJD (Odisha), JD(S) (Bihar), TRS (Telangana) and YSRCP (Andhra Pradesh) got two-thirds of their funding (Rs 3696 crore) from electoral bonds, but anonymous donations made up 55-87% of the total donations received. However, AAP (Delhi), AIADMK (Tamil Nadu) and opposition parties such as TDP, RJD, DMK, SAD, CPI, CPM, NCP, BSP and SP, didn't receive any donation via the bonds, even though their total collection ran into crores. Whether the trend changes is worth a watch as sale of the 13th tranche of electoral bonds started Monday last and is till January 22. Hope more light is shed on criticism against bonds bringing 'opacity' in poll funding being justified as against the 'transparent' mode through corporations, individuals and electoral trusts and aids the Supreme Court where a petition challenging the scheme is pending.

Rajasthan Bickering All is not well in Rajasthan's corridors of power. The friction between Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his deputy Sachin Pilot refuses to ebb. Apparently, both the top leaders have been making comments against each other, though fortunately not naming the other. Recall, that Gehlot had blamed Pilot for the rout in the Lok Sabha elections, which made the latter question his campaigning style. There are more instances, but the latest tragedy of the death of 100 infants at a Kota government hospital has put the bickering in the spotlight. Pilot said his government should have been more humane in handling the crisis, referring to Gehlot's statement that deaths do happen and these were less than in the BJP's regime! The infighting according to the grapevine is impacting governance. The head of the party and that of government can't be walking in opposite directions as this would affect workers, which doesn't bode well for any party. In fact, BJP is making the best of it saying its role is easier as there is 'opposition' within the government. This should make Congress High Command and 10 Janpath sit up, if it hasn't already. Or better remember a stitch in time saves nine. ---INFA



By Ranjita Biswas

In Buenos Aires, the giant screen with neon lights tracing the contours of Eva Peron lit up the night sky again after a four year gap. Argentines are once again paying tribute to their icon, beloved ‘Evita’, for succour after the devastating economic downturn that the previous elected body unleashed. True, she was the wife of President Juan Peron and led a privileged life but that did not take away her empathy for the common people and her involvement in numerous activities to help the poor and needy.

Now that the Left-wing Peronist coalition is back in power thrashing the conservatives, Eva’s portrait in lights, a landmark on a Buenos Aires thoroughfare is back. It was darkened earlier by the Rightist government, ostensibly to save power. But loyalists saw it as an attempt to block the legacy-and influence of the lady. People affectionately called her Evita or the little Eva. In Andrew Webber’s famous musical Evita Madonna, in the title role sang Don’t cry for me, Argentina and introduced the younger generation worldwide about Eva Peron’s place in the mindset of South American country long after she is gone. Eva died of

cervical cancer in 1952 when she was only 33. Reading the report brought me memories of visiting ‘Museo Evita’, a museum built around her life, when I was in Buenos Aires. Actually, Eva Peron never lived in the building where this museum is situated on the Lafinur Avenue in the upmarket Palermo area of Buenos Aires. It was inaugurated in 2002, fifty years after her death, with the tagline ‘ Mi vida, mi mission, mi destino’ (My life, my mission, my destiny). Museo Evita dwells the fascinating life of Eva Peron. Indeed, her life held a lot of drama as an actress, social activist and wife of president Juan

Eva once again in Buenos Aires

Eva Peron’s portrait in neon lights is back after a Leftist coalition won in Argentina

Peron. During the turbulent 30s to 50s, Eva Peron was a figure around whom legends were woven, her reputation even resonating in far-off Europe, and beyond. Born Eva Duarte in May 1919 in Los Toldos, a province near Buenos Aires, she was brought up in an influential household but political downfall of her father saw the family slipping into penury. After his death, her mother somehow held the large family together. Good at theatricals, Eva left home to seek a career in Buenos Aires though opposed by her mother. But, as Eva Peron wrote in her autobiography La Razón de Mi Vida (The reason for my life), “Like the birds, I’ve always preferred the freedom of the forest. I’ve wanted to be on my own and I have been on my own.” Eva worked diligently to rise up from a radio artist, to the stage and then as a film artist. During a charity programme to raise funds for earthquake victims, she met her future husband and president-to-be, Colonel Juan Peron. Right from the beginning, Eva Peron brushed aside notions of the expected role of a wife standing one step behind the husband which was not liked by the conservative factions even within Peron’s army. People loved her because she was a people’s leader. Her Eva Perón Foundation established hundreds of new schools, clinics, old-age homes and



vacation facilities, and introduced complimentary physicians’ visits and scholarships, among other benefits. The beautiful mansion that now houses the Museo Evita was actually known as Hogar de Tránsito (Temporary Home) in Eva Peron’s time. Now it is a National Historical Monument. In 1948, the Foundation bought it and turned it into a house for women and children with no resources. Inaugurating it Evita had declared “The Temporary Home shelters those in need and those who have no home... for as long as necessary until work

and a home can be found... ” She saw in her own struggling days the way the so-called upper-class Portenos (as people of Buenos Aires are called) looked down on the immigrants from the countryside who came in search of livelihood in the big city and it stayed on with her. She wrote, “Charity separates the rich from the poor; aid raises the needy and sets him on the same level with the rich.” The museum displays the kitchen where food was cooked, how women were trained to learn a skill to earn a living, her speeches as well as some of her personal effects like the beautiful gowns she wore on different official occasions. Strong-willed as she was who declared “I am my own woman,” Eva Peron believed in the equality of women. She fought for women’s suffrage and influenced the government to introduce the law in 1947 giving voting rights to women of Argentina. One can remember Evita’s address to women of Spain (Madrid, June 15, 1947): “This century will not go down in history as the ‘Century of World Wars’ nor even as the ‘Century of Atomic Disintegration’ but rather as the ‘Century of Victorious Feminism’.” Standing on the threshold of a new decade in this century with women at the forefront in many fields and equality being the mantra, her words seem to remind how much ahead of time she was. (TWF)



(Clockwise from top left) Eva Peron died of cervical cancer when she was only 33; a portion of the museum in Buenos Aires; and Eva speaking at a women’s gathering

Photo courtesy: The author & Creative Commons/Wikipedia)

An eye for a purpose, on land & under sea

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Nature has a reason for everything. A creature’s environment plays the main part in deciding how its eyes develop and function. For instance, starfish have five eyes at the end of each arm, but they can only see shade and light and huge masses of land. They don’t need to see any more than looting coral reefs, so that is how their eyes have developed. The eyes of the nocturnal elephant hawk moth excel at collecting the tiniest traces of light. Even in faint starlight, it can distinguish the colours of blossoms bearing nectar. Lemurs, who feel safer foraging at night, have such excellent night vision that they can make out colours in complete darkness. Here’s the explanation behind some of the pupils you find in nature. Those animals with vertical pupils, like cats, foxes, crocodiles, snakes, geckos, are ambush predators, active in hunting both by day and night. A vertically oriented pupil is a precision instrument, capable of razor-sharp focus in many light conditions. A crocodile’s eyes can adapt to twilight or night-time. One reason is their ability to open very wide or close to tiny slits, depending on how much light they need to let in. A cat’s pupils can expand by 135 times, for example. Compare that to the 15-fold expansion of our own pupils! Horizontal pupils belong to grazing prey animals like goats, sheep, horses, moose, deer. An animal with horizontal pupils tends to have its eyes on each side of its head, so these pupils can give it a panoramic view that lets in

more light from its front, back, and sides. That helps them both detect an oncoming predator and keep tabs on it while they flee. Crescent pupils belong to water-dwelling animals that spend a lot of time motionless. For example skates, rays, flatfishes, catfish and some whales. Light bends differently in water than it does in air. Crescent shapes can take in more information than a circular pupil with the same surface area. This pupil turns points of light that are in front of its owner into U shapes (or crescents facing up) and points of light that are behind it into n shapes (or crescents facing down). The closer the object, the larger the U shape, and vice versa. For a flounder on the seafloor watching schools of fish swim by, the ability to know exactly how far away each one is comes in handy. Camels have three eyelids, but because they’re as thin as paper, they can still see even with all three eyelids closed — which is handy in a sandstorm. Snakes have two sets of eyes. One set is used to see and the other to detect heat and movement. Penguins have eyes that allow them to see better underwater. The hexagonal lenses of a bee are so strong that they can see ultraviolet rays that humans can’t. Macaws and other parrots see everything in ultraviolet vision, allowing them to see the maturation of fruits. The upward-looking left eye of the squid is twice the size of its right eye, the better to spot prey in light from above. The squid’s smaller eye points down into the dark waters below. If there are no benefits of seeing, some animals lose their eyes altogether. Mexican Tetras are small freshwater fish which, in the Pleistocene epoch, swam into several deep caves. Their eyes were of little use in the pitch blackness, so their descendants evolved into



different populations of blind cavefish—pinkish-white creatures with skin covering where their eyes used to be. The Ganges river dolphin can only live in freshwater and is essentially blind. It lost its eyes in the course of evolution to adapt to the muddy water of rivers. Gangetic river dolphins navigate using sound waves made by clicking sounds through their throat that bounce off targets and return to their large, flat heads equipped with extremely sensitive auditory systems. They have rods and cones, found in mammal eyes, but these are feeble and just help tell light from dark. Cephalopods, like Octopuses, squids, cuttlefish, are the smartest creatures on Earth - they can communicate by changing the patterns on their skin. They can even change their own DNA. You can find cephalopod pupils in the shape of Ws, crescents, dumbbells, and what-

ever. Their eyes don’t have cells for colour vision, but they can see colour — they just do it in a completely different way. They might be able to spread out these colours, and bring certain wavelengths into focus, by changing not only the shape and position of their pupils but also the depth of their eyeball and the distance between their lens and their retina. Some creatures have more than two eyes. The weirdest lenses in nature, and the largest number of eyes, belong to chitons — a group of marine molluscs that look like ovals adorned with trailing bundles of stinging tentacles. It doesn’t even have a proper brain — merely a ring of neurons running around its bell. The Box Jellyfish has 24 dark brown eyes grouped into four clusters, called rhopalia, anchored on a flexible stalk. Four of the six eyes in each rhopalium are simple light-detecting slits and pits. But the other two are sophisticated; they see images. Its lower lensed eyes

spot approaching obstacles, like the mangrove roots that it swims among. The upper lensed eyes are always looking upward, even if the jellyfish swims upside down. If this eye detects dark patches, the jellyfish senses that it’s swimming beneath the mangrove canopy, where it can find the small crustaceans that it eats. If it sees only bright light, it has strayed into open water, and risks starving. With the help of its eyes, it can find food, avoid obstacles, and survive. A Praying Mantis has 5 eyes: 2 big compound eyes and 3 other tiny eyes in the middle of their head. The big eyes are for detecting movement, while the other 3 are for detecting light. Scorpions have 2 eyes on top of their heads. There are also 5 more eyes along each side of their body as well. Scallops have rows of eyes along the edge of their mantles. One scallop can have between 50 and 100 eyes. The mantle of the bay scallop is festooned with up to 100 brilliant blue eyes. Each contains a mirrored layer that acts as a focusing lens while doubling the chance of capturing incoming light. These eyes let them know if there are threats approaching. The Purple Sea Urchin’s entire body acts like one big eye. On the other hand Hydra, a small relative of jellyfish, has no eyes, but it does have photoreceptors in its body. These receptors control the hydra’s stinging cells, so that they fire more easily in darkness. This allows the creature to react to the shadows of passing victims, or to fire at night when its prey is more common.

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

When compulsions take control

By Dr Anjana Kannankara

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, or OCD, is one of those terms that some people misuse as a way to describe people who like things super-clean or arranged meticulously. But if you have the actual condition that is identified as obsessive-compulsive disorder, the manner in which it affects your life is very real.

OCD usually does not happen all at once. Symptoms start small and to the affected person they seem to be normal behaviours. They can be triggered by a personal crisis, abuse or something negative that affects you drastically, like the death of a loved one or severe family problems. It is more likely if people in your family have OCD or another mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety.

OCD can be explained as a mental condition where excessive thoughts called obsessions lead to repetitive behaviours termed as compulsions. It is characterised by unreasonable thoughts and fears that lead to compulsive behaviours and rituals.

More than 1 million cases per year is reported in India. It is a bit more common in women than in men.

There are some facts about OCD which everyone should know. The disorder can be treated but cannot be cured. Chronic cases can last for years or be lifelong. OCD requires a medical diagnosis and laboratory tests or imaging is not required.

Warning signs

Everyone has habits or thoughts that repeat sometimes. But OCD can be suspected in an individual when thoughts or actions.

- Take up at least an hour a day or more
- Are beyond the person’s control
- Aren’t enjoyable but causes distress
- Interfere with work, social life, or other areas of life

Symptoms

People may experience:

Behavioural symptoms: Agitation, compulsive behaviour, compulsive hoarding, hypervigilance, impulsivity, meaningless repetition of own words, persistent repetition of words or actions, repetitive movements, ritualistic behaviour, or social isolation

Mood: Anxiety, apprehension, guilt, or panic attack

Psychological symptoms: Depression or fear

Others: Aversion to food, nightmares, repeatedly going over thoughts or ruminating

Categories of OCD cases

Most people with OCD fall into one of the following categories:

- Washers: They are afraid of contamination from germs or dirt. They usually have cleaning or hand-washing compulsions.
- Checkers: They repeatedly check things whether stove is turned off, door is locked, etc. that they associate with harm or danger.
- Doubters and sinners: They are afraid that if everything isn’t perfect or done in right way, something terrible will happen and they or their loved ones will be punished.
- Counters and arrangers: They are obsessed with order and symmetry. They may have superstitions about certain numbers, colours, or arrangements.
- Hoarders: They fear that something bad will happen if they throw anything away. They compulsively hoard things that they don’t need or use. They may also suffer from other disorders, such as depression, PTSD, compulsive buying, kleptomania, ADHD, skin picking, or tic disorders.

Doctors aren’t sure why some people have OCD though genetic and other factors like difference in brain activity have been pointed out by researches. Stress can make symptoms worse. Symptoms often appear in teens or young adults but may become evident later also.

OCD symptoms mainly include obsessions, compulsions, or both.

An obsession is an uncontrollable thought or fear that causes stress. A compulsion is a ritual or action that someone repeats a lot. Compulsions may offer some relief, but only for a little while. If you find yourself helpless with time consuming thought pro-

cess and rituals that distress you considerably then you are in trouble.

Most people have superstitions or rituals, or fear that they left the door unlocked or the oven on before leaving for work or vacation.

If one can control those thoughts or think about

them because they enjoy them, but because they cannot quit. And if they stop, they feel so bad that they start again.

Obsessive thoughts can include worries about self or other

order every time or a certain number of times; needing to count things, like steps or bottles; and fear of touching doorknobs, using public toilets or shaking hands.

Common obsessions often have a theme like fear of germs or dirt where one might be scared to touch things other people have touched, like doorknobs or wouldn’t want to hug or shake hands with others.

One can have extreme need for order and feels stressed when objects are out of place. It’s really hard to leave home until things are arranged in a certain way.

There is also fear of hurting self or someone else or excessive doubt or fear of making a mistake. In the second case, the individual needs constant encouragement or reassurance from others that what he is doing is right.

Some have fear of embarrassment and become afraid that they might yell out curse words in public or behave badly in social situations.

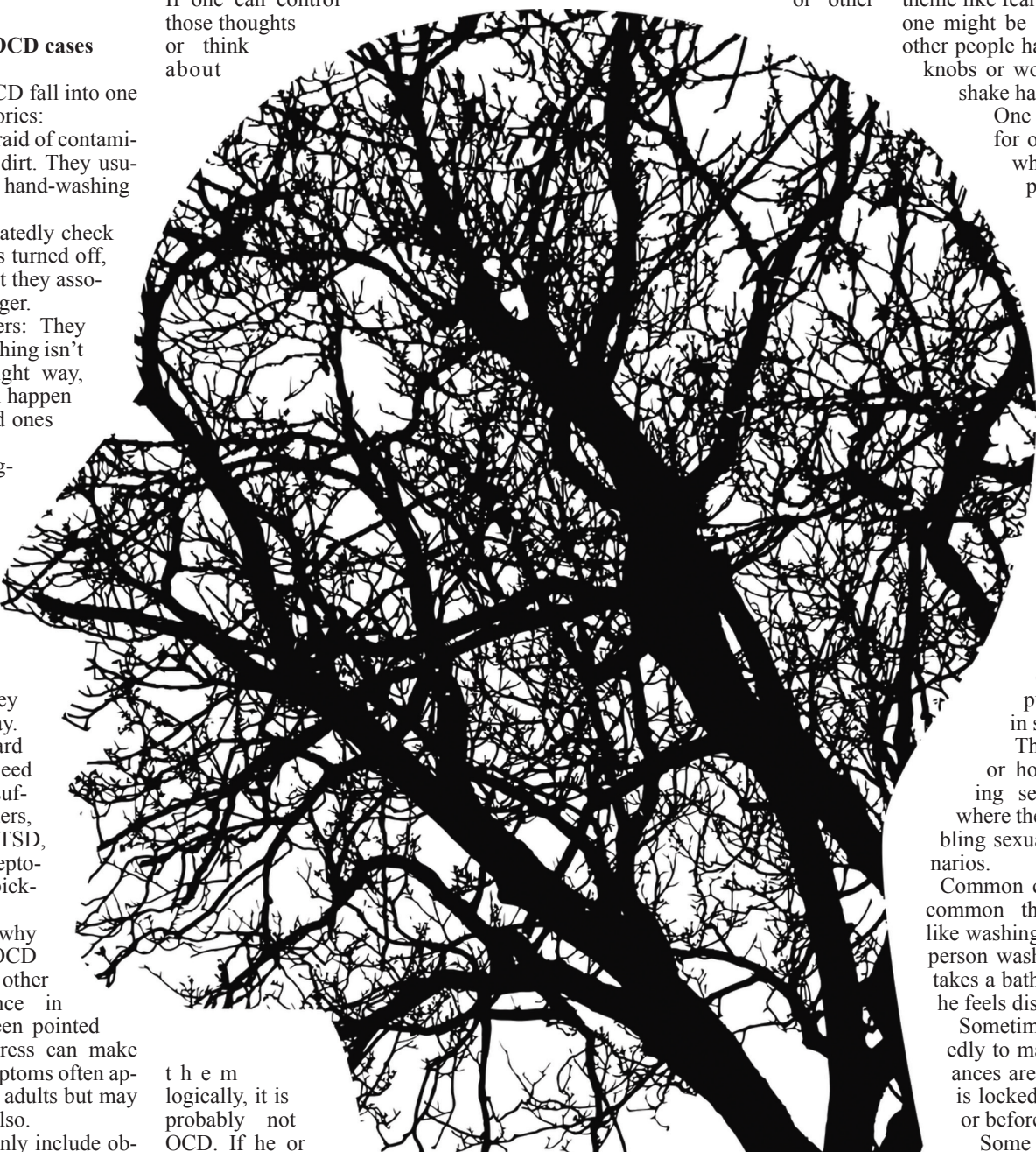
There is also fear of evil or hostile thoughts, including sexual acts or religion where the person imagines troubling sexual or disrespectful scenarios.

Common compulsions also have common themes and symptoms like washing or cleaning where the person washes hands, showers, or takes a bath over and over, or else he feels discomfort and guilt.

Sometimes one checks repeatedly to make sure kitchen appliances are turned off or the door is locked when he leaves home or before sleep.

Some individuals say out loud or to oneself numbers in a certain pattern. Some also feel the need to eat certain foods in a specific order. They arrange all the clothes or kitchen items or furniture in a specific way. Collecting or hoarding is also a common compulsion where an individual cannot stop buying things un-

people getting hurt; constant awareness of blinking, breathing, or other body sensations; and suspicion that a partner is unfaithful, with no reason to believe it. Compulsive habits can include doing tasks in a specific



them logically, it is probably not OCD. If he or she cannot control them, or they take up pretty much time of the day and cause problems in life, it is a sign that it is time to get help.

Many individuals who have OCD are aware that their thoughts and habits do not make sense. They don’t do

cess in overseas projects and earn well from these associations. You enjoy good moments with your beloved, your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you big boost of confidence. The unattached can look forward to meeting someone who catches their eye. However this also brings financial pressure as you incur expenses on traveling, trips and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to further professional ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



This period brings mixed results for you. You will face obstacles at work and could get embroiled in controversies. Be wary of those who entice you with seemingly attractive ideas. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth putting off for the time being as projects could get stalled. The desire for some form of recognition is strong. Financial success on the other hand is enhanced now. You may have a difference of opinion with spouse and health of some of the family member may suffer. Try to give moral support and help. However, people in love will have a great time as they listen to the inner feelings for each other.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



The planetary configuration brings good results particularly at the work place. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes are on cards. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and speculations and adopt new strategies in financial matters. Your association with like-minded people favorably turns things around. Your loved one would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony to your relationships and feel more comfortable.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would add creativity to your work and projects in hand. This is the best time to use your higher education and skills to promote your career prospects. Strong chances of up-gradation and new responsibilities could come up. Concentrate on the work at hand and you may need to work more and put in extra hours. Avoid confrontations and arguments at the work place, as this would spoil time and energy and brings no results. You have more work, less time so go ahead and meet challenges to complete the desired task. There may be a romantic development at your work place. Listen to your heart and express your feelings to your beloved.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



The planetary configuration promotes your luck. New ideas and attitude to resolve issues would be beneficial. You will meet with appreciation even from unexpected quarters. Your professional prospects improve as you communicate well and interact in more positive way. You exhibit leadership qualities as you lead from the front. On the domestic front, try to compromise in family related matters. Change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection. You will be in demand on the social front. You may visit religious places. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



This phase brings good luck and appreciation in property and land related matters. This is the best time to resolve land and property related issues as this brings good returns. On the professional front, you have to be careful to meet desired success. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings. Avoid any conflicts and confrontations. Children do you proud as they make progress in their chosen field. You can improve your love life by being more proactive. Some of you may fall in love with an intellectual person of a much younger age. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet programme to rejuvenate energy.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You tackle work related issues and handle all legal matters successfully. People in law, justice and related fields will have great time as they use their talents and skills to meet desired success. Sports, competitive exams and fighting spirit come to the fore. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. Differences and discordant tendencies between people you love could crop up. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve the issues. You may find frequent changes and mood variation in your loved ones. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers and this brings favorable results in your romantic life. You need to conserve health and energy.

Make a fashion statement



By Ranjan K Baruah

Many students dream to choose fashion as their career. When we talk about fashion it is not only limited to fashion shows but is one of the most creative professions. When we talk about fashion as career then we have to talk about fashion design, textile design and leather design, among others.

Many players, including global players in the fashion industry, are not looking forward to 2020 and beyond as the McKinsey Global Fashion Index forecasts that fashion industry revenue growth will slow further in 2020, down to 3-4 per cent, slightly below predicted growth for 2019. The most optimistic region is Asia, especially China and India. Despite the current slowdown in the economy, the Indian clothing market is expected to be worth \$53.7 billion in 2020, making it the sixth largest globally, according to the fourth annual State of Fashion report by The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company.

There are many advantages in India related to fashion. Rise in income levels is expected to drive demand in textile industry. And similarly growth in building and construction will continue to raise demand for non-clothing textiles.



India has an abundant availability of raw materials such as cotton, wool, silks and jute. Cent per cent FDI (automatic route) is allowed in the Indian textile sector. To boost exports, free trade with ASEAN is allowed. Huge investments are being made by government under Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks (SITP) and Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme to encourage more private equity and train work force. These factors bring more opportunities for students who are planning to choose fashion as their career.

Courses in leading institute like National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) include Bachelor of Design in Accessory Design, Fashion Communication, Knitwear

necessarily.

These repetitive routines usually may not have anything to do logically with the obsession the person is trying to fix and can take hours to do.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis process will likely include a physical exam to see if the symptoms are due to a health condition; blood tests to check the blood count, how well thyroid works, and any drugs or alcohol in the system; a psychological test or evaluation about the individual’s feelings, fears, obsessions, compulsions, and actions.

Treatment

There’s no cure for OCD. But it might be possible to manage how the symptoms affect a person’s life. Treatments include psychotherapy, relaxation, medication and neuromodulation.

The reassurance and support of the family and friends is most needed for OCD sufferers. They themselves struggle to get out of the situation but find it impossible which increases the anxiety and stress considerably. Never scold, blame or ignore them since they are not voluntarily doing this to cause discomfort to others. The negative approach of the loved ones will result in tremendous stress and loneliness that in turn will result in worsening the condition and resentment towards life. The family needs to understand the issues that the person has encountered and acknowledge their mistakes if any in the occurrence of such terrible situations. With constant support, the condition can be managed well in most cases.

There is a fine line between helping and enabling our loved ones with OCD. The best way to help and not enable is to learn everything we can about the disorder and the proper way to respond to it.

It is also essential to remember that it’s okay to feel angry, annoyed, frustrated, and overwhelmed, as long as these feelings are directed toward the OCD and not the person we care about. OCD sufferers need the understanding, acceptance, compassion and love of their families, and they deserve no less than that.

(The author is director, TGL Foundation, and chairperson, CSA)

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 19, 2020

Moon sextile Saturn on your solar return chart and this is going to be an exciting year. You will be energetic and raring to go. And will be ready to meet the challenges that comes your way. Hurdles won’t deter you. And you will meet all the challenges with confidence. New sources of income will accrue. Friends and colleagues would help you immensely. Your plans will get completed without any hitch. You will also develop new contacts in your profession. Your professional circle will grow. And you will plan to buy a new house or vehicle. You will have a perfect health regime and will eat healthy food to stay fit. You would go for regular walk, do some light exercises and include yoga and meditation. Your romantic life will be wonderful. And you will also be giving time to your family. Your partner will support you and prove to be a source of strength. Your financial position will be generally good.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



This phase brings excellent results. You would express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with people. In your interactions make sure that you avoid conflicts. Your social life may be restricted to work and family obligations. Look at present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you. You need to conserve health and energy and deal with practical details and finances. Chances of a pilgrimage as you realize that you cannot control or plan too much as the unexpected is expected. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



An established business concern flourishes and partnership may expand into triangular collaborations. Success and good fortune at work open new horizons for expansion. Look at the present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you and act accordingly. Your domestic life takes on top priority and you support family members and feel comfortable and secure this week. You have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support with family. You may visit and spend a lot of time in company of your beloved one. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you at this time. You may redecorate your home and add to the interiors to feel rejuvenated.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



This period brings a phase where you can win the trust of people in authority. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel a part of the whole, as this brings new opportunities and monetary gains. Avoid making compromises with your own truths, values and priorities. Your strong spirit supports you through the changes. This is a period in which you can successfully use charm, and your sense of humor to make peace with others. You can improve your love life by bringing more affection, love and a feeling of togetherness. Unusual attractions and dreams could feature now as you spend time with your beloved.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



This week brings mixed results. On the professional front, it would be better to let go of the past and make a new beginning as something greater awaits you. You may feel professionally unstable and emotionally insecure. Avoid indulging in any arguments and confrontations especially with people in authority. Financially a good week, you earn well and your communication skills are impressive. Communicate, listen to others, express yourself, and get everything done in your favor. Talk to your beloved one and don’t keep yourself away from people, enjoy the feeling of togetherness. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



New horizons open up for you and this boosts your self-confidence and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently and bravely. Take advantage of your courage and go ahead to achieve desired goals. You may be able to finalize a property related issue and this brings financial gains. Also you have been highly motivated to make money and this brings positive results if you use your communications skills. Your domestic life takes priority as you discuss future plans and enjoy moments spent together. You might spend time in making short trips meeting friends and loved ones. You may feel restless at times; eat health food, yoga and meditation recommended.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



This is going to be an exciting time. You are most likely to express your views in an intellectual and unconventional manner. This brings success and reward in overseas related matters. You will get suc-

“If you create an act, you create a habit. If you create a habit, you create a character. If you create a character, you create a destiny.”

--- Marcus Aurelius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.159SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 2020

BJP’s new phase

THE BJP is stepping into a new phase in its existence as the strongest national party, with the installation of a new president soon. The process for election of the new party chief will be initiated on Monday, and an announcement is expected soon. It is already clear that working president JP Nadda will succeed Amit Shah, current Home Minister, as the party chief. Shah exits from the party chief post after a five-year period which saw the BJP winning large numbers of assembly polls, as also parliament elections with relative ease. Yet, recent times saw the party’s fortunes waning as it lost out to rivals in quite a few states – the last rounds seeing Maharashtra and Jharkhand giving it a thumbs down. The assembly polls in Delhi a month hence too will be closely watched and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal might or might not yield much ground to the BJP or the Congress this time – against the AAP’s near-total sweep of seats in the last assembly polls, leaving only three seats to its rivals. The last five years saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party chief Amit Shah acting in unison, to push the party’s prospects. Modi’s old chum in Gujarat, Shah acquitted himself well as a taskmaster in organizationally equipping the party to fight and win polls.

In recent times there is a reverse in the party’s fortunes. The BJP lost Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, and narrowly managing to retain power in Haryana. A failure in Delhi, if it happens, will mean the BJP is largely on the downslide. The failure of the principal Opposition, the Congress party, to get its act together has been of help to the BJP for long. PM Modi made best use of this situation in the last LS polls, effecting a near-sweep of seats in many states – while the south as also Odisha and West Bengal were retained by regional parties. It is virtually impossible for Shah to continue as head of the party any longer, burdened as he is with heavy responsibilities as home minister – more so as Kashmir, the CAA, the NRC-NPR etc require him to focus attention on governance. At the same time, even as the party gets a new chief, there is little doubt that he will function in full coordination with the Prime Minister and Home Minister, besides retaining active ties with the RSS which has considerable say in the running of the party as also the Government.

Illegal Procurement of Coal: Will Govt Penalise Cement Cos?

By H H Mohrmen

The NGT Committee report came down heavily on the cement companies and coke plants operating from the state for using banned coal transported during the time when the coal ban by NGT was in operation. The illegal procurement of the mineral has not only deprived the Government of royalty due to the state, but it also indicates a blatant violation of the court order by the companies. Royalty is the tax from both major and minor minerals that is shared by the state and the respective district councils.

Not only royalty, but the companies have also defaulted in paying VAT/ GST and since the coal is bought illegally for the production of cement or coke during that particular time, the companies have also deceived the Government by not paying the taxes due on the coal bought by the companies. The illegal procurement of coal by the cement and the coke companies raises a very pertinent question as to whether the State Government will continue to deal with erring companies with velvet gloves and whether the Income Tax authorities will allow them to go scot free even if they had defaulted in paying taxes that are due to the government which amounts to crores of rupees!

The truth came to light in the report of the Committee constituted by NGT which reported that the nine cement plants in the state had used 39,36,684 MT (metric tonnes) of coal from 2014-15 to 2018-19 which they have illegally procured from local suppliers. The NGT committee led by justice (retired) BP Katakey reported the amount payable by the defaulting companies as royalty to the State Government and the respective Autonomous District Councils on the about 40 lakh MT of coal bought during the audited period amounts to Rs. 256.72 crore. As per the report the State Government is also due to receive Rs. 190.92 crore which should go to the Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund (MEPRF) on the mentioned quantity of illegally acquired coal.

This is a huge amount of money and the question is whether the State Government will simply turn its blind eye to illegal acts and deny the state the Rs. 447.64 crore that is due to the public exchequer and

allow the cement and coke companies to go scot free. What about our tax man or the central taxation department? Are we going to compromise on the VAT/ GST which amounts to Rs. 157.46 crore defaulted by these companies by way of purchasing illegal coal during the period of the ban? These companies committed two offences. First, they have violated the court order which also amounts to contempt of court by illegally procuring coal which was banned. Secondly, the companies did not pay royalty, taxes and other dues to the Government on the illegal consignment.

The report also reiterated that the plants did not participate in the auction of 38,000 MT of coal made by the State Government which had conducted an open auction of seized coal available near the cement plants. As per records none of the cement companies participated in the auction. The coal used was therefore

they have clean air to breathe? Obviously the government considers the profit of the companies to be more important than the lives of the people otherwise what is preventing it from testing the air quality in the area and therefore ensure that people enjoy good quality air.

The cement companies continue to be the Government’s favourite business entity in spite of some companies defaulting even in paying the Meghalaya Energy Company Ltd its dues for supplying electricity to the cement plants. And now when not even three months have lapsed since the MSPCB organised a failed public hearing for the proposed expansion of mining lease for limestone mining by Star cement at Brichyrnot, the Board has again notified a new date for the same hearing on January 30, 2020. It may be mentioned that the proposed hearing which was due to be held in

The different cement companies are taking the state and its people for a ride. Now it remains to be seen if the companies will finally pay their dues to the State.

illegally purchased by the cement and coke companies from the coal produced in the State, the mining and transportation of which was banned by the NGT.

The State Government’s soft corner for the cement companies is also obvious from the fact that although the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board has as per National Air Monitoring Program installed units to measure air quality in at least ten strategic locations in different parts of the state but for reasons best known to the MSPCB none has been installed in any location in the Narpuh area. The MSPCB has almost on a regular basis released the air quality index recorded from these ten locations but no report has ever been issued with regards to the AQI in the Narpuh area despite the eleka having many cement plants. If air quality test units were installed in the different industrial areas, why is none installed in any part of Narpuh? Are the lives of the people in the area so insignificant that the MSPCB does not consider it important to ensure that

October last year had to be cancelled because of the public protests against the hearing, but the Board’s decision to reorganise the hearing on behalf of the cement company raises many questions.

Why is the Board in a hurry to grant mining lease to the cement plant? Why can’t it wait for even six months to fix the date of the next hearing? Is there something than what meets the eye with regards to cement plants and limestone mining? The cement companies in the Narpuh area in particular had promised to bring development to the area, but what development are we talking about when the water is polluted and the air people breathe is not even tested despite having more than eight cement plants in one single area. None of the cement plants has even provided health care centres for the people in the area. The only health centre even in Lumchhong is a Government run health centre. The nine cement companies cannot even come up with a modern hospital equipped with state

Modi-Shah have kicked the proverbial hornet’s nest with CAA Protests by Indian Muslims, seculars and students won’t end soon

By Harihar Swarup

A question invariably asked is why Narendra Modi government has invested so much political capital in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)? The Act, critics say, is plainly illogical, not least because it leaves out of its purview the largest group of stateless refugees currently living in Indian soil—Tamils from Sri Lanka—many of whom are Hindus. The Act is also manifestly immoral, in that it singles out one particular religion—Islam—for particularly spiteful treatment and exclusion from any refuge.

If the logic and morality of the CAA are suspect, the timing of the Act is mystifying. Had not the abolition of Article 370, the conversion of India’s only Muslim-majority state into a mere Union Territory, already done a great deal to satisfy the BJP’s hardliner Hindutva base? Had not the Supreme Court’s verdict in Ayodhya dispute, mandating the building of a

facto, and altogether unconvincing denials by the Prime Minister—the government of India, and particularly the Home Minister, have repeatedly made clear that the CAA would be implemented in conjunction with National Register for Citizens (NRC). This provoked (wholly legitimate) fear that the Muslims would be made particularly vulnerable by this pincer operation, for any non-Muslim left out by from the NRC could immediately reapply for citizenship on the basis of CAA.

One striking aspect of the popular protests against the CAA and the NRC has been that people of all faiths have enthusiastically participated. In cities like Kolkata and Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi, tens of thousands and thousands of people, who are themselves not Muslims, have poured onto the streets to express their anger and dissatisfaction with the ruling regime.

Article 355 of the Constitution asks the Union to protect states against the external aggression and internal disturbances. The Union is thus duty bound to protect the country from any external aggression such as illegal immigration and internal disturbances. The opposition needs to understand that the Constitution cannot be read selectively. If the Opposition invokes the Constitution to claim its right to protect, then it cannot overlook the duty cast upon a citizen to protest peacefully. Violent means cannot be part of a protest.

The government and supporters of CAA say the Citizenship Amendment Act has been passed to protect religious minorities—Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians—who face persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan which are all theocratic nations.

The Opposition parties, which are orchestrating protest against the CAA, as bring ultra vires the Constitution, are trying to find their lost ground by shooting from the shoulders of students. They do not even care to educate the citizens as to how Constitution is being violated.

Article 355 of the Constitution asks the Union to protect states against the external aggression and internal disturbances. The Union is thus duty bound to protect the country from any external aggression such as illegal immigration and internal disturbances. The opposition needs to understand that the Constitution cannot be read selectively. If the Opposition invokes the Constitution to claim its right to protect, then it cannot overlook the duty cast upon a citizen to protest peacefully. Violent means cannot be part of a protest.

It is noteworthy that once a law has been passed by Parliament, the chief ministers of states ruled by Opposition parties cannot unconstitutionally refuse to implement it, out of hatred for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This will lead to anarchy. The irony is that the Opposition, which pretends to protest in the name of Constitution, is itself violating constitutional provisions with impunity. (IPA Service)

grand new Ram temple satisfied them further? Is the greed of the base really so insatiable that this third bone has to be thrown their way so soon after the other two?

The downgrading of Jammu and Kashmir and the building of a temple in Ayodhya were issues of enormous symbolic importance to the BJP. One could understand why a second successive majority in the Lok Sabha emboldened the Modi government to act quickly in these matters. But the CAA was of a relatively trifling importance. It was estimated that just a few refugees would get Indian citizenship as a result of its passing. Why then was it given such a high priority? Particularly, at a time when the economy was in such a mess, and its revival needed urgent attention?

There are, perhaps, two reasons behind Modi government’s unseemly haste in passing the CAA through Parliament. The first is bigotry, the ideological compulsion to rub it in even further to the Muslim citizens of the Republic that they even live here on the grace of mercy of Hindu majority. The second is the hubris: the sense (or delusion) that since Muslims of India did not offer any dissent at the abrogation of Article 370 or at the court verdict concerning Ayodhya, this time too, they would meekly accept this wanton humiliation heaped on them by their own government.

It has turned out otherwise. Indian Muslims have turned out in large numbers to protest this dangerous piece of legislation. This is, in part, because—despite the post

TO THE EDITOR

Whither our National Anthem?

Editor,

Since the opening of the Digital Multiplex theatres here in Shillong, we are much blessed and enjoy the premiere launch of movies with other states and countries of the world. I applaud the Gold Cinema at Police Bazaar and The Galleria Cinema (formerly known as Anjalee cinema) for giving us an entertainment and relaxation. Yes, they are excellent and almost at par with big theatre giants around India. To name a few - PVR Cinemas, Inox Cinemas, Jazz Cinemas, IMAX etc., and others who are big giants in the giant screen. The point I wish to make is this. Why is it that these giant cinemas around the country always have the National Anthem playing on the screen before starting their movies? I was dumbstruck when I visited a PVR cinema recently where the National Anthem was played. The person

sitting beside me looked at me curiously as he saw that I was in awe and like a dumb spectator at an orchestra. I stood up instantly and at that moment when the National Anthem was played a sense of patriotism swept over me. Once the National Anthem was over, the person asked me, “What happened?”

I was ashamed but had to tell him that the National Anthem was never played in any of our theatres in Shillong. He seemed irritated and stated that its a mandatory on every theatre there that they should play the National Anthem before the start of the movie. The story did not end there. All the metro cities from Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, you name it, all play the National Anthem before the start of a movie. My question therefore is why the cinema halls in Shillong have stopped playing the National Anthem. In the earlier years it was always played so why did it stop suddenly?

It’s an honour to pay our respects to our country by playing the National Anthem. I look forward to

hearing it being played again in Shillong’s theatres. After all, we are Indians and a spirit of national pride and patriotism should be inculcated in the heart of every Indian!

Yours etc.,
Chanmiki Ezra Laloo
Via Email

NCERT text books - Visa to JEE, NEET

Editor,

Apropos Nissar Fazil’s letter “Use of unauthorized NCERT text books,” (ST Jan 18, 2020), contrary to the worries of the writer, I feel we are blessed and should be happy about using the NCERT text books. You may ask why it so? The MBOSE Science text books are replete with errors, fanciful explanations, unheard of experiments that have never been performed at all. It is surprising how VK Sally and SK Agarwal had convinced the MBOSE authorities to recommend

their books. NCERT text books provide a sound background for students wishing to sit for the NEET and JEE entrance tests for Medical and Engineering courses respectively. That students of Class VI to VIII are reading the NCERT text books is heartening. Mr Fazil does not seem to know the recent developments in the Education Department led by Mr Lahkmen Rymbui. Four letters to the editor appearing back to back in The Shillong Times about the pack of lies in all the text books from Class IX to XII, from June to August had produced results. The Minister finally had to eat humble pie and to quietly introduce the much desired NCERT text books used for CBSE students in Class XI. Had the minister acknowledged the error long back then the CBSE Physics text book would have been introduced in Classes IX , X and XII in this academic year itself.

I have heard teachers complain about MBOSE text books in Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology as well. So Nissar Fazil your discovery of the use of

NCERT text books which is in fact a blessing is a bit too late because by the next academic year MBOSE will be using purely the NCERT books. I take this opportunity to thank the 16 JNU and IIT professors with two Higher Secondary teachers, who, I believe, are moderators, for the books with full syllabus coverage and down to earth explanations, even on the dual nature of light, a chapter we covered in MSc in the 1970’s.

Only one nagging question remains: Who in the Education Department approved the MBOSE texts of Sally and Agarwal and the Mehta brothers? Did he/she go through the texts before torturing our children who aim to study MBBS and Engineering or just want to become scientists? Perhaps money has changed hands to create hell for lakhs of our dear children, especially children of farmers and daily wage earners who could never afford to attend coaching classes. Of the MBOSE toppers of the 2019 batch, only those who could afford JEE and NEET coaching could make it.

Those from poor backgrounds missed the bus in spite of ST concessions. Let me also apprise the Education Minister of one fact. For Classes IX AND X comprehensive Physics, teachers with BSc Hons, (Physics or Maths) can no longer teach. By this I mean that any teacher who makes Physics boring is not a good teacher. And CBSE IX and X must have teachers that are post graduates. For Classes XI and XII, I cannot blame the post graduate teachers for the simple reason that NEHU did not have a Professor in Electronics since 1984, when Dr. Sisodia left to teach in the USA. Electronics and Electro-magnetic radiation is a vast subject and in the absence of a strong foundation it is not easy at all to learn and understand.

Yours etc.,
Wandell Passah,
Via email

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

“ *Scars are milestones of the past.*”
--- Khang Kijarro Nguyen

The Shillong Times
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Meghalaya turns 48
FORTY seven years ago, the state of Meghalaya was carved out of the composite state of Assam. The demand for statehood was led by ordinary men and women of this state and a few leaders. It was a non-violent movement that lasted several years. What triggered the statehood demand was the pas-sage of the Assam Official Language Bill, 1960, which declared that English and Assamese would be the official languages of Assam. The tribal peo-ple felt marginalized by the elevation of Assamese over their own language. Under the banner of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) they started the agitation for a separate state to be cre-ated out of the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. In 1971, Parliament passed the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971, which conferred full statehood on the Autonomous State of Meghalaya on January 21, 1972.

Participants in the statehood movement had genu-ine aspirations that the leaders who spearheaded the Movement would craft out a roadmap that would kick-start the process of development where the tribals would govern themselves according to their own genius. What merits mention is that the APHLC also included many non-tribal residents of Meghalaya who were part of the Hill State Move-ment and who genuinely felt that they needed to support the tribes in self-governance. Forty seven year down the line the same non-tribals and their descendants are treated as second class citizens in the only homeland they know. So while the tribes revolted against Assamese chauvinism, forty seven years ago, today they exhibit the same traits over the minorities in Meghalaya. This state can only develop when every citizen is treated with respect and given their due. Tribal chauvinism demonstrated every now and again and which is directed at the “other” is a poor alibi for bad governance. The gov-ernance failures we experience cannot be attrib-uted to the “outsider.” This is an internal problem created by an electoral system that rejects capable candidates and elects those with money power. Each time a new government is elected new hopes are raised. The irony is that they expect change from the same set of non-performing politicians whose only objective of being in politics is to further their private businesses.

Statehood Foundation Day is not about celebra-tion. It is about serious stock-taking. The State of Meghalaya cannot progress if its people have fallen between the developmental cracks and are today worse off than they were when Meghalaya was born. Today the human development indices par-ticularly in health and education are nothing to write home about. Malnutrition has increased; so has extreme poverty. Statistics says that 76 % of rural Meghalaya is today landless and voiceless. Com-mon property resources such as water sources, catchments and forests have been appropriated by the affluent tribals. This gives rise to a new set of problems. Unfortunately there is no serious reflec-tion on these key issues. It serves everyone’s inter-est to blame the ubiquitous “outsider.” But for how long?

In Meghalaya today the phrase ‘tourism potential’ has become a buzzword. In general, people talk of it as if it is such an elementary issue; something that does not require much thinking, analysis, planning and strategy. We go out to the hills and valleys, rivers and waterfalls, caves and rocks, etc; and the first thing we start contemplating on is, ‘tourism potential’. In most cases, whenever we see natural beauty surrounding us we conclude that the place has got tourism po-tential and as such let us start thinking of promoting the spot as such. Amidst this herd mentality, we fail to factor the important point that tourism is not a panacea and it is not an answer to all of our devel-opmental problems. Tourism may work for some pockets and it will not work for oth-ers. But, where do we draw the line? How do we know where and when to do tour-ism and where and when not to? The answer lies in comprehending the true nature of tourism potential and the potency of its im-plementation. As such, this article is a representation of the skewed nature of how Meghalaya has mistakenly understood its tourism po-tential. In relation to this, the visit to Wei Sawdong Falls (a picturesque attrac-tion near Dainthlen Falls) over the New Year is the motivation for writing this piece. Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, let us just figure out as to what really is ‘tourism potential?’ If we are able to address this question then our tourism will have a better sense of direction and meaning. At the outset we have to real-ize that tourism potential does not only mean scenic beauty. It is not only about the breathtaking thrill that one gets while visiting a fascinating tourism spot. In fact, this element of ‘scenic beauty’ is the least impor-tant. As such, if we crave that our tourism develop-ment will be responsible and sustainable with socio-econ-omic benefits to the grass-roots stakeholders then we will have to give due impor-tance to the real elements that matter, namely – acces-sibility of the spot, avail-ability of basic hospitality services such as food and sanitation, possibility of presenting the culture and practices of the place as a

The problem with Meghalaya’s tourism potential

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

learning to the clientele, ca-pability and readiness of the people/community to do tourism, ability to do basic planning and control by the managers of the spot and finally, figuring out as to the form of tourism a particular spot will propagate (say adventure or sports or rec-reation or educational, etc). These elements are to be factored holistically so as to really define the tourism potential. Without taking

far outweigh the benefits that accrue to the people/ community (to whom the spot belongs). Hence (to name a few), the elements of availability of basic hospi-tality services, capability and readiness of the people/ community to do tourism and the management of the spot will always figure as the decisive factor towards the proper running and suc-cess of any tourism spot. Sadly, this is primarily miss-

Amidst this herd mentality, we fail to factor the important point that tourism is not a panacea and it is not an answer to all of our devel-opmental problems. Tourism may work for some pockets and it will not work for others. But, where do we draw the line? How do we know where and when to do tour-ism and where and when not to? the potency of its implementation.

care of these issues, tour-ism development initiatives will become a bane for all concerned.

Secondly, we must not pick and choose amongst the elements mentioned above. Neither should we give more weight to some selected elements by ignor-ing the others. Most criti-cally, scenic beauty must not be the driving element that defines the tourism po-tential of any spot. How-ever, that is the exact prob-lem with tourism develop-ment in Meghalaya. The vast majority of our spots are propagated around the pillar of scenic beauty alone. This is so wrong and so callous on our part. All we see is the present while the practices for sustainability are alien to us. This is also precisely the reason why our spots (par-ticularly those which are nature based) are dirty and filthy with plastics and bot-tles, littered with thrown away eatables; have no sense of proper sanitation measures, etc. To this end, all that works for a particu-lar spot is the collection of parking fees and the sales of chips and beverages. Amidst all this, the damage being done to the natural setting and its preservation

ing in most cases.

Thirdly, I would like to present a case in point in the form of a recently popular-ized spot called Wei Sawdong. However, it must be noted that the issues that we faced at Wei Sawdong are the same as faced in other nature-based tourism spots of Meghalaya. Wei Sawdong is now a happen-ing tourism spot located around Sohra and just a few kilometers down the road from the famous Dainthlen falls. Personally, the visit to the spot started with high expectations of serenity and recreation. Sadly, it ended with a bitter and a disap-pointed feeling. As of today, Wei Sawdong stands as one of the deplorable examples of tourism being started af-ter factoring the one and only one element of tourism potential - that of scenic beauty alone! As the other elements are totally ignored the spot has brought about more damage than benefits to the local community. There are issues galore ranging from waste manage-ment to sanitation to lack of tourism services to planning and strategy, etc. Scarily, that is not the end of it! Through a conversation with the boys running the parking bay, one learnt that

there are other spots in that area which they are looking to develop as a tourism product. Apparently, there is some stream which has got health/medicinal ben-efits. What these youth need to be told is not to popularize any further spots in the area until they have put in proper systems for tourism development in place. Above all, the com-munity must be capable and ready to run an even bigger show; else the damages of Wei Sawdong shall multiply manifold!

Lastly, we must not be too hard on our local com-munities that are involved in tourism activities. Tour-ism is now highly special-ized and an ‘experience economy’. Hence, it would be impractical to expect our local communities to meet up to the clientele’s expec-tations at all times. This is more so in case of those communities who are ven-turing into tourism for the first time. Fact being, some of them are very poorly aware about tourism and its nature (especially in terms of business operations). As such, what is the way out? The way out is counseling, guidance and hand-hold-ing. These local communi-ties need proper awareness on tourism and its opera-tional dynamics across fi-nance, human resources, marketing and information technology and tourism spot management. A series of counseling discussions is a must before starting any tourism destination. Here, it would be better if a dedi-cated plan of tourism man-agement for a particular area is developed which shall act as a future guideline. To this end, the state government may look into the possibil-ity of initiating a specialized agency which shall help the local communities in tourism planning, growth and de-velopment (starting with the assessment of tourism po-tential). In addition, local-ized NGOs with specialized knowledge and expertise of a place can play their roles. Well that way, the tourism students and teachers can play their own part for a much more streamlined, re-sponsible, sustainable and strategized tourism devel-opment in Meghalaya. (The Author teaches at NEHU)

Time to expand tax net to increase revenue Lower taxes on salaried people, pensioners

By Nantoo Banerjee

Over 120 crore telephone subscribers, 25 crore motor vehicles users, around five crore foreign holiday goers, 17.10 crore domestic air trav-ellers, 38 crore holders of Permanent (income tax) Ac-count Number cards, over 12 lakh active registered com-panies, over 10 lakh regis-tered doctors, close to three lakh Chartered Accountants (CAs) serving as the fi-nance guides, about 20 lakh lawyers (according to Bar Council), lakhs of consult-ants of all kinds, from real estate to management serv-ices, and crores of traders — from kirana shops and roadside hawkers to home delivery establishments — are impressive statistics for India in 2019. The e-com-merce retail business is among India’s fastest-grow-ing markets and is expected to grow at a CAGR (Com-pound Annual Growth Rate) of 52 percent to touch \$36.7 billion by 2020. Together, they help contribute to the country’s current GDP to the tune of nearly \$3 trillion. Further, it’s interesting to note that over 3,00,000 In-dian students currently study in foreign countries. India is the second largest source of international stu-dents after China. The an-nual cost per Indian stu-dents abroad in local cur-rency varies from Rs.9 lakh to Rs.15 lakh. Rich students spend even more. Indians are spending like never be-fore. No one is complaining. Expenditure generates a vi-brant economy. It creates fresh demand, induces in-vestments in production and supplies and creates employment. Economy grows. Is the government’s tax revenue growing in tan-dem?

Not really. The expendi-ture pattern is not generat-ing the right impact on the government’s revenue in-come. When it comes to payment of individual in-come tax to the government, actual tax payers’ number boils down to less than five percent of the country’s population. It only suggests how incompetent has been the country’s revenue de-partment in organising and spreading the direct and in-direct tax net to cover large number of tax evaders and tax avoiders over the years. As a result, honest regular tax payers are made to share the tax burden of those tax evaders and tax avoiders. Ironically, the salaried peo-ple, pensioners and those

living purely on income from savings with banks and post offices still continue to be key targets of the gov-ernment’s income tax col-lection department.

In fact, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will do well to induce the revenue department to find a way to expand the direct tax net in keeping with the country’s vastly diversified sources of income and personal ex-penditure and reduce the tax burden on regular tax pay-ers. Definitely, there is a strong case for reduction of income tax for those earning below Rs.10 lakh per annum and for senior citizens, liv-ing on pensions and in-comes from fixed deposits with banks, companies and government bonds. The union budget for 2020-21, the first full-year budget under the Modi govern-ment’s second term, will hopefully look into the scope and opportunity for expanding the tax net and reducing the direct tax bur-den on the existing low and middle income group tax payers.

It’s time that the govern-ment rejigs tax slabs as well as tax rates. Income from dividends beyond the level of Rs. 30 lakh per annum of individual shareholders de-serve to be taxed. Through the next financial year’s budget, the government should also use the tax tool to eye the ways of further boosting consumption and reviving growth. The com-mittee set up to review di-rect taxes has sought a 10 percent personal income tax rate for those with annual incomes up to Rs 10 lakh; 20 percent for those with in-comes over Rs 10 lakh and up to Rs 20 lakh; 30 percent for incomes over Rs 20 lakh and up to Rs 2 crore; and 35 percent for incomes above Rs 2 crore. At present, an-nual income up to Rs 2.5 lakh is tax free. Income of Rs 2.5-5 lakh is taxed at five per-cent; Rs 5-10 lakh at 20 per-cent; and over Rs 10 lakh at 30 percent. These slabs have been stable for many years though the govern-ment has been providing re-lief at the lower end through rebates. The commit-tee hasn’t suggested any change to the current in-come tax exemption limit. The task force also sug-gested removal of the sur-charge on incomes at the upper limit. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Mawlai rocks while the authorities slumber

Editor,
Come festivals and local-ity weeks or odd seasons, and Mawlai becomes the hotbed of various rock and heavy metal groups to en-thrall the people of the lo-cality. People, especially youths from all walks of life throng such venues to watch the live entertain-ment. Recently, such event have been organized at the Mawlai Sacred heart cam-pus from 15th – 17th Janu-ary 2020. For three con-secutive nights people danced and screamed in tune with the musical eu-phoria where full decibel can be heard from distant localities as well.

the event until midnight? As far as our knowledge goes the District Adminis-tration usually grants NoC to organizers with the con-dition that they conclude their programme by 10:00 PM sharp. The liberty of al-lowing events to continue with ear-blasting music be-yond midnight, complete with DJ blasts has become a nightmare for the neigh-bouring localities; not to mention the faint- hearted ones. They massacre the precious serenity of the night as if they are the only people who live in the city. Similar programmes have been conducted at Mawlai Nongpdeng-Wahumkhrah area in similar fashion last year where neighbours stayed awake through the night while the District Ad-ministration turned a blind eye and a deaf ear.

If all other localities are told to conclude their pro-grammes before the 10 PM deadline then the East Khasi Hills District Administration too should enforce the same yardstick everywhere. The public deserves to be rid of such unwanted activities. Will the District Administra-tion act ?

Yours etc.,
Bill Carson Rymbai
Shillong -8

Rapists don’t deserve mercy

Editor,
Gender discrimination is the root of many evils. While thwarting the aspira-tion of women certain men have committed many wrongs in the past. Apart from physical torture, de-fenceless women undergo endless mental torture. Within the domestic con-fines innumerable sins are still being committed which mostly go unreported. However, it was the Nirbhaya rape incident in Delhi that was “instrumen-tal” in bringing about a gen-der awareness renaissance in India. Post the Nirbhaya incident many changes in the laws have been made. The safety and security of women have been prioritized. Policemen across the nation have been sensitized and to a large ex-tent, even road transporta-tion has been made women-friendly.

There were countless protests across the country

condemning the six rapists. People from all walks of life too relentlessly pressurized the government that the Nirbhaya convicts must be awarded capital punishment. Media’s contribution to the campaign is immeasurable. Alas, India’s judiciary is so annoyingly slow it has taken over 7 years to pronounce the death sentence. But even now a veteran advo-cate, Indira Jaising has made a statement that evoked sharp criticism. Without a thought for the conse-quences Jaising suggested that the convicts be “for-given” by the parents o Nirbhaya in the same man-ner that Sonia Gandhi for-gave her husband Rajiv Gan-dhi’s killers. This tweet has touched a raw nerve. Peo-ple’s anger spilled over on social media. The most scath-ing response came from di-rectly from Nirbhaya’s mother - Asha Devi. A cou-rageous lady, who deter-minedly fought for justice for so many years, thundered, “Who is Indira Jaising to give me such a suggestion? The whole country wants the convicts to be executed. Just because of people like her, justice is not done with rape victims.” Asha Devi further

adds -- “Can’t believe how Jaising even dared to sug-gest such this; I met her many times over the years in Supreme Court, “not once” did she ask for my well-being and today she is speaking for convicts. Such people earn a livelihood by supporting rapists; hence rape incidents don’t stop.”

These comments by Nirbhaya’s mother have un-done the years of human rights activism that Indira Jaising claims to have practiced. While Jaising has not offered solace to Nirbhaya’s mother how could she even suggest that the rapists be par-doned? Then again, here is another bombshell which many of us may have for-gotten. There was a shock-ing proposal in 2015 by Delhi Government to award the Nirbhaya juvenile con-victs with Rs 10,000 and a sewing machine? Who are the leaders spouting such bizarre ideas and what les-sons should the citizens draw from this?

I think the public is right and more sensible now to point out the “hard cruelty” with which the gang had sexually tortured Nirbhaya. They had inflicted unspeak-

able injuries on the young lady and not only killed here but also her dreams. So, given the increasing cases of rapes and subsequent in-human cruelty and cold-blooded killings, capital punishment is the only an-swer and the only deterrent.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali
Shillong

The RSS misreads History

Editor,
The Shillong Times (Jan 19, 2020) has quoted the RSS chief, Mr Mohan Bhagwat as saying that “this country belongs to Hindus”. This is a false read-ing of history. The Indo-Europeans (previously re-ferred to as Aryans) came to India about four to five thousand years ago. They are referred to as Ancestral North Indians (ANI) in ge-netic parlance. When they came to the subcontinent it was already populated by Ancestral South Indians (ASI), who had come sev-eral thousand years earlier.

The earliest inhabitants in India are the Ancient An-cestral South Indians (AASI) which are repre-sented by the genetically purest tribals in India, who have been historically iso-lated in the Andamans and thus did not intermarry with other ethnic groups.

The first inhabitants of India are the tribals, notab-ly the Austro-Asiatic tribes such as the Munda and Khasi who came out of Africa about 65-70 thou-sand years ago. The anti-quity of these groups and the timing of their ancient mi-grations are traced through gene mutations. The Austro-Asiatic languages are considered by linguists to be the oldest language group in the country thus providing linguistic confir-mation of the genetic vin-tage of tribals. It is now be-ing increasingly considered that the Indus Valley Civil-ization was made up of ASI and AASI individuals who freely intermarried.

Hinduism as a religion was formed only about four thousand years ago and the caste system became rigid about two thousand years ago. This is based on ge-

netic evidence showing that earlier inter-marriage pat-terns ceased with the hard-ening of caste divisions, es-pecially among the higher castes.

The tribal religions based on social elements, nature and spirits, dates back to pre-historic times, evi-denced by sacred forests, monoliths and ancient ritu-als. But while the tribals are the first peoples of the sub-continent and their religion is the most primeval, we have never laid claims to the coun-try. India belongs equally to all its citizens, irrespective of origin, ethnicity or religion.

Those who would like a scientific reading of the his-tory of the peopling of India should read “Which of Us are Aryans?” by Romila Thapar, India’s foremost his-torian and “Early Indians” by Tony Joseph, a prominent journalist.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

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“I don't believe in team motivation. I believe in getting a team prepared so it knows it will have the necessary confidence when it steps on a field and be prepared to play a good game.”
--- Michael J. Gelb

The Shillong Times

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Mind the economy first
DEMOCRACY functions in such a way that leaders will have to connect with the masses by all means. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi does a good job of reaching out to the people with his various radio and TV programmes. He started with the Chai Pe Charcha at the time when he aimed at the PM’s chair in Delhi. The latest was his Pariksha Pe Charcha - an engagement with students. His monthly radio programme, Mann Ki Baat is also hugely popular and helped him win 2019 Lok Sabha polls to power for another term. The question that now arises is whether the Prime Minister should be engaging in these pursuits of public engagement when there are other more serious matters that call for his immediate attention. The economy, for one is passing through precarious times. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reiterated that the Indian economy is on the downslide. It’s cold comfort for India that other economies of note are also in a similar plight. The point is that India’s population burden is a cause for worry, especially its youth who now find themselves without jobs and without any opportunities for start-ups. This demographic dividend could turn out to be India’s Achilles heel.

There is little optimism about a revival of the Indian economy right now. From a level of nine plus rate of economic growth, it has slumped to around five per cent. The upcoming budget is eagerly awaited to see whether the government has a magic wand to stop this downslide and to give the budget a makeover. Expert doses must go into its fundamentals. The UPA regime managed to steer the economy on the right track since a person who understood the fundamentals of economics and finance was at the helm in the form of Dr Manmohan Singh. Yet, in the last phase of UPA-II, the economy showed serious strains. Modi inherited such a scenario. He could not effect positive changes; rather, the drift continued in his first term. Admittedly, economic growth cannot be on a steady keel for long. There will be ups and downs. China has had a long period of heating up of the economy but it remained at around nine per cent. However, China too is growing at around five per cent now. Some say, this was a deliberate cooling down effected by the government, in order that the economy did not over-heat itself. PM Modi will need to attend to the present mess here with more seriousness and get financial experts from across the board and not just those with BJP leanings to sort out the financial mess that India is in today.

TO THE EDITOR

Death penalty no deterrent

Editor,
In 2012, the entire country watched in shock the news of a young woman being brutally gang raped, tortured and murdered. In what I think was a remarkable turn of events, widespread rage slowly but startlingly began to spill over into streets in the form of mass citizen protests. Something about Nirbhaya’s story hit a raw nerve with millions of Indians who know that sexual harassment and rape in our country, often with impunity, is all too real. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the death sentences for the accused in the case has been widely welcomed. However, what is surprising is the glee and frivolity that has followed in public domain discourse,

including the chest thumping by political parties who wish to leverage this to their advantage. Personally, I am against capital punishment but I’m not batting against the judgment, which I believe has followed due legal and judicial processes. However, this celebration of deaths of rapists as some great victory is I think somewhat misplaced. They are rapists and murderers, but still human beings- if that word has any gravity at all. So the levity with which their lives (and deaths) are talked about gives a hint of blood-thirstiness. Also, many do not grasp the terrible conditions in Indian jails unless you’re privileged and when you factor in the fact that rapists get exceptionally horrible treatment in jails, one might even argue that life imprisonment is worse than capital punishment. I believe speedy action and

impartial judgment will be a better deterrent for rapists considering the huge numbers of rape cases we have rather than death sentences for the accused in one high profile case. But ultimately, unless we foster a culture of gender parity and equality, these differences in what we consider to be good deterrents will not matter, simply because rape and sexual harassment will continue to happen. Without working together to really change how Indian society perceives and values its women, sadly we are simply perpetuating the popular refrain which emerged in Kolkata after Dhananjoy Chatterjee was hanged for raping and murdering a 14-year-old girl in 2004: dhora porle Dhananjoy, na porle Dhananjoy, (“if caught, Dhananjoy, else, enjoy”). Nirbhaya’s legacy should be

so much more. Yours etc., Karen L. Donoghue Asst. Professor, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication NEHU, Shillong

Incorrect reading of history
Editor,
Apropos the letter “The RSS misreads history” (ST January 21, 2020) by Glenn Kharkongor, it is ironic that in his zeal to oppose the viewpoint of Mr Mohan Bhagwat, Mr. Kharkongor makes some blatant misreads himself. Firstly, Mr Kharkongor equates Hindus with Aryans and North Indians, ignoring the fact that crores of Dravidians and several Adivasi communities also practice Hinduism. Hinduism is not limited to North India in its practice. It is practised by

communities all over the subcontinent, from Nepalis and Manipuris to Dravidians and Aryans alike. In fact, several of the most venerated Hindu shrines, like Tirupati, were established by Dravidians in South India. Secondly, the statement that Hinduism was formed four thousand years ago is wrong. Unlike Abrahamic faiths like Islam and Christianity, Hinduism does not have a founder and does not consist of a uniform method of worship. Hinduism is a confluence of several modes of worship and meditation that are often extremely different from each other. The Hinduism we see today was not formed four thousand years ago. Rather, the various faiths and beliefs that comprise Hinduism coalesced into a somewhat homogenous religion around the time.

Thirdly, the Munda and Khasi tribes have different origins and ethnicities. The Mundas belong to a group of tribes and communities who were the first settlers in India. Their descendants are today called Adivasis. The Khasis, on the other hand, migrated to India from South East Asia at a much later point, as evidenced by the fact that the Khasi language bears striking resemblance to the Khmer language spoken in Cambodia. Interestingly, the Khmer language itself was influenced by Sanskrit and Pali when Hinduism spread to Southeast Asia. Instead of using history to further divide our society and raise a pointless debate about who came to India first, we should strive to be tolerant and welcoming towards all communities. Yours etc., NK Kehar Shillong 3

Two cases that test the core of federalism of constitution
Crucial Supreme Court decision coming up

By Amritananda Chakravorty

The protests against the draconian trio of CAA-NRC-NPR continue in India, while the Judiciary waits for the ‘violence to stop’, before making any meaningful intervention. In contrast, several state governments have voiced their strong disagreements on the principle behind and implementation of these laws; out of these, Kerala and West Bengal stand out as the fiercest critics, with both the Chief Ministers, P. Vijayan and Mamata Banerjee, having directed to stop the work on the NPR (‘National Population Register’) in their respective states. The growing opposition of the state governments to the fascist policies of the Central Government led by the duo, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Home Minister Amit Shah, is a clear indication of severe strain on the federal structure of India, and the Indian Constitution. The issue is: are the states bound to follow an inherently discriminatory law or a law violative of the federal structure or does the Constitution provide enough safeguards to state governments to protect their autonomy? This is precisely the question before the Supreme Court in recent two cases, wherein the state governments have challenged the validity of a Central law in a suit proceeding. In one case, the State of Kerala has filed a suit under Article 131 of the Constitution challenging the validity of the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019), while in another case, the State of Chhattisgarh has filed a similar suit under Article 131 challenging the validity of the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008 on the ground that it violates the principle of ‘cooperative federalism’, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Before we get into the specifics of these two cases, it is important to understand the federal nature of Indian polity.

Article 1(1) of the Constitution states that India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. Though the Constitution did not use the word ‘federal’, the essence of the Constitution was federal in nature. The Constituent Assembly debates are replete with references to dangers of over-centralisation, and the need to protect the autonomy and individual cultures of the provinces. There was an almost unanimous opinion that India was too diverse and vast as a country to be governed by a unitary government, but the horrors of Partition in 1947 tilted the scale in favour of a strong central government. According to the Second Report of the Union Powers Committee tabled in August, 1947 to the Constituent Assembly, “Now that partition is a settled fact, we are unanimously of the view that it would be injurious to the interests of the country to provide for a weak central authority which would be incapable of ensuring peace, of coordinating vital matters of common concern and of speaking effectively for the whole country in the international space.” Accordingly, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, while introducing the Draft Constitution in November, 1948 noted that “the Draft Constitution can be both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances. In normal times, it is framed to work as a federal system. But in times of war it is so designed as to make it work as though it was a unitary system. Once the President issues a Proclamation, which he is authorised to do under the Provisions of Article 275, the whole scene can become transformed and the State becomes a unitary state. The Union under the Proclamation can claim if it wants (1) the power to legislate upon any subject even though it may be in the State List, (2) the power to give directions to the States as to how they should exercise their executive authority in matters which are within their charge, (3) the power to vest authority for any purpose in any officer, and (4) the power to suspend the financial provisions of the Constitution. Such a power of converting itself into a unitary State no federation possesses.” Thus, it is clear from the debates that the Constitution-makers intended to make the Indian polity essentially a federal system, “with the Union at the Centre and the States at the periphery each endowed with sovereign powers to be exercised in the field assigned to them respectively by the Constitution”, and during external exigencies like war, the Centre can exercise its legislative and executive powers in a unitary fashion, without taking into account the State’s concerns. This understanding was reflected by the Supreme Court of India in State of West Bengal v. Union of India (AIR 1963 SC 1241), wherein the apex court held that “our Constitution adopted a federal structure with a strong bias towards the Centre. Under such a structure, while the Centre remains strong to prevent the development of fissiparous tendencies, the States are made practically autonomous in ordinary times within the spheres allotted to them.” In Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1976), the

Supreme Court held federalism as part of the basic structure of the Constitution, which cannot be altered by way of an amendment. In the last few decades, the Indian jurisprudence has seen the rise of ‘cooperative federalism’, wherein the Centre and the state governments cooperate with each other in a meaningful federal spirit to implement the social welfare legislations of the Union, e.g., the Right to Food Security Act, 2013, the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, etc. In this context, one has to analyse the current situation wherein 11 states have disagreed with the CAA-NRC lethal combo out to destroy the Indian Constitution, and its people. Is it then a question of cooperative federalism? Should the states cooperate with the implementation of a blatantly discriminatory Central law? If they don’t, then is it violation of Constitution or in preservation of the Constitution? The State of Kerala in its suit against the Central Government challenging the CAA has argued that “the Impugned Amendment Act, the Impugned Passport Rules and the Impugned Foreign Order Amendments are class legislations harping, inter alia, on the religious identity of an individual, thereby contravening the principles of secularism, which has been recognised repeatedly by this Honourable Court as a basic structure of the Constitution. The same make religion and the country of origin of the person criteria for grant of citizenship and result in classifications based on religion and based on country, both classifications being apparently and manifestly discriminatory, arbitrary, unreasonable and have no rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved.” Similarly, the State of Chhattisgarh, while challenging the validity of the NIA Act, contends that “the NIA Act is ultra vires to the Constitution of India and is beyond the legislative competence of the Parliament since the Act empowers the Defendant to create an agency for “investigation”, which, notwithstanding the NIA, is carried out by the State Police, which is a subject matter of the State under Entry–2, List–II, Schedule-7. The NIA Act, in its present form, not only takes away the power of conducting investigation by the plaintiff through Police but also confers unfettered discretionary and arbitrary powers on the defendant. Moreover, there are no rules governing the exercise of power which gives ample discretion to the defendant to exercise its power at any juncture without providing any reason or justification for the same”. It is noted that the law on the question whether a state government can challenge the validity of a Central law in a suit under Article 131 of the Constitution is yet to be settled, and the precise issue is currently pending before a larger bench of the Supreme Court. It is important to understand the distinction between a writ jurisdiction, and a suit proceeding, wherein the writ proceedings do not involve disputed questions of facts, while a suit proceeding is a mixed question of facts and law. In a suit proceeding, pleadings are critical, along with a full evidentiary procedure, including cross examination of witnesses, and thus it would be highly interesting to see if the Supreme Court hears the CAA challenge in a suit or in a writ, or hear them together. At the heart of the current two challenges is the fact that the federal structure of the Indian Constitution is increasingly under attack, owing to the unilateral and arbitrary decisions of the Central Government, completely bypassing the constitutional norms and principles of federalism. This is especially true in the context of state governments governed by opposition parties like Kerala, West Bengal, etc. The unilateral revocation of Article 370, and the arbitrary division of the State of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories created terror in the federal heart of the Constitution whereby a majoritarian Central government can just reduce a full state into Union territories within a few hours. This assault on the federal polity only got aggravated with passage of draconian laws like NIA Act, and CAA, thereby proving true the real apprehensions of the Constitution-makers of an all powerful Centre trying to homogenise the entire country by diluting or erasing the regional diversity and specificities. So the question is whether the Supreme Court will be guided by constitutional morality, i.e., upholding the core values of equality, non-discrimination, liberty, and fraternity of the Constitution, or by Constitutional formalism that prioritises the bare form of unitary government over state autonomy. The choice is all too clear and stark, but going by the recent history of Supreme Court’s decisions, one has reasons to be very fearful. But still one hopes. #Hum Dekhenge. (IPA Service)

Modi must assert the credibility of his government
Section of BJP leadership worried about loss of face

By Arun Srivastava

Suddenly an innocuous question has started making rounds in the political circles of Bihar, which has been causing consternation in the BJP circle. The question is: who is running the BJP government? Is it Narendra Modi or Amit Shah? While a section of the BJP leaders outright rejects this, describing it as simply a rumour, some leaders find reasons for it. Their argument is without fire inside there should not be smoke. The argument finds strength from the style of functioning of Shah and his sustained emphasis that CAA, NRC and NPR would be implemented and no force on earth could stop it. Though Modi has been systematically castigating his opponents, Shah has been more aggressive and unsparing. These leaders even confide that Modi desires to dilute the legal provisions of these rules, but Shah is not at all willing to concede any ground. It is in the backdrop of this development that Modi-Shah intend to have a detailed discussion with the RSS leadership. Some top BJP leaders keeping away from the exercise or showing lukewarm response has been matter of concern. In fact, women actively participating in the movement and resorting to satyagraha across the country has unnerved Modi as well some national leaders. There is a lurking fear that the way political developments are taking shape even a section of bureaucracy may adopt a passive attitude. Initially the police in Uttar Pradesh was quite responsive to political directives but they too in recent days have developed a passive attitude after women turned the vanguard of the protest. With protesting taking a pan India character, it is interesting to note that the allies of the Modi government have started deserting the BJP. With a brute majority in Lok Sabha, the BJP may not bother their dissent but it would certainly erode the base of public confidence in the Modi government. Two strong BJP allies, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Ram Vilas Paswan’s Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), have already strongly opposed the government’s design to thrust the citizen matrix. While Akali Dal refused to contest the Delhi assembly election in alliance as a protest, they have now voiced openly the demand to roll back the proposal, much to the dislike of Modi-Shah combination. Had they been fully subscribing to Modi’s accusation about the protest movement against the CAA and NRC, then they should have appreciated Modi slamming the opposition for “spreading lies” and his allegation against media of being biased. SAD has deplored the Modi government for its machination to force the citizens to stand in queues to prove their citizenship. The BJP has lost its most important ally Shiv Sena. Another ally Nitish Kumar has refused to follow its line on CAA and NRC. Their distancing from Modi’s action makes it explicit that Sikhs and Biharis are not willing to toe his line. Their stand would invariably impact the Delhi polls. Akali Dal MLA Manjinder Singh Sirsa is already on record: “Our

leader Sukhbir Singh Badal has always maintained that all religions should be included in the CAA and that Muslims should not be left out. During our meeting with the BJP, we were asked to reconsider our stand on the CAA but we declined to do so. The Shiromani Akali Dal is of the firm stand that Muslims cannot be left out of the CAA”. In a significant statement Paswan quipped: “The government thinks it has the majority, so it can do whatever it wants. They can bring any law.” He criticized the insertion of new queries in the NPR and the manner in which the government was dealing with the student protests. He also raised the issue of date of birth. He said large number of the people do not have any record of their birth and it was beyond the power of any political party to take away the citizenship of people belonging to any religion. Police forcefully taking away water bottles, biscuits and blankets has been met with severe criticism from this section of the BJP leaders. They allege these brutal actions of police would erode the party base in UP and for this Yogi must be held responsible. Yogi’s goons sneaking into protest camps with the aim to give it a bad name is also being criticised. The worst incident that has to happen with Amit Shah is the denial of his own ministry that no Tukde-tukde’ gang ever existed in the country. An RTI application was filed on December 26 after Amit Shah had told a rally in Delhi earlier that the “tukde-tukde gang” needed to be taught a lesson. Amit Shah has made it the biggest issue that the country was facing. For the last four years Shah has been systematically harping on the phrase Tukde-tukde. But ultimately this has proved to be a smear campaign against Leftist student leaders, specially Kanhaiya Kumar by Shah. The RTI reply could not endorse that it has police approval and it referred to any gang. It was the figment of imagination by Shah. It has been much ado about nothing and this is confessed by the home ministry’s own admission in writing. “Ministry of Home Affairs has no information concerning tukde-tukde gang,” was the reply that Netizen Saket Gokhale got on Monday in response to an RTI application seeking answers from the ministry to various questions, including the official definition of the phrase and whether standard operating procedures (SOPs) had been drawn up to identify this “gang”. Gokhale had filed the RTI application after Shah told a rally in Delhi that the “tukde-tukde gang” needed to be taught a lesson. Gokhale has also sought to know whether the ministry had drawn up a list of the leaders and members of this “gang”, and under which penal provisions action was being planned against them. Unfortunately for Shah it came out in one crisp and simple reply for all the queries: it had no information concerning the “tukde-tukde gang”. This is the most ridiculous development. How could Union home minister speak such blatant lies? He had made the imaginary tukde-tukde gang the biggest threat to India and its democracy. (IPA Service)

“ Don’t wait for the last judgment - it takes place every day. ”
--- Albert Camus

The Shillong Times

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SC puts off hearing CAA cases

THE Supreme Court has refused to stay the execution of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and has also put off hearing a batch of 144 CAA cases challenging the constitutionality of the Act without first hearing the Central Government. Advocate General KK Venugopal said the Government has been served copies of only 60 of the 144 petitions. Foremost among the petitioners are Congress leader Jairam Ramesh who calls the Act a brazen attack on core fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The petition of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) led by Assaddudin Owaisi says the CAA violates the fundamental right to equality and aims at granting citizenship to illegal immigrants based on their religion. The SC has given the Government four weeks time to respond to all the petitions. The Court also said it will consider if the matter requires to be referred to a Constitutional Bench.

Several groups and individuals from North East India including the North East Students’ Organisation (NESO), the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and the scion of the royal Tripura House, Pradyot Manikya Debbarma have petitioned the apex court to exclude the region from the purview of the CAA. Pradyot Manikya has also petitioned the apex court for implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) because he feels that several people holding important positions in the present Government of Tripura are not Indian citizens but have come in from Bangladesh and have no empathy with the tribals there. He has also pointed to the fact that even job reservation in Tripura is skewed against tribals and that tribal land is constantly being alienated in favour of non-tribals. Now the apex court has said it would hear the petitions related to Tripura and Assam separately, having regard to the special grounds pleaded in the petitions.

Meanwhile the Khasi Students’ Union (KSU) has started distributing pamphlets explaining to people the detrimental nature of the CAA. Questions have been raised as to why the Supreme Court has put off hearing a case that has agitated people, especially the youth across India and which has brought schools and universities to a grinding halt. This is a matter of concern as the Modi Government seems adamant on implementing the CAA at any costs. Questions have now arisen as to why the Government refuses to speak to agitating parties which have come to the streets spontaneously. Instead, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and Home Minister, Amit Shah are repeating blaming the opposition parties of instigating the protests, thereby, discrediting the genuine aspirations of civil society and their capability to protest against an Act they consider unconstitutional. This is unprecedented!

Fallouts for India!

US-China trade deal

By Dr D.K. Giri

the trade war on the world economy, and other countries in particular? An UNCTAD study concluded that, there was \$35 billion Chinese export loss in the US market. Out of which, US diverted imports of \$21 billion to other countries, and absorbed \$14 billion by its companies. Three countries -- Taiwan, Mexico, and the EU benefitted the most. There was certainly some ‘domino effect’. Even India gained \$755 million additional exports to US in 1st half of 2019 which included chemicals, metals and ore.

There was limited diversion of investment to India,

Americans came to a truce. Trump had to show to Americans in an election year, that he has tamed the Dragon, and they can count on him to do it again. The Chinese realised they could not dilute their unrivalled strength i.e. their robust and surplus economy in an unending fight with Americans. If Trump loses the election, they would face another president, who may open up other areas for confrontation such as speed up the fight for technological supremacy etc. They could contain Trump on trade issues as he is more transactional. By accommodating

phones, but tariff of 25% on \$250 billion goods remains, so does the Chinese tariff of 25% on \$100 billion imports from US. Furthermore, Chinese have said the increased US imports would depend upon demand. As a good many observers suggest the distrust and suspicion that exist between two countries seems to continue. The signing of the Agreement, and the small function surrounding it, bore evidence. Not keeping with protocol, Trump signed the deal with Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He, not his counter-part Xi Jinping. Trump could have delegated US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer or Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Perhaps, he didn’t want to share the credit of securing a deal with Chinese that is largely tilted in US favour.

At any rate, a deal is better than a conflict. It should restore normalcy in world trade. The hypothesis for New Delhi is “if the truce fuels global trade, India should benefit”. Similar was the assumption then, “India could increase its trade footprint in the midst of the trade conflict between US and China”. Did it happen? Not really! Take for example, US imposed heavy tariffs in steel from China as it imports 25 million tonnes of steel every year. But India exported 0.7 million tonnes of steel. The trade in this alone was expected to rise by \$11 billion. India failed to take advantage and it appears it will miss the bus again. What could be the reason for such persistent failures to grab the opportunity? A major is the lack of adequate manufacturing capabilities in India. Second, New Delhi was plugging the imports, not focusing on exports. The ‘Make in India’ enterprise seems to be an import-substitution mechanism, not export-promotion. This would not enhance Indian economy. Third, New Delhi has not taken the reform process to a logical end; mainly in land and labour. Both are important factors of production. There is plethora of labour laws and land laws are still complicated. It needs to build more infrastructures with roads, ports and power. All in all, New Delhi needs to move fast, through innovative policies and a solid focus on infrastructure development. Putting energy, resources and time on NRC/ NPR is a misplaced priority. These can wait while economy is put back on rails.---INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

Between revenue shortfall and high money-requirement Indian budget exercise becomes a tightrope walk

By Gyan Pathak

Having seen the dismal performance of the ‘bahikhata’ budget 2019-20 of the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reportedly involved himself in the budget exercises for the year 2020-21, the first of its kind for a Prime Minister. He not only met economists and stakeholders while seeking ways out of the economic quagmire, but also asked the Finance Minister not to make the budget highly ambitious but ‘realistic’. The real GDP growth rate has plummeted to a new low, and therefore even setting target of GDP for the budget has become problematic. Government finds itself between huge revenue shortfall and a high money-requirement. Ideas and suggestions are many but money available is limited enforcing the Finance Ministry to perform a tightrope walk.

First of all, the Ministry of Finance is trying to decode Modi’s advice of being ‘realistic’ in the budget. The current year’s budget was prepared on the assumption of 12 per cent of GDP growth rate as against 10 per cent of the last year. PM’s advice reveals that he himself found 12 per cent as unrealistic for 2019-20 when the previous year’s growth rate was only 6.8 per cent. Taking this hint the ministry, as it is reported, was trying to set the GDP growth rate target for the year 2020-21 at 9.5 to 10 per cent, i.e., almost at the level of the year 2018-19. But they are still afraid of its being highly ambitious because the target for the year 2018-19 was set on the backdrop of 7.2 per cent growth rate in the previous year, while the growth rate in the current year is only around 4.8 per cent. On the other hand, if they don’t prepare the budget on the presumption of around 10 per cent of growth rate, they cannot present a rosy picture of the economy. Thus, the officials are caught between the devil and the deep sea.

‘Highly ambitious budget’ is a term used by critics when they believe that the targets set in the budget are highly unrealistic and unreasonable, and therefore, in all probabilities, unachievable. India’s budget for 2019-20 was clearly of this category which set a GDP growth rate of 12 per cent when it was really growing at 6.6 per cent between October-December 2018 with annual average of 6.8 per cent. Leaders of the ruling establishment tried to silence the critics by saying that the budget was only ‘ambitious’, and the targets set are achievable, though difficult. Now, almost at the end of the year, we know, the leaders of the ruling establishments were totally wrong. GDP growth rate touched a new low of 4.5 per cent in the last quarter and RBI has to revise the annual growth rate of only 5 per cent. The most recent assessment of the IMF has put it at only 4.8 per cent.

Though the collection of receipt at 12 per cent of the GDP growth rate was resorted to by the government to portray a rosy picture of the Indian economy, the real growth at annual average of 4.8 per cent has left the country with very low level of revenue collection compared to the target set and the present requirement. After returning to the power for the second term with absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, Modi and his lieutenants perhaps thought that they are law unto themselves forgetting the fact that economy runs on its own principles and logic, not on the whims and fancies of the leadership.

They started harping on making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024, and \$10 trillion by 2030. To achieve this too ambitious goal, several wild provisions were made, and several unrealistic taxes were imposed on industries and business. However, nothing worked. Ministry of Finance had to reduce several taxes, and had to give assurance to Industries not to implement the law that had made the failure of meeting CSR contribution a crime. Several other measures were taken to revive the economy but all failed. Nothing could reverse the economic downturn.

Budget exercise for the year 2020-21 was commenced in the backdrop of such an economic crisis which has threatened to push the Indian economy to the door of economic recession. Making budget this year has become unmistakably more difficult due to lower real growth rate of 4.8 per cent than the last year which was prepared when the Indian economy was performing at 6.8 per cent. Moreover, inflationary pressure has doubled. Crude oil prices are most likely to increase which would deepen the crisis.

Among the diagnosed reasons of the present crisis is fall in domestic consumption mainly due to lack of money with the people, due to loss of job or joblessness. Millions of industries and businesses are struggling to survive, while millions of them have already shut down. Due to fall in demand, millions of industries have reduced the level of production. Fresh investment became its victim, because investors, by and large, found it not profitable in the present scenario. Industries and business also suffered from lack of funds induced mainly by the banking crisis.

The fall in the domestic consumption is primarily caused by weaknesses in the Rural economy. The dream of doubling farmer’s income remains a dream. Moreover, about 40 per cent of our so called farmers and more than half of the rural households are landless. It is thus natural for the government toying with an idea of pumping in large amount of money into the rural economy.

Where will this money come from? One of the sources is Official Development Assistance from IMF, World Bank, and ADB etc which usually comes with certain policy conditions, such as market oriented reforms. It suits the present ruling establishment to buy support from poor voters in lieu of financial support from the government for furthering economic reforms, such as labour and land reforms, full or partial privatization of PSUs, structural reforms in railways, banking sector reforms, reducing subsidies except for the targeted population etc.

From the beginning of this month itself the railways have increased the fares to cover up the revenue shortfall, which is an indication of government’s intention to increase various charges and taxes for goods and services it provides. Proceeds from disinvestments, borrowings from market and institutions, advance transfer of funds from RBI, etc might be other sources of money. To know how far government succeeds in balancing the budget and controlling the deficit we will have to wait for the budget to be tabled in Parliament. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

The RSS Misreads History: A response

Editor

I agree with the conclusion in the letter written by NK Kehar (ST January 22, 2020) that we should “be tolerant and welcoming to all communities.” My own letter said that, “India belongs equally to all its citizens, irrespective of origin, ethnicity or religion.” The main intent of my letter was to object to the RSS claim that, “this country belongs to the Hindus”. Mr Kehar has conveniently side-stepped this point, choosing to go instead into tangential points of little relevance that camouflage the main topic.

Furthermore he has gone on a personal attack accusing me of ‘blatant misreads’. I had not made any claim to expertise on this subject and merely quoted from authoritative scholars on this subject and had provided the sources. The term Ancestral North Indian, Indo-Eu-

ropean and Aryan come from the academic literature and this study has been led by Prof David Reich of Harvard University which has collaborated with the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad.

His (sorry if my presumption of the gender is wrong) claim that the Khasis came from Southeast Asia is based on outdated assumptions which have been updated by recent genetic and linguistic evidence. It is well-established that Munda and Khasi are related genetically, linguistically and culturally such as the similar patterns of monolith erection. I will be happy to provide a complete bibliography of scientific references to anyone.

Another issue is worth raising here. In the 1951 census form there was an option of choosing “tribal religion”. This was removed thereafter and “other religion” was added. But from the 2011 Census, even “other” was removed and tribals who followed their own religion could not indicate their religion. Many tribal organisations have raised this issue but to no

avail. Now we are being told we are all Hindus. Hinduism has great philosophies and precepts but so do other religions.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor
Via email

Six lane a pipe dream!

Editor,

The caption in the front page of The Shillong Times, January 22, 2020 says, “Six lane GS Road possible if land is available.” This caption already clarifies the doubt that land is not available for a six-lane GS Road. The matter ends there! Governments past and present found it impossible to have even a proper airport at Umroi because they could not get land. So to dream of a six lane GS Road is to build castles in the air. It is no different from the Supreme Court Ruling in 2018 on the eve of Diwali saying, “Cracker bursting allowed IF the crackers are green.” There was instant joy especially in Delhi but half an hour later there was an eerie silence as there were no green crackers in India at

the time.

Meghalaya is the only place in the whole world that allows overloaded trucks to inch at 3 kmph. In this respect I salute my people who commute between Jowai and Shillong in small vehicles behind these trucks that run at snail’s pace. On January 14, 2020 an overloaded truck travelling from Wah Nangbah to Puriang reversed and missed our car by a thread, due to diesel mis-injection. I travel once in a while to Jowai but I really praise the courage of those who travel on this route regularly in small cars.

As for myself, I shall never visit my home town Jowai until I can purchase a second hand JCB. It is very safe to ride on. One does not have to pay road tax or go for pollution tests and there is no jerking as well because the wheels are the size of the giant wheels in a circus.

Yours etc.,
W Passah,
Via email

Another blow to secularism

Editor,
I was shocked and upset

to read the news that the Ministry of Defence has dropped the Christian hymn, “Abide with me,” from the, ‘Beating The Retreat,’ ceremony to be held on January 29 2020. This Christian hymn has been part of the closing ceremony of the Republic Day celebration since 1950 and it was Gandhi’s favourite hymn. Also people from various faiths love this song and draw inspirations from it. This hymn that has been played at every ‘Beating the Retreat’ programme gives me a sense of security and joy that secularism still prevails. This hymn is our prayer that God will abide with us as a country, helping us to live in peace and prosperity and also to strengthen us through the challenges that we meet.

I am wonder why the Defence Ministry has taken this decision at this juncture when the citizens of the country are opposing the CAA/NRC. Some people may say that it is just a song and it needs to change but for me the hymn is not just a song but it is a song that was included in the ceremony to remind us of our leader, Mahatma Gandhi

who professed and believed in secularism. So what is the motive for excluding this song from the ceremony? This decision by the Ministry does not respect the sentiments of other minorities and decisions like these pose a threat to our right to profess our faith and our continued mission works to uplift our country.

I call upon our Christian community and our fellow citizens to respect secularism and as a mark of respect for this enduring principle, on our Republic day January 26, 2020 we will pray and sing this hymn in the church, in our homes and on the streets to show that we believe in a secular India and we will always uphold this secularism.

Yours etc.,
Rev NB Diengdoh.
Shillong -14

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

“Adapt yourself to the things among which your lot has been cast and love sincerely the fellow creatures with whom destiny has ordained that you shall live.”
--- Heraclitus

The Shillong Times
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Democracy and India

THE Democracy ranking for India dropped by 10 points to 51 on a scale set by a global media establishment -- one that retains considerable credibility. The context it cited is understandable, namely the actions by the Modi government in relation to the Kashmir and CAA – these having raised the communal temperature. Both the steps are controversial while, admittedly, a nationalistic spirit is involved in these pushes, but beyond a point it hurts the sentiments of the main minority community, the Muslims. Notably, the Supreme Court is seized of such matters but did not see the necessity to order a stay on the Government proceedings. Rather, it would hear the pleas from both sides in normal course. Those who expected a quick-fix solution from the apex court vis-à-vis the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were disappointed by the way things progressed in the court this week.

The freedom that Democracy gives to citizens, the soundness of the judicial system that is supposed to take decisions in an impartial manner and a Parliament that weighs and reflects the opinion of the people at large are all the strengths of the unique system. India fell a few points down, but it still holds its head high overall, which must be acknowledged. The free airing of views in respect of Kashmir and CAA is by itself a demonstration of the strengths of democracy. At the same time, the Government may take note of the way India gets projected globally in the context of the new steps. Wholesale freedom to individuals or other entities is an unacceptable proposition. A sense of responsibility must guide both the people on the ground, the political establishments and governments as well while handling matters of national importance. It should also be the attempt on the part of governments to engage people in dialogues rather than adopting confrontationist postures. The right to exercise one’s freedom also enjoins on citizens and institutions of democracy the need to act with restraint. A footloose style is not the way forward. It is also important to maintain the communal equilibrium in a nation where the only way to exist is to co-exist. In ensuring such a scenario of peace and amity, the impartiality of courts is of prime importance. Justice to one and all is the central creed of governance in a democracy. It is for courts to ensure this will remain so now and for all times to come.

TO THE EDITOR

6-lane versus No lane

Editor,
A report in this daily on January 22 last stated that the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) is ready to convert the Guwahati-Shillong road into a six-lane road provided the State Government makes land available for the purpose. My immediate reaction is ‘Why six lane for GS Road while the Nongstoin-Ranikor road in West and South West Khasi Hills is languishing with no lane at all?’
The sanctioned Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Phlangdiloin-Mawthabah-Ranikor road in West and South West Khasi Hills was cancelled in 2016 and 2018 because of opposition from pressure groups like the KSU. To please these pressure groups KHADC CEM Pynshngain N Syiem and the mercuric HS Shylla refused to grant NOC to NHAI for the construction of the much needed road. The pretext for the opposition was that the road was meant for uranium mining in Domiasiat (South West Khasi Hills).
Now, Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) reveals that uranium is found all along the western parts of Meghalaya, from Jaintia Hills, Khasi Hills and Garo Hills (uranium belt). Uranium is found in Sohra, Tyrsad, Mawsynram,

Mawlyngad (East Khasi Hills), Domiasiat and Mathabhab (South West Khasi Hills) and in Garo Hills. Will KSU and other groups oppose two lane roads to Sohra, Mawsynram and to other location where uranium is found? Will KHADC refuse to grant NOC for two lanes to the above places? Uranium will be ferried along the current 4-lane and future lane GS road too. Will the highway be shut down?
The opposition to the two lane Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Phlangdiloin-Mawthabah-Ranikor road is from West and South West Khasi Hills backward. The Shillong based NGOs who oppose the road look down on the people of the two districts. For this reason ‘ki seng bhalang’ are nick named ‘ki seng sniewlang’ for their anti-development attitude particularly in rural areas.
Yours etc.,
Albert Thyrniang
West Khasi Hills

Abide with Me

Editor,
Before coming to Rev Diengdoh’s letter about the dropping of the tune, ‘Abide with Me’ from the January 29, Beating the Retreat programme, I want to express my thanks to Glen Kharkongor for reminding us of our Cambodian connection. Not to waste time, Larnai (8 km from Ummulong), Cambodia and

“The simplest definition of a budget is “telling your money where to go.”
Thus said Tsh Oxenreider in his book, “Organized Simplicity: The Clutter-Free Approach to Intentional Living.” So many different explanations are being offered for the current slowdown in the economy that budget 2020 needs to provide a level of explanation far greater than what has been done by any previous budget document. The philosophy of the government needs to be given as much space as the actual plan itself.
For a start, the budget needs to explain how the government has fared on the non-economic goals it set for itself last year. A first message that would build credibility is to clearly indicate what was achieved in some of the areas. There has been a view that the appetite for investment has tapered off. At a philosophical level, animal spirits are required to drive investment. These abound only when there are meaningful opportunities for profit. The dramatic take-off in growth in the mid-90s was because opportunities for super profits existed. Inevitably, these opportunities also created oligopolies amid accusations of the disproportionate accumulation of wealth (For example: Harshad Mehta/ Sukh Ram and other worthies from the past). A series of actions, starting from the overreach during the 2G scam, through to the highly priced auctions for resources, have tightened the tap on some of the routes to high profit. This has particular resonance when one expects private parties to actively participate in divestments or the sale of natural resources like coal. It would be worthwhile to indicate that the government is prepared to leave some money on the table, as that is the incentive for people to invest in what is an uncertain risk environment. The government needs to communicate that investment and job growth may take precedence over revenue maximisation. There is nothing wrong or unethical in making such a choice.
This period of slow growth has placed a burden on State revenues,

imposing fiscal pressures. Governments have traditionally sought to understate fiscal deficits, through their cash accounting mechanism — by simply not making payments. In particular, in situations where the last-mile closures of projects have not happened (in the case of highways, for example), for reasons outside the control of private parties, there needs to be an approach which ensures at least some liquidity to the bidding company. It is better to acknowledge the existence of a higher fiscal deficit, explain its causes and increase the flow of payments through the system. Credit rating agencies, that are often sensitive to fiscal shortfalls, are likely to be far more accommodating of fiscal expansions if the budget indicates why the actions taken will be useful, especially in creating jobs and stimulating demand.
One response to anticipated fiscal constraints seems to have been a tightening of tax collection, resulting in anecdotal instances of the creation of a fear psychosis. The finance minister and others have correctly sent across the message that the tax department needs to be more transparent in its positions and be seen to be fair towards the assessee. Greater collections and a lower potential for harassment will come only with a simple tax code. It will be worth stating how the government wants to simplify the tax process, and what its expectations would be by way of higher revenues but greater ease of tax management, so that assessors and assesses know the behaviour expected of them.
The strong mandate received by the ruling party would indicate that the efforts made towards the provision of toilets, gas connections, insurance and financial inclusion were, in some measure, successful. This constitutes an extraordinary achievement in a country of our complexity. If the government can provide third party evidence of improved outcomes, this would demonstrate that its

welfare State activities have actually paid off. It is also worth explaining why these actions, if successful, have not boosted growth. This might indeed be because many of the products that were delivered to the public provide great convenience (such as the Ujala scheme), but do not necessarily induce extra consumption. But, we need to hear this from the finance minister and the chief economist.
A defining feature of the past few years has been the pursuit of investigations into irregularities of various kinds. These investigations are desirable to reinforce a compliance culture, which was often largely absent. The budget must indicate a time frame to arrive at some settlement of most of these investigations. While the government cannot control the judicial processes that defendants might use, they can make clear the behaviours, that in their view, violate the spirit of the law and that such violators would, in future, not meet “ fit and proper “ requirements for, say, government contracts. In a market economy, that alone would normally suffice as punishment. There is more than enough discretion in government to bring errant companies to heel by using the “ spirit of the law doctrine”.
In specific situations such as the sale of stressed assets through the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, the government could reiterate that those who take on stressed assets will not be held accountable for the misdemeanours of past owners. This is not being said often enough.
Considerable debate has ensued about the quality of economic data, without which one cannot objectively assess the performance of government. Changes in statistical bases, though very well-intentioned, have allowed opponents of government action the room to make criticisms that are then difficult to disprove. Greater effort could be made to explain exactly why these changes in data were made and for the government to help interpret these in a credible manner. Budgets are about choices, and by explaining the rationale

underpinning these the government will increase the conviction in the plans for the \$ 5 trillion dollar economy.
The forthcoming budget may make special efforts to boost the rural economy. This is a step in the right direction. Unless the rural economy is rejuvenated, any sustained revival in mass incomes, and, therefore, demand, will continue to elude the Indian economy. Here are four things which the budget could consider.
One, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is among the most crucial policy instruments of mass income generation. Anecdotal accounts and reports by social activists have repeatedly pointed out that payments under the scheme are often delayed by long periods. This defeats the purpose of the scheme, as those seeking work are mostly looking to buy their next meal. The budget should make sure that such delays do not occur. Two, the government has spent a lot of money on providing private infrastructure such as houses and toilets in villages to improve standards of living. It should now focus on public infrastructure to augment incomes. Livestock is a key area here. A focus on reviving common pastures will help both farm incomes as well as environmental concerns. Three, the last budget announced its intent to make India self-reliant in edible oils. It should build on that commitment with a clear policy to incentivise farmers to achieve this goal. Four, with rising freak weather events, crop losses will mount in the future. This hurts both consumers as well as farmers. The budget should lay down a policy to deal with such exigencies in addition to the existing public distribution system. Finally, if revenue shortfalls and fiscal considerations lead to a cutback in rural spending, then it will reinforce the idea that the rural economy is only the residual element in this government’s scheme of things. Any tall promises in the forthcoming budget will have to be taken with a pinch of salt in that case.

politics, but the downside to this is that our feeds often resemble an endless stream of stress. In 2015, researchers at the Pew Research Centre, Washington sought to find out if social media induces more stress than it relieves. In the survey of 1800 people, women reported being more stressed than men. Once a man or woman creates an account with Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, he or she is being initiated in to the busy world of chatting oblivious of the dangers inherent in the use of social media. If a person is aware the inherent dangers of social media she/ he can control or limit its use. But excessive use of Facebook etc., may lead to domestic problems. Hence its good to step back and check if we are addicted to social media and learn to limit its use.
Ultimately, technology is for our comfort and welfare and it should not be vice versa. If the use of Facebook kills our pleasure or peace, then we should limit it or avoid it, for our life is more precious than the use of social media. Let us first love ourselves, our family, our relationships and social responsibilities more than the use of the social media. If we set our priorities right social media could be an ally rather than a bane.
Yours etc.,
TK Nandanani,
Via email

Kejriwal’s Aam Aadmi Party may return to power in Delhi

By Kushal Jeena

With free water, cheaper electricity, no hike in school fees and better management of health facilities as its main election plank, the chief minister Arvind Kejriwal led Aam Admi Party seems all set to return to power in the national capital of Delhi that goes to polls on February 8.
Besides, a triangular contest among three major players, the AAP, Congress and BJP has placed Kejriwal in an advantageous position because like previous occasions a split of votes helps him emerge as a clear winner. However, he is unlikely to repeat his previous performance of winning 67 of the 70 seats in Delhi assembly as there exist two factors; anti-incumbency and minority voters who might switch over to Congress in the wake of UPA government’s insistence on implementing new citizenship amendment act that Parliament passed in December last year.
Meanwhile various surveys that have appeared so far in the media have indicated that Kejriwal is bringing his party back to power for the second consecutive term, but with reduced strength in Delhi assembly. If the AAP’s performance in the Lok Sabha election is taken into account, the target of crossing previous tally looks extremely ambitious. But then voters across India have shown different preferences in national and local elections. If Kejriwal’s good governance plank works with the voters, the AAP may come back to power in spite of BJP’s claim that popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi among core BJP voters continues to hold grounds.
The opponents of Kejriwal particularly the Congress have been accusing him of having a clandestine understanding with Prime Minister Narendra Modi because he seems wary of the Modi wave and has tried not to target the prime minister in person. In many elections in the past, when Modi was made the subject of personal target, he has turned the scale in his favour. The BJP, though, is trying to project Delhi assembly election as a battle between PM Modi and CM Kejriwal, the AAP leadership including the chief minister has stayed away from launching personal attacks on Modi. The deliberate silent on the part of Kejriwal on contentious issues like CAA, NRC and NPR is also indicative of a discreet understanding between Modi and Delhi’s chief minister.
During 2019 Lok Sabha election, Delhi was reeling under a strong Modi wave and as a result party swept all the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. However, it failed to capture power in 2013 and 2015 Delhi assembly elections even as both held when Modi’s popularity was at its peak. In 2013, Modi as Gujarat chief minister and BJP’s prime ministerial candidate had addressed a series of election rallies in Delhi. Still, the party fell short of majority after results came in and decided to take high moral ground unlike recent examples seen in Goa, Karnataka, Haryana and Maharashtra and did not stake claim to form government. Kejriwal formed government in 2013 for 49 days.
In 2015, the BJP could win only three seats while the Congress was reduced to zero. On both occasions, the BJP had contested Delhi assembly election with a declared chief ministerial candidate Harsh Vardhan in 2013 and Kiran Bedi in 2015. The losses that BJP suffered in 2013 and 2015 were promptly tagged to Harsh Vardhan and Kiran Bedi. This time, the BJP has put its best foot forward by proclaiming that PM Modi is their face for Delhi election pitting him virtually against Kejriwal. The BJP hopes that Modi ‘magic’ will eclipse Kejriwal’s charisma in Delhi.
The Congress is in tatters in Delhi. The district units of the party had been engaged in an open fight till recently. The party failed to enter into an alliance with the AAP that has wider support on the ground. The deal failed during the Lok Sabha election, which the AAP leadership suspected was main reason behind BJP’s cakewalk and had approached Rahul Gandhi, then Congress president for an electoral alliance.
The Congress’s performance in Delhi in the Lok Sabha election surprised even some within the party leadership as the party finished second in five of seven constituencies pushing the AAP to distant third. But recent surveys show that people have clear preferences for Delhi Assembly election.
Analysts say Congress is expected to do well in areas where anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests were intense. The visits by Congress leaders to protesters’ venues have generated lot of goodwill for the Congress particularly among Muslim voters, who are dominating voters in five constituencies and may influence electoral outcome on some other seats. If the Congress actually makes inroads in such areas and manages to get some hold back in constituencies dominated by slums and unauthorised colonies, there may be a surprise in store in the upcoming Delhi assembly election.
Delhi’s electorates are sharply divided among certain categories Purvanchalis, Punjabis, Muslims, upper caste-baniya combine and slums. They have traditionally been voters to one party or the other. The AAP broke this pattern in 2015. The Congress suffered biggest casualty during Kejriwal’s sudden rise in Delhi. While the BJP held on to its vote bank with 32 per cent vote share, the Congress suffered a loss of 15 per cent over 2013 election. The AAP got over 54 per cent.
With Manoj Tiwari, a purvanchali at the helm of party’s affairs in the national capital, the BJP is banking on a swing in Purvanchali vote bank, division among Punjabis and steadfast hold on upper caste-baniya combine. The Congress is banking on votes of slum dwellers, return of Purvanchalis and support of Muslim electorates. The AAP argues that polarisation and caste-wise division of votes will not happen this time also and there is a visible trend of repetition of 2015 in its favour.
The development is hardly an issue for the residents of Delhi because the city has a huge majority of people who have roots in other states and rest of India is not as developed as Delhi. This makes development a less appealing election issue in Delhi polls. This is also a major factor behind Kejriwal’s grand success as he promised to keep electricity cheaper in Delhi. Availability of electricity is not a concern for an average Delhi voter unlike neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. Sheila Dikshit was at the receiving end just before 2013 Delhi election as there were talks about hike in power tariff in Delhi.
Water supply has been a concern in Delhi. But Kejriwal’s promise in 2015 and subsequent implementation of almost-free water in the past five years has made this issue irrelevant till a voter is not shocked by reports of climate change and impending water crisis all over the world including Delhi. A high-stakes triangular contest among AAP, BJP and Congress, elections for the 70-member Delhi assembly will be held on February 8. The counting of votes will take place on February 11. The results will be seen as a verdict on recent incidents that have seen BJP and its opponents clash over allegations of “majoritarianism” and “intolerance” with regard to violence on campuses and legislations like the Citizenship Amendment Act.

“A good career is a long-lasting career. When you're there in every competition doing a good job you're a part of an elite, and that's the most important thing.”
--- Marquis de Sade

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KHADC conundrum

THE repeated call for Administrator’s Rule in the Khasi Hills District Council reeks of gross unconstitutionality. The problem with the district councils is that they are inherently unstable institutions dictated by the lucre of office. Those elected to the Councils have belied the aspirations of the founding father of the Sixth Schedule, JJM Nichols Roy. The Sixth Schedule was wrested with much sacrifice by Nichols Roy who cared for the tribal people of undivided Assam. That threat of domination by the non-tribal rulers of Assam is now in the past at least for Meghalaya. The state is now ruled by tribals and the district council has become an adjunct institution mainly engaged in handing out trading licenses to non-tribal traders. The relationship between the Councils and the traditional heads is frayed. The syiems are arbitrarily set aside if they don’t comply with the Council’s demands which most often than not are about money accruing from taxes and tolls from village markets and toll gates. The Councils relationships with other traditional heads such as the Dorbar Raid and Dorbar Shnong are also tenuous.

The practical thing to do was to dismantle the District Councils after Meghalaya was created. But for political reasons and not for reasons of public service they have been allowed to continue. Every institution created vide the Constitution is meant to deliver public goods. When the Councils started they were running primary schools and rural health services. They failed to run these two basic services. Both are now run by the State Government. At this point the Councils have become rent-seeking institutions and the constant bickering and loss of confidence engineered against one Executive Council(EC) by a group of Councillors aligned with those in the Opposition is purely because of the spoils of office and not because the EC has not performed. If a particular EC has not performed then there should be a thorough discussion in the House and point by point allegations need to be made against its wrongdoings. But the last EC did not go through this process because the Chief Executive Member (CEM) resigned at the first hint of trouble. Now that the tug of war is going on between the two opposing parties in the Khasi Hills District Council, the State Government wants to impose Administrator’s Rule which is akin to President’s Rule. If there is antagonism towards President’s Rule which nullifies the role of elected representatives and which people find that undemocratic then why allow the State Government to extend its rule over the Council?

LOOKING BACK

June 27, 1989

10 cops killed in Bodo blast

Ten policemen were killed and seven others injured when a powerful bomb reportedly planted by Bodo militants exploded at Bhurtinali in Kokrajhar district on the second day of the 340 hrs Assam bandh. The dead included the driver of a requisitioned bus which blew up in the explosion. The cleaner of the bus was injured, official reports received here said. A police party was escorting a vehicle of Bhutan to Gelengpung when the bomb exploded at Bhurtinali under Sidli police station. The injured were shifted to Bongaigaon refinery petrochemical hospital. High police officials including Inspector General of Police Mr J K Sinha also left for spot. This was the second bomb explosion in Kokrajhar district within a week Nine people were killed and an equal number injured in an explosion at the Kokrajhar railway station on June 20.

Agroecology learning centre: Respecting indigenous knowledge

The introduction of the Green Revolution (GR) in India during the 1960s was a momentous occasion in the history of the country. Facing the dual challenges of increasing population amid food shortages, the country decided to adapt the work done by Norman Borlaug (1970 Nobel Peace Prize recipient) and his associates in Mexico to bring a sea change to India’s agricultural landscape.

Farmers were encouraged to replace their traditional seeds with High yield varieties and adopt associated agricultural techniques. This strategy has allowed India to attain self-sufficiency particularly in terms of food grains. The increase in yield was so dramatic that on many occasions the existing infrastructure found it difficult to absorb the surplus production.

Farmers’ income especially those who were able to afford to adopt the package also saw an improvement. However, all of this has come at a cost that has become more apparent with time. The increase in yield has reached a plateau while the negative consequences of the GR have become more prominent.

In 1935 NI Vavilov, a Russian scientist listed regions which he believed were independent ‘centers of origin’ of cultivated food plants around the world. In these regions, there is a diversity of traditional varieties of a wide range of crops along with their wild relatives.

The Indian centre (which includes Meghalaya) is a very important centre where several kinds of vegetables are found. Around 100,000 varieties of rice were found till the 1970s in India. Indigenous areas, especially, are the hotbed of agrobiodiversity.

The North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) undertook a participatory mapping exercise on agrobiodiversity in 32 villages (which include 28 villages from Meghalaya and four villages from Nagaland) and found that there is an average of 202 food plants in a single community. This includes both wild and cultivated varieties.

Generations of careful selection, breeding by farmers made possible this astounding richness in agrobiodiversity. This diversity was in turn supported by the practice of agroecological practices in terms of crop management, which includes soil, water, and pest management. After agriculture was discovered 10,000 years ago (8,000 BCE), it was found that humanity used this knowledge to build civilisations. But since the advent of industrial farming and GR, all this knowledge, which had ensured human survival, was now considered to be backward and primitive.

Instead of it, modern varieties developed under laboratory conditions using methods of modern science together with by-products of petroleum (chemical fertilizers and pesticides) are

By Bhogtoram Mawroh and Pius Ranee

touted as the panacea for the ills facing agriculture. Farmers who refuse to be swayed by this propaganda are labeled as close-minded and blamed for keeping agriculture backward. Their knowledge, which was the outcome of thousands of years of experience, is branded as primitive. Indigenous communities, living at the margins, have always been a target of negative connotations.

However, after the environmental pollution, there is an increasing skepticism of the methods of modern science. Consequently, there is an increasing acknowledgment of indigenous traditional knowledge, which has developed and nurtured the rich agrobiodiversity found in different regions of the world including Meghalaya and Nagaland.

According to the UNESCO indigenous knowledge, “...refers to the understandings, skills, and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings” and it offers innovative solutions to climate change (of which the fossil fuel-driven GR revolution is a major contributor). NESFAS also concurs with this assessment and wants to strengthen the indigenous food system by exploring the agroecological basis of their farming practices. To achieve this end, Agroecology Learning Circles (ALC) were formed as an important vehicle. The aim of these ALCs is to bring respect and recognition to indigenous knowledge especially concerning agroecological practises that have sustained indigenous food systems for generations.

ALCs combine agroecology with participatory research and aims to empower indigenous communities to recognize, revive, practice, and eventually further develop traditional agroecology technologies and practice and stimulates local innovation for sustainable local food systems. It is farmer-led and its ‘laboratory’ is the field following the lines of the Farmer Field Schools. It is also a creative and collective space where community members and scientists meet to share and learn from each other about new skills and capacities along with new tools and processes to enhance local agroecology practices, food sovereignty and social transformation through local food initiatives.

NESFAS along with its partners, Society for Urban and Rural & Rural Empowerment (SURE), Social Service Centre (SSC) and North East Network (NEN), have established ALCs in a few of their project villages. Local farmers from their respective villages are members of these ALCs. Initially, a meeting with ALC members was held where members are asked asked to reflect on the important factors that affect crop production during the session. During the session,

solutions are also solicited from members who come up with different methods of overcoming the problem, pest infestation, soil fertility, etc. A decision is then made on the choice of the experiments to be conducted and members assigned for particular experiments.

On October 17, 2019, NESFAS with the support of Living Farms, Odisha, organised a one-day workshop -- Sharing Results of Best Agroecological Practises -- at the KJP Conference Hall where Thomas langjuh, Junior Scientist at Bio Resource Development Centre, Shillong, attended the programme.

During the workshop, three ALCs were invited to present the result of their experiments. These were from Bhoiymbong (Khweng, Liarsluid and Khliehmstem) (Ri Bhoi), Umsawwar and Mawhiang (East Khasi Hills).

The experiment that was conducted by Bhoiymbong ALC was on pest management wherein ALC members identified cut worm/Niangkhung (Agrotis ipsilon) and Corm borer/ Niagrije (Haplososnyx chalybaeus) as the pests to focus during this cycle. These particular pests affect potato and taro respectively. To reduce their infestation, four methods were devised by the members, viz., fill the stem centre of the Taro with rice hull; fill the stem centre of the Taro with powered maize; fill the stem centre of the Taro with crushed rice (khaw pyrsit); and fill the stem centre of the Taro with soil. The experiments were performed from May to June 2019 with the harvesting of taro and potato crop from the experimental plots. A reduced infestation of cut worm/Niangkhung (Agrotis ipsilon) and Corm borer/ Niagrije (Haplososnyx chalybaeus) was noticed by the members. The members who conducted the experiments were Wosly Muktieh, Ridian Syiem and Triol Jalong.

The Mawhiang ALC carried a similar experiment on pest management as well. The members who took part in the experiment included Radalin Kharraswai and Iorial Nongsieje. Here the members focused on cut worm/Niangkhung (Agrotis ipsilon) and ret ants (Solenopsis) on taro and potato crops. Two experiments were conducted viz., lime was spread around potato seed during the planting season to prevent infestation of red ants (Solenopsis); to thwart cut worm/Niangkhung (Agrotis ipsilon) marigold was planted alongside taro. These experiments began from March to June 2019 when both the crops were harvested. The decline in infestation was noticed in both cases. Reduction in crop losses in both Bhoiymbong cluster and Mawhiang subsequently resulted in a greater harvest of taro and potato crop.

The Umsawwar ALC already has plans to share the result of the experiment with the local community. The world at large is suffering from the ill effects of a farming system, which is based on imposing an order, which threatens the sustainability of the ecological balance of the planet itself. Revival and adoption of the traditional knowledge, regarding agroecological practises of indigenous communities such as those from Meghalaya and Nagaland, is one of the ways to negate that gloomy prospect. Only when that happens will a truly sustainable food system can be built. Through ALC, NESFAS, SURE, SSC and NEN are trying to do just that.

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TO THE EDITOR

EFLU a lesser known institution

Editor,
At a time like this where competition is high, students are competing to get into the best colleges and universities. It reminds me of Charles Darwin’s theory, “Survival of the Fittest,” turned into a popular phrase by Herbert Spencer. The point I wish to make here pertains to our students in Shillong. We have the best institutions in the country right here from Medical Science to Engineering, Arts and Science, Humanities and as well as Foreign Languages. We have it all. To mention one University which has been

here since 1973 is the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) formerly known as Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL). This is not a private university as so many tend to misunderstand. It’s a Central University Established by an Act of Parliament and is of national importance. It is also one of the elite institutions in the country where the permanent campus is in Telangana, Hyderabad and it’s satellite campuses in Lucknow and Shillong. And mind you, the Shillong campus is of high calibre having the best teaching faculties. Many from around the country throng to get their admissions here, but sad to see, we barely have our own students from Meghalaya studying here! I was a student of this University, and during our times too, there were just a few of us studying here! Students across the country study in this University! EFLU offers different courses in English in many specialisations viz. English Literature, English Language Teaching (ELT) , Linguistics, Journalism and Mass Media, right from under-graduate to PhD level. It also offers foreign languages like German, French, Russian, Spanish is being taught here! I’m writing this letter to inform other young people about this University located in the premises of North Eastern Hill University. Its permanent

Tronila Lynshiang shared with the others her method of making compost. The members who took part in the experiment are Theirisa Nongrum, Saphina Suting, Earnestina Mynsong, Sitamary Nongrum, Shidalin Nongrum, and Ledran Suting.

Tronila Lynshiang demonstrated composting, which included digging of two pits, one for preparing the compost and the other for storing compost. The next steps include spreading the cut grass on the floor of the pig shed. Leave it there for a few days (some times, cow dung is added). Remove the grass from the shed and place it inside the pit. Pig dung and ash from the fireplace is added every morning. Cut grass, fallen leaves, garden weeds, dry stems of pea plants and leaves of medicinal plant are added to the pit whenever available. Compost is ready when it is soft. The finished product is transferred to the storage pit and finally before harvest, the compost is slightly mixed and turned.

The results of the experiments were mixed, with improvement in soil fertility for one ALC member but there was no change for the others. A reason for this could be the fact that the latter did not increase the amount of input for making the compost. For the members who did increase the amount of compost improved soil fertility and production of potato was noticed.

Future experiments are being planned in the three ALC as well as other ALCs, for example the Mawlum Mawjaksew ALC (Mawthadrashian Block, West Khasi Hills) is going to start experiment on May beetle/ Niangbyrnai (Phyllophaga). In this experiment fresh leaves of lantan/sohpang khlieh (Lantana camara) are cut and buried into the soil while planting the particular crop. The experiment began in September 2019.

Currently, NESFAS and its partners in their respective villages are monitoring all these experiments.

The Umsawwar ALC already has plans to share the result of the experiment with the local community. The world at large is suffering from the ill effects of a farming system, which is based on imposing an order, which threatens the sustainability of the ecological balance of the planet itself. Revival and adoption of the traditional knowledge, regarding agroecological practises of indigenous communities such as those from Meghalaya and Nagaland, is one of the ways to negate that gloomy prospect. Only when that happens will a truly sustainable food system can be built. Through ALC, NESFAS, SURE, SSC and NEN are trying to do just that.

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Of Streets & Classrooms The Misguided Students?

By Proloy Bagchi

It appears from what the newspapers say or what the media shows that the entire country has become secular in mindset and that all participating individuals in demonstrations and rallies against the Citizens Amendment Act would go all out to uphold their secular beliefs against all odds. They would not flinch from taking recourse to even violence if it ever came to that.

If all this were true there would be all the reasons to be happy. A secular mindset is always welcome as it shuns prejudices and hatred for other communities as is normally witnessed. It is a liberal and harmonious way of life that promotes efforts to try and understand the opposing antithetical views.

Diversity of views is welcomed and each is allowed to coexist along with the contrarian and prevailing majoritarian view. Basically, it is a tolerant society that has a place for every way of looking at things in a society. It also has to have the majority with a very large heart that has the capacity to accommodate various opposing viewpoints without any rancour or bitterness or heartburn.

This would be an ideal society but unfortunately it just does not exist anywhere. Human beings being what they are, live through their lives with all the emotions of love and hate, likes and dislikes and all their biases and sense of fairness. Hence, if someone were to scratch a secular person, he/she would find underneath the thin veneer of secularism all the ills of prejudices and hatred for other compatriots.

Many of those who are taking part in the rallies and demonstrations against the CAA and/or NCR are therefore not secular in the true sense of the word as they are unwilling to appreciate the contrarian point of view. A secular individual would argue it out rather than be violent and use force to bring home his opinion.

The ongoing agitations against the Citizenship laws have mobilised massive crowds. Worse, various places of learning have seen violent students and others destroy public and private property. Unfortunately, many of the students have been mobilised by various political parties through their subaltern units in the universities or colleges or other places of learning that exist in the shape of students’ unions. Each union toes the political line of its master causing confrontation with the opposing union.

The places of learning have thus become kind of war zones as exemplified by what happened at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Students came for the “fight” wearing masks and wielding lathis. They too were certainly not secular. In fact they came for a “war” against those who happened to hold opposing views.

Students should not be out on the streets, they should be in the classrooms. They should be kept out of various societal controversies where political parties of various shades push their agenda. Politicisation of an issue only divides the nation – more so the student community. Such divisive actions need to be avoided. Similar sentiments were given expression to by the cricketing icon, Sunil Gavaskar recently while delivering the Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lecture. Hinting that it was not for students to take sides in the current agitations against the controversial citizenship laws, Gavaskar said, “The country is in turmoil. Some of our youngsters are out on the streets when they should be in their classrooms. Some of them

are ending up in hospitals for being out on the streets”.

He went on to say, “We as a nation can go higher only when we are all together, when each one of us has to be simply Indian, first and foremost. That is what the game (Cricket) taught us....We win when we pull together as one” Gavaskar’s advice to the students was that they should go back to the classrooms. That is their main duty. Pithily, he observed, “They have gone to the university to study, so please study”.

There can be various and even differing views on the matter but one has to consider the facts that the parents of the students have spent their hard earned money to send them to colleges and universities. Even the State expends large sums of money to provide for their education. They just cannot avoid their responsibility in this regard. No society would ever like them to abstain from the classroom and fight on the streets against the arms of the law or vice versa.

Most of us have gone through this stage of our lives and have now come to realise that all that orchestrated recalcitrance and anger against the established authority were futile and were of no use in building a good future for any of us. In no way such conduct could be considered as doing a good turn to the parents who, inflicting great pain on themselves, spend their last bit to have their wards properly educated.

It is politicisation of campuses that is at the bottom of this problem. Students’ unions have become nothing but political arms of various political parties holding varied ideological views, distracting students from their basic reason of being in educational campuses. I recall the pre-Independence days in Gwalior, where the college used to have a union of students. It used to be guided union with a faculty member guiding it. The union generally would deal with affairs relating to students’ welfare, their extra-curricular activities, sporting events and so on.

The union never indulged in politics and, since it was a princely State, organisations like Students’ Federation of India were kept out of the campus. Yet the College produced politicians like Atal Behari Vajpayee, who not only was a great debater and a fiery speaker he also collaborated with the member of the family of the same ruling feudal to form a political party and later rose to become the country’s prime minister.

Politicians are a bane for the campuses. They try and mould the young minds to suit their conveniences. They vitiate the environment causing antipathies, dividing the student community. Howsoever people might say that the campuses are breeding grounds for future politicians, none could objectively say so.

Arvind Subramanian, former Chief Economic Advisor and currently teaching at Harvard University writes from the US about the anguish caused to him as he saw the images of Indian educational institutions in turmoil streamed across the globe. Quoting a protagonist from a Mira Nair film he asks “Aren’t these our children who need to be protected from ourselves, from our instincts to hate and harm? These young, our college students, need to be nurtured, educated and equipped to build the wealth and the future that we want for our country”. Surely, students are our human capital which needs to be nursed and cared for. Instead of dissipating their energies in futile fissionary warfare they need to be encouraged to build an economically strong nation making the country proud.---INFA

Driving change to improve lives

By Burton Bollag

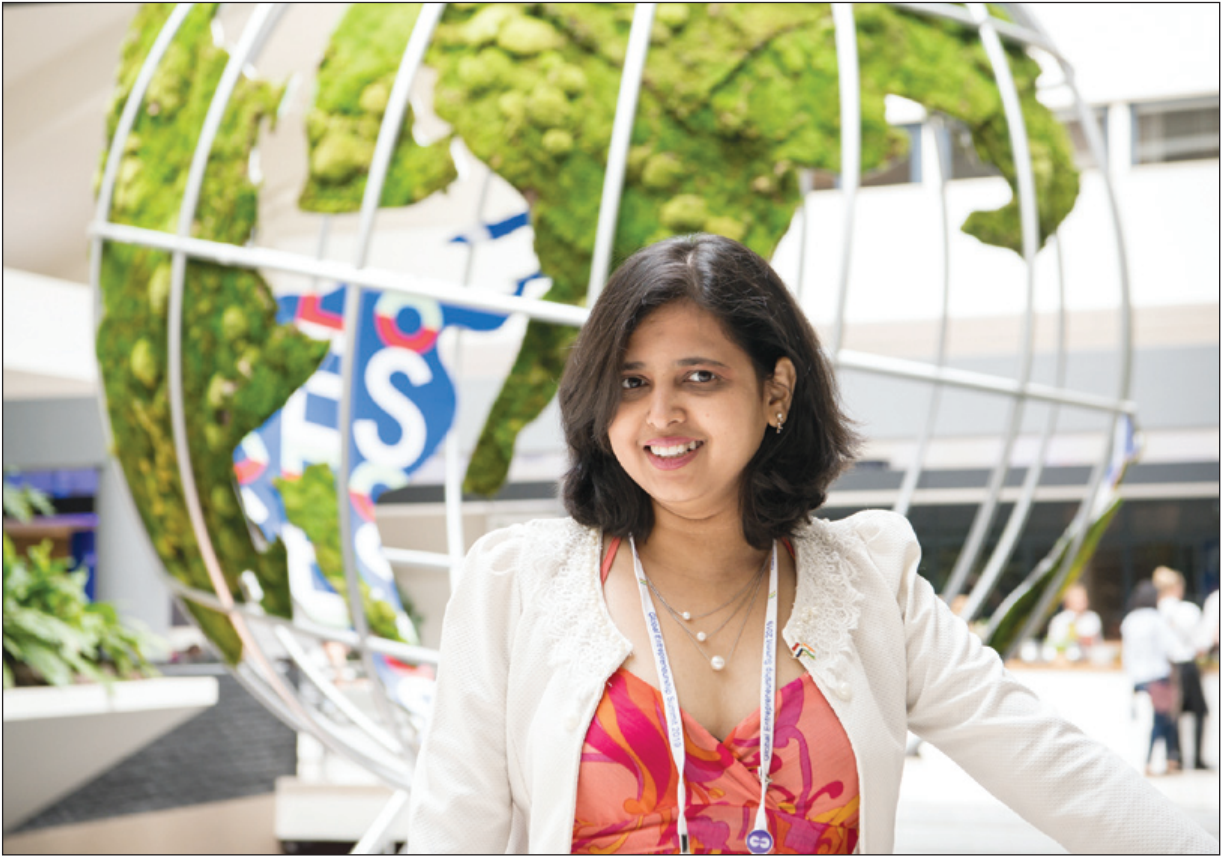
Yamuna Sastry is working to improve the lives of cab drivers in India, including those who work for digital ride-hailing services like Uber and Ola. In 2016, she co-founded Cab Dost, with the aim of helping cab drivers take advantage of financial services like bank accounts, insurance and pension plans. One of the key areas of focus for the start-up is providing tax filing assistance to cab drivers which, Sastry says, is a necessary step to access financial services and benefits. Without a tax declaration, she adds, “It’s hard for them to get loans. They fall prey to money lenders, who charge much higher interest rates,” as compared to banks and other lending institutions. The cab companies often deduct a part of drivers’ earnings as TDS (tax deducted at source). When their income tax is calculated, many drivers are owed refunds from the government. But they can only receive these refunds if they file income tax returns — something that many drivers have never done.

“We start from scratch,” says Sastry. “Filing an individual tax return may take 20 minutes. But we also create email addresses for them and make sure their names and dates of birth are the same on all their documents. And, we call up the drivers when the tax credit arrives.”

Cab Dost, which currently has 24 employees, has organised a dozen Tax Mela campaigns, during which free tax filing assistance is offered to drivers at airports, railway stations and outdoor locations. Sastry says that since 2016, the company has provided free tax filing assistance to over 7,000 drivers. In addition, it has provided the service for a fee of Rs 500 to a slightly larger number of drivers.

During these campaigns, Cab Dost also helps raise awareness among drivers about other important issues like health and wellness, substance abuse, sanitation, women’s safety and financial planning.

All this may be public service, but Sastry says, it is also good business. The company is already profitable. As it grows, it plans to increase earnings by providing other paid services to drivers, like company registration and bookkeeping, as well as by sell-



(Clockwise from top left) Yamuna Sastry; Sastry speaks to drivers during a financial inclusion drive; and a driver development dialogue in progress

ing them products like health and life insurance plans and small loans. The company has also started providing training to drivers in spoken English, tour guiding, behaviour and etiquette, and road safety. The training sessions are paid for by tour companies.

Sastry graduated in 2011 from Jain University in Bengaluru, with a master’s degree in commerce and then worked for three years, doing risk analysis, for the Indian branch of the international accounting firm, KPMG. She then spent the next year and a half interviewing 3,000 cab drivers to learn about their financial problems, before creating Cab Dost with her partner, Shafeeqe Thazhathari, who owned a small car rental business at the time.

Sastry was invited to participate in the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) in 2017 in Hyderabad. The event, co-hosted by the governments of USA and India, provided mentoring and networking opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs.

Sastry was invited again to the 2019 GES, which took place in The Hague, co-hosted by the governments of the United States and the Netherlands. Sastry says the guidance provided at the summits as well as contacts with

entrepreneurs from other countries have been invaluable for her work at Cab Dost.

In 2018, Sastry participated in the U.S. State Department’s Professional Fellows Program, during which she spent five weeks in the US, mainly in Oklahoma. There she was placed at Goodwill Industries of Tulsa and Tulsa Area United Way’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, where she learned about management practices and their free tax filing service. She also attended leadership classes at the University of Oklahoma.

The exchange visit was Sastry’s first trip to the United States. “I learned about people management, compliance and how, in the United States, they put people first,” she says. The leadership classes taught her how to focus on her core mission as a business founder, and “how to declutter,” she adds.

She also credits what she learned during her fellowship with helping her find better work-life balance. The experience changed her life, says Sastry. And it helped crystallise her goals for Cab Dost: “To build a business that makes profit, but with a purpose — to give back to society.” (TWF/SPAN)

New-age fashion job

By Ranjan K Baruah

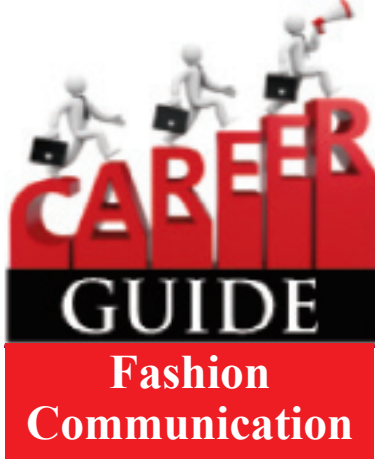
We are aware about the importance of communication in our life and career. Communication is a must for all of us and at the same time it has connection with fashion too. When we say communication and fashion then one of the subjects that come to our mind is fashion communication. Forget about the subject of discipline of studies but let us look at how important fashion communication is and its demand in the present market.

Let us look at any market or any brand, what we need is a good branding of the product before it comes to the market or get more customers in the existing market. Communication is related with lifestyle and other products related to fashion and hence there is demand and students are willing to take up subjects like fashion communication.

Fashion Communication is a unique and specialised programme that enables students to acquire communication skills relevant to the fashion industry. It includes styling, photography, fashion journalism, design, branding, advertising and visual merchandising. It is a relatively new areas or subject in the lifestyle and fashion industry but it has boomed after globalisation and privatisation. These days we can see a lot of brands in India and around the world bringing more opportunity for the aspirants who are planning to take up courses related to fashion communication.

National Institute of Fashion Technology is one of the leading institutions in the country apart from others which offer courses related to fashion communication. In the ever-growing world of fashion, the Fashion Communication (FC) design programme at NIFT happens to be the single most cutting-edge, exciting, and increasingly essential pathway to open up in the fashion and lifestyle industry.

The significance of brand identity has come to be seen on a par with what the brand sells. Numerous products and luxury brands keep appearing in the Indian retail scenario and it has become essential for each one of them



growth of digital revolution has bought challenges and opportunities, so one needs to plan his or her career keeping this in mind. Every one may not get into leading institutions but that does not mean that one would quit subjects like fashion communication. Choose your institutes carefully as not all institutions will help you in getting a sustainable job.

Apart from qualification, one must have the employability skill. One should not forget that it is not only big industries which need fashion communication but even small and new start-ups would need the same.

Update

An examination will be conducted by the Union Public Service Commission on April 19 for admission to the Army, Navy and Air Force wings of the NDA for the 145th Course, and for the 107th Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC) commencing from January 2, 2021. Unmarried male aspirants may apply online for the NDA entrance before January 28.

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

Don’t fear online exam

By Kaustov Kashyap

From the biggest professional institutions in India to the largest government employer such as the Indian Railways, they are now recognising that online examinations provide them the opportunity for their services while ensuring easy access to eligible candidates from across India.

An online exam not only reduces the time and effort put into conducting an examination but also provides security of data, logistical ease and is definitely environment friendly with limited use of paper. Here are some tips which will help students overcome their fears and prepare for an online exam in a confident manner.

Have exam updates and requirements

Regularly visit the exam conducting body’s website and keep abreast of the latest updates. Check the admit card and note the reporting time, exam time, documents to be carried, verification process, exam do’s and don’ts, etc.

Recce the centre

You would not want to reach late or go to the wrong centre. Check Google maps in advance and if possible visit the centre in person. This will help you plan your travel on the day of the exam.

Familiarising

Familiarise yourself with the user interface of the examination. Most institutions and organisations offer options for series of mock tests to accustom students with the exam process. Practicing these online tests will help you get comfortable with its operating techniques so that you don’t waste time during the actual examination.

Read instructions

Don’t be in a haste to get started with the examina-

tion. Instructions can guide you as to how to go about the exam in the best possible way. Before the beginning of any examination, you should thoroughly read the instructions and enquire with the invigilator if you have any queries.

Use your time wisely

Timer is present on the console of the candidate which will help keep track of time during the course of the exam. This will help you maintain a steady pace of answering questions before the time is over. We know there’s a flip side to the timer on the screen and it may get on your nerves. Don’t let this ticking clock overpower you. Remember the timer only serves as a reminder.

Don’t panic

In an event of a technical failure, bring it to the attention of a nearby invigilator immediately. Be confident that no time will be lost due to technical disruption as exam restarts where the timer has stopped.

Reading online

During the exam, your eyes would be focused on the computer screen for two to three hours at a stretch and not many people are used to this. Inculcate the habit of reading online blogs, news etc. daily as much as possible.

‘Save’ measure

One must always press the ‘Save’ option after attempting the question and marking the correct option even if the given examination saves the answers automatically. This is just a good practice while taking an online examination.

Have a plan

When you take any exam, especially online, it is important to have a clear strategy on how you will go through the sections. If getting the strategy right requires you to take prep tests before the actual exams, one should definitely do so. Better to get your plan right through the prep tests than making unforced mistakes in the real online test.

Be thoroughly prepared

All the tips above will not be helpful unless you thoroughly read and well-prepared as per the examination syllabus. Remember an online examination, though a convenient form of taking examinations is at the end of the day, a test of your knowledge about the subject. The only way to perform well and do your best is to prepare well in advance.

(The author is a career counsellor)



Celebrating old ties in Year of Rat

By CK Nayak

Last Saturday (January 25) was the first day of the Chinese New Year, this year being the year of Rat. And in a bid to herald the upcoming Chinese New Year, the embassy of the People’s Republic of China held grand celebrations of Chinese art and culture in Delhi, Kolkata and other places in India.

This New Year also marks the 70th anniversary of Indo-Chinese diplomatic ties. Befittingly, China is going to have 70 events throughout the whole year in different parts of India to mark the occasion.

The New Year festival is usually referred to as the Spring Festival in China, and is one of the several Lunar New Years in Asia. The first day of Chinese New Year begins on the new moon that appears between January 21 and February 20. In 2020, the first day of the Chinese New Year was January 25, initiating the Year of the Rat.

While the China National Symphony Orchestra celebrated the India-China ties with their rendition of the 1951 hit ‘Awara Hoon’, the famous China Oriental Performing Arts Group performed ‘The Splendour of China’, to represent the oriental artistic characteristics of Chinese culture.

From the boldness of Chinese warriors to the wonders of Chinese medicines like acupuncture, the dance troupe put on magnificent displays of the Chinese culture through various dance forms. The performances had a lot of elements. Not only ballet but also Chinese folk dance, Peking opera, modern dancing and even acrobatics.



All these elements of Chinese culture were combined.

In Delhi, the celebrations kicked off with a welcome note in Hindi by the Chinese hosts. This drew loud applause from the Indian audience.

“The societies of India and China are very similar. Rooted in traditions, both nations take pride in their values and are very family-oriented. Our common love for rice, tea and silk are well known worldwide,” said MP Narendra Jadhav, who was also the chief guest.

The Chinese ambassador, Sun Weidong, hosted the colourful evening as many ambassadors and politicians were seen at the event which was held at the Siri Fort auditorium.

Bao Jiqing, wife of the Chinese ambassador, was there at the celebrations. She expressed her keenness to visit some historical monuments in Delhi to celebrate the New Year. The cultural counsellor of the embassy, Zhang Jianxin, had briefed the media prior hand and had explained the details.

In an equally grand function in Kolkata held in Oberoi Grand, the Consulate General on January 10 organised the traditional Chinese lion dance show. A band of percussionists from Kolkata called ‘Beat Blasters’ put on wonderful performances.

The Chinese population in Kolkata is mainly concentrated in two regions, the Territy Bazar (Old Chin Town) and the Tangra (New China Town), and they celebrate their New Year in the traditional way.

The New Year festival is the biggest in China and celebrated like Diwali in India.

Forcing children into violence

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Children use role play to deal with complicated situations and understand them better. Young children act out real or imaginary situations, not just as themselves but also as other people or characters such as friends, family members, characters in story books or superheroes. They are experimenting with alternate viewpoints which help them develop emotional and social skills.

But whom do we present as heroes? Bull fighters, hunters, wrestlers, warriors. When a matador in a bull ring is glorified as a hero, a child will imagine himself/herself as a matador. It is irrelevant to the child that the bull suffers the most terrible agonies in a completely unequal attack. What is relevant is that he sees himself as a hero. Is this child going to be a respectful person to all beings? Michelito Lagravere, a well-known matador, often dubbed as “Justin Bieber of Bullfighting”, killed six young bulls when he was 11 years old in 2007. This led to parents putting their six-year-old children into bullfighting schools across Mexico.

Here are two good examples reported in France of the unfortunate consequences of children taking inspiration from Matadors. *Midi-Libre*, a daily newspaper published in France, reported that a dog had been used as a target for shooting arrows, then thrown into a riverbed where it died. The local head of the SPA (Societe Protectrices des Animaux — Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) discovered that the culprits in this sordid affair were a group of children who were trying to imitate a bullfighter.

French media have mentioned recently of a game called the *jeu de torero*, or bullfighter game, where adolescents try to dodge a moving train like a bullfighter dodges the bull.

As if imitation wasn’t bad enough, children are exposed to parental domestic violence as well. Anna Baldry of King’s College London found that over 50 per cent of children/adolescents that had been exposed to domestic violence, and witnessed animal cruelty, engaged in animal cruelty themselves. Baldry found that witnessing a mother enact animal cruelty resulted in over 90 per cent of boys directly abusing animals. The exposure to witnessing



animal violence will always make him believe that this is an acceptable behaviour.

A study conducted by Fiona McEwen et al from Kings College, London, and Duke University found that children exposed to domestic violence were significantly more likely to engage in animal cruelty.

Approximately 29-32 per cent of children exposed to domestic violence engage in animal cruelty. Researchers also found that approximately 50 per cent of rapists and over 25 per cent of paedophiles had childhood histories of harming animals.

Animal abuse has long been linked with other forms of antisocial behaviour and criminal violence, and has a long lasting effect on children.

In how many ways are children exposed to violence and made to believe that it is acceptable. Games where humans enter the ring and tame the animal with whips and pain, bloodsports like cock and dog fighting where animals are made to fight , when adults in the house abuse pets to teach submission and even when humans own and eat the flesh of animals to prove their supremacy on the species.

Kambala is an annual Buffalo Race held illegally in coastal Karnataka. Buffaloes yoked together are whipped to wade through deep water. Many die. In Maharashtra, horses and cows are tied together and made to race, after inserting iron studs into their anuses. Both usually die. Children watch this “festival”. Jallikattu is another spectacle in which a starved, blinded and pain crazed bull is released into a crowd of people, and adolescents attempt to grab the animal and try to stop it. Both

Jallikattu is another spectacle where a starved, pain-crazed and blinded bull is released into a crowd and adolescents attempt to grab the animal and try to stop it. Both animals and young people die.

In a variant of Jallikattu, called Palakivaddu Jallikattu, instead of teenagers, children participate.

The hunting season in Spain involves hunters buying 10 to 70 galgos, the Spanish “greyhound.” Galgos are forced to hunt hares and at the end, the dogs which don’t perform well are killed. About 1,00,000 galgos are hung alive. Children watch the spectacle, called “piano playing” as the dogs desperately try to reach for the ground.

Dog fighting takes place in Punjab, and the young people who take part, photograph themselves with illegal guns, drugs and the dead bodies of dogs that have lost fights and been killed by their owners. Do you think that these children will make a peaceful world, or will have respect for anyone on it? Bullfighting is sickening and cruel as it is. Yet children across the globe are taught to follow in these steps and maintain this horrific tradition in bullfighting schools. Children who engage in animal cruelty are more likely to abuse in the community, at school, and in the family and to be exposed to domestic violence.

In the Vietnam Elephant race in March, elephants are ridden on by children who whip the animal crazily in order to reach the finish line. Locals say the race is a celebration, but Dionne Slagter of the NGO Animals Asia believes that “this is one of the highest levels of animal cruelty”.

Cruelty is not only limited to blood sports or games but also includes animal slaughter. In India, many of the slaughterhouses I have been to, use children of 4 and 5 years old, of a particular religious denomination, to

use their knives to kill large buffaloes and goats. Men stand around laughing while their children stab the victim repeatedly till it dies.

Children are taught to use razor blades on the throat while their parents hold the frightened animal. Is it possible to link this desensitisation to a worldwide belief in violence by the same community? When I asked the slaughterhouse adults why they made their small children kill animals, they replied that if they did not teach them killing at this age, they would refuse to do it when they reached adulthood.

On August 19 last year, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) in America released a resolution regarding animal cruelty and its link to other forms of violence. This is what it said “Empirical research demonstrates a direct link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, including intimate partner abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse. In homes, where serious animal abuse has occurred, there is an increased probability that some other type of family violence is also happening.”

What could be more abusive than allowing children to believe that baiting and killing animals is a sport? That sport fishing is a relaxing way to pass the day? That posing with dead animals is macho?

Is there a difference between Buzkashi, the game played by children in Afghanistan where they kill sheep and use their heads as footballs, and bullfighting where people watch a bull being speared to death slowly and viciously and clap as each spear is thrust in. Are Spain and France more civilized than Afghanistan? No way. In fact the level of violence in both countries is the same.

When institutionalised cruelty becomes institutionalised entertainment, can our children switch off and become peaceful gentle humans? No, they can’t. Inside each one of us is an angel who demands peace. This is why most of these so-called sports need to be accompanied with alcohol so that we switch off the voice of our angel. Do we want this world to be the same, only worse, for our children? If we could keep our children away from animal abuse it will give a chance to them to live as we should, with respect for all and harmony with all.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 26, 2020

Moon conjunct Mercury on your solar return chart. This will bring mixed results for you. There will be times when you will face obstacles but you will also taste success. Your plans would face difficulties at the inception stage but will get completed in due course. You may become a victim of some vicious campaign against you. People will turn against you. But if you fight against all odds victory is written in your favour. You will be able to take colleagues and subordinates along side you. Your superiors would also appreciate you. Financially you will face some challenges but gradually things will improve. You may also get a promotion or favorable transfer/posting. Atmosphere in the family will be one of joy and laughter.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



tively use your talents and efficiency. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work.

The planetary configuration brings good-luck for love and romance. You are noble and generous in family situations. You adopt new styles and this brings colours and glamour in your life. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself creatively. You would maintain balance between the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in your favor in business dealings. You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal many issues bravely and successfully. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending to professional, personal and material aspects. You interact with people in position of power and authority gracefully and diplomatically. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through that ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You may be especially focused on pleasing your loved one and may discover new facets to your love life.

This period brings love, emotions, spirituality and pleasant interactions with people at work and at home. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. Combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness. You would show sensitivity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than many other things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental and emotional to your loved one. You would work in association with senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at the work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities to expand the business and work opportunities. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

Your heart tends to over react emotionally in personal and professional relationships, look at things from a balanced and positive perspective. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and personally. You tend to be fiery and impulsive when faced with choices and decisions. You would be more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others. This is a favorable time to learn something new, feeling at ease in social situations, taking care of the details of daily life. Obey traffic rules and don't indulge with people in authority.

You may be especially focused on pleasing family and children and be fond of the life of the home and family at this time. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and at home. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. You are likely to take your hobbies and talents more seriously. In fact, this is an excellent time for materializing personal hobbies and talent, as this would prove to be helpful in financial matters. Health food, yoga and meditation are recommended as would help to overcome from health problems, however, health of spouse needs to be attended to.

This phase brings good results in professional matters, as achievement is most important to you now. You are resourceful and don't want to waste time, energy, or resources and make best use of them now. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you indicated. You may explore new ways of doing your work as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. This is an excellent period under which you bring more understanding to your relationships with loved ones. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

MECHUKHA DIARY

Chitrahaar all the way

It was a journey down the memory lane, albeit on an unknown path. The drive from Aalo, or Along, to Mechukha Valley in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh in a public Sumo vehicle is almost 10 hours. The journey is arduous and the road pathetic.

So who else can be the best ‘saathi’ in this 104-km of ‘zindagi ka safar’? And you guessed it right. Bollywood never fails a lone traveller and the driver.

One should not be surprised if he or she catches a Bollywood tune anywhere in Arunachal Pradesh, where young lovers woo their beaus singing Hindi love songs and 10-year-olds casually hum ‘thande thande paani mein nahana chahiye’ in the bathroom. Here I am, looking to experience the simple ways of tribal life, exquisite and ethereal, and Bollywood comes with its bundle of emotions, evoking memories seldom remembered.

The *Chitrahaar* (a popular musical programme on Doordarshan in the late eighties) started with the car engine. Rimo, the driver, was an extremely romantic gentleman and one can understand that from his collection of Bollywood songs.

The journey began with livelier songs, electric and funky. As the vehicle ascended, the tunes changed to youthful and coquettish with the songs from the nineties.

As Alka Yagnik cooed love’s promises and Kumar Sanu teased his paramour and praised her kohl-lined eyes, the vehicle danced on the unpaved muddy road, its rhythm in sync with the Bollywood beats. As soon as Udit Narayan’s forlorn voice sought answer from his allegedly infidel lover, a surprise bump jolted



Lunch stop on the way to Mechukha Valley. Photo by ST

me to the backseat of the Sumo. Two of my co-passengers sang along Narayan. The homogeneity of pathos in the voices of the three singers was commendable. But before the trio could finish the song, it was already time for lunch. By now, the air felt colder and the clouds denser. The ‘Welcome’ gate read, “Mechukha 89 km.”

Rimo ji (*bhaiya* or sir at times) had time-travelled to the seventies and his songs too change mood. Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar dominated Rimo’s list. *Zindagi ka safar hai ye kaisa safar*, he must have wondered several times while ferrying strangers and friends to their respective destinations.

Palkon ke peechhe se kya tumne keh dala, wondered Mohammad Rafi. And immediately Sharmila Tagore’s dimpled smile flashed in my mind. We were in the sixties and the transition was as amazing as

my transportation to the *Chitrahaar* days. Those Wednesday evenings were never to be missed. The black and white television screen would suddenly be filled with colours, as much as one’s imaginations could go wild.

Memories flooded my mind. The lyrics faded. The Siang flowed below, turning with the road and then vanishing behind the trees. *Aate jate khubsoorat awara sadkon pe*, Kishore Kumar sang.

‘Welcome to Mechukha’. The wondering road finally ended at our destination. The marathon *Chitrahaar* was over. Rim and the remaining co-passengers bid me goodbye. I hummed, ‘*Aate jate khoobsurat awara sadkon pe/Kabhi kabhi ittefaq se/Kitne anjaan log mil jaate hain/Unmein se kuchh log bhool jaate hain/Kuchh yaad reh jaate hain.*’

~ NM

“ *Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.*”

--- Abraham Lincoln

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Another virus worry

THE world is on the threshold of a new virus threat - the Coronavirus that has brought life to a stand-still in some 15 cities across China. Millions of people in various cities there have been quarantined, flights cancelled and movement of people from one city to another curtailed across the red nation in recent days as the death toll climbed up slowly, but steadily.

The outbreak of the new epidemic occurred at a time when China was all set to celebrate its annual Lunar Year, and mass migrations for participation in the festival is a norm year after year. Also of concern to nations in the region as a whole is that the epi-centre of the virus outbreak is Wuhan, a city where medical and other students from several Asian nations including India are currently undergoing courses. Many of them have left the city for their homes during the festival vacation time, and this adds to the concern of Asia and beyond. It is likely some of them carried the virus that surfaces with symptoms identical to those of flu.

The SARS virus outbreak in China in 2003 had left hundreds dead and thousands affected in serious ways. It was contained, but only after it spread terror for several months across the Asian region. The Chinese as a community are widely spread, beyond Asia to Europe, the Middle East, Far East, Europe and the US. Saudi Arabia has reported infections in a few people, obviously intakes from the Chinese population there. India as also several other nations are on alert though WHO has said there was no reason to declare a global health emergency - something that China did within its landmass already.

Millions had been killed in pestilences in China as also the rest of the world in the past. With advances in the field of medicine, such horrors are old stories. The AIDS virus that came in during the 1980s spread a big scare across the world for several years. There were fears that the extinction of mankind was close at hand. The medical field concentrated its attention on finding remedies, and succeeded too. Its intensity as also the scare has come down - after a long stretch of time, of course. In the present case, China did not act fast when the initial reports about the virus outbreak came in December. It is doing its best now to check the spread of the disease. That in itself is reassuring.

LOOKING BACK

June 22, 1989

The crossroads of high Asia

Walk in the Bakerwal shepherds through the mountains. Drink Tibetan butter tea and with monk in a gilded monastery, watch polo played against the backdrop of a palace that rises like Lhasa's Potala Drift down the Indus, shop for masks and prayer-wheels and turquoise in markets as old as caravan trails, trek across green meadows where half-wild horses thunder and marmots whistle their warnines om the clear, cold, crisp air of the highest bastions of the world. Tibet? Guess again, Mongolia? Have another try. The wild steppes of Russia? Turkestan? Yarkhand? Wrong again, but you're coming close.

We're talking about that 3,500 meter-high fragment of Central Asia snuggled in the mountains of India. It's called Ladakh but we prefer the name that author Janet Rizvi gave to it, the Cross-roads of High Asia.

You can fly into Ladakh's city Leh, from Delhi or from Kashmir's lake centered capital of Srinagar. But if you have the time and, frankly, if you don't have the time, don't go to Ladakh travel up by road. It's a two day journey starting from Kashmir's Golden Meadow, Sonamarg, where you can take a morning's horse ride to the foot of a glacier. From Sonamagar, if you catch one of the most awe-inspiring vistas you have ever seen. Occasionally you will

get glimpses of green, river threaded, valleys where pony-trails still mark the course of the ancient Silk Road to China. Here you will encounter the wiry, bearded, Balti men who look like woodcuts from some forgotten Kipling tale. In places the road cuts through high walls of impacted snow across which the goats and sheep of the Bakerwal shepherds walk like tiptoeing ballerinas and the headsmen, with their staves and blankets and fierce guards dogs, plod with great care. Over the Zojila Pass.

Now the snow-fed streams, which have been flowing away from you, begin to flow with you. You have reached a great watershed behind lie the beautiful valleys of Kashmir ahead lie the stark mountains of Ladakh.

There is nothing quite like these mountains anywhere else in the world.

These saw-toothed naked ranges rise in temperature shades of pink and khaki, umber, mauve, charcoal, and bronze. And starting, in irrigated river valleys, are oases of incredibly lush green orchids of apricots rising out of barely fields where willows not over gushing irrigation ditches and the tall spires of polars rise as sentinels against at the painted hills.

No more tears for Lukha

By H H Mohrmen

because it was a market day the challenge was to see who amongst the sisters could reach the market located in the plain areas first. Lunar started first while Lukha took it easy and was combing her hair and knitting it into plaits and Lunar which flows rapidly over the hills and valleys was way ahead of Lukha. After some-time Lukha was shocked to see that Lunar was leading and thought of ways to slow Lunar down. She thought for some time and then using her powers Lukha decreed a stone nearby to fall on the course of the Lunar. The huge stone fell in the middle of the path on which Lunar was about to run and blocked the river's flow downstream. Lukha managed to slow down Lunar's flow and reached the market ahead of her. This according to the folk story is the reason why from the confluence onwards the river is known as Lukha only while Lunar has lost her name.

The stone which Lukha caused to block the Lunar's flow is known as 'moo-set' meaning a stone which blocked or obstructed and one can still see the stone today a little distance upstream of the confluence where Lunar meets Lukha. The story is meaningful even in today's context because during the lean season the water becomes acidic and changes its colour to sky-blue because of the acid mine drainage which flows from the Lunar but at the onset of summer the rain-fed Narpuh forest discharges fresh water to the Lukha giving the river its annual lease of life. The wonder of nature works in marvellous ways and the Narpuh forest and forest along the bank of the river release fresh water to Lukha to rejuvenate the river.

Nature's wonder has been doing its annual cycle around Lukha since 2007 which also helps cause the Lukha annual rejuvenation where fishes return to the river with the coming of the fresh water. Fishes from upstream of Lukha and also from the streams and tributaries of the river which were not affected by mining have their annual sojourn to the Lukha. Every summer fishes from these streams swim in search of food in the

main river Lukha when the water is clean. It is said that even fishes from the plain areas swim upstream in search of food during summer because the water is clean.

There is a hope for reclaiming river Lukha once again for good if the forest which feeds fresh water to the river are kept intact, but the government has other plans. The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board before allowing the Star Cement Company to start another mining at Brichyrmot an area located on the banks of river Lukha, as per rule, organised a public hearing in October 18, 2019.

NGOs and pressure groups led by the organisations of the six villages downstream of river Lukha opposed the hearing and had successfully stopped the hearing. It is not every day that you have prominent pressure groups like the Khasi Students Union, the Jaiñtia students Union, the Jaiñtia Students Movement and other groups joining hands in supporting the same cause. But the hope that pervaded last August was dashed to the ground when this time around the organisation of six villages decided to support the hearing proposed to be held on January 30, 2020. The about-turn as claimed by the organisations is because the government had sanction rupees two crore to rejuvenate Lukha. Now the question is the whether the proposed process of reclamation of the river is backed by any study. Has any study been conducted to find out the cause(s) which led to water discolouring and reasons why the river is bereft of fishes during winter? Has any pilot test been done to confirm that the proposed process is effective and it is certain that it will help reclaim the river?

If in just one visit the District Administration of East Jaiñtia Hills District can come up with solutions to reclaim Lukha, then why hasn't it been done earlier? What takes it so long to save the river when it looks like the DC already has a readymade plan to clean Lukha? The other question is also who are the experts that the District Administration engaged to draw a plan to reclaim Lukha and how long will it take to clean the

water in the river? If the DC East Jaiñtia Hills has not even taken the advice of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board to save the river, then he really is a genius and the CM should award him with the start-up award that this technology can be replicated elsewhere. The DC must also be possessing a magic wand if he believes that the river Lukha can be rejuvenated once and for all with rupees two crore only. But the esteemed readers need to be reminded that this is the same District Administration which has failed the state and in it people in the way it handles Ksan tragedy and the same administration which turns a blind eye when coal is illegally transported from the State to Assam, to the cement companies and even to Bangladesh.

The irony is that limestone mining involves clearing of the same forests which helps recharge clean water to the Lukha during summer. Water and forests are two sides of the same coin; one cannot exist without the other. In fact forests feed water to the river and if there is no forest then there is no river, so if we destroy the forest then we also kill the river.

The mining lease will be like opening a Pandora's box because adjacent to the site where the Star Cement proposes to start its mining activity, is limestone rich land which is owned by Topcem another big cement company of the region. If mining is allowed at Brichyrmot to Star Cement then next Topcem will seek permission to mine near the Star Cement proposed mining site. Then the vicious cycle will continue until Lukha will run dry one day.

The hope for reclaiming Lukha is dashed to the grounds once again and this time it will be for good. The incident now is much more painful because it was a Brutus-like stab. It is a stab from the people who live close to the river, the children of Lukha themselves. What would be more painful for Lukha than the fact that on January 30 while the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board conducts the hearing on the application to issue mining lease to the Star Cement, the people of the area like the emperor Nero of infamous Roman will be celebrating the Lukha festival. How ironic! And pathetic too!

India's economic and diplomatic woes multiply Modi-Shah steering us towards global isolation

By Amulya Ganguli

It isn't only the economic slump which is a cause of concern, there is also reason to be worried about how India's diplomatic ties with countries far and near are deteriorating.

To take our neighbours first, the chances of a rapprochement with Pakistan as when Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an unscheduled visit to Lahore in 2015 have receded into the distance. Instead, India's approach is currently more militaristic than ever before in peace time with its articulated intention of incorporating Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) into Jammu and Kashmir.

While relations with Pakistan have generally been unfriendly, this wasn't so with Bangladesh, especially when Sheikh Hasina Wajed has been the prime minister. But ever since the passage

zine, The Economist has said.

It can be safely assumed that this damaging perception of those who earlier lauded India's multicultural democracy will not change as long as three former chief ministers remain under detention in Kashmir and the protests by students and Muslim women continue against the citizenship law and the national population register (NPR), which is seen, along with the national register for citizens (NRC), as the means to hound the Muslims even if all the "termites" (illegal immigrants) cannot be evicted.

India may have been pleased with the partial success of a guided tour of Kashmir by several East European members of the European parliament notwithstanding their reputation as

If the BJP thought that the citizenship-NPR-NRC roadmap will divert attention from the economic difficulties, the tactic has misfired. Saving the constitution is not the only reason why the universities are astir with protests. The students are also worried about their future because of the dire employment situation. Moreover, the police highhandedness in dealing with them has possibly made them more determined to carry on their protests.

of the amended citizenship law, there has been a cooling off of the ties, with Bangladeshi ministers cancelling their trips to India and Sheikh Hasina saying that the new law was not necessary.

Given New Delhi's insistence on enforcing the law despite the protests against it and the refusal of several non-BJP state governments to implement it, few will expect a turnaround in Indo-Bangladeshi relations in the near future.

Apart from anything else, this decline will weaken Sheikh Hasina's position in domestic politics with her political opponents driving home the point that her "pro-India" stance did not help her by befriendng India.

For the sake of implementing an item on the BJP's Hindutva agenda, the government has soured India's friendship with Bangladesh, perhaps enabling China to make inroads into that country.

It isn't only Dhaka which is unhappy despite New Delhi's laboured explanation that the persecution of Hindus there took place before Sheikh Hasina assumed charge, Kabul, too, will be displeased with its bracketing with Pakistan by India in the matter of the ill-treatment of minorities.

India's friendship with Afghanistan is likely to come under strain, therefore, at a time when there is a possibility of the Taliban striking a deal with the US with Pakistan's assistance and returning to power in Afghanistan. The RSS-driven citizenship law can be said to have driven a wedge between India all of our three neighbours in the west and east.

If India is on a tricky wicket with countries in its vicinity, it is the same with those in Europe as well as the US. Even before the disquiet over the Kashmir situation has subsided in America and Europe, the citizenship law has been seen by them as a negation of Modi's earlier image as a business-friendly modernizer and an affirmation of India's intolerance towards the Muslims as the British maga-

fascists and Islamophobes. But it will now have to take into account the resolution moved by a group of socialists and democrats in the parliament which has described the citizenship law as "discriminatory" and "dangerously divisive".

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The politicians have so far taken a back seat which is just as well because the BJP would have otherwise taken advantage of their involvement to brand the protests by students for being politically motivated and the Muslim women for being in the grip of Islamic extremists. The BJP spokespersons have already latched on to an intemperate speech by a Muslim student to malign the Shaheen Bagh gathering of Muslim women.

It is possible that the politicians will come to the fore after February 11 when the Delhi assembly election results will be announced. If the BJP fares poorly, the emboldened protesters will feel that half their battle has been won. Otherwise, they will have to brace themselves for a crackdown.

However, the protests appear to have reached a stage where the politicians will generally have to follow in their wake and not play a leading role. One reason why they are likely to remain in the background is that there are no charismatic personalities in the non-BJP camp who can be a galvanizing factor. The other reason is that there is a likelihood of articulate individuals with innate organizing skills emerging from the amorphous groups who have taken to the streets as during Jayaprakash Narayan's movement in the 1970s.(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Indian Constitution is secular & socialist

Editor,
The Preamble of our Constitution says that we are a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. But a section of people argue that since the words - Socialist and Secular - were not there in the original Constitution therefore they can be ignored. This is a dangerous propaganda based on half-truths. It is true that these words were not in the Preamble when the Constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950. It was incorporated by the 42nd Amendment Act in 1976. But the Socialist Secular character was embedded in our Constitution and even in its Preamble since its birth.
Secularism has been embodied in Article 15, Article 25 to Article 30 and Article 51A(e) in our Constitution. While Article 25 has given every citizen equal entitlement to freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion; Article 25

(2) has brought religion under the control of the State and not vice versa as for example Article 25 (2) (b) has given the State the power to throw open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.
On the other hand, the socialist character has found its room in Article 14, Article 16 to 18 and Article 38 to 47 of the Constitution from the very beginning. The Constitution directs the State to secure that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as to best serve the common good (Article 39(b)) and the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment (Article 39(c)).
As a matter of fact, our Constitution is Socialist and Secular in every inch from its Fundamental Rights to Fundamental Duties to Directive Principles of State Policy. Even the Preamble itself was Secular and Socialist in character at the time of its birth. On 26 January 1950, the Preamble resolved to secure to all its citizens Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and wor-

ship and Equality of status and of opportunity.
Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Kerala's novel protest

Editor
Kerala is witnessing a massive protest by the CPI (M) led Left Democratic Front in the form of a statewide human chain demanding withdrawal of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on Republic Day, Sunday. The LDF has organised the 620 km long human chain from Kasaragod in the north Kerala to Kaliyakkavila in the southernmost part of the state and expect about six to seven million people to participate in it. The human chain will be formed at 4 pm following which the preamble of the Constitution will be read out.
Kerala is in the forefront of holding protest rallies against CAA and the state also held many protest rallies to register their dissent in the recent past when the Centre was contemplating to implement the Act. The speciality about holding ral-

"A consistent soul believes in destiny, a capricious one in chance."
--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIINo.167SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Delhi’s toxic electoral climate

INCENDIARY and provocative election speeches by BJP MP Anurag Thakur who is also the star campaigner for the Delhi elections can only erode the democratic ethos of this country. The MP is stated to have instigated participants in an election rally in Rithala to raise slogans against anti-CAA protestors in Shaheen Bagh calling them traitors that should be shot at. Another BJP MP Parvesh Verma went a step further. He warned that what happened in Kashmir to the Kashmiri Pandits could happen in Delhi too. This is an insidious warning to the protestors in Shaheen Bagh, mainly women that they could be assaulted, raped and even killed. Never before has India seen such hate-filled and communal speeches. Shaheen Bagh has become India’s symbol of resistance against anti-democratic forces at work in the country today. The CAA/NRC/NPR offensive of the BJP-led NDA Government has brought out its worst traits. Regular verbal attacks on protestors by no less a person than the Home Minister who also is campaigning for the Delhi elections, are unparalleled. Across the country there is a sense of foreboding of what could happen next, especially after the Modi-Shah experiment with Kashmir in August last year.

The entry of masked men into the JNU campus at the start of the anti-CAA protests, the violence that visited protestors in Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Milia Islamia all portend a dangerous trend of gross intolerance. That the protestors are mostly students and comprise that critical demographic dividend should cause anxiety. A violence that was allegedly perpetrated by those in power against a section of the student community and the venom that is regularly spouted by the Home Minister himself, also infamous for labeling all who have taken adversarial positions on the CAA as anti-national, has far reaching consequences. It is no longer a war of words that the BJP is unleashing on students but also physical violence. What feelings will the student protesters carry about the government of the day which has turned them into pariahs? These are serious questions which India’s citizens need to engage with. What is unfortunate is that large sections of citizens of this country are today hugely polarized along religious lines and a good number refuse to see reason. But somewhere, it is the image of India that is taking a beating and this will continue to haunt us even when the BJP is no longer in power because strong emotions as are evident today cannot be switched on and off. This actually calls for a serious societal discourse.

TO THE EDITOR

New traffic rule

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I would like to thank the SP Traffic for imposing new traffic rules in Police Bazar and G.S. Road. The residents and shop owners of the area are grateful as this order will greatly benefit the shoppers and residents of the area. I congratulate the Police Department and hope this order will continue for the welfare of all.

Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania
Shillong -1

RIP Lukha

Editor,
With seven cement plants mushrooming on two plateaus that send their waste to the Lukha and with its symptoms in 2007 never investigated, Lukha it is regretful to say has now passed away. The 2019 monsoons did help the River to some extent and temporarily pleased the people of Lumshnong and Brishytnot etc., to arrange a fishing competition and to try to cleanse the River. But nature has its own handicaps. It is known that

gypsum is CaSo4 and the presence of sulphuric acid cannot be ruled out. The findings of St. Edmund's college team of Zoology department in 2007, when the River first turned blue (which made me joyous as I thought the blue was a result of Copper Sulphate), is tragic. The pH count was 3.5 so there is no chance whatsoever for aquatic life to survive. This compounded with P.PM (Part per Million) at a minimal of 4 pH. Mahseer, the fish of my dreams could live only when the PPM is 7 at the minimum. Let me also tell Physicists not to come to the conclusion about copper though Meghalaya would be extra rich especially with the US planning e-vehicles. Why Meghalaya did not respond to the findings is difficult to comprehend. But whatever the case may be and irrespective of the findings a poor river cannot live in the ICU forever. The Wahumkhrah is gone; the Umshyрпи is about to go. What next?

All this reminds me of a song : There is a river called the river of no return / Sometimes it's peaceful and sometimes wild and free. Let

me add "Lukha is no more save in our history/ Swept on forever to be lost to the eternal sea (Bay of Bengal). Yours etc., W Passah, Viaemail

Assassination of Soleimani & unintentional disasters

Editor,
Major General Qassem Soleimani, aged 62, an Iranian military officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was killed when US drone fired missiles into a convoy while he along with Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis, militia commander of Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) was leaving the Baghdad International Airport in Iraq on January 3. Soleimani was the commander of the al-Quds Force which is an elite unit of the IRGC responsible for extraterritorial and military intelligence operations directly reporting to the Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. While he was hailed as a hero, brave and a charismatic strategist and

loved by his troops in Iran, the US designated al-Quds Force he led as a foreign terrorist organisation was responsible for killing Americans and their allies in several attacks on US bases in Iraq in recent months.

The al-Quds Force under his able commandership became the architect of Tehran's proxy conflicts in the Middle East. It had established bases in Middle East even supporting the non-state actors. Trump administration said his killing is a 'decisive defensive' action to protect US personnel stationed abroad. A day after the airstrike, US President Donald Trump said that action had been taken 'to stop war', 'not to start war' while defending the killing. However, Iranians believe that the killing of Soleimani is 'tantamount to opening a war front' and there shall be military actions as revenge.

In the aftermath of Soleimani's killing, US-Iran tension got heightened including the military escalation. Iran fired ballistic missiles targeting at least two US army bases in Iraq. Iran claimed to have killed many US and coalition

forces, which the US has denied. In the name of revenge, Iranian defence system shot down the Ukrainian passenger jetliner killing all 176 people on board on January 8 a few minutes after taking off Tehran which was bound for Kiev. Victims were mostly Iranian, Canadian and Ukrainian. Iranian military commanders feared the passenger jetliner to be an incoming American cruise missile and shot it down as a hostile target. Iran admitted the tragedy saying it was an 'unforgivable mistake,' of 'and termed the accident as a 'human error'. Commentators argue that Iran could have taken the precaution of halting civilian air traffic as it had already begun missile strikes against US and coalition forces in Iraq. But Iran didn't take the required precautions and hence its missile otherwise meant for hostile target killed the innocent people on board. It testifies to the failure of the defence system and its management which Iranian military commanders could have prevented instead of firing missiles in haste. Iran could not prevent the stampede that occurred on 7 January amid a funeral

procession for Soleimani in the Iranian city of Kerman killing over 50 and wounding several hundred.

This accidental shooting down of the Ukrainian airliner is not the first case. There are several cases of so-called 'unintentional' killing of people on board in the history of commercial aviation at different points in time. Increasing militarized zones in the world and military escalations amongst countries even in peace times are putting human lives in jeopardy. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau with tremendous grief and loss said 'plane victims would be alive if not for US-Iran tensions'. He asked for clear answers about what happened to the aircraft and even insisted to make sure that such tragedy never happens again. World leaders need to take a close look at the matter of shooting down of passenger jetliner and devise a scientifically proven solution of avoiding such unintentional accidents.

Yours etc.
Gendra Galla Narzinary,
Barpeta, Assam

Chronic Defections Tribunal permanent remedy

By Dr S Saraswathi

The Supreme Court is indeed forced to make a rather drastic recommendation that Parliament should by an amendment of the Constitution add a provision in the Tenth Schedule to constitute a permanent tribunal to decide cases of defection of MPs and MLAs. For the present, it has directed that the Speaker, who is acting as a tribunal, should decide on disqualification petitions "within a reasonable time" and fixed an outer limit of three months from the date of filing of the petition.

The judgment is given in a case relating to a Congress MLA in Manipur Assembly who joined BJP and also became a Minister when BJP formed government in 2017. The Speaker had not taken any decision on dozens of petitions received by him seeking the member's disqualification for defection.

This is in sharp contrast to the speed with which the Karnataka Speaker recently not only disqualified one Congress and another JD(U) member who gave up their party membership, but also barred them from contesting election during the remainder of their term.

Ever since the Anti-Defection provisions were added as the Tenth Schedule in the Constitution, courts are flooded with cases involving judicial review of decisions of Speakers on migration of MPs and MLAs from party to party inviting interpretation and application of the law. Defections have grown as a chronic political disease in our parliamentary democracy and certainly require a permanent remedy. A standing tribunal is likely to find its hands full to deal with growing number of cases throughout the year. It will also lessen the burden on the overburdened SC. As more and more laws are enacted and rules under the laws and court directives increase, more litigations are bound to come up leading to delay in judgements whereas issues have time-bound existence.

The question of Speaker's powers to decide disqualification of members and the power of intervention by the court are important constitutional issues that have faced contrasting court verdicts. Setting up a larger Bench of five judges recommended by the Court in 2016 to go into this has not yet materialised. In this background, the recommendation for a permanent tribunal is made by the SC.

"It is time that Parliament has a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to the Speaker as an impartial quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto", stated the judgement. It questioned the necessity to conduct the disqualification proceedings in-house when removal of judges is handled outside the judiciary.

The problem of political defection has been enlarged and transformed as a constitutional issue of Speaker's rights and also judiciary's role vis-à-vis the legislative body.

Unlike the Speaker of the House of Commons in Britain, the Speaker in India is not required to resign from his party. The first Speaker Mavalankar considered adopting the British convention of uncontested election of the Speaker and his/her independence from party affiliation, but it was not acceptable to political parties in India and given up. There is no continuity in the office of Speaker who is elected by members among themselves.

Rather, a convention of granting the post of Speaker to the ruling party and that of Deputy Speaker to the main Opposition Party has found favour with all parties and also broadly followed. In the politics of alliances, these posts, like ministries and chairmanship of some important boards, are among the items in top-level negotiations conducted for concluding sharing formula among the allies.

The practice of entrusting decisions on defections and disqualifications in the office of the Speaker has enhanced the power and influence of the Speaker. This development is linked with increase in the number of political parties and establishment of "coalition governments" and constant efforts for "opposition unity". Government formations and dismissals have come to depend much on mobilising support of elected members more than voters. The context providing the incentive for engineering defections, the office of the Speaker is growing in importance. His role both in Parliament and State legislatures goes beyond what was envisaged in the Constitution.

Executing the Anti-Defection Law in letter and spirit is stressed by the SC as vital to the functioning of democracy. It is for achieving this, it suggested that a tribunal under a retired judge of the SC or Chief Justice of a High Court or some similar independent body should handle defection cases because of doubts raising over the impartiality of Speakers and to speed up decision-making. The inordinate delay made by Speakers on several cases when the term of the legislative body is fixed as five years has already nullified the effectiveness of the law. Nariman's Bench this time was for Court's intervention when the Speaker delayed decision inordinately. It is a way of assisting the Speaker to arrive at a quick decision provided political interests are kept away. His contention is that the previous judgement did not prohibit judicial intervention to assist the Speaker.

What happened in Tamil Nadu in 2017 after Jayalalitha's demise best illustrates the latent power of the Speaker in deciding the fate of governments. Disqualification of 18 dissident AIADMK MLAs by the Speaker reduced the strength of the House and thereby helped the party to retain power. Lack of confidence in the Chief Minister expressed by the dissident members was interpreted as "voluntarily giving up" their party membership. The Speaker' decision received the approval of the courts and ended in bye-election for vacated seats. A similar case in Karnataka of disqualification of 11 BJP legislators was upheld by the High Court.

Whether urgent hearing of this case will take place or the recommendation for constituting a permanent tribunal will move ahead is to be settled now. The decision on this will have multiple consequences - direct and indirect. It will help determine the powers of the Speaker, and also the limits of judicial review of Speaker's decision. Indirectly, it will impact the political party influence on the functioning of Speakers who cannot disassociate themselves from their political affiliations for the sake of an office for a limited term. The Speaker's stand and judicial delay have been deciding survival and breakdown of governments following defection of members. The Supreme Court hopes for speedy and impartial decisions from an independent tribunal. We have to wait and hope.---INFA

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

“ Failures, repeated failures, are finger posts on the road to achievement. One fails forward toward success.”

--- C. S. Lewis

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.168 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2020

Air India’s fall

LOOKING back, one of the major pride of India around the world was Air India. Its demise is near at hand. The government, faced with a worsening economic and other crises afflicting the national carrier and its subsidiary Air India Express, has come up with plans - the second time in two years - to completely sell the stakes. This, in case some-one is ready to buy them up.

Clearly, it is proven time and again that the government cannot run entities on a commercial basis. There are the problems with lack of proper management, the problems posed by employees who not want to walk the extra mile, and there are the problems posed from the ministry and bureaucratic levels too. Most public sector institutions are facing serious odds and are not able to stand up on their own, and losing out to private sector which introduces better management techniques and enforces discipline.

Air India flights often got cancelled for reasons of poor maintenance. The resultant inconvenience to passengers can only be imagined. The UPA periods saw mismanagement also as regional parties and their representatives allegedly made mincemeat out of Air India and AIE through multiple indulgences. Five years of the Modi rule too did not help change the fortunes of the national carrier for the better.

The infusion of funds by way of a bailout, involving Rs 30,000 crore, in 2012 by the Manmohan Singh government did not help AI and its subsidiary to spruce up. The debts of the national carrier kept mounting to a level of Rs 60,000 crore. It was clear for some time that Air India and its subsidiary cannot be saved. While the attempt to sell 76 per cent stakes by the government failed last year, there is no guarantee that the sale plan will succeed this time. Else, the way out for the government is to close down the operations. Notably, the two entities have a staff of 16,000.

Ever since Air India started operations in 1953 on Indian skies it always had an edge and carried on that way for decades for want of competition. The entry of private airlines meant Air India could not withstand competition of a high order. Many PSUs are in a rudderless state and reporting losses year after year. Bureaucratic inefficiency coupled with political interference at the highest levels ensured that PSU’s only served a limited purpose not a public one. The PSU banks are facing serious odds. The railways too are awaiting privatization. Overall, the scenario is pretty grim.

Terrifying data on the power scenario

By Omarlin Kyndiah

us statehood. There is no doubt that industrial development gives rise to per capita income and creates employment avenues. But for a power starved Meghalaya, industrial promotion would be an unforgivable blunder if the energy scenario in the State does not improve.

The cement industry is among the nine energy intensive sectors. It also results in high level of Carbondioxide (CO2) out-

duce their SEC beyond their target. Those companies which fail to achieve their target are required to purchase ESCerts for, or are liable to be penalised.

PAT Cycle - I started from 2012, with its baseline from financial years 2007 - 08 to 2009-10. Cement sector has achieved energy saving of 1.48 million TOE (tonnes of oil equivalent) in comparison to the target of 0.815 million TOE during the PAT Cycle I. This achieve-

It's production contributes significantly to annual anthropogenic (man-made) global CO2 emissions, mainly because such vast quantities are used. Thus, energy efficiency becomes very important in its production to reduce this carbon footprint.

put. Cement production is the third ranking producer of anthropogenic CO2 in the world after transport and energy generation. Five percent of the worldwide total of CO2 is caused by cement production. International Energy Agency (IEA) reported that from 2014-2017, the direct CO2 intensity of cement production increased by 0.3 % per year (0.53 tonne CO2 per tonne cement). It is reported that cement plants worldwide have more carbon footprints than airlines worldwide. Surprising, isn't?

In a bid to combat increasing energy consumption and related carbon emission, the Government of India (GoI) released the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008. Under the NAPCC, eight national missions were framed to focus on various aspects related to water, solar energy, sustainable habitat, agricultural, energy efficiency, ecosystems, etc. One of the eight missions under the NAPCC is Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme. PAT is a component of the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE).

PAT is a regulatory instrument to reduce specific energy consumption (SEC) in energy intensive industries, with an associated market-based mechanism to enhance cost through certification of excess energy savings, which could be traded. Energy Savings Certificate (ESCerts) are issued to the industries which re-

ment has estimated GHG (Green House Gas) emission reduction of 4.34 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent and 3.42 million tonnes of coal saving.

PAT cycle -V which is effective from 1st April 2019 from financial years 2019- 20 to 2021- 22 is currently being implemented. Under PAT cycle -V, 110 DCs from the existing sectors of PAT i.e. Aluminium, Cement, Chlor-Alkali, Commercial Buildings (Hotels), Iron & Steel, Pulp & Paper, Textile and Thermal Power Plant have been notified. The total energy consumption of these DCs comes out to be 15.244 million TOE and it is expected to get a total energy savings of 0.5130 million TOE through the implementation of PAT cycle -V.

Man and nature are intimately related to one another and they are truly inseparable. Protection of environment and preservation of ecological balance and energy saving must, therefore assume paramount importance in side by side along with programmes of industrial development. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Power, GoI realized the need to address global climate issues and implement a scheme, for the benefit of industries and the nation. It is blissful to know that if the energy intensive cement plants in Meghalaya come under PAT Scheme, a scheme which had led to huge savings in term of CO2 emission reduction and coal then the fight of a student environmentalist Greta

Thunberg will not be in vain.

Climate Change is fuelled by individuals, businesses, cities and nations. It is a problem of personal consumption too. Examples of the great role of an individual are not too far-fetched. Let us take the case of an immersion rod affordable by the poor. Since it is not geyser with set degree automatic off, we should be always watchful to attend to the state of water. Televisions keep on televising to no one in the room. Swiss scientists say humanity could limit the effect of climate change if each person could use just 2000 watts of powers a year. And one advice which I apologize before giving is, "Please do not use 120 BHP vehicles to drop and pick up children to and from school." Yes, we have cash, but what about waste of fuel especially at a time when the Middle East is burning besides burdening our traffic. We need to know that 50 milli ampere hour (50 mAh) of energy is used to charge 3.6 V Lithium Hydride battery, the powerful cell, the invention of Dr Stanley Fleming (2019 Nobel Laureate). In India with a population 1.21 billion, if 50% use smartphones, the small milli multiplied by billion is not little MW per hour. Electricity consumption in Indian homes has tripled since 2000. The percentage of households with access to electricity has increased from 55 % in 2001 to more than 80% in 2017. In 2014, an electrified Indian household consumed about 90 units (kWh) of electricity per month on an average; enough to run four tube-lights, four ceiling fans, a television, a small refrigerator, and small kitchen appliances with typical usage hours and efficiency levels in India. This is three-fourths of the average monthly household consumption in China, a tenth of that in the USA, and a third of the world average. Let us use our electric and electronic gadgets sparingly and have the will to change our lifestyles. In short we do not belong to the age of plenty anymore; now every drop counts.

At this point I am reminded of Henry David Thoreau's 1863 essay "Life without Principle" in which he issued a challenge: "Let us consider the way we spend our lives." The grave challenge today is the global crisis of climate change.

(The writer is Associate Professor & HOD Biochemistry Dept., St. Edmund's College)

Mr CM, strengthen cooperative not corporate sector

By Avner Pariat

I have seen a number of initiatives enacted by this government which on the surface seem quite commendable. Notable among these are the attempts to encourage and support commercial enterprises from the state particularly among the youth. Many young people attended the recently concluded summit organised by the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) on January 21, 2020. And based on the turnout I think it is safe to say that the spirit of the youth is entirely on the side of self-employment and the liberties associated with it.

That being said, more than half of those businesses (start-ups) that were felicitated at the summit are in real danger of dying off within the next few years. History shows this to be true. The reason being that government support and assistance at various stages for numerous years is vital for them to scale up and expand their operations. It is not hard to see many similar attempts that have died and dried up along the wayside of this state's economic history. There have been too many ventures like these before which sadly fell victim to indifferent autocratic bureaucracy. True, their project reports were not as glossy nor as full of colourful charts as today's start-ups but they were there nonetheless. They came and went.

Again, though I say this in a rather pessimistic voice, there has been an earnest attempt by the government and MIE to bridge this gap in the model and business chain. They have sought to address some of the old persistent problems by helping the start-ups through the provision of rent-free space (the new business hub at JLN stadium, Polo), by promising to give government support through schemes, and also through the provision of training and funding opportunities. These are good signs. And if the admin is secure and not overburdened with work I think some real changes might be seen sooner rather than later.

After all is said and done though, there is indeed an elephant in the room with regards to all this entrepreneurship business. The Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, and his officers might point out the various answers to my tentative questions and on paper at least everything looks good. There are no loose ends. They have conceptualized a system which seems fluid and workable. However, my own apprehensions are more related to long-term considerations not necessarily to a 5 year cycle.

The truth is if these sorts of undertakings are meant to lower the high levels of unemployment and poverty within the state of Meghalaya then I am afraid, at the current level, we will never achieve those targets. There are huge goals that need to be achieved and no number of sexy summits or cool conventions can make the hard task of reforming this economy any easier. The main flaw as I see it has to do with the focus of these initiatives. There is too much thrust on the presumed abilities of individual entrepreneurs. In a society where most people have had little or no exposure to commercial culture and business activity this is a road fraught with peril. The harsh reality of the national marketplace is not something to be shrugged at.

Our people (by which I mean tribal people) are not in any sort of place right now to be able to withstand the tremendous pressures of the marketplace. It is NOT ENOUGH to "guarantee

market access" as one of the summit documents declares. Market access has never been the issue, market security or the security of their businesses in the face of old entrenched players is the main task here. I have said this before: if the government will not intervene on behalf of these businesses even after incubation then they are doomed. They can produce a thousand and one things but if they are insecure in the market then what is the point.

This thrust on individual entrepreneurship is also dangerous in that it might lead to a situation where a few come to dominate the landscape. It has already been seen how the most celebrated and financially favoured (by the state government) of our state's entrepreneurs are from a specific class and social category. They have a lifetime of important connections hoarded away from school, church etc. So out goes the tenet of free and fair competition through the window!

In an increasingly unequal world, should we not pre-empt the tide and bolster our economy in new, dare I say, inclusive ways? What is the use of spending state resources just to ensure a few people get money and employment? I think, Mr CM, if you want to be re-elected you're going to have to pick up the pace and scale of this entrepreneurship thing. In this regard, prioritizing co-operatives would be the smart and logical way to go. You can kill many birds with one stone. They lay emphasis on inclusiveness, democratic decision-making, profit-sharing, joint ownership and can employ larger numbers of people in a sustainable and more economically just way. They might not make HUGE profits nor generate HUGE revenues but why should they? What is this obsession with Big Business models and corporate start-up culture? I think we need to start distancing ourselves from these unsustainable and exploitative practices and their zealots. Why the hell are we courting the Ambanis so hard?!

The indigenous cultures of Meghalaya (allow me to be Romantic and essentialist) were founded on spirits of egalitarianism and participation. Why don't we play to these strengths? They are strengths by the way, not weaknesses. Globally, co-operatives are rallying in the face of unmitigated and unregulated corporate power and greed. Increasingly they are now seen as the standard bearers of Green, sustainable, futuristic economies.

To be fair, there are a considerable number of co-operatives that already exist and have come forward to be a part of this entrepreneurship program. Many of them have been around even prior to this MDA government. However, they SHOULD be the main target of these programs not just part of the fabric. Instead of these long and tedious summits, publicize the work being done by these amazing co-operatives and open up to suggestions on improvements and quality assurance via social media, opinion polling, etc. This is just one small thing that can be done. Make everyone a part of the process. Don't hide behind jargon.

God, my socialist soul is weary of corporate jargon! Merely hearing terms like "aspiration this" and "inspiration that" makes me wretch about violently in my seat, as I exhale one exasperated sigh after another. But anyway, I digress. I hope that policy changes radically in this direction in favour of the Future and not the Feudal. The ball is in the court of the government and its associates.

TO THE EDITOR

India’s image abroad

Editor, Hungarian-born billionaire financier George Soros, in an address to the World Economic Forum at Davos said the biggest setback to an open society as a result of the surging tide of nationalism is happening in India, obliquely referring to the Narendra Modi government. In an equally serious tone, a leading business magazine called out Modi's government as a threat to open society and to the survival of the biggest democracy in the world. Soros said that nationalism, far from being reversed, made further headway and the biggest and most frightening setback occurred in India where a democratically elected government is intent on creating a Hindu nationalist state, imposing punitive measures on Kashmir, a semi-autonomous Muslim region, and threatening to deprive millions of Muslims of their citizenship. Giving a shot in the arms to climate change activists and pro-

testers who fight authoritarian governments, Soros said he was enthused by rebellions across the world against dictatorial regimes, mostly by young people and most notably taking place at Hong Kong. Soros committed a \$1.billion fund to start a global university to fight authoritarian governments and climate change, terming them the twin challenges that could threaten the existence of our civilization.

While India has always given asylum to all irrespective of creed or colour, the Modi government has reversed all this. With the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the NRC, what the BJP-RSS had always believed within the party is now being practiced. This is a blot on the social canvas of the country. At Davos too, the reverberations of people's resentments could be felt.

Soros, a passionate philanthropist and philosopher is influential in the setting and upsetting of the world order and politics. As of February 2018, he had a net worth of \$ 8 billion, having donated more than \$ 32 billion to his philanthropic

agency, the Open Society Foundations. Though some of the poignant remarks of Soros are acceptable, his comments on the Kashmir issue were out of place as this is India's internal problem. The intensity of the Kashmir problem cannot be fully gauged by an outsider.

Yours etc., TK Nandan, Via email

ADCs in a tailspin

Editor, Much newsprint has been wasted in your reportage about the shenanigans of the Khasi and Garo Hills autonomous district councils. As onlookers we know that its al a power game and there is nothing in these power plays that will benefit the people who voted the MDCs. Every term has seen similar shenanigans enacted by people who are more keen about what's in it for them rather than about addressing the problems of people who elected them or setting things straight in the area of village governance which is in a shambles. In

Hima after Hima there are problems between the Syiems and the Dorbar Shnong/Dorbar Raid regarding allotment of land for different purposes. The traditional heads are today driven by greed and not by a sense of service to the public. The District Councils should have sorted out all this and streamlined village administration in a manner that will not result in land alienation because land is a finite resource and while the population has grown, land has remained the same.

It is also unfortunate that the Councils have on more than one occasion had to look for justice from a court of law because the MDCs can no longer discuss, deliberate and decide as to who has the majority in the House. Why can't the show of strength be held in civility within the respective Councils? Why was an MDC abducted by the NPP in Garo Hills? Also how can the Congress MDCs partner with those from the BJP to form an Executive Committee? Are the two not diametrically opposite in terms of ideology and cannot see eye to eye on any issue? Just for the sake of power

even two opposing parties are willing to come together? This is never heard of in the past. It's very demoralizing for the people who elected these depraved individuals who are only interested in their power games.

In fact the question to ask now is why have District Councils if all that the MDCs do is to fight and squabble? The people of Meghalaya should speak up and not remain spectators any longer because what is happening with the District Councils is a blot on the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Yours etc., PL Nonglaid, Via email

Thanks for your concern Mr PM

Editor, Apropos the news report, “CAA brought to correct historical injustices, fulfill promises: PM” (ST Jan 29, 2020), I express my sincere thanks to Prime Minister Modi for having expressed deep concern for Christians who were being

persecuted from time immemorial since the time of Nero in the first century. About Afghanistan, it being thousands of kilometers away from Meghalaya, my knowledge of Christians being persecuted in that country is limited. Even so, it is good that Christians are included too. On Pakistan and Bangladesh what I gather from the traders at the border haats at Borghat, is that they don't wish to discuss religious persecution. By the way, I also thank the government for having continued with the tune, “Abide with me” in the Beating the Retreat event. In the days of Caesar Tiberius of the Roman Empire and in the British Raj with Jallianwala Bagh still ringing in our ears, only the likes of Gandhi could express a liking for the hymn by a Scottish Anglican Henry Francis Lyte put to tune by William Henry Nominal another British citizen. Christians like me seldom sing it. To invite God to stay with us unless we prove worthy of his presence is not right.

Yours etc., W Passah, Via email

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

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Cities, traffic nightmares

IT might come as no surprise that four Indian cities are in a list of "top ten worst" urban sprawls in terms of traffic snarls. Highly chaotic Bengaluru occupies the top slot, while largely struggling Mumbai, as also Pune and capital New Delhi are in the list. Notably, despite all the fast-paced urban growth, Chinese cities do not figure in the list, while Asian nations like the Philippines and Indonesia are there, as also Russia, which has Moscow in a mess. One of the first endeavours of Jawaharlal Nehru after Indian won Independence and he started running the first government was to introduce five-year Plans. It helped push agriculture and various other key sectors of national life and economy. What the successive governments missed out was, most prominently, urban planning and housing sectors. Cities grew on their own without state intervention. The result, private agencies played havoc, there are choked drains, slums where the poor live with too little of facilities, and narrow roads. The flooding of vehicles on the roads in the past quarter of a century was an unexpected turn. Such is the difficulty on the traffic and parking fronts today that, in many cities, those having own cars keep it back home and take the services of new taxi car companies like Uber, Ola etc, to avoid mental strain.

The traffic snarls in Mumbai have been a tortuous experience on roads for decades. The fast growth of Bengaluru as an IT city turned it into another traffic nightmare. Notably, the governments did too little to overcome the problems. Even the Metro Rail system there is yet to reach out to most parts of the city; so too with Mumbai. Delhi has introduced its Metro system some 20 years after Kolkata did. This helped somewhat. Yet, the massive flooding of the capital with vehicles, and fast-paced growth of the capital's neighbourhood meant much more needed to be done. Notably, despite the vast spread of the city and its teeming populace, Kolkata presents a better picture, as modes of transport are many there, unlike in other cities. Also, the people there have less of a fancy to owning vehicles, as public transport is doing well. In fact, there are lessons for other cities to learn from Kolkata. More of adherence to the Metro Rail system in urban areas is the way forward, which can help reduce the number of vehicles on the roads. This is environment-friendly, cost-effective and well-presented. Governments should be more serious about urban planning as a whole; and not shirk such responsibilities.

TO THE EDITOR

Silver lining for EFLU aspirants

Editor,
I express my gratitude to our Education Minister, Mr Lakhmen Rymbui for taking up the issue of seat reservation for local candidates at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Shillong. There are just two ST seats that are available those not reserved for Meghalaya students but are shared with the entire ST community in the country. Mr Rymbui's intervention on this matter with the Human Resources Development (HRD) Ministry, Govt of India is a welcome initiative and I do hope that our Union Minister, Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank would ensure that the State Reservation Policy applies for admission of locals in this University. We are now seeing a silver lining on this matter and I

hope it becomes a reality, for EFLU aspirants in our state.
Yours etc.,
Chanmiki Ezra Laloo
Former Student
EFLU

Wanted equality before law

Editor,
While one extreme way of dealing with cold blooded murderers is to give them death penalty, the other extreme is to provide them with bail having one rider or two. But there must be uniformity in justice. All cold blooded murderers should be in jail without bail till death. This will act as a more effective deterrent than occasional "rarest of the rare" capital punishment for a few, some years of confinement for others and even bail for some brute massacres. It is time to acknowledge that such a difference fails to highlight equality before law. Law

Tribal societies: Trapped in jargons and definitions

By Patricia Mukhim

So a conference called, 'Land Rights of Indigenous Women in NorthEast India,' was organised at the Martin Luther Christian University on January 30. We live in a world of jargons which the world of the non-government organization (NGO) is adept at. If you can memorize some of these trendy terms and brandish them at a conference, especially in Delhi or even better outside the country you will become the darling of the NGO conferees that lap up those jargons without making it a point to demystify the terms and go to their etymology. The word 'indigenous' is now a part of common vocabulary but what does it really mean. What are the markers of indigeneity? Has anyone done an exercise for the ordinary person in the village to help her understand what rights does being indigenous confer on her? Do women automatically enjoy rights over land?

So let's unbundle the world "Indigenous." There are many who have tried to define this word and as usual we have tried to fit into that mould like puppets. Indigenous people are (a) natives of the land or the first settlers (b) they have a shared history, culture and language (c) their resources - rivers, water sources, forests, minerals etc., are considered 'Common Property Resources' (CPR) to be used by the community (d) individual rights are subservient to the collective good (e) indigenous people preserve traditional ways of life. (e) land is held as a trust and not owned Hence the entitlement to land ownership is a modern construct. Indigenous or tribal communities in the north east defy the principles of indigeneity because they were never egalitarian in the first place. They have all been oligarchies ruled by chieftains who also controlled land administration. They might not have been powerful or affluent when they started off but today they are all well-placed and more often than not act arbitrarily in matters of land distribution. Indigenous societies are also not necessarily gender equitable. Rather they are all embedded in patriarchy. The questions that arise therefore are (a) Did the Khasis of yore all own land? (b) Do we know from any written accounts if at least the head of the family owned land? We are not very clear about that at least from all the books I have read. If there is information to the contrary I would like to be enlightened by our

renowned scholars of the Khasi Department, NEHU. Do we know if there were poor Khasis? Of course we do from our folk tales. 'Ka Likai' a lady whose story is macabre and depressing, worked in an iron smelting unit in Sohra. We can imagine how difficult it is for a woman to be doing that kind of work. Her husband on the contrary looked after the home and Likai's child (his step-child). Likai's story does not reveal what happened to her first husband, the father of her child. But apparently abandonment (not necessarily understood as such since a man is said to be rang khat-ar lama or free to sow his wild oats) was rife even at that period of Khasi history. Did Likai live in her 'own' hut or was it leased to her? Why was there no one to help her out of her predicament when she realized she had eaten the flesh of her own child? Where were her clanswomen/men? We don't know of that either. Much of our history is silent on how the concept of 'land' was understood and much less about how it was later administered by the traditional heads. Since we are talking of land ownership by women, for starters, please visit some of the areas of Shillong where poor women abandoned by their husbands/partners and with several small mouths to feed live their daily existence. Would they even dream of owning land? Just two square meals is a monumental challenge to overcome day after miserable day through much sweat and toil. The kids obviously cannot attend school and soon become child labourers. Does anyone care? Does the state have the statistics of such single women leading their soulless lives? Where are the clans and are they actually geared to meet these modern challenges? Or are the clans only interested in banal social gatherings where clan members are introduced to one another to avoid incest? One of the things that Khasi society does not do too well is to question past history and to document whatever is remembered of that history by wise elders. History and memory are integral to our understanding of our past and the past is important because we draw our life skills and survival skills from them. When we abandon the past too quickly because of a new influence we lose a lot of our societal values. Tribal societies across the North East don't seem to have had a strong connect to their

roots hence indoctrination into a western religion - Christianity - was fairly easy for the British and German missionaries. Let's not discuss here about whether the advent of Christianity was a boon or bane. Let's keep that for another article. But the point that the inheritors of the Seng Khasi indigenous faith often point out about Christians is that they have abandoned their cultural practices, because Christianity demanded that of them. This may not go down too well with the church elders but I am here to analyse my roots and I apologise if I tread on tender corns. So let's come back to the issue of 'land.' What is land to the Khasis? It's termed as "Ka khyndew, ka shyiap" which literally translated means "the soil and sand." Land was never connected to wealth until the British came to these hills and realised they needed land for building roads and infrastructure. That was when commodification of land started in right earnest. After that there was no going back. Land in the Khasi annals was divided into different categories many of which are baffling. The Khasi society was not a democratic one by any stretch of imagination and just because some British chronicler said so does not make us democratic. A society that owes allegiance to a chieftain is by definition oligarchic. Is Khasi society today democratic? Is there participatory decision making in the traditional institutions? The answer is a definite "No." Traditional institutions too are top-down institutions and only men can take decisions. The Dorbar allows for a Seng Kynthei (women's group) under its fold which is 'allowed' to operate under a definite mandate assigned by the Dorbar. They cannot exceed that brief. So to speak of 'land rights for women' in such a society is a bit far-fetched. And to believe that Khasis today have seamlessly transitioned into modern democracy as we know it today is delusional. The Khasi thought process is still embedded in oligarchy. Yes the Khasis have strong clan systems but there are only a few privileged clans today that own hectares of land while other clans own nothing. True there is the Ri Raid where the Syiem or Bakhrav allots land to residents of that village but a lot of Ri Raid is today converted to Ri Kynti (privately owned land) by manipulation of the traditional heads. That's how cement plants in Jaintia Hills have come up.

Capitalism entered this society not after liberalization in the early nineties. Capitalism happened when the British converted land into a transactional commodity. The only clarity about Khasi society is in its culture of inheritance. The youngest daughter (Khatduh) remains the custodian of ancestral property which might be just a small house or a hut and the debts incurred by parents during their lifetime. So the much glorified "Khatduh" presumably seen as the inheritor of wealth is a dwindling entity and is reduced to a diminishing section of Khasi society. That is why the socio-economic-caste survey, 2011 which finds that 75.98 % of rural Meghalaya is landless tells a sordid story of the realities in Khasi society. Poverty is growing; so too the number of female-headed households. Many may argue that the SECC has glaring defects and that the NFHS survey places landlessness at 56% but does that make us feel better? The strength of a society comes from a system of checks and balances. Do we have checks and balances in traditional institutions to prevent the commons from being privatized? No, even within Shillong city catchment areas and water sources are today privately owned and no one can do a thing since the respective Dorbar Shnong/Dorbar Raid allows that to happen! There is land gluttony today which is rapidly progressing, not just within the suburbs but in distant villages too. I wish to put this searching question to all the Khasi Syiems and Myntris; to the MLAs and MDCs as well. Why does Meghalaya resist a cadastral survey? What are we afraid of finding out? Please go to Ri Bhoi and find out how many local people still own land and how much of the land is owned by the elite in Shillong? We will have got our answers. It's the same in other Khasi villages as well. So we should stop talking about ourselves as if we are pristine tribal societies and indigenous people. We are not. Period! The culture we wax eloquent about protecting is all superficial. The Khasis don't want to deep dive into anything lest the ghosts of the past confront us. But that's precisely why we have academic research and universities. Alas! Universities have become vacuous employment agencies!

Without delay all should reach a consensus in order to bring about peace in Assam.

Assam lies in a strategically important place sharing boundaries with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. Only through Assam all these states can be accessed via rail or road. So, it is of paramount importance that Assam should remain peaceful at any cost. The common fear among the people of the rest of India is that northeast is a highly disturbed area and visit to northeast is discouraged fearing attack on visitors by the ultras. So, this stigma has to be shrugged off by all who love Assam and its people. Yours etc., TK Nandanani, Via email

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

Bodo Peace Accord, 2020

By Gendra Galla Narzinary

The Bodos who are first settlers of Assam have been demanding a separate state to be created out of Assam since the late sixties. Mechanisms for this separate state demand changed from a democratic one to a violent upheaval at different points of time. Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) formed in 1967 not only taught the Bodos political consciousness but also a sense of having a separate homeland for the plains tribes of Assam. This party demanded a separate state named Udayachal in northern bank of mighty river Brahmaputra in Assam. Apart from the Bodos who constitute the largest plains tribe in Assam, this demand for Udayachal was supported by other plains tribes as it strove for inclusiveness. However, PTCA failed to fulfil its dream for Udayachal. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) also formed in 1967 started withdrawing its support to the PTCA sometime in 1979. The fallout of it were dangerous including the deadly fratricidal killings amongst the Bodos, destruction of livelihoods and burning of villages. This incident stands out as a the most tragic for the Bodos. PTCA became dormant after ABSU

entity, created under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. But this second peace treaty was also a failure as it couldn't serve the political aspirations of the Bodos. These two peace accords were only temporary measures to shun violence and bring an end to armed conflict in Bodo areas. The Bodos again vowed for separate state of Bodoland under the leadership of ABSU. NDFB remained as armed outfit indulging in violence across the state. Hence the second peace treaty also stood as sub-optimal.

NDFB vowed for full fledged separate state after it gave up the concept of sovereign Bodo nation after it came to a ceasefire agreement with Gol in 2005. In the long journey of armed conflict, it got split into four factions. NDFB(S) led by B. Saoraigwa which signed a ceasefire agreement with Gol a fortnight ago from its base in Myanmar. After its coming into ceasefire agreement, the tripartite third Bodo peace accord was signed on January 27, 2020. All the factions of NDFB, ABSU and UBPO (United Bodo People's Organisation) signed this new accord with Gol and Assam Government which is called the final and comprehensive peace deal

The outcome of this third accord is the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) without affecting the territorial integrity of Assam. It would have legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers on several policy areas. This new Bodoland would resolve for protection and development of language, art, culture, education and economy in the region. It is not a separate state but a state of Bodoland within the state of Assam. Despite being hailed as a historic Bodo peace accord, several pertinent questions are being asked.

withdrew its support. Therefore, ABSU under the leadership of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma launched the movement for a full- fledged state of Bodoland in 1987. Meanwhile, a militant outfit, the Bodo Security Force (BSF) was formed in 1986. It was rechristened as National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1994. This outfit adopted violence as way to achieve its goal of creating a sovereign Bodo nation. The first bipartite Bodo peace accord was signed in 1993 under the banner of ABSU and Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) with Assam Government in presence of the then Union Minister Rajesh Pilot according a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). It, however, miserably failed to fulfil the political aspirations of the Bodos. NDFB rejected this peace deal and its package. Hence they remained adamant at fighting for a sovereign Bodo nation. The failure of BAC was too poisonous as it paved the way for forming another militant outfit Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLT) in 1996 to fight for a separate state Bodoland within Union of India under the provision of the Constitution of India. Aftermath of BLT formation, the Bodos again entangled in ugly fratricidal killings. However, after the short stint of violence, BLT signed the tripartite second Bodo peace accord with Government of India (Gol) and Assam Government in 2003 according the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)-an administrative

with Bodo organizations demanding a separate state. This peace accord would bring to an end the final phase of Bodo militancy in Assam. The outcome of this third accord is the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) without affecting the territorial integrity of Assam. It would have legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers on several policy areas. This new Bodoland would resolve for protection and development of language, art, culture, education and economy in the region. It is not a separate state but a state of Bodoland within the state of Assam. Despite being hailed as a historic Bodo peace accord, several pertinent questions are being asked. Would this peace accord bring permanent solution to the Bodo issues? Would demand for separate state of Bodoland come to an end? Would it serve the political aspirations of the Bodos? Would this new Bodoland deliver development to each and every person in the new dispensation? This historic accord in the history of Bodoland movement would definitely bring the end of over 34 years of Bodo militancy in Assam. Both Central and State governments should expedite the implementation of clauses of accord in letter and spirit. Leaders, in the corridors of power, should know the purposes of creation of this new Bodoland. It is created by sacrificing many souls! All the people therein be they Bodos or non-Bodos ought to get the privileges and share of the development cake.